I, Jill S Minor, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Counselor Education.

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Elementary School Counselors’ Professional Experiences and Practices Working with Students Identified as Gifted: A Qualitative Study

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Elementary School Counselors’ Professional Experiences and Practices Working with Students Identified as Gifted: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract
A greater understanding of students identified as gifted, and the unique social, emotional and behavioral issues they may face is a pivotal element of a comprehensive school counseling program. While numerous conceptual publications have devoted attention to the social, emotional, and behavioral issues of the gifted student, little has been written describing elementary school counselors counseling practices with students who are gifted. Therefore, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the day-to-day experiences of elementary school counselors working with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model provided a framework the study. The elementary school counselor sample consisted of five females who identified their cultural group as Caucasian/White with school counseling experience ranging from 2 to over 20 years of experience. The setting of the study was one school district in Ohio. Data collection consisted of descriptions provided by five participants through individual semi-structured interviews. Data analysis followed the steps set forth by Braun and Clarke (2006) where five findings emerged. The findings included: (1) commitment to intentionality and accountability, (2) collaboration, (3) knowledge, training, and professional experience, (4) identifying students’ nonacademic barriers to learning, and (5) core curriculum and small group effectiveness. The findings from this study may serve to assist elementary school counselors’ counseling practices with gifted students.
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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my students. You have all influenced who I am today as a clinician, an educator, an advocate and now a researcher.
Acknowledgments

Throughout my life, I have strived to create my own path. Initially, I thought my dissertation journey would be no different. However, I found out early on in the process that this was not a journey I could do solo. With that said, I would like to thank those individuals who influenced me along the way.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Neil Duchac. You are the most amazing counselor educator I know. Your support and guidance was unyielding. You picked me up and placed me back on the path with your kindness, knowledge and sense of humor. I admire your humility. Thank you to my chair Dr. Mei Tang and committee members, Dr. LaTrice Montgomery, Dr. Julie Morrison, for your feedback and words of encouragement. A heartfelt word of thanks also goes out to my fellow doctoral cohort member, David Jones. I am so appreciative of your words of wisdom and friendship.

Thank you to the five participants who willingly shared their experiences and trusted me not only as a researcher, but also as a professional colleague. I respect the daily efforts you make to improve the lives of your gifted students.

To my husband Tom, thank you for your patience, understanding and willingness to listen to and talk through my research over and over again. Thank you for putting up with and stepping over my mess of books and papers all over the house. Finally, thank you to my parents. You encouraged me to be me.
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Problem

Professional school counselors are called upon to provide counseling services to an extremely diverse population of students with a range of social, emotional, and behavioral needs that individually or collectively may interfere with their ability to learn (Davis, 2015; Lockhart & Keys, 1998). Today’s students experience a myriad of internal and external influences that seem to play a direct role in affecting their academic performance, peer relationships and general mental health. In some students, feelings of anxiety, stress, and aggression are on the rise. In response to addressing the mental health needs of students, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) adopted a position statement encouraging professional school counselors to identify and respond to the need for mental health and behavioral interventions that promotes wellness for all students (ASCA, 2015). Yet, the mental health needs of students are often being unmet in schools around the country (DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2010). Furthermore, students from diverse cultural groups are even less likely to receive appropriate services (Panigua, 2005). One cultural subgroup of students within schools who have higher academic abilities often termed gifted is not immune from needing mental and emotional support from the professional school counselor (Levy & Plucker, 2009). However, these students are often overlooked as not needing counseling services in schools (Gibbons & Hughes, 2016). As it is incumbent on professional school counselors as leaders and advocates to create safe and positive academic learning environments for all students, including students who are gifted, these findings have powerful implications.

Although there is no empirical evidence supporting the notion that students who are identified as gifted being more susceptible than their typical non-gifted peers for mental health issues, it is clear from the literature and research that gifted students have a number of social,
emotional and behavioral concerns related to their giftedness (Fonseca, 2011; Moon, 2004; Peterson, 2006). Professional school counselors must consider the multitude of social and emotional barriers that could interfere with the academic and career development of their gifted students. Thus, professional school counselors, trained in working with social, emotional, and behavioral health issues, must take on leadership and serve advocacy roles in the prevention and intervention efforts of students in need within their schools (Young & Miller-Kneale, 2013).

Background of the Study

The *ASCA National Model-Third Edition* (2012b) provides a framework for building comprehensive school counseling programs. Considered the archetype framework through which a program is developed, the ASCA National Model emphasizes an incumbent focus on the needs of all students across three domains: academic, personal/social, and career. Additionally, the ASCA National Model provides structure for designing standards-based programs that use evidence-based practices and have outcome-based accountability methods (Studer, 2015). Focus on data-driven programs facilitates the identification of needs-based improvements and drives interventions with the goal to increase academic achievement and access for all students (Lee & Goodnough, 2014). When implementing an evidence-based, data-driven school counseling program, professional school counselors may discover gaps for groups of students who are underserved or underrepresented in their programs (Hatch, 2014). One underserved and underrepresented group in many school counseling programs are the students who are identified as gifted learners (Levy & Plucker, 2009; Reis & Moon, 2002; Seeley, 1993; Silverman, 1993). As it relates to students who are identified as gifted, ASCA’s position statement asserts that the school counselor assists in “providing technical assistance and an organized support system within the developmental comprehensive school counseling program for gifted and talented
students to meet the extensive and diverse needs of all students” (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2013, p. 10).

Special attention is needed to the circumstances and challenges gifted learners face within schools (Coleman & Hughes, 2009) in light of social, political, and historical contingencies that impact professional school counselors’ practice (Liu, Fridman, & Hall, 2008). The first point of reference in understanding the social and emotional needs of this population is to be aware of what constitutes giftedness and its historical significance. Educators and researchers have defined giftedness in a variety of ways for many years (Lotta, Kerr, & Kruger, 2008). Clear definitions support common understandings, and foster progress toward a specific goal; however, there is no firm consensus that exists among professionals as to precisely who should be considered gifted, talented, or both (Lotta et al., 2008). Quite simply, the word gifted means different things to different people, authors, researchers, counselors, and the like. Typically, most state departments of education throughout the U.S. rely on some adaptation of the Marland Report (1972) definition of giftedness which includes 3% to 5% of the population of school-age individuals who exhibit outstanding abilities, performance and achievement in general areas of intellect, creativity, leadership, the arts, and/or psychomotor ability.

According to the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC, n.d), the Ohio Department of Education estimated the number of identified gifted students at 265,555 in 2011-2012 school year. Despite the number of students, not all students who meet the criteria request or seek professional school counseling services as a gifted student. Most suggestions for school counselors working with gifted students have been designed and evaluated by gifted education scholars and not researchers with experience within the school counseling field (Delisle, 1992; Moon, 2002). Yet, research suggested differentiated counseling services by a professional
school counselor are needed to meet their unique set of social and emotional needs (Colangelo, 2002; Peterson, 2006; Wood, 2010a, 2010b).

Researchers within the gifted community who investigate the social, emotional and behavioral issues of gifted children continue to expand awareness of the need for counseling services (Colangelo, 1997; Mengalio & 2007; Peterson, 2003; Peterson, 2015; Peterson & Moon, 2008; Wood, 2010a; 2010b); however, little attention has been paid to the professional school counselor’s experiences of service and practice in working with gifted children. Accordingly, and in consideration of previous research indicating the effect of various counselor qualities, interventions and programs on counseling outcomes (Hatch, 2014; Whiston, Feldwisch, & James, 2014), a closer examination of how elementary school counselors’ work with students identified as gifted may aid in the development of best practices.

Elementary school counselors are in a unique position to support the social, emotional and behavioral needs of gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2013). This support is demonstrated through direct services such as in individual counseling, small groups, classroom guidance, and indirect services such as consultation, collaboration, and referrals. However, the majority of research on services, interventions and best practices for counseling gifted children remains largely conceptual (Buescher, 2004; Kwan & Hilson, 2009; Milgram, 1991; Moon, 2002; Moon, Kelly, & Feldhausen, 2004; Silverman, 1993). The majority of the extant research on the social, emotional and behavior issues of gifted students retains its foundation in gifted education (Moon, 2002) and in clinical settings (Cross & Cross, 2015; Peterson, 2009). To date, there are only a small number of studies related to school counselor involvement with gifted students (Carlson, 2004; Dockery, 2005; Earle, 1998; Peterson, 2013; Wood, 2010b). None of these studies specifically address the elementary school
counselor’s day-to-day work with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. Given the greater demands for accountability faced by elementary school counselors, the distinct social, emotional and behavioral needs of the gifted population, and the scant research for supporting such needs, it is necessary to better understand the experiences and practices of elementary school counselors in their leadership, advocacy, and counseling work with students who are identified as gifted.

Statement of the Problem

The information regarding elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students within the structure of the ASCA National Model is minimal in the literature, despite the evidence that these students are at risk for underachievement, dropping out of school, poor peer relationships, high stress levels, and depression (Colangelo, 2003; Colangelo & Davis, 2002; Kerr, 1991; Robinson, 2008; Wood, 2010a). Even though professional school counselors are in a position to develop, implement and evaluate counseling services, a clear, vetted description of best practices within their work with gifted students is grossly insufficient in the literature. Therefore, this study serves to address the research gap focusing on the experiences and practices of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students within the framework of their comprehensive counseling program.

Purpose of the Study

A greater understanding of students identified as gifted, and the unique social, emotional and behavioral issues they may face is a pivotal element of a comprehensive school counseling program. With the increasing emphasis on professional school counselors as agents of systemic change (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Lee & Goodnough, 2014), there is the need to understand, and learn from, the experiences these individuals who work with various populations of students,
including those identified as gifted. The practices of professional school counselors working with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program is relatively nonexistent in the school counseling literature. Therefore, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the in-depth experiences of elementary school counselors working with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program.

**Research Question**

This basic qualitative study was an exploratory inquiry about the thoughts, professional experiences, and practices of elementary school counselors in providing direct and indirect services with students identified as gifted. The research question is as follows: How do elementary school counselors utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program describe their professional experiences and practices working with gifted students?

**Significance of the Study**

The experiences and practices of professional school counselors working with students who are gifted within a comprehensive school counseling program have not been a frequent subject of study in school counseling literature. School counselors play an integral role in the academic and personal/social development of all students, including gifted students (ASCA, 2013; Peterson, 2015). Gifted students bring with them a unique set of social and emotional characteristics that may require attention within a school setting. Wood (2010a) suggested that in order to provide the most effective support for the gifted learner, it is imperative that school counselors recognize the nature and scope of their social and emotional needs. Hence, there is a significant and immediate need for research that furthers theoretical and empirical knowledge and understanding of what works regarding the process, methods, techniques and procedures used by professional school counselors in their day-to-day work with gifted students under the
umbrella of a comprehensive school counseling program. Describing professional school counselor views, actions, and life experiences within the context of their direct and indirect services with gifted children offers great value, creating a meaningful and multidimensional analysis that assists in developing an initial understanding of the process of providing direct and indirect services with elementary-aged students who are gifted. By providing accountability information from the professional school counselors’ experiences and the effects of their interventions and services with gifted students, this research sought to provide pertinent clinical information that informs counseling practice. Although the existing research provides a starting point from which to begin examining the experiences of professional school counselors, few have attempted to qualitatively examine differences in counseling services with gifted students from the perspective of the elementary school counselor. The unique research question combined with the use of basic qualitative study clarifies and situates this study by strengthening the connection between the academic (higher education) and clinical (practitioner) worlds of research. Therefore, this study was necessary to discover potential insight and understanding of the authentic experiences of elementary school counselors who engage in direct and indirect counseling services with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. The understanding gained from these experiences add to the knowledge base by informing and enlightening those who study the social, emotional and behavioral needs and counseling service delivery of gifted elementary students.

**Definition of Terms**

In a research study, it is important to define terms that are central to the study. Additionally, the researcher should define terms that may not have a common meaning or have the possibility to be misunderstood by the reader (Creswell, 2014). The terms are listed below in alphabetical order.
**Accountability:** One of the cornerstones of the ASCA National Model. Professional school counselors are responsible for their work and the impact it has on stakeholders (Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2014).

**Advocacy:** Creating positive change where change is needed; supporting in word and need, a topic, cause, need person, or group of persons (Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2014).

**American School Counselor Association (ASCA):** The national, professional organization for professional school counselors and is also a subdivision of the American Counseling Association.

**ASCA National Model:** A model for school counseling programs developed by ASCA in response to the education movement in which standards-based education focuses on performance rather than entitlement (ASCA, 2005). This model is built around four elements: (a) the foundation, (b) the management system, (c) the delivery system, and (d) accountability. Focus is emphasized on collaboration, leadership, advocacy, and systemic change.

**Collaboration:** People working together voluntarily with shared responsibility and accountability in meeting mutual goals.

**Comprehensive School Counseling Programs:** The cornerstone of an effective counseling program driven by student data and is based on student standards in academic, career, and personal/social development in order to promote student achievement and enhance the learning process for all students (Davis, 2015).

**Core Curriculum:** The ASCA National Model (2012b) defines core curriculum as “a planned, written instructional program that is comprehensive in scope, preventative in
nature and developmental in design” (p. 85). Core curriculum is delivered through direct instruction and group activities.

Direct Services: The ASCA National Model (2012b) defines direct student service as “in person interactions between school counselors and students” (p.83).

Elementary school counselor: A state-certified or licensed school counselor with the state department of education. Professional school counselors generally hold, at minimum, a master’s degree. Last, this person is situated in an elementary school typically grades K-6 and performs the role as a school counselor.

Gifted Student: A person who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression. For the purposes of this study, gifted students are defined as those who show potential for a high level of intellectual, creative, artistic, and leadership abilities and who require unique services and activities by educational professionals for effective development.

Indirect Services: The contacts and activities that professional school counselors have or do with teachers, parents, and others on behalf of students (i.e consultation, collaboration, and referral).

Intervention: A strategy initiated to bring about a desired change (Neihart, 2006).


Small Group Counseling: Small group counseling refers to a number of people usually eight or less, who meet on a scheduled basis, to discuss a particular topic with an individual trained in group facilitation and counseling.
Assumptions

Qualitative research begins with assumptions on the part of the researcher thereby causing an interest strong enough to move through the research process (Creswell, 2007). Assumptions are statements that the researcher holds to be true as one embarks into a qualitative study as well as what the researcher is able to draw some conclusions (Creswell, 2013).

Therefore, the key assumptions existed in this study included the following:

1. Participants answered the interview questions openly, honestly, and reflected their experiences working with gifted students.
2. School counselors, who have a gifted program and/or a gifted intervention specialist, are more knowledgeable about students who are gifted and more likely to advocate on their behalf (Carlson, 2004).
3. Advocacy is one of the primary responsibilities and ethical practice of professional school counselors (ASCA, 2012b).
4. Professional school counselors provide prevention and intervention services and programs that promote a positive school environment and support the mental health needs of students (Davis, 2015; DeKruyf, et al., 2013).
5. Constructivist theory is an accurate theoretical framework for the study.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to acknowledge experiences and potential biases related to the research study, since the qualitative researcher is the instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). The researcher was an elementary school counselor for 11 years. In that time, she created, implemented and evaluated counseling interventions for/with students identified as gifted. The researcher believes that gifted students have unique social, emotional and behavioral
needs that require a differentiated counseling approach. Since there was a lack of information from a practitioner’s perspective describing their counseling practices with students identified as gifted, the researcher chose the basic qualitative research design to investigate what was occurring with other elementary counselors within their work with gifted students.

**Organization of the Remainder of Study**

Chapter One consists of an introduction to the topic of interest, background of the study, the statement of problem, purpose of the study, the research questions, a statement of significance of the study, the definition of terms utilized throughout the dissertation, assumptions and the researcher’s positionality. Chapter Two comprised a literature review that includes the following: overview of gifted students, overview of elementary school counseling programs and the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Three includes the qualitative research methods utilized in this study including information about research design, the setting of the study, sample procedures, recruitment and data collection and the trustworthiness of the data. Data analysis and results of the study are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses the summary of results with implications and recommendations for further research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Careful review and synthesis of the existing literature was conducted by examining professional journal articles and books. The material providing most pertinent information included was literature that focused on the relationship between school counseling and gifted education. Material featuring this dynamic relationship provided the study with the most relevant and generally accepted information guiding professional school counselors today. This chapter will review available literature from the following perspectives: (1) overview of gifted students; (2) overview of school counseling; and (3) constructivism as the theoretical framework. Compiled all together, this chapter serves to establish the foundation and context from which this study was conducted.

Overview of Gifted Students

Giftedness Defined

Educators and researchers have been defining giftedness in a variety of ways for many years. Clear definitions support common understandings, and foster progress toward a specific goal; however, there is no firm consensus that exists among professionals as to precisely who should be considered gifted, talented, or both. Quite simply, the word gifted means different things to different people. Why define giftedness? In countless urban, suburban, and rural school districts a clear, ubiquitous definition would serve as a foundation and springboard for all subsequent decisions for developing, identifying and funding appropriate educational programs for gifted children: No definition, no program.

Most people outside of the gifted education field are unaware of the decades-long search for consensus over a single definition for giftedness. The following definitions are in no way an exhaustive list, however, they represent a diminutive attempt to define giftedness with respect to
professional school counseling from distinct definitions within the field of gifted education. The U.S. Department of Education defines gifted under the Marland report (1972) as:

gifted and talented children as those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These children require differentiated educational programs and services in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas: (1) General intellectual ability; (2) Specific academic aptitude; (3) Creative or productive thinking; (4) Leadership ability; (5) Visual and performing arts, and/or (6) psychomotor ability (Marland, 1972, pp 13-14).

In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement issued *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent*, in which they tweaked their earlier definition of giftedness:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkable high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capability in intellectual capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (p. 3)

The National Association of Gifted Children [NAGC] (2013) defines gifted children:
Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in the top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

The development of ability or talent is a lifelong process. It can be evident in young children as exceptional performance on tests and/or other measures of ability or as a rapid rate of learning, compared to other students of the same age, or in actual achievement in a domain. As individuals mature through childhood to adolescence, however, achievement and high levels of motivation in the domain become the primary characteristics of their giftedness. Various factors can either enhance or inhibit the development and expression of abilities. (NAGC: What is giftedness?, 2013, para.5)

A definition of giftedness that focused on social and emotional attributes was proposed in 1991 by a group of educators and psychologists known as the Columbus Group:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally (Columbus Group, 1991, para. 2).

Though the federal definition is comprehensive and inclusive, states and school districts are not required to use the federal definition (NAGC, 2013). Further, James Delisle (1992) noted that it is unlikely any one definition of giftedness will ever be written that satisfies the
researcher, the educator, and so on. However, Balchin (2009) argued differently that all stakeholders must accept a concise definition. Doing so, Balchin suggested, would help move away from a categorical, strict, and often confusing conceptualization of giftedness in terms of aptitude in one or more areas of learning, and towards a more developmental, practical definition that embodies an understanding of the fluid nature of giftedness, and leads directly to a reasonable understanding for educators and the gifted learners they serve.

Students, who could be identified gifted, are present in schools in all grades, races, genders, and from all socioeconomic levels. Gifted children are usually identified in elementary school (Silverman, 1993) when teachers, professional school counselors or parents, refer the student for a formal educational evaluation. This is an optimal time gifted children should be recognized so differentiated educational opportunities can be lined up to provide an educational path that taps into a gifted child’s ability and potential. Moreover, the identification process varies across school districts and amongst states, but the outcome should be centered on the child receiving necessary differentiation and modifications to a school’s curriculum so that the child can be challenged in school (NAGC, 2009; Rotigel, 2003). Most schools have some type of screening and selection process so students are not subjectively placed in special programs.

With respect to Balchin’s (2009) argument of one concise definition of gifted, the Ohio Department of Education defines gifted as:

students who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience or environment and who are identified under division (A), (B), (C), or (D) of section 3324.03 of the Ohio Revised Code (Revised Code 3324.01-.07, 1999).
School districts across the state of Ohio are to identify students who perform or show the potential of performing at high levels of accomplishment in the areas of superior cognitive ability, specific academic ability, creative thinking ability, and/or visual and/or performing arts at least two times of a year. Although the Ohio Department of Education offers a step-by-step guide on the process of identifying gifted students, Ohio public schools are not required to serve gifted students nor fund the differentiated instruction these students need.

**Characteristics of Gifted Children**

Regardless of a child’s academic achievement or performance, and regardless of the identification cutoff score in a particular school or in any particular state, a child who is intellectually gifted is consistently at the higher end of the academic bell curve. The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC, 2009) offers a list of common characteristics of gifted individuals through the work of Webb, Gore, Amend, and DeVries (2007). These characteristics include, but not limited to the following: unusually large vocabulary and sentence structure for age, often self-taught reading and writing skills as a preschooler, intense concentration, interest in experimenting, excellent memory, deep intense feelings, idealism and sense of justice at an early age, highly curious, desire to organize people and things, concern with social and political issues and injustices, extremely sensitive, vivid imagination and keen sense of humor.

Although this list contains both cognitive and affective characteristics of this population, it is important to consider additional characteristics not mentioned by Webb, Gore, Amend, and DeVries (2007) such as striving for perfection (Silverman, 2000), divergent thinking, perceptiveness, and drivenness (Lovecky, 1992) as well. These gifted characteristics are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive (Silverman, 2000). Yet, several authors emphasized the need for school counselors and educators alike to have specific knowledge not only of the cognitive
characteristics, but to the affective characteristics as well (Colangelo, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 1998; VanTassel-Baska, 1990). In fact, due to the initial focus across school to look for academic/cognitive markers when identifying a student as gifted, the myriad affective particularities frequently associated with this group of learners were often overlooked. Solow (1995) supported this finding in highlighting a general public acceptance of the cognitive characteristics and less acceptance and understanding of the distinct social, emotional and behavioral characteristics of this population.

**Developmental Challenges of Gifted Students**

Findings in the gifted literature have focused primarily on academic performance rather than the social, emotional and behavioral attributes of students who are gifted (Peterson & Wachter-Morris, 2010; Yoo & Moon, 2006). Consequently, understanding and providing education and services promoting social, emotional, and behavioral development of gifted students is of an increasing imperative in the field of gifted education (Garrett, 2005; Peterson & Moon, 2008). Social, emotional and behavioral development in all children is a complex process, and children who are gifted are no exception. “In the earliest stages of talent development, it is important that young children see the world around them as inviting and full of opportunities to learn” (Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik & Worrell, 2015, p. 147). As a child gains understanding of his/her surroundings, a significant confluence between environmental experiences and social contexts converge, shaping one’s development (Santrock, 2009).

Human development refers to an individual’s physical, mental, emotional and social growth throughout life. Humans are most vulnerable during infancy and childhood as children can experience both typical and atypical developmental trajectories (Newman & Newman, 2010). Typical development usually follows a known and predictable pattern whereas atypical
development does not follow such a probable course. Atypical development appears when a child either falls behind or accelerates ahead of typical peers in physical, cognitive, and/or social skills. Given that the gifted population is more advanced in areas of cognitive development than age-mate peers, it may complicate their development (Robinson, 2008). Historically, early studies regarding the social, emotional, and behavioral development of gifted children by Terman (1925) stated that these individuals had typical personalities and were not more maladjusted than others. In other words, the data indicated they were not any more susceptible to developmental issues or social or emotional challenges as their non-gifted peers (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986; Neihart, 1999). Nonetheless, other researchers contend that some gifted students experience atypical developmental challenges that are related to their giftedness (Lovecky, 2004; Peterson & Moon, 2008; Silverman, 2012).

The concept of atypical development is similar to what is known in the gifted literature as asynchronous development. Simply, *asynchrony* means uneven development, (Silverman, 2012) and asynchronous development is based on the different rates of cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral growth in gifted children compared to their non-gifted peers (Silverman, 2002; Silverman, 2012). Because of this atypicality or uneven development, it is suggested by Peterson (2006) that gifted traits and characteristics may make coping with life events more difficult and may cause gifted students to experience them qualitatively different than their non-gifted peers. This developmental asynchrony creates distinct challenges for gifted children as their cognitive development generally outpaces their social, emotional and behavioral development (Robinson, 2008; Silverman, 1993; Silverman, 2012).

Perhaps most important to understanding how developmental challenges impact gifted children is a recognition of these unique social, emotional and behavioral experiences of these
individuals. Manaster and Powell (1983) described the imbalance of such developmental needs as being *out of stage* (cognitive development), *out of phase* (social discrepancies), and *out of sync* (feelings of not fitting in with non-gifted peers). Lovecky (2004) echoed the interplay of imbalances between developmental issues and cognitive issues as the following:

Not only do many gifted children go through stages of emotional, social, moral and spiritual development at earlier ages than more average children, but also they experience crises within each stage in a qualitatively different way because of their exceptional intensity and sensitivity (pp.12-13). Their imbalances and/or asynchrony in development often create a myriad of potential social, emotional and/or behavioral difficulties for gifted students (Gilman, 2008). Therefore, gifted students need a professional school counselor to aid in supporting their social and emotional wellbeing (Silverman, 2012).

**Social, Emotional and Behavioral Needs of Gifted Students**

Understanding and providing services in promoting the social, emotional and behavioral development of gifted students is imperative in the field of gifted education (Garrett, 2005; Peterson & Moon, 2008). The gifted learner may have needs that can be addressed by professional school counselors within their comprehensive school counseling program. Wood (2010a) suggested in order to provide the most effective support for the gifted learner, it is imperative that school counselors recognize the nature and scope of their social and emotional needs. Building upon that assertion, ASCA (2013, para. 5) stated the school counselor assist in promoting understanding and awareness to the following social and emotional issues affecting gifted learners: (1) meeting expectations, (2) perfectionism, (3) stress management, (4) depression, (5) underachievement, (6) dropping out, (7) delinquency and (8) difficulty in peer
relationships. Likewise, the NAGC (2009) stated gifted students may have social, emotional and behavioral needs in the areas of perfectionism, underachievement, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, substance abuse, and emotional responses to life events. In addition to the school-based social and emotional areas identified by ASCA and NAGC, Mendagaliio and Peterson (2007), described their top eight issues from a clinical setting of gifted youth: (1) problems related to extreme sensitivities, (2) depression, (3) anxiety, (4) underachievement, (5) social difficulties, including isolation and aggression, (6) drug use and dependency, (7) adjustment disorder related to troubling life events, and (8) developmental issues for both high and low achievers.

Although gifted students may come to school with diverse set of social, emotional and behavioral needs, it appears from the identified sets of issues a relationship between gifted learner behaviors and how they may perceive themselves within their proximal school environment. Neihart (2002) pointed to how social and emotional issues emerge from a mismatch of educational experiences and the ability level of the student, the difficulty of finding like-ability peers, and/or a mismatch of self-expectations as compared to others such as the proximal influences of parents and teachers.

As mentioned earlier some scholars of giftedness report that gifted children are no more at-risk for social or emotional problems than their average peer (Neihart, 1999). Many gifted children excel academically and are well rounded socially, emotionally, and behaviorally requiring little to no additional assistance or support from school personnel. Students who are gifted have many strengths as they tend to reason well, learn rapidly, have excellent memory, show compassion, and be morally sensitive (Peterson & Moon, 2008). Many gifted students even find school enjoyable. However, there are great misunderstandings about giftedness
In countless schools across the country, many educators and counselors alike have misunderstandings regarding giftedness such as “high ability students don’t face problems and challenges” (Moon, 2009, p. 274) or high ability students do not experience any social or emotional issues or behavioral difficulties if they did, however, they would figure it out on their own (Peterson, 2009).

Because of these and many other misconceptions, an awareness of and sensitivity to the unique characteristics of gifted children is important for all educators. Social, emotional and behavioral issues can emerge in school settings amongst high ability students from a mismatch of educational experiences (Neihart, 2002). Yet, environments that provide appropriate rigor and support are most likely to encourage positive development in gifted children (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). Davis and Rimm (1998) stated that when school personnel understand such characteristics, “then they can aid and support the troubled gifted students, helping them realize they are not abnormal, they are not weird, and they are not alone” (p.390).

Since most students are identified as gifted in elementary school (Silverman, 1993), the responsibility in schools for helping the gifted learners reconcile the social, emotional and behavioral needs they require is that of the elementary school counselor.

**Overview of Elementary School Counseling Program**

Professional school counseling in the United States has developed out of historical tradition, ideas, and transformation of the vocational guidance movement dating as far back as the Industrial Revolution. From its inception, vocational guidance in schools assisted students in transitioning from school to the world of work (Gysbers, 2010). While vocational guidance efforts retained its foundation in high school settings, there is evidence that teachers were appointed as elementary school counselors in Boston schools as early as 1910 (Gysbers &
Henderson, 2012). During the 1920s and 1930s, William Burnham focused his efforts and attention to the wellbeing of students during the early years of schooling (Ziomek-Daigle & Land, 2016). He was an advocate and pioneer for what is now known as elementary school counseling (Studer, 2005). Because of the vocational guidance roots, the emphasis of guidance and counseling at the secondary levels has overshadowed the work of the elementary counselors historically. (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). In fact, counseling at the elementary level is the least researched area of school counseling (Ziomek-Daigle & Land, 2016) despite the fact that many psychological issues can be addressed through prevention and early intervention (Myrick, 1997).

Despite the paucity of the research, the basic foundation of elementary school counseling programs was based on evidence of the adverse effects of unhealthy early childhood psychological development (Miller, 1989). Yet today, only 20 states including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico mandate school counseling services for Grades K-8 (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2012). Despite the discrepancies between states, research has supported the advantages and benefits of having elementary school counselors within the school setting, such as students improved classroom behavior, peer relations, and academic success (Borders & Drury, 1992; Miller, 1989; Rose, Miller, & Martinez, 2009). The ASCA succinctly stated elementary school years set the tone for developing the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for children to become healthy, competent and confident learners.

**Elementary School Counselors**

An elementary school counselor is a certified or licensed master’s level educator trained in school counseling with unique qualifications and skills that address the academic, personal/social and career development needs of all students (ASCA, 2009). Elementary school
counselors are employed in elementary and/or primary schools across the country. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) and promote the development of their school’s counseling program within a comprehensive school counseling model. An effective school counseling program is comprehensive in scope, preventive in design, and developmental in nature (Studer, 2015). A counseling program should be a vital component of the school’s mission and vision. When implementing a comprehensive school counseling model, close attention is paid to balancing and meeting the needs of all of their students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Studer, 2015).

The role of the elementary school counselor has been delineated by ASCA. ASCA’s website (n.d) states: “Elementary school counselors are professional educators with a mental health perspective who understand and respond to the challenges presented by today’s diverse student population.” The activities and domains outlined in Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (ASCA, 2014) are considered vital elements in effective school counseling programs. The standards cover curriculum content along with the skills and competencies that students acquire as a result of their participation in the program. Last, the ASCA described the importance of a comprehensive developmental elementary school counseling program as elementary school counselor’s work as a team with teachers, administration, parents and the community to create a caring culture and climate for the betterment of students.

**Framework for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs**

The art of managing an effective, data-driven, comprehensive and developmental school counseling program is a skill that school counselors learn, execute, refine, and reflect upon. Professional school counselors use a comprehensive developmental model to deliver programs and counseling services to all students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Effective comprehensive
school counseling programs serve all students by promoting typical development and addressing issues that impact the lives of students (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Many developmental counseling program models have been developed over the years such as Myrick’s Model (1997), Gysbers and Henderson’s (1994) Comprehensive Career Development and Guidance Program Model, Paisley and Hubbard’s Model (1994) and the ASCA National Model (2012b). With the shift in school reform to focus more on accountability and evidence-based practice, the ASCA National Model has become the archetype from which most professional school counselors design their comprehensive school counseling program (Brown & Trusty, 2005). It is considered the most influential document in the history of professional school counseling (Davis, 2015).

**ASCA National Model.** The ASCA National Model was designed to represent how school counseling programs are developed, implemented, managed, and evaluated. This paradigm shift towards accountability and evaluations of school counseling programs began over the past two decades (Davis, 2015). Through many historical changes in school counseling over time, the position statement of ASCA with respect to a comprehensive school counseling program has evolved into the following:

Professional school counselors design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs that promote student achievement. These programs are comprehensive in scope, preventative in design and developmental in nature…A comprehensive school counseling program is an integral component of the school’s academic mission. Comprehensive school counseling programs, driven by student data and based on standards in academic, career and personal/social development, promote and enhance the learning process for all students (ASCA, 2012a, para. 1).
Additionally, a professional school counselor within a comprehensive school counseling framework delivers data-driven services to and for students through counseling, collaboration, and consultation (Studer, 2015). A school counselor’s ability to create and implement such a program is a combined result of education, training, consultation and collaboration amongst school personnel, shared experiences among school counseling colleagues, and intention of the ASCA National Model.

Pivotal to the integral aspect of successful school counselor leadership within this model is a counselor’s ability to ascertain what decisions are needed to achieve results that will align with the vision and mission of their school counseling program (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). The ASCA National Model provides a framework for building a comprehensive school counseling program that is connected to the school mission and is integral to the educational demands of today’s schools. These demands include the roles, programs, functions and services of programs of school counselors.

The ASCA National Model brings counselors together in unity by the following key concepts:

(1) ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students; (2) identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program; (3) is delivered to all students in a systematic fashion; (4) is based on data-driven decision making; (5) is provided by a state-credentialed professional school counselor (ASCA, 2012a, para. 1).

**ASCA National Model themes and components.** Leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change are the central themes of the ASCA National Model. These themes provide
professional school counselors a direction to address social justice issues within their schools (Studer, 2015).

Theme of leadership. ASCA has put leadership and advocacy in the forefront of today’s educational agenda for professional school counselors. Davis (2015) defined leadership as the “process of influencing others to create a shared commitment to a common purpose” (p.278). Leadership practices are positively related to the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (Davis, 2015). Beyond being leaders in the design and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors play a unique role in leading the education mission through the lens of academic, career, and personal and social emotional development. Further, as school systems become more diverse and complex with equity, achievement, and attainment gaps increasing, the resounding call for professional school counselors to be leaders of social justice and education reform continues (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015; Lee & Goodnough, 2015).

This transformation starts with effective leadership by the school counselor (House & Hayes, 2002). According to Hughey (2001), “Effective leadership is important for professional school counselors and it is necessary for active involvement in school reform efforts” (p. 11). If school counselors are to be leaders within schools, understanding the contexts in which leadership occurs, the activities involved in each context, and the skills required for those activities can be a way of conceptualizing and applying effective leadership of comprehensive school counseling programs (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Dollarhide, 2003).

Professional school counselor leaders value equity and justice for all students. Therefore, it is important to have an understanding of those contexts in which their interaction with students interact are critical to personal development and academic achievement. Similarly, Wingfield,
Reese, and West-Olatunji (2010) stated “when school counselors are recognized as leaders and experts of interpreting the social context of achievement to colleagues, it becomes much easier for them to advocate for marginalized students” (p. 126).

*Theme of advocacy.* Similar to leadership, advocacy happens when the professional school counselor deliberately attempts to influence and change existing practices, policies, and procedures for and on behalf of all students. Advocacy is defined in the ASCA National Model as:

Actively supporting causes, ideas, or policies that promote and assist student academic, career, person/social needs. One form of advocacy is the process of actively identifying underrepresented students and supporting them in their efforts to perform at their highest level of academic achievement (ASCA, 2005, p.129).

Similarly, Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, and Mason (2014) define advocacy as “creating positive change where change is needed; supporting in word and deed, a topic, cause, need, person, or group of persons” (p. 258). Furthermore, the professional school counselor ensures within their comprehensive school counseling program a high level of academic, college and career readiness and personal/social by fostering it in every student (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2014).

*Theme of collaboration.* ASCA has called for professional school counselors to promote, facilitate, advocate for successful collaboration of all stakeholders on and behalf of students. School counselors are currently in pivotal roles in collaborating and leading school transformation at the local, state, regional, and national levels (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006). The more relationships and partnerships professional school counselors have with administrators, teachers, parents, students, local businesses and the like, the more impact they will have in promoting student achievement (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).
Theme of systemic change. Professional school counselors help close gaps in educational access, opportunities, and attainment for their students. Systemic change is defined as:

Change that occurs within and between the multiple spheres of influence that shape educational processes and policies, including (but not limited to) students, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and community members (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015, p. 236).

Professional school counselors are positioned within their schools to identify systemic barriers to student achievement (ASCA, 2012). Chen-Hayes and Getch (2015) asserted that “Key to transforming the school counseling profession is the transformed school counselor’s use of leadership and advocacy skills as change agents for equity and social justice to endure academic, career, college readiness, and personal/social competencies for every student and in publicizing program interventions and outcomes for all students” (p. 194).

Although leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change are themes interwoven throughout the ASCA National Model, the program components of foundation, delivery, management and accountability show how to implement the model.

Foundation. Foundation component is the what of a comprehensive counseling program and answers the question: What knowledge, attitudes, and skills will students learn from participation in school counseling programs? (Studer, 2015) The actionable components make up the Foundation are program focus, student competencies, and professional competencies from which a comprehensive school counseling program is built.

Management. The management component is the when, the why, and on what authority of a comprehensive counseling program addressing the questions: Why do students benefit from school counseling programs? Who determines the focus? When will program activities occur?
(Studer, 2015) This component provides the assessments and tools to effectively organize a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Delivery.** The delivery component is the *how* of a comprehensive school counseling program answering the question: What activities and strategies will be used to address student needs? (Studer, 2015) This component consists of direct services (with students) and indirect services (on behalf of students) while promoting student achievement, equity and access for all students (ASCA, 2012b).

**Accountability.** The accountability component answers the question: How have students changed as a result of the counseling program? (Studer, 2015) Accountability is provided by a professional school counselor through the collection and tracking of data and making decisions based on the analysis. The actionable items that make up accountability are data analysis, program results and evaluation and improvement. In sum, the ASCA National Model provides a foundational framework for building, managing and delivering a comprehensive school counseling program ensuring that all students including those who are gifted have equal access to counseling services.

**Elementary School Counselor and the Gifted Student**

Elementary school counselors implementing a comprehensive school counseling program in alignment with the ASCA National Model make sure close attention is paid to balancing and meeting the needs of *all* of their students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Studer, 2015). Similarly, they are responsible for ensuring students with unique gifts and talents receive appropriate academic, career, and personal/social interventions as well (Chen-Hayes, et al., 2014). Too often, students who exhibit characteristics of giftedness do not receive effective social and emotional and/or affective instruction they need.
Greater understanding and/or training is needed to effectively support the development of gifted students in their immediate context of family, peers, and school (Rotigel, 2003; Silverman, 1993). School professionals often times cannot relate to or have a firm understanding of the social and emotional needs this subgroup of children may require (Neihart, 2002; Winner, 1997). Hence, Levy and Plucker (2008) developed a model that extended specific considerations for working with gifted students within a comprehensive counseling program, as they are viewed as a subculture with distinct academic and personal/social needs in today’s ever changing school environments. Given their risk of personal and academic issues, gifted students need a professional school counselor leading a comprehensive school counseling program that directly addresses their needs.

The NAGC recommendation for schooling is there should be a social and emotional component of gifted education programming both in and outside of the regular education classroom (NAGC, 2013). Typically, this type of social and emotional guidance has fallen to the gifted intervention specialist as this educator tends to be the one with the most proximal influences to the student during the school day (Wood, 2010a). However, NAGC’s Social and Emotional Guidance and Counseling standards highlight and recognize the school counselor, who is familiar with social and emotional needs, as the one who should be providing such services (NAGC, 2013). Despite Wood’s (2010a; 2010b) recommendations, there are no studies to date that examine the specific use, implementation, nor effectiveness of the NAGC standards by a professional school counselor with their gifted students.

**Training of Elementary School Counselors to Best Support Gifted Students**

Early recognition and appropriate counseling interventions of gifted students within a school setting increases the probability of future extraordinary achievement over the life space
and reduces the risk for later social, behavioral, emotional, and/or educational problems (Gross, 1999; Harrison, 2005). The social, emotional, and behavioral development of gifted children, for school counselor has received some attention within gifted education journals (Wood, 2010b). However, not as much information has been published in journals specific to school counseling though school counselors are usually the first line of defense in supporting students affective and behavioral needs in schools (Adams, 2014; Peterson, 2007). Professional school counselors could benefit greatly not only from research that incorporates a systemic approach, but also from practical applications as well (Myers & Pace, 1986). Building upon that assertion, VanTassel-Baska (2009) suggested in order for human external influences to be productive in children’s lives, adults must be trained in relevant skills, select interventions, and ensure that the systems within which they function are attuned to the need for flexibility in implementation.

Despite these assertions, professional school counselors graduating from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counselor education programs are not required to take courses specializing in serving gifted students (Peterson & Wachter Morris, 2010). This graduate preparation expectation is in sharp contrast to the many calls for professional school counselors have at least some foundational knowledge about the affective and behavioral needs of gifted students. According to the NAGC position paper, “given the salience of giftedness in social and emotional development, and the likelihood that career and academic concerns have implications for well-being, school counselors need to be prepared to work with highly able students” (National Association of Gifted Children [NAGC], 2009, p. 3). Elementary school counselors should focus their efforts on collaborating with educators in schools to establish the conditions for optimal growth and development in their students (Howard & Solberg, 2006). Yet, professional school counselors are often uninformed or
misinformed regarding the social, emotional and behavioral developmental needs of gifted children in relation to intellectual development and schooling (Peterson, 2015; Silverman, 1993; Wood, 2010a). Last, since professional school counselors play such a vital role within the school district, Walker (1982) contended that “the counselor with knowledge of the characteristics of the gifted and talented student will be invaluable service as programs and curricula are developed” (p 364).

**School Counseling Services for Gifted Students**

Many gifted students utilize different coping strategies depending on their situation and environment (Coleman, Casali & Wampold, 2001). Collecting data from the gifted learner’s perspective (self) and their person-environment interactions (teachers and parent) before determining what educational, preventive, or intervention approaches are needed is crucial to the success of a professional school counselor’s comprehensive program (ASCA, 2012b). Simply put, data drives the goals for intervention. However, Reis and Moon (2002) stated the following:

> There are many good ideas in the literature for developmental interventions by parents, teachers, and counselors, but few suggestions for how to help professional counselors best address the needs of their clients who are gifted and talented. What is needed most, however, is solid empirical research on patterns and interventions that promote the healthy development of gifted students into gifted adults who lead satisfying personal and professional lives (p. 262).

Subsequently, Wood (2010a) added that a comprehensive school counseling program aligning with the ASCA National Model supports the three domains of academic, personal/social and career and the ASCA (2013) position statement *The Professional School Counselor and Gifted and Talented Student Programs* explains the need for school counselors work with gifted
student is evident in the literature. Though school counselors may be well informed of what they need to do but “not necessarily how to meet those needs” (Wood, 2010a, p. 43).

Gifted education scholars have established activities and service delivery models that professional school counselors could employ with their gifted students (Mendaglio & Peterson, 2007; Moon 2002; Silverman, 1993; VanTassel-Baska, 1998) though few have made it to the professional school counseling literature nor to the hands of the school counselor practitioner (Wood, 2010b). Myers and Pace (1986) summarized this conceptual theory to practice disconnect as:

Significant information is starting to accumulate on the needs of gifted persons, but there is very little experimental documentation of effective counseling and guidance strategies. What knowledge is available about counseling this population is based mostly on clinical experiences and descriptive research (p. 550).

This disconnect between theory and practice is echoed by Reis and Moon (2002) who state, “While numerous strategies and some models have been suggested for addressing the social and emotional needs of students with gifts and talents, few have been comprehensively implemented by school personnel or even by private counselors who practice with this population” (p. 251).

Nonetheless, research supports that school counseling interventions can have significant effects across K-12 settings (Davis, 2015). As ethical professionals, professional school counselors are obligated to seek out the most effective interventions for the diverse population they serve (ASCA, 2010, Standard E.2.c.). ASCA (2012b) suggested the professional school counselor could provide individual, small /or large group counseling as a resource for gifted students and their families in meeting their unique social, emotional and behavioral needs. This is supported by Wood’s (2010a) study concluding that school counselors need to be aware of a
wide array of best practices and implementing such when working with their gifted students. Many researchers advocated for differentiated counseling approaches in which giftedness is centralized within academic, career, and social and emotional interventions (Colangelo, 2003; Moon, Kelly, & Feldhusen, 1997; Silverman, 1993). Specifically, group counseling is suggested as most effective when the participants are homogeneous in ability, Peterson (2006) explained gifted students may be more comfortable and find commonalities amongst group members and make connections with others based on their feelings and experiences.

A sampling of specific counseling strategies noted in the research used to enhance social, emotional and behavioral competence include reclaiming normalcy (Probst & Piechowski, 2012), bibliotherapy (Delisle, 1990; VanTassel-Baska, 2009) journal writing (Hall, 1990; VanTassel-Baska 2003), discussion of gifts and talents (Peterson, 1990; Silverman, 1990), use of affective curriculum (Peterson, 2003; Peterson, Betts, & Bradley, 2009; Silverman, 1993), and playing games focusing on interpersonal, psychological dimensions (Peterson, 2003). Although these suggestions are presented as counseling strategies in the literature, there is almost no outcome data on the effectiveness of these approaches or strategies implemented specifically with gifted students (Moon, 2002).

Rather than focusing on specific counseling approaches, Peterson (2006) suggested that gifted children are best served when school counselors work collaboratively with gifted personnel. Wood (2012) echoed this sentiment as describing it as a powerful partnership for servicing gifted students. Conversely, Cross (1997) suggested in the interest of identifying effective strategies to support gifted learners, it is important to emphasize that gifted children are children first, and gifted children second. Since giftedness does not release one from experiencing social and emotional issues while growing up, schools should address the
psychological needs of normal development first, then address specific areas related to
giftedness. When considering a counseling approach with students the counselor should consider
individual differences among the gifted as gifted children are more different than they are alike
(Brown, 1993; VanTassel-Baska, 1990).

Though there are different ways to address the social, emotional and behavioral concerns
of gifted students, one common thread is the school counselor should consider the impact
giftedness has on the student (Peterson, 2006). Additionally, gifted education scholars identify
the need for differentiated counseling services. However, it is unclear if elementary school
counselors follow these recommendations in practice. The current study endeavors to understand
and describe the professional practices of elementary school counselors as they provide
counseling services with gifted students.

**Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Theories are used in research to organize and give meaning to information and to provide
a framework for researchers to conceptualize, analyze, and interpret facts (Miller, 2011).
Qualitative researchers typically use a theoretical lens to guide their research (Creswell, 2009)
much like a school counselor’s theoretical orientation guides, frames and affects their
professional practice. Specific to educational research, a theory aids in examining issues in
context that are important within the research setting and/or specific population within the school
who may need to be studied in more detail. Ultimately, a researchers’ theoretical perspective
describes their philosophical stance behind their methodology as well as their attempts to provide
context for the process and grounds of their study (Crotty, 1998). The researcher’s theoretical
perspective used in this study was that of constructivist theory within the context of the ASCA
National Model.
Constructivism has become one of the reigning theoretical learning theory in educational research. The constructivist epistemological paradigm views “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Thus, learning and meaning making occurs in the social and cultural context in which the educator or researcher in this case should be situated within the real activity and practical context (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

The constructivist concept of social situatedness coined by Vygotsky (1962) is important to this study. He explained that situatedness is the interplay between the researcher, the situation, and the context, when combined, all affect and shape how the research is developed and undertaken. Moreover, Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs (2010) added to the discussion of social situatedness as it relates to insider research. They argued that researchers who are considered professional insiders are able to draw upon the shared understanding of the participants used in their study. This situates the insider researcher in such a way that enables a clearer understanding of the context for their research inquiry. Due to the fact that this researcher was considered a professional insider (as stated in Chapter One and will be explained in more detail in Chapter Three), she was situated in the working contextual reality of the participants, and was able to meaningfully interact, in a manner consistent with Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) description.

The goal of a researcher utilizing constructivism in research is to comprehend and construct new ideas based on existing knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As a constructivist, this researcher recognized and acknowledged the implications her background experiences and prior knowledge provided to the topic being studied. As Crotty (1998) explained the
constructivist researcher usually has “something to work with” (p. 44). Through a constructivist paradigm, the researcher attempted to make sense of the multiple narratives or realities of the research participants (Creswell, 2013). This more interpretive nature coincides with the tenets of a basic qualitative research design as its emphasis is on discovery and understanding from the participants’ experiences.

This research study sought to explore a variety of narratives regarding the experiences and practices of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students. In accomplishing this goal, the researcher explored the participants’ reality through their professional experiences and practices within the context of the ASCA National Model. As mentioned earlier, the ASCA National Model provides a framework for professional school counselors that is comprehensive in scope, data-driven, and promotes student achievement. Though considered the archetype from which a professional school counselor could align their comprehensive school counseling program, not every professional school counselor implements a comprehensive school counseling program (Lapan, 2012) nor aligns it with ASCA. This study was grounded in the context that all research participants aligned with the ASCA National Model for their comprehensive school counseling program.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a literature review exploring both gifted education and school counseling. Covered topics include an overview of gifted students including their characteristics as well as an overview of elementary school counseling including their roles and responsibilities. Taken together, this review supports the need for a qualitative study of the experiences and practices of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. Despite the ethical obligation
in finding and delivering effective intervention with this population of student, there is a paucity of information regarding best practices and interventions serving gifted students by the elementary school counselor. Therefore, this study furthered the research by describing professional school counselors’ experiences and practices of their counseling services with elementary-aged students who are gifted.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three provides a discussion of the methodology used in this research study. The rationale for the selection of a qualitative inquiry and other relevant aspects are included along with the sampling strategy, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

When undertaking qualitative research, the first step is to determine which type of research design will provide the best way of thinking about and studying the research phenomenon. The most common approaches in qualitative research are the following: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case study research, basic qualitative and critical research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In developing a research design, two fundamental concepts were considered: the nature of the research questions and the desired end product. After considering these two concepts, this researcher decided to utilize a basic qualitative study as the research design framework.

The term basic qualitative design is used interchangeably with the words generic, interpretative and pragmatic approaches in qualitative inquiry (Lichtman, 2013). According to Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003), basic qualitative inquiry is exploratory research that seeks understanding and discovery and can be appropriate for understanding an experience or event. A basic qualitative study allows for more of a generalized approach of the subject matter being studied. A basic qualitative research design is the most commonly used in educational research, as it is grounded in people’s experiences and practices and their exploration of the meaning of events and phenomenon (Morrison, 2002). Additionally, it is easily applied in counseling (Merriam, 2003). As such, the intention of this study was to explore the described common
experiences of elementary school counselors from their own perspectives. Ultimately, the research design allowed each participant to express words, feelings, and descriptions (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003) of their experiences providing direct and indirect services with gifted students.

A basic qualitative study research design is used when trying to uncover strategies, techniques, and practices of the participants (Worthington, n.d). Also, the basic qualitative inquiry format allowed participants to share openly about their professional practices as elementary school counselors working with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. It is through this openness that data collected was the most authentic, hands-on and representative of how these counselors work with their gifted students.

**Setting**

One school district in a metropolitan area within the state of Ohio was selected for this study. According to the township website, the area is considered to be one of the most populated townships in the State of Ohio with roughly 47,000 residents and covering 34 square miles. Based on 2010 Census data, the racial makeup of the township was 94.9% White, 1.1% African American, and 4% of all other races combined with a median income for a household in this area was $88,000.

The school district from which this study was drawn employs roughly 430 teachers including general education, gifted and talented, career-technical, art, music, physical education, special education and school counselors. All of the teachers have at least a Bachelor’s degree with 76% if these teachers having at least a Master’s degree. All of the teachers are properly certified/licensed within their teaching area. The school district serves roughly 7500 students.
According the Ohio Department of Education (n.d) website, 90% of the students are White, non-Hispanic. Students identified with disabilities are considered 9% of the student population while 15% of the student populations are considered economically disadvantaged. Nearly one-third of the students were identified as gifted which is higher than the state average of 16% reported by NAGC. Yet only 4.9% of the total enrollment of the school district within this study are receiving gifted services provided by a gifted intervention specialist.

This setting is compelling to this research study because the Board of Education specifically addressed school counseling and school counseling initiatives in their strategic plan for increasing student achievement. Since Board of Education’s major responsibility is setting policy and ensuring its alignment, the professional school counselors within this district are considered key people in ensuring the success of students by creating conducive learning environments that promotes student learning. This district in this study uniquely promotes academic, career and personal/social development for every student through a comprehensive school counseling ASCA National Model provided by the professional school counselor. Last, the school district including the professional school counselors in this study use the multi-tiered supports and services of the RtI framework to strategically monitor students’ strengths and needs with appropriate interventions and services. RtI is defined as an “integration of assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavioral problems” (NCRTI, 2010, p. 2). The purpose is to bring a student to higher levels of development by matching intervention and supports to his or her social, emotional, behavioral, or cognitive needs (Shepard, Shahidullah, & Carlson, 2013). Tier 1 interventions are provided to all students and focuses on mostly preventative strategies. Tier 2 is targeted instruction for a smaller percentage of students identified as needing more intensive intervention. Tier 3 is
considered the intensive intervention and specifically designed instruction for a small number of targeted students based on school data.

**Sampling**

**Sampling Method**

The sampling method used in this study was consistent with non-probability purposive sampling. According to Liamputtong (2013), purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of specific individuals, events, or settings because of the crucial information they can provide. This type of sampling is used when trying to gain insight and understanding of the phenomenon under review. Though there are many different types of purposive sampling strategies, criterion-based sampling suited this study best as it required the participants to share a common experience (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, criterion sampling can be useful for identifying and understanding cases that are information rich (Patton, 2015). The criterion specific to this study included:

1. Held a master’s degree in a counseling discipline and licensed in the state of Ohio with at least one-year experience as a professional school counselor.
2. Identified as aligning with the ASCA National Model within their comprehensive school counseling program.
3. Employed in an elementary school that identifies and serves gifted students.
4. Worked in the same elementary building that has a gifted intervention specialist or teacher of the gifted.

**Recruitment Procedures**

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research study recruitment methods of soliciting elementary school counselors in Ohio based on the strict criteria mentioned. First, an email was sent to the Director of Special Services to gain approval.
and access for the study. After approval was granted for this study, the qualified participants were recruited via email based on the established criteria. All elementary counselors within one school district who participated in this study met the inclusion criteria stated above and approved by IRB.

After each potential participant responded to an open request for participation email, the researcher provided a more detailed description of the study including inclusion criteria. The potential participants were given an informed consent document via email for their review as well. When participants self selected to participate, a mutually agreed meeting time and place was scheduled for a face-to-face interview.

**Disclosure of affiliation.** The researcher had previous knowledge and connections with the school district which served as the setting for this study. She was employed for the district as a professional school counselor. However, the researcher was on professional leave during the time the research was conducted. Additionally, the researcher was familiar with the participants being interviewed as well. These individuals were professional colleagues of the researcher.

**Sample Size**

There are no rules for an ideal universal sample size in qualitative inquiry (Creswell 2013; Patton, 2002). However, it is crucial in qualitative research to select the sample size based on the scope of the research, the nature of the research question, the amount of useful information gained from each participant, and the methodology and methods employed (Morse, 2000). Additionally, Mears (2012) described the researcher as someone who is required to collect sufficient data to represent the experience they are investigating. Giorgi (2009) proposed that five to eight participants might be an optimal number of subjects. Based on the scope of the research, the nature of the research question, and the usefulness of the information collected
through interviewing, it was believed that five to six participants would be suitable. Six participants were initially solicited for this study with five agreeing to participate.

**Instrumentation**

According to Creswell (1998), “The qualitative approach allows the researcher to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 15). This allowed the researcher to explore the participants’ thoughts, experiences and practices concerning their work with students identified as gifted. Interview questions were developed based on the literature, theoretical framework, research purposes, and expert opinions for the semi-structured interview protocol. Prior to the actual inquiry, these questions were field tested by one counselor educator and one elementary school counselor both with research experience. Their suggestions were considered and incorporated in the revisions.

The interview questions consisted of a demographic questionnaire and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered first, followed by a face-to-face interview. The questionnaire was made up 13 questions that addressed three sections: personal demographics, school counseling training, experience, and degree, and their alignment with ASCA National Model. The participants were able to answer open-ended questions “where they can respond any way he or she [chose], elaborating upon answers, disagreeing with questions, or raising new issues” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 29). The interviews were conducted in quiet, private meeting places at the participants’ discretion and so confidentiality could be maintained. The interview guide included questions to help steer the direction of the interview. The questions were prepared to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experiences and practices working with gifted students. The questions covered counseling interventions and strategies,
collaboration, advocacy, leadership, and prevention and intervention efforts. Appendix B contains the actual interview guide, including a demographic questionnaire and interview questions used in the study.

**Data Collection**

Prior to data collection, each participant received information about the study including a consent form to review and sign indicating their willingness to participate in this study. The participants were encouraged to ask questions before, during, and after the interviews. Data collection included a basic demographic questionnaire, but relied on interviews as the primary source of data collection for this study. These approximately 30 minute interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format and were audio recorded utilizing a digital recorder.

The interview questions were given to each participant on a piece of paper to aid in their memory of the question. The interviews began by asking questions and engaging in conversation. Audio of the interviews were recorded and notes were taken when needed as a memory aid for key ideas. After the interview, the researcher thanked the participants for their participation.

**Data Analysis**

The goal in qualitative research analysis is to answer the research question set forth by the research study (Merriam, 2009). In order to reach the goal, the researcher organized the transcribed interview data, coded the data, and studied the coded data to ultimately find themes to answer the research question through an inductive process known as thematic analysis (TA). TA involves “discovering, interpreting, and reporting patterns and clusters of meaning within data” (Ritchie, Lewis, Mc Naughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014, p. 271).
Thematic analysis is best suited to explaining the specific nature of the participants’ conceptualization of the phenomenon under study. Interview data tend to be one of the main elements of thematic analysis (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Additionally, thematic analysis is characterized as being flexible and adaptable to many qualitative methodologies including Basic Qualitative Research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA is useful for researchers conducting more practitioner or applied research approaches (Braun & Clark, 2014). TA illustrates which themes are important in the description of the phenomenon under study. Thematic analysis comprises the identification of repeated patterns of meaning by searching, coding, and interpreting the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

An inductive, data-driven approach was employed to search for repeated patterns of meaning. Using the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) as a guide for carrying out the thematic analysis for this study, the six phases to data collection were followed: The six essential phases are as follows: (1) review and familiarize yourself with the data, (2) generate initial codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review generated themes, (5) define and name themes; and (6) produce the report. The process was conducted for each of the five participants.

**Review and familiarize yourself with the data:** Data were collected via a demographic questionnaire and semi structured open-ended interviews through the use of a digital recording. The transcription included the time, date, and location of the interview. When all the interviews were completed, transcriptions of the interviews ensued. The researcher immersed herself in the transcription process to gain better understanding of data elements. After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher sent the transcript via email to the participants for member checking to review for edits, accuracy and/or elaboration as described by Carlson (2010). After the edits were corrected on the transcription, the researcher sent back the new transcripts.
**Generate initial codes:** After the member checking process, the researcher read through each transcript to try to make sense of the data. The researcher coded the elements of the raw data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clark, 2006). Coding is simply labeling information with descriptions (Fade & Swift, 2011). Codes were developed based on data related to acts or behaviors, events, strategies or practices, states, meanings, conditions or constraints, relationships, involvements, consequences, settings, and/or reflexive issues (Gibbs, 2007). Line-by-line coding, as suggested by Merriam (2009), was performed on the data and comments were made in the margins with sticky notes (Appendix A).

After reviewing the codes, the researcher looked for related or potential categories from the data. Merriam (2009) described the naming of categories as an “intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (pp 183-184). After initial coding of the data from the first two interviews, the data were recoded by a colleague peer debriefer familiar with the qualitative research and the coding process. A peer debriefer (also known as a peer reviewer), provided an external check of the research process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The codes produced by the colleague peer debriefer were compared with the researcher’s initial codes and differences were reviewed and discussed.

**Search for themes:** Merriam (2002) stated that once the data are collected, they are “inductively analyzed to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data” (pp. 6-7). Themes as defined by Percy and associates (2015) are “patterns of patterns” (p. 81). This was a process of sorting and sifting as described in Lichtman (2010). The entire data set was reread, ensuring all relevant data were incorporated and the preliminary themes, “accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 91).
As a final step, a thematic map was created and used as a visual aid. After reviewing the thematic map of coded data, the emergence of overarching themes was evident.

**Define and name themes:** The data driven themes and sub-themes were refined to the level of more than a couple of sentences capturing the scope and content of each construct (Braun & Clark, 2006). Finally, these themes and patterns chosen answered the research question.

**Produce the report:** Writing the final report from the research findings was the final step. The new findings were then compared with existing theories or explanations from the existing research. The research study set out to describe the professional experiences and practices of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. With that in mind, the researcher contemplated what had been learned overall and what were the overall main ideas presented by the data. Last, the themes became the findings from this research study. The findings of the study were commitment to intentionality and accountability, collaboration, knowledge, training, and professional experience, identifying nonacademic barriers, and core curriculum and small group effectiveness.

**Trustworthiness**

Within the context of this research study, the concept of trustworthiness can be best described as the soundness of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criterion from which to judge the trustworthiness of a study is “closely tied with the paradigmatic underpinnings of the particular discipline in which a particular investigation is conducted” (Morrow, 2005, p. 250). Additionally, the researcher needs to be transparent and reflexive about conduct, theoretical stance and values encompassing themselves as a researcher (Seale, Gobo, Gurbrium, & Silverman, 2004) as well as the steps they have taken to ensure the quality and trust
of the research process (Hunt, 2011). In order for a study to be deemed trustworthy, the concepts of credibility, transferability and confirmability should be examined (Rolfe, 2006).

**Credibility**

Credibility involves demonstrating the congruence between the research findings with a truthful picture of reality and whether the research findings really measure what they are intending to measure (Merriam, 2009). Credibility was addressed by applying a strong qualitative research framework at every stage of the research process. This is evident through both knowing the setting and the participants in advance, and having acquired a trusting relationship; also, by having ongoing consultation with a peer debriefing and using member checking with the participants as well.

**Transferability**

Transferability means simply can the findings be transferred or generalized to other settings or contexts (Munhall, 2012). A qualitative researcher must “provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether a transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Transferability can be demonstrated through the description of sample and participant characteristics. The characteristics and qualifications of the participants have the potential to be similar to other elementary school counselors, which could possibly provide transferability when working with gifted children in their schools.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability assumes the findings are reflective of the participants within the context of the research study. Reflexivity refers to a strategy that focuses on the intersection between who the researcher is as a person and how he or she represents data (Pillow, 2003). Within the
confirmbility of a study, the researchers’ reflexivity is essential to the process. Reflexivity occurs when the researcher thoroughly examines the underpinnings of the research process and how their “interests, positions, and assumptions influence and inquiry” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189). Confirmabilty was demonstrated in this study in the following ways: (1) thorough description of the researcher’s positionality, (2) description of the role of researcher in relation to this study, (3) description of the role of the researcher as experienced practitioner in relation to this study, (4) a disclosure of affiliation statement, and (5) through ethical considerations. In addition, the researcher kept a reflexive journal to document any biases.

**Ethical Considerations**

**Researcher Positionality**

Qualitative researchers involve themselves in every aspect of their research (Farber, 2006; Merriam, 2009). The researcher is critical in all forms of qualitative research (Lichtman, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to introduce and describe the term *human instrument* in qualitative research. Merriam (1998) further described the qualitative researcher as “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis who relies on his or her skills to receive information in natural contexts and who uncovers its meaning by descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory procedure” (p. 345). In a basic qualitative study, the researcher has some knowledge and/or understanding about the topic of study that they want to be able to more fully describe from the participant’s perspective (Percy, et al., 2015).

This research study bears personal meaning and stems from the researcher’s academic, professional and personal experiences. As a tenured, licensed professional school counselor in the state of Ohio, the researcher worked with a diverse population of students in an elementary school setting. During this time, the researcher developed a passion for and commitment to
school counselor advocacy for and with all students, particularly those who are identified as gifted and those underachieving, unidentified gifted students.

With that said, a researcher’s background and position may affect what one investigates in a study, the angle taken in the investigation, the methods deemed most appropriate for the purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the communication of the conclusions (Malterud, 2001). Setting aside the preconceptions of the researcher, she began an investigation by asking questions to other professional school counselors regarding their experiences working with students identified as gifted. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that researchers address preconceptions by being aware of “how they slant and shape what they hear and how they interface with the reproduction of the speaker’s reality and how they transfigure into falsity” (p. 148). Simply speaking, the researcher believed students identified as gifted have a unique set of social and emotional characteristics that can be addressed by a professional school counselor within a comprehensive school counseling program. In an attempt to minimize subjectivity, the researcher kept a reflexive journal during the research process, documenting her thoughts and experiences before, during and after data collection. Additionally, the researcher employed member checking, a process in which participants were given opportunity to correct any errors in their interview transcript, as well as a peer debriefer was used to uncover biases, perspectives, and/or assumptions, if any, made on the part of the researcher.

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) described insider research as research conducted by people who are already members of the organization who are seeking to investigate. With regards to this research study, the researcher was considered a professional insider as the researcher worked for the school district which served as the setting for this study. However, the researcher was on professional leave during the time the research will be conducted. As a professional insider, the
researcher may have had the opportunity and access in obtaining information that may not be available to an individual not employed by the school district. Additionally, the researcher had professional interactions and relationships with the professional counselors being interviewed. Being acquainted with the interviewer may have offered the participants a level of ease in answering the interview questions. Consequently, the subject matter, experiences and processes discussed might prove to be more authentic and transparent providing high quality data. Conversely, it could have been a disadvantage as well if the participants feared a connection associated with their responses. As a professional insider, Humphrey (2007) suggested the professional insider must hold together the two distinct roles of being an insider and being a researcher.

**Ethical Issues in the Study**

Creswell (2013) asserted that the researcher faces many ethical issues during their qualitative inquiry and data collection in the field. Although collecting data was critical to the research study that accurately represented the actions and experiences of those participating, respecting the rights of the participants was standard practice. The initial step in protecting the rights of the participants and following procedures was obtained through the IRB approval at the University of Cincinnati before entering the field. The researcher understood the importance of not putting participants at risk as a result, numerous steps were taken to assure that ethical considerations were adhered to in the study.

One measure to protect confidentiality was insuring the identity of the research participants and the name of the school district remained anonymous. Second, the data were stored in a password-protected computer as well as any papers were locked in a cabinet. Additionally, the researcher developed an informed consent document (Appendix A)
acknowledging the participants’ rights. Confidentiality was protected during the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases of the study. Lastly, the researcher implemented proper school district procedures for the study site and receive approval beforehand.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three described the research methodology. Using a basic qualitative research design, elementary school counselor participants who met the selection criterion engaged in face-to-face semi-structured interviews regarding their attitudes, opinions, and experiences working with gifted students. Hence, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore school counselors’ experiences and practices working with gifted students, by identifying how they work with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program, to potentially identify themes from their experiences. This research study sought to describe and analyze the following research question: “How do elementary school counselors utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program describe their professional experiences and practices when working with gifted students?” The results of the data analysis will be described in Chapter Four.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the in-depth experiences of elementary school counselors working with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. This researcher interviewed five licensed school counselors to gain insight into their professional practices when working with gifted students. This chapter describes the sample and district demographics, present the data collected via interviews, illustrate the results of the data collection and analysis, and finally summarize the chapter.

Description of the Sample

The Description of the Sample section provides a comprehensive overview of the sample and size, the criteria utilized for selection of participants for the study, and a description of the setting. A purposive sample was utilized to select up to six potential participants. Participants were recruited through an email where five of the participants emailed back stating their willingness to participate in the study. Each of the voluntary participants was assigned a pseudonym beginning with the letter “A” and ending with the letter “E” to avoid any possibility of recognizing any of the participants. Of the five participants who self-selected to participate, all five identified themselves as being White and female. A summary of each participant’s demographic information is provided below next to their pseudonym.

Abigail

Abigail is a Master’s degreed, licensed school counselor with between 1-5 years of professional school counseling experience, with less than one year of elementary school counseling experience. She indicated that she is White and between the ages of 47-57. Abigail stated she had no graduate training in gifted education; rather, her knowledge of gifted education
comes from her on the job experiences.

*Barbara*

Barbara is a Master’s degreed, licensed school counselor with more than 21 years of professional elementary school counseling experience. She indicated that she is White and between the ages of 47-57. Barbara stated she had no graduate training in gifted education. Her knowledge of gifted education comes from her on the job experiences, literature and the Internet, and consultation with colleagues.

*Charlotte*

Charlotte is a Master’s degreed, licensed school counselor with between 11-15 years of professional elementary school counseling experience. She indicated that she is White and between the ages of 47-57. Charlotte stated she had no graduate training in gifted education. Her knowledge of gifted education comes from her on the job experiences, literature and the Internet, and workshops or seminars.

*Diane*

Diane is a Master’s degreed, licensed professional counselor and licensed school counselor with between 11-15 years of professional elementary school counseling experience. She indicated that she is White and between the ages of 47-57. Diane stated she had no graduate training in gifted education. Her knowledge of gifted education comes from her on the job experiences, literature and the Internet, and workshops or seminars.

*Emma*

Emma is a Master’s degreed, licensed professional counselor with between 1-5 years of professional elementary school counseling experience. She indicated that she is White and between the ages of 25-35. Emma stated she had no graduate training in gifted education. He
knowledge of gifted education comes from consulting and collaborating with the teacher of the gifted.

**Description of School Demographics**

Summarizing the school demographic information is pivotal in the understanding contextual influences as they relate to the number of gifted students they serve. The population for this study was from one suburban school district in Ohio. To be identified as gifted in this school district the students must have received a composite standardized test score of at least 128 on the InView or the 95th percentile or above on the Terra Nova. School district demographic data were obtained from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) website for the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Percentage of Students Identified as Gifted and Percentage Receiving Gifted Services by the Gifted Intervention Specialist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Number of Total Students</th>
<th>Percentage of students identified as gifted</th>
<th>Percentage receiving gifted service by gifted intervention specialist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of the Analysis

The findings from this research were generated in response to the research question:
How do elementary school counselors, utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program, describe their professional experiences and practices when working with gifted students? The next two sections include the early stage coding and then emergent findings of the study.

Early Stage Coding

Coding has an important role in data analysis. Codes are labels made by the researcher of words, phrases, sentences or sections of a transcript that are deemed relevant or meaningful to the study. These labels help “…trigger the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data. This scheme helps the researcher to ask questions, to compare across data, to change or drop categories and to make hierarchical order of them” (Basit, 2003, p.144). Moreover, Green and associates (2007) argue that coding is more than just labeling as it requires a clear understanding of the context in which the statements are made. Either way, Delamont (1992) cautions that a researcher should allow plenty of time to the early stage coding process by taking no short cuts. Examining both the labels (ex. actions, activities, concepts, opinions, differences) within each transcription and the context of what was the participant saying, the researcher deemed these words and phrases most relevant to the study from the interview questions.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Stage Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview Questions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss your experiences, if any, working with gifted students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss the needs or issues, if any, your gifted students experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss the counseling interventions or strategies, if any, you have used with your gifted students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From your experiences and practices, describe the interventions that are effective in addressing their social and emotional needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss your experiences, if any, working with the gifted intervention specialist or teacher of the gifted in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have experiences as an advocate for gifted students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have experiences as a leader for gifted students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What observations and/or experiences have shaped your attitudes concerning gifted students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How has the ASCA National Model supported your efforts, if at all, in prevention or intervention activities with students who are gifted?

Reaching all kids, intentionally serving, make effort for classroom guidance, make sure they are getting Tier 1, data and evidence, evidence, Tier 2 organization group, Tier 1, more intentional

Discuss the barriers, if any, you have experienced in working with students who are gifted

Can be challenging, social part impacts them in the regular class, schedules are tight, trying to find the time, competition between students, parents, student anxiety gets in their way, classroom teaching issues, teachers not understanding gifted, nonacademic barriers to learning

Emergent Findings

**Finding 1: Commitment to intentionality and accountability.** The first prevalent finding that emerged universally from the data involved the individual participant’s responsibility for the intentionality and accountability of their professional practices. Abigail, Barbara, Emma and Charlotte explained how they intentionally planned and prepared their counseling services within their comprehensive school counseling program in a various ways. These participants discussed their intentional counseling initiatives through the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework. This is implemented through a tiered framework. Abigail speaks specifically to the intentionality of her work through a multi-tiered approach: “I have tried to be intentional and doing Tier 1 when they [students identified as gifted] are not being pulled out…so they do not miss it.” Barbara explained intentionality in counseling as using a variety of services to suit the different needs of the student. She explained how she purposefully teaches specific skills that may be needed to support gifted students successful functioning within the school.

*Within our whole school, we do Steps to Respect and Second Step. That is all about self-regulation and it is a skill approach. They all get that in whatever grade they are in. The*
small group stuff, if they [gifted students] are not showing the skills they need in Tier 1 then they need a small group for Tier 2.

Last, Emma used the RtI framework, coupled with the components of the ASCA National Model in designing and implementing school counseling interventions within her comprehensive school counseling program. She described as: “RtI is part of ASCA. We have definitely started that. The Tier 2 is where they [students identified as gifted] are coming.”

With respect to the ASCA National Model, Diane described her intentional use of the model within her comprehensive counseling program for planning and delivering services for gifted students as the following:

Diane stated: With the ASCA Model, I make sure I am reaching all kids. It seems like before the ASCA Model, I was doing a lot more reacting and serving the kids that needed it, or showed up at my door, or who were in crisis. Now, with the ASCA Model, I am trying to intentionally serve kids that may not just show up at my door. I think this gifted pod was a nice way to serve a population that I normally didn’t serve or intentionally do it.

One participant discussed her commitment to evidence-based counseling practice. Charlotte described how she was being accountable within her comprehensive school counseling program by implementing evidence-based practices through data and information collection. Specifically, she explained in the following statement her use of needs assessment as a way to identify current service needs of her gifted students:

Charlotte stated: Using data and evidence to show where the need is and also the intervention or what we are doing for students working. So, that has been really helpful
for me instead of doing what looked good or felt good now having evidence to support that.

**Finding 2: Collaboration.** The second prevalent finding mentioned by all participants was that of collaboration. All participants reported working with the gifted intervention specialist at various levels ranging from little interaction to working together on a regular basis. Despite the range in collaborative efforts, all participants expressed the importance of collaboration with other educators as an essential role of the professional school counselor. Specifically, the importance of professional school counselors’ alliance with the gifted intervention specialist can not be overstated in the participants’ descriptions. Abigail described the expertise and her admiration of the gifted intervention specialist at her school:

*I just happen to have a school where the gifted teacher is pretty exceptional.*  
*She handles a lot of this stuff where she specifically has a lunch bunch where she brings her kids in. She is really dealing with the social and emotional piece all within her class.*

Charlotte, Barbara and Diane described their working alliances between themselves of the gifted specialist within their schools:

**Charlotte reported:**  *She and I have worked 4 or 5 years on this curriculum that the two of us have developed ourselves with resources and it is very collaborative relationship.*  
*Also, when we have new students who I usually meet the new students if there is anything that I feel that she needs to be responsive to or if they mention they were in a program similar to that in their old school that she is very easy to collaborate with. One other thing, we worked together on is acceleration. We had a couple of students who have been subject accelerated or grade level accelerated and I am usually part of those team meetings with her.*
Barbara stated: *I talk often with the ELO teacher [gifted specialist] and she shared a project the students did about life lessons of famous people. The ELO students had to show how these famous people persevered during life. I loved the projects so much and we talk about perseverance as a character trait that we want our students to have.*

Diane stated: *I have a very close working relationship with our gifted teacher. She comes to me and we consult, kind of work together, [and] talk about kids individually. She will talk about issues she has in the classroom with particular kids. Or, issues parents have brought to her attention in the classroom or she has had to bring to the parents. Then, ask for ideas and suggestions on what to do. She has invited me in to run a month long weekly group classroom guidance lessons and activity on how treat each other and get along better and how to care for one another.*

The collaborative partnership between Emma and the gifted intervention specialist in her building appeared to be in the infancy stages. Emma was the only participant that discussed the systemic barriers of lack of time or finding time. This is evident in the following statement:

Emma stated: *They [gifted intervention specialist and her gifted class] do not have much time. So, we are struggling with that piece of how much time she can give me out of that time together.*

Despite this fact, she is still attempting to build a positive working relationship with the gifted intervention specialist, Emma explained the relationship in the following way:

*She is very helpful with information. She will give me articles to read about the gifted population because she knows that I am interested in how they are different and how their thinking processes and their organization thing I am seeing come from them. She is*
giving resources and what not. She is the one who came to me for support. So, her and I work together.

**Finding 3: Knowledge, Training and Professional Experience.** None of the participants in this study had any formal education or training within their graduate school counseling program pertaining to the gifted population. However, Barbara noted “I did have a college class [in undergraduate school] called *the Exceptional Child* and that is where I connected with the professor of that class about gifted students.” All five participants described their knowledge of the gifted population and their distinct needs came from their direct professional experiences on the job. Abigail described her first experiences with gifted students on the job as well as her knowledge level.

Abigail stated: Some of the kids that were gifted were also failing so I was kinda like it just didn’t match up. I think they were identified as gifted when they were in the 2nd grade. Nobody had gone back and looked at the difference like what had happened over the years and whatever. When you’re gifted you’re always gifted. I don’t understand the criteria for gifted. So, if that gives you any background of how little I know about this.

Emma’s first experience with the gifted population occurred on the job while she was a teacher. “As a teacher, I was in first grade. I just had to deal with interventions in the classroom. In the last two years is when I really started working with the gifted population.” Like Emma, Charlotte was also a teacher. However, she expressed that her knowledge and training working with the gifted population came more so during her experiences as a school counselor. Additionally, she described her desire to learn more so she could effectively work with this distinct population.
Charlotte stated: *Most of my experiences have been as my role as a school counselor. I did share a room with the gifted teacher when I was teaching, but that was as far as it went.... Well, I will say I was a special education teacher before I became a school counselor and once I was a school counselor I needed to look at all students and their needs and knowing that I was very comfortable working with students were identified as special education and their parents and their needs then realizing I did not have a lot experience working with gifted students so when I became the school counselor I was seeking that out. [Based] on some of the students I was working with, I knew I needed to become more knowledgeable working with students who were identified as gifted.*

Emma reported from more of a systemic level on the training needs of not only herself, but of educators as a whole regarding the gifted population. Emma stated:

*On a district level,] we need to start focusing in on that [unique needs of gifted students]*

*I think the gifted department and the counseling department do not talk hand-in-hand. I am not sure if the gifted department and regular ed department talk hand in hand. She continues in saying I think this one we really, really need...We don’t know enough about this population.*

**Finding 4: Identifying students’ nonacademic barriers.** The participants shared a wide variety of nonacademic barriers to learner witnessed in their gifted students, as well as, their experience addressing those needs. Based on these experiences, the participants named skewed self-concept, lack in understanding empathy and rapport building skills, poor peer relationships, and anxiety and stress as barriers to their student’s learning. Four out of the five participants implemented some type of counseling services to improve behavior and enhance social and emotional competence based on the unique needs and/or issues faced by their students. Four out
of five participants described these needs as being unique to their gifted students. The fifth respondent, who had the least amount of school counseling experience, did not share many specific social, emotional, and behavioral barriers of her gifted students stating her experience up to this point as “Their issues are the same [as non-gifted peer]” without much elaboration to such comment.

*Self-concept*: The participants described how self-concept has a great impact on the gifted students academic and social and emotional learning. Fostering and maintaining a healthy self-concept in gifted students was often the target for counseling interventions. Self-concept is a multidimensional construct that refers to “our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge about our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability” (Byrne, 1984, p. 429). The participants described how some gifted students may have higher self-concepts in the academic realm while their interpersonal skills may lag behind their nongifted peers. On this point, Abigail commented: “… a gifted [student] want[ed] to meet individually because she was putting a lot of pressure on herself and she was not handling it well.”

In order to learn about the social interactions and experiences of being a gifted child, these participants listened to not only what the child said, but also how they perceived their fit within the school amongst their peers. The gifted students’ social acceptability was described in the following ways:

Barbara stated: ...6th grade girls...have a tougher time fitting in more than the average student because they do not have the same sense of belonging because they don’t think people understand them as much. I think it is harder for them to connect.
Diane stated: *Some of them have expressed some concerned that people perceiving them in a particular way because they are in the gifted program as opposed to looking at them as a normal kid.*

Last, the notion of one’s knowledge or skills about one’s abilities was illustrated by one participant:

Emma stated: *We are now seeing that some of our 6th graders are not going to be in [the gifted program] at [the middle school] and how will this be a blow to their self esteem not being in [the program] because we have one girl who values her worth based on her gifted education. She did not make it [in the program].*

*Demonstrate empathy and rapport building:* The participants described empathy as having the ability to take on the perspective of another person. It is putting yourself in the other person’s shoes. To do this, you must be able to comprehend what that person’s needs and feelings are (Summers, 2012). These participants discussed why empathy is discussed and ways the concept of empathy is built into the core curriculum:

Charlotte stated: *Empathy and developing empathy[are emphasized] because some students we’ve seen identified as gifted kind of are still egocentric and do not necessarily connect well with others or care too much about how others feel so we do a lesson on empathy.*

Diane stated: *We go into the classroom and do things on empathy by talking about learning disabilities, Asperger’s, etc. and famous people who have had these disabilities and we also put gifted in there and the characteristics of the gifted to broaden their understanding of the differences of people in general not just kids who are smart.*
Peer Relationships: The participants described peer relationships as being another significant developmental issue for students identified as gifted. The participants were most likely to see gifted students when their peer relationships impact their social or emotional well-being or their academic performance which is pointedly stated by Charlotte as “…some [gifted students] do not necessarily connect well with others.” On this same notion Diane explained peer relationship issues along with the stigma of giftedness her students face: “Some of the issues our gifted students have experienced usually revolve around the social and friendship issue realm, struggling with friendships, and/or struggling with their perceptions from others as to what they are like as a gifted person.” Next, these participants framed peer problems specific to gifted girls as follows: Emma stated “There is a huge competition going on between a couple girls…who gets the skill first, the grades, who does it better.” Specifically, Barbara explained an intervention to assist students “I started a group with them [girls identified as gifted] that focused on celebration of friendship and what does long term friendship look like.”

Anxiety and Stress: The participants described emotions as impacting the gifted child’s psychological wellbeing. Interventions related to stress and anxiety management are an important facet of a comprehensive school counseling program. Sometimes gifted students feel extreme pressure by teachers and parents. One emotion explained by a participant related to the stress and pressure a student might feel is that of being identified as gifted.

Charlotte stated: *I would say primary [issue] is the anxiety and stress that comes from the pressure of being identified as gifted and dealing with the perception of other people, um like their regular classroom teaching may make comments you are gifted you should be able to do this so some of that pressure that comes from them even though they really don’t um doesn’t come that easy for some students in some situations. Umm, it is dealing*
with those pressures that come from their peers, their classroom teachers, and their parents.

Barbara shared in the following statement how emotions may impact behavior along with an intervention strategy she uses to help students understand their emotions more appropriately.

Barbara stated:  

Yeah, I think because they perceive things so intensely then that carries over into their emotions, and then it carries over in their responses to the teachers, to themselves. So, we do a little bit more of things of understanding their feelings and emotions and we look at those in a way that helps them be able to manage in their day.

Diane shared how parental influences may create stress on a student as well as in their classroom behavior. Diane stated: “… for some children [parents place] a lot of stress on them…to be the best, to get the top grade, and to always get A’s that it is creating in some a competition that is not always healthy in the classroom.”

Finding 5: Core Curriculum and Small Group Effectiveness. Education is all about learning. Professional school counselors aid in the learning processes wherein students acquire the necessary attitude, knowledge, and skills to be successful in school, at work, and in life. It is important to know what delivery methods result in the most positive benefits for students. Core curriculum and small group counseling allows for school counselors to execute meaningful and high impact services to a multitude of students at one time students identified as gifted are no exception. The effectiveness of delivery core curriculum and the use of small group counseling was noted by all participants in the following ways:

Charlotte stated:  

Ok, in the small group classroom guidance I call that both because they are a pull out-group, but then I teach it as lessons with the gifted teacher. Um, kids are identified here in 4th grade during 4th, 5th, and 6th grade she and I co-teach lessons
specifically designed for those identified as gifted. We do a total of 6-9 lessons every year for 4, 5, and 6th grade. So, some of the lessons include bullying, perfectionism, future planning, trash and treasure habits, developing habits worth hiring, some career learning specific for them.

Emma stated: *I think the small group worked well. They were very anxious though of what they were missing elsewhere in the world. So, if I do it again and the need arises I will probably do a before school time. I don’t like to take them out of lunch or recess because once again it is kind of like a removal for them from their typical peers. Since that is an issue we were trying to address, so I would take them before school.*

**Summary**

The main objective of this qualitative research study was to describe the professional experiences and practices of elementary school counselors working with children identified as gifted. Five participants from one school district in Ohio were interviewed. The research achieved its purpose through in-depth, face-to-face semi structured interviews. The interviews were coded into themes through Thematic Analysis to answer the research question guiding the study: How do elementary school counselors utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program describe their professional experiences and practices when working with gifted students? The analysis of the data revealed five findings: Commitment to intentionality and accountability, collaboration, knowledge, training, and professional experience, identifying nonacademic barriers, and core curriculum and small group effectiveness. Chapter Five will comprise a summary of the overall research and discussion of the results, implications and recommendations for further research or interventions.
Chapter Five: Discussions, Implications and Recommendations

This basic qualitative study allowed five elementary school counselors the opportunity to share and describe their experiences working with students identified as gifted within their comprehensive school counseling program. Chapter Five shares a summary of the results and is organized in the following manner: (1) Summary of Results, (2) Discussion of Results, (3) Implications of the Study, (4) Limitations, (5) Recommendations and (6) Final Conclusions.

Summary of Design

This study explored the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and reflections of elementary school counselors who work with students identified as gifted, to obtain a broader perspective regarding their experiences and to identify themes in their experiences that can develop new understandings of professional practice. Within the framework of the ASCA National Model and through a constructivist lens, the researcher analyzed and explored elementary school counselors’ professional experiences in working with gifted students. This research sought to answer the following research question: How do elementary school counselors, utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program, describe their professional experiences and practices when working with gifted students? It was important to explore these experiences, as professional school counselors need to recognize the nature and scope of the social, emotional and behavioral needs of the gifted learner in order to provide the most effective support within the school setting (Wood, 2010a). Research has shown that professional school counselors following the ASCA National Model as their framework for their comprehensive school counseling program, influence academic achievement and performance of students (Chen-Hayes, et al., 2014). With the call for accountability initiatives in how professional school counselors support student academic achievement, there was a need for additional research on the
experiences of elementary school counselors who work with gifted students to develop new understandings of professional practice.

A basic qualitative study research design was comprised of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with five purposively, criterion-based selected elementary school counselors. A more descriptive approach, consisting of narrative accounts of elementary school counselors work with gifted students was implemented because it is the most commonly used in professional practice settings, such as in counseling (Merriam, 2009) and in education (Kahlke, 2014). A thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in this study because it offered a step-by-step process for data analysis. Analysis of collected data produced the following findings: (1) commitment to intentionality and accountability, (2) collaboration, (3) knowledge training and professional experience (4) identification of nonacademic barriers and (5) core curriculum and small group effectiveness.

Discussion of Results

In reference to the aforementioned research question addressing how elementary school counselors describe their professional experiences and practices working with gifted students, the research uncovered five key findings. The participants described their counseling as intentional, along with being accountable to and with their gifted students. This finding is referred to as Intentionality and Accountability. The second finding described by the participants was their practice and experience working in collaboration with other staff within their schools. This finding is entitled Collaboration. Knowledge, Training, and Professional was the third finding that emerged participants explanations of the effectiveness of their training as it is related to authenticity in preparation for working with students identified as gifted along with how their knowledge evolution working with these students. The fourth finding uncovered many barriers and issues the participants have witnessed and identified when working with gifted students.
This finding is referred to as Identifying Students’ Nonacademic barriers. Finally, the last finding uncovered within the data described how the participants provided direct counseling services and the effectiveness of such services with their gifted students. This finding is entitled Core Curriculum and Small Group Effectiveness.

**Finding: Commitment to Intentionality and Accountability**

Among the elementary counselors studied, all participants utilized the ASCA National Model to provide the framework through which individualization and differentiation of student and counselor interaction could be maximized. The process by which this relationship and interaction is planned and implemented benefits in its intentionality from the clear framework the ASCA National Model facilitates. These elementary counselors were selected in anticipation that their comprehensive counseling program, which aligns with the ASCA National Model, would be providing effective and appropriate direct and indirect counseling services with their elementary-aged gifted students. Within its position statement of *The Professional School Counselor and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs*, the ASCA National Model brings counselors together in unity by the following key concepts:

1. Ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students; 2. Identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program; 3. Is delivered to all students in a systematic fashion; 4. Is based on data-driven decision making; 5. Is provided by a state-credentialed professional school counselor (2012).

Pertinent scholarly writings support the direct and positive benefits for all students from school counseling programs that adhere to a framework such as the ASCA National Model. The net result of a fully aligned and implemented comprehensive counseling program was higher
satisfaction with education (Lapan, 2001; Lapan, Gysbers & Sun, 1997) and fewer disruptions and improved peer behavior (Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Sink, 2005; Sink & Stroh, 2006). Though not related to gifted students specifically, extant literature additionally reveals positive outcome data of increased student engagement, fewer disciplinary problems, and higher achievement (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012).

Professional school counselors are being “asked to tell what they do, they also are being asked to demonstrate how [they do] what they do and the program in which the work makes a difference in student’s lives” (Gysbers, 2010, p.199). In essence, the ASCA National Model provides a common language of telling what they do, telling how they do it, and showing how it benefits students. Consequently, professional school counselors who utilize this model can focus on their craft with intention. The elementary school counselors in the district studied seemed to have a common language and ongoing responsibility amongst each other and to their work with students that were based on intentionality and accountability. Barbara shared comments of intentionality, similar in language to the other respondents, as “…I consult regularly to see if she [teacher of the gifted] needs to tweak things and to make sure the kid’s [gifted students] needs are being met.” This type of intentionality not only demonstrates caring for her gifted students, but also encourages their optimal social, emotional, and behavioral development.

Though there has been extensive literature in support for accountability in school counseling practice, there is a concerted push in the school counseling profession that “accountability talk is not enough” (Gysbers, 2010, p.228). Sink (2009) made a call to action for professional school counselors and counselor educators to become accountability leaders.

In short, as a principle element of the leadership role, school counselors and school counselor educators must do more than merely acquiesce to the rising accountability tide;
rather, they need to be genuinely committed to and engaged in improving student educational outcomes and the profession, rigorously testing and then jettisoning unproven practices and refining those that show positive results (pp. 72-73).

In Sink’s call to action, language used provides the connotation that professional school counselors need to do more than just be accountable. It isn’t difficult to infer from his words that he is advocating for professional school counselors to be accountability agents. In other words, through intentional methods practiced, professional school counselors set the bar for accountability. In this study, Charlotte considered herself as a leader for and on behalf of gifted students in the following way.

Charlotte stated: *I develop curriculum [for gifted students]...I have presented at the Evidence-based School Counseling conference [where I] shared the curriculum we taught with students identified as gifted as well as some of the data that supports [the curriculum] through pre-post surveys looking at attendance and some grades though there was not a huge change in GPA...So from there I had other counselors contact me to see what the curriculum looks like and borrowing some of the lessons we have done with students.*

In sum, the findings in the literature are clear: professional school counselors must be held to the same stringent accountability standards as other educators (Mason, Eberts, & Wynne, 2016). However, there is no generally vetted and accepted step-step-process on how every school counselor should do so. The participants in this study already had their comprehensive school counseling program in place. Integral to their program, the participants described their intentional approach using a multi-tiered system to differentiate their counseling services with their gifted students within the RtI framework. Professional school counselors use of the RtI
framework within their comprehensive school counseling has been described in the literature (Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012) along with how to use RtI in partnership with school psychologists (Zambrano, Castro-Villareal, & Sullivan, 2012). Though based on the data from study, future research on the effects of RtI on the gifted student by the elementary school counselor in this area may be warranted.

**Finding: Collaboration**

As advocates for counseling their gifted students, these elementary counselors described their collaboration work with the teacher of the gifted. Given the risk for emotional, social and behavioral concerns, gifted students need a professional school counselor leading a comprehensive school counseling program working collaboratively with the gifted intervention specialist, to address their needs as a team. Carlson (2004) contended school counselors who have a gifted program and/or a gifted intervention specialist are more knowledgeable about giftedness and more likely to advocate on behalf of the gifted student. This assertion can be corroborated as far back in Wiener (1967) where the attitudes and knowledge of the school counselor working in schools with gifted programs were more favorable in quality and service.

The findings from the current research are consistent with a number of scholars and existing research suggesting the importance of collaboration when working with students identified as gifted (ASCA, 2012; NAGC, 2013; VanTassel-Baska, 1990; Wood, 2012). Collaboration is simply defined as working with others cooperatively. Although simplistic in its definition, the rationale for collaboration among professional school counselors and gifted intervention specialist is multifaceted. Wood (2012) argued “by working together, school counselors and gifted educators could find themselves in a powerful partnership, a deep professional relationship, and as persuasive advocates in the service to gifted students and their
families” (p.273). Further, collaborative efforts are effective in making systemic change for a student’s academic, career, and college readiness (ASCA, 2012b). Last, collaborative efforts in delivering counseling core curriculum assists in meeting the diverse and unique needs of this population of students (ASCA, 2013).

Collaborating with teachers is an essential skill and role of the professional school counselor within the framework of a comprehensive school counseling program. “If public schools are to make a contribution in this area, two key groups need to collaborate—teachers of the gifted and school counselors” (VanTassel-Baska, 1990, p. 40). That being said, an effective collaborative effort may lead to real changes in school culture, in creating an optimal learning environment for gifted students.

**Finding: Knowledge, Training and Professional Experience**

One increasing demand facing professional school counselors today is their ability to effectively meet the personal/social, academic and career needs of diverse populations within their school. The unique nature and specific counseling needs of diverse populations have been well documented (Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines & Johnston, 2008; Levy & Plucker, 2008; Studer, 2015), yet many professional school counselors are not required to take specialized courses pertaining to the gifted population in order to enhance their knowledge and clinical skills. Despite this fact, gifted students can be found across all races, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic levels. An end result, as documented in Peterson (2006), is that many professional school counselors feel inadequately trained exiting their master’s programs to effectively address the unique and diverse needs of gifted students. The participants in this study were no exception.
Professional school counselor perceptions, experiences and preparation in working with the gifted population all impact service delivery (Wood, 2010b) within their comprehensive school counseling program. The lack of training and awareness of professional school counselors on behalf of the gifted population, and the impact it has on the delivering counseling services is well documented (Carlson, 2004; Dockery 2005; Earle, 1998). Peterson (2007) described when professional school counselors fail to receive adequate trained on the gifted population within their counselor preparation programs, they might not understand or respond appropriately to the unique social, emotional, behavioral or cognitive needs gifted students present. Ultimately, she described that this lack of familiarization with their unique affective needs may result in negative developmental issues such as stress or lack of motivations for the gifted student.

As it related to describing their academic teaming in preparation of working with the diverse learners with whom they would be responsible for, none of the participants in this study reported receiving any meaningful formalized training pertaining to working with gifted students. That is not to say that despite their lack of training in their graduate preparation program elementary counselors in this study were not intentionally seeking out resources to aid in their understanding, awareness and knowledge of this population. On the contrary, the participants all described their continued process of discovery about the social, emotional, behavioral and cognitive needs of their gifted students, and about approaches they use and should use when counseling them. Abigail, Barbara, Emma and Diane described their process of increasing their knowledge and awareness of the gifted population through consultation with the gifted specialist and through reading professional journal articles and books. Charlotte discussed her inquiry for information seeking out professional workshops and trainings regarding gifted population to enhance her knowledge, awareness, and clinical skills. Enhancing awareness and

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skill in the area of giftedness is considered crucial to the future of talent development (Colangelo & Wood, 2014). It is this type of initiative by professional counselors as described in this study that could be used to inform practice.

**Finding: Identifying Students’ Nonacademic Barriers**

Four out of the five elementary school counselors in this study had similar perspectives on the nonacademic barriers to learning facing elementary-aged gifted students. These professional counselors described these unique needs and how they were being addressed through direct and indirect services within their comprehensive school counseling program. The barriers addressed in this study were related to self-concept, empathy and rapport building, peer relationships and anxiety and stress.

The elementary school counselors reported a number of social, emotional and behavioral barriers of elementary-aged gifted students as mentioned above that have been reported in the literature. Issues specific to the social, emotional, and behavioral vulnerabilities in gifted children have been well documented (Mendaglio & Peterson, 2007; Missett, 2013; Pfeiffer, 2013; Saunders, 2005), along with their impact on learning (VanTassel-Baska, 2009). Examples of such issues related to giftedness are reflected in comments, by Charlotte as “…the anxiety and stress that comes from being identified as gifted” and by Diane “…struggling with their perceptions from others as to what they are like as a gifted person” supported such assertion. The participants in this study were well aware of the nonacademic barriers to learning their gifted students face and used various interventions to support their needs. Peterson (2015) put it well when describing these barriers and how professional school counselors should approach their gifted students. She stated: “When school counselors respect and gain access to the often invisible struggles of gifted youth, they are working with the whole child, not just with the
Finding:  *Core Curriculum and Small Group Effectiveness*

Within the ASCA National Model, the delivery system focuses on the methods for implementing direct and indirect services for students (ASCA, 2012). The delivery system of the 2012 ASCA National Model consists of “direct and indirect student services. Direct services are provided with students, and indirect services are provided with students” (p. 83). Based on the ASCA National Model, there are elements that make up direct student services: school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning and responsive services.

The findings of the current study confirm much of the literature regarding the benefits of incorporating a school counseling core curriculum (instruction and group activities) and responsive services (counseling) as advocated by ASCA when working with gifted students (Buescher, 2004; Colangelo & Peterson, 1993; Mendaglio, 1993; Peterson, 2009; Peterson, Betts, & Bradley, 2009; Peterson & Moon, 2009). In the same respect, the participants in this study aligned with the same suppositions of Peterson’s (2013) research of school counselors’ experiences working with high-potential children from low-income families in which the school counselors described the *power* of group work when working with the gifted population.

Small group counseling is well documented in the counseling literature as an efficient and effective way of providing direct services with students (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2010; Riddle & Bergin, 1997). Additionally, counseling in small groups is effective with elementary-aged as a tool for making social and emotional gains by assisting them in awareness and understanding of their presenting issue, as well as teaching them ways to address or avoid future problems (Grant-Hayes, 2001). Peterson and associates (2004) support the notion of the valuableness of small groups as well specifically with the gifted population in stating “groups
can be the most significant and effective component of an affective curriculum in gifted education” (p.289).

The only other study that discussed core curriculum and small groups with gifted students within a school setting was in Dockery (2005). However, her research related to high school counselors. With that said, the use of core curriculum and small groups as interventions is in contradiction of Dockery’s (2005) study with high school counselors. In this study, individual counseling was used as the primary mode of service delivery for meeting the needs of gifted students. This may be based on Gysbers & Henderson (2000) sample use of time distribution in which elementary school counselors spend more time supporting students through a guidance curriculum at 35%-45% and in which high school counselor percentage of time is 15-25%. Or simply, the high school counselors from this study’s counseling services “did not reflect best practices and recommendations found in the literature for effective school counseling programs” (Dockery, 2005, p. 213).

ASCA (2012b) suggests the professional school counselor could provide core curriculum and/or group counseling services as a resource for gifted students and their families in meeting their unique social, emotional and behavioral needs. Using core curriculum and small groups are important to the social, emotional and behavioral development of gifted students because some gifted students have few opportunities to talk about what it is like to be gifted. Gifted students might find comfort knowing that their intellectual peers have some of the same thought, feelings and concerns as their own.

**Implications**

The current study captures the findings relevant to elementary school counselors’ professional experiences and practices in working with gifted students. Drawing implications
from a thorough synthesis of the findings that emerged from this analysis of five elementary school counselors in one Ohio suburban school district appear to add a new perspective to the existing theory and research for elementary school counselors of the practices and processes of other professionals in the field.

**Implication: Working Within a Comprehensive Counseling Framework**

In examining whether or not a study carries any significance, it must demonstrate how the findings can be purposeful in knowledge and practice within the fields of research that are presenting the problem. The school district in particular was chosen based on the fact the Board of Education strategic plan specifically stated the school district promotes academic, career and personal/social development for every student through a comprehensive school counseling ASCA National Model. Moreover, these elementary counselors were selected in anticipation that their comprehensive counseling program, which aligns with the ASCA National Model, would be providing effective and appropriate direct and indirect counseling services with their elementary-aged gifted students.

Within its position statement entitled *The Professional School Counselor and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs*, the ASCA National Model brings counselors together in unity by the following key concepts:

(1) ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students; (2) identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program; (3) is delivered to all students in a systematic fashion; (4) is based on data-driven decision making; (5) is provided by a state-credentialed professional school counselor (2012c).

As such, elementary school counselors, leading a comprehensive school counseling program,
contribute to the social, emotional, and behavioral development of all students, including those considered gifted. This implication is supported by pertinent scholarly writings on the positive benefits of comprehensive school counseling programs for all students and the utility of its systematic design for school counseling practice (Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Hoffman, 2012; Lapan, 2001; Lapan et al., 1997; Sink, 2005; Sink & Stroh, 2003).

**Implication: Working with Intentionality**

Since an exhaustive search revealed no other research study in which an exploration of the day-to-day practices of elementary school counselors who work with students identified as gifted within the framework of a comprehensive school counseling program, the construct of intentionality as expressed by the research participants in this study has significant implications for professional practice. Intentionality has been explained by May (1969) as “The structure which gives meaning to experience” (p. 223). It is through this structure that professional counselors have the power to impact the lives of students they serve. Experiences that are derived from purposeful intentionality in assessing, planning and delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program produce positive results for students.

Professional school counselors are responsible for ensuring students with unique gifts and talents receive appropriate academic, career, personal/social and behavioral interventions and support. This is an influential position to hold and one that brings with it tremendous responsibility within the school community. A professional school counselor’s intentionality contributes to both the degree and direction of the helping relationship with students who are gifted. This is important in practice because professional school counselors, who counsel with intentionality, differentiate their counseling services based on the needs of their students. As
shown by the respondents in this study, elementary-aged gifted students have unique needs relating to self-concept, empathy, rapport building, relationship skills, decision-making, and/or self-management of anxiety and stress. All of these can be addressed through specific strategies and interventions to this population within a comprehensive school counseling program.

The five elementary counselors in this study had a range of counseling experience from two years to more than 20 years. Each professional counselor in this study was licensed through the Ohio Department of Education. Information gleaned from studying the best practices of these elementary counselors alluded to working with intentionality. As described in May (1969) their methods appeared to be *purposeful, stretching toward, and caring* for their students. All of the participants discussed their intentions and desire to work with their gifted students. In no part of the interview process did this researcher have any indication that these elementary counselors had what Peterson (2006) described as any ill-feelings or negative partialities towards this population of students that may have impacted their work with this population of students. Barbara’s comments sum up the attitude amongst these elementary counselors:

Barbara stated: *And then, there was more couple of what I would call case studies of [gifted] students who have really intrigued me. Then, that has made me delve in more of my own kind of self-study where I have consulting with other colleagues outside of even ELO [gifted], like counselors and then the ELO teacher is obviously a part of that. We actually consult on a regular basis about a lot of her kids. Then, I look through some books and other readings and things to make sure I am having an understanding of their profile.*
Implication: Collaboration of Professional School Counselor and Teacher of Gifted

In the above quote, we also hear the importance of collaboration. Collaboration between the teacher of the gifted and the elementary school counselor is critical because what happens to children in the early years of schooling has consequences throughout the course of their lives (Rotigl, 2003). Although there are many opportunities to intervene and make a difference in the lives of children and young people, researchers advise that intervening in early childhood is the most effective phase to impact the future development of the gifted child (Harrison, 2005). Investing in the early school years is vital for children who are identified as gifted so they do not lose interest, withdrawal from school and peers, develop poor work habits, and fail to participate with effort (Delisle, 1992). One’s sense of self is deeply integrated to one’s contextual relationship with family, peers, and school. It is at this time, therefore, that systemic interventions provided by a professional school counselor and intervention specialist serving gifted students collaboratively as mentioned need, to be utilized to facilitate and enhance the gifted learners social, emotional, and behavioral competence. Moreover, professional school counselors giving such attention to the social, emotional and behavioral needs of the gifted learner through a collaborative lens with the teacher of the gifted could go a long way in keeping gifted students balanced and focused in their schooling and in their lives. Previous scholarly writings in school counseling literature and in gifted education supported this implication (ASCA, 2012b; VanTassel-Baska, 1990; Wood, 2012).

Implication: School Counselor Preparation

The majority of school counseling program courses are the same courses taken by students enrolled in a mental health counseling program. Students enroll in courses including counseling theories, counseling techniques, career development, assessment, program evaluation,
human development, group work, ethics and multicultural counseling. Students who are in a school counseling program track usually take courses specific towards their program track, such as an introductory school counseling foundation course, counseling children, college and career readiness, practicum and internship. Additionally, some programs may allow other electives outside of the counseling department such in education, administration, or special education.

Though counseling in its core philosophy is based on a wellness model focusing more on prevention on what makes people tick, over a more pathology focus of what makes people sick, professional school counselors are limited in their training in both scope and practice on the “how to” of developing prevention-oriented, developmentally appropriate counseling efforts for gifted students. Many elementary school counselors are in a unique position to be able to provide such services; however, they are often left trying to muddle through on their own while on the job. After students graduate from their counseling program, they often no longer have library access to materials about research and evidence-based best practices in providing affective curriculum to their students. This lack of training and access to best practice information has impact on the elementary school counselors awareness and understanding of diverse student social, emotional and behavioral needs for all students of diverse populations, especially those who are identified as gifted.

The success of school counseling programs in PK-12 settings hinges, in large part, on the qualifications, training, and effectiveness of professional school counselors. There is consensus in the literature that providing consistent and systematic professional development positively affects educators and their students (Shields & Knapp, 1997). One strategy for initial implementation would be to create a conceptual map linking professional development on social, emotional, and behavioral needs of the gifted student with the following: basic introduction to
talent development, counseling core curriculum implementation, differentiated counseling approaches and possible assessments using process, perception and outcome data. With this framework in mind, professional development and education during a school counselor’s training program would provide opportunity for developing an affective curriculum focusing on the social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of gifted students would not only benefit their own training needs, but their future gifted students as well.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations of this study that warrant attention. First, a small sample size aided the researcher in investigating the research problem in a contextualized, qualitative approach such as in a basic qualitative study. However, this small sample size of five practitioners may not be represented of the larger population of school counselors. Future research may aim for a larger size for a more heterogeneous sample. Relatedly, this study was designed as a descriptive research study examining perceptions of school counselors in one school district rather than an experimental or causal-comparative study. The reader should be cautioned against drawing inferences from this descriptive research study of five participants. Consequently, the degree which the results of this study generalize to school counselors working in other settings is unknown. Future research should aim for a more diverse setting pool including more school districts. The third limitation is the sampling strategy and strict inclusion criteria which reduced the pool of possible participants to six elementary school counselors. Future research should aim for a larger sample to include middle and high school counselors from a larger geographic region. Fourth, as a professional insider, the participants may have had difficulty adjusting to the interviewer’s role as researcher known by Maxwell (2005) as *participant reactivity*. 
Recommendations

Elementary school counselors interested in enhancing their professional practices in counseling gifted students within their schools are likely to find a dearth of information. The available information is mostly conceptual in nature from gifted education describing best practices professional school counselors use when working with gifted students. The following recommendations provide a unique and experienced voice to the conversation from the practitioners’ point of view. These recommendations are intended to provoke further consideration for how elementary school counselors can best serve gifted students along with considerations for future research.

Recommendations for Professional School Counselors

1. Develop an affective social competence curriculum with the teacher of the gifted, if possible, that is developmental in nature taking into account the gifted students’ unique developmental characteristics (physical, intellectual, behavior, social and emotion) within various contexts to ensure dynamic, engaging, and growth-producing environment for students.

2. Through a differentiated counseling practice, professional school counselors deliver with the teacher of the gifted, if possible, an affective social competence curriculum using discussion groups for all students who are identified as gifted. Differentiated counseling is needed in order to meet the unique needs of the gifted student. Differentiated counseling services balance the unique needs of the individual with the counseling curriculum. At the core of a differentiated counseling practice, similar to educational practice is the modification of four curriculum-related elements: content, process, product, and affect. Differentiated counseling would involve modifying the content, (what we want gifted students to learn) process (how will gifted students
understand and make sense of content), product (how gifted students demonstrate what they know, understand, and are able to do now based on learning), and affect (how students’ emotions and feelings impact learning).

3. Within a differentiated counseling approach, the elementary school counselor may want to examine the ecological considerations of the students’ person-environmental interactions as having significance in developing psychological traits conducive to talent development. Utilizing an ecological framework as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) would help systematically organize the multiple levels of influence on the students’ talent development (i.e. parent-gifted student, teacher-gifted student, peers-gifted student, community-gifted student, educational policy-gifted student). Additionally, an ecological approach to counseling as described Conyne and Cook (2004) would aid in formulating a thorough case/student conceptualization and assist in designing effective, differentiated interventions while simultaneously recognizing the people, places, and things that directly or indirectly enhance or limit the student.

4. Encourage other school counseling practitioners to take leadership and advocacy roles for the gifted population within their schools through education and scholarship. To carry out the demand for best practices in counseling gifted students, professional development and research on such practices is needed by/for practitioners in the counseling field. This could be completed through an action research framework where the professional school counselor desires to improve their own practice when working with the gifted population. If other school counselor practitioners read through scholarly journals, take notice during professional conference presentations and/or make use of such practitioner-based
research within their own professional practice, best practices emerge and true change occurs within the school counseling field. This would help with the research-to-practice gap that permeates the counseling field and school counseling field specifically. The end result of closing this gap would be gifted children are more socially, emotionally, behaviorally and cognitively ready to learn, equipped with and the coping skills needed to be independent and self-directed students.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This research study investigated the experiences of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students. This study of five elementary school counselors raised a number of questions appropriate for further research. Though this study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, efforts should be made to identify and explore more comprehensive school counseling programs aligning with ASCA National Model that are providing counseling services with and for elementary-aged gifted students. Specific services that are being offered to address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted students in an elementary school setting and the empirical effectiveness of such services are recommended. Additional recommendations for further research include:

1. Future research could extend the current study by examining the professional experiences and practices of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students in other school districts in Ohio.

2. The current research participants expressed the effectiveness of delivering core curriculum and small group counseling with students who are gifted. In a future qualitative study or mixed methods study, researchers might examine gifted students’ perceptions of the impactfulness of such intervention.
(3) Longitudinal inquiry regarding the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs and student outcomes with gifted students to determine the link between student outcomes and comprehensive school counseling services.

(4) Qualitative research inquiry examining professional school counselors’ experiences working with teachers of the gifted.

(5) Quantitative research inquiry on the effectiveness of an affective social competence curriculum implemented by a professional school counselor as it relates to a student’s development on concepts of self-concept, empathy, rapport building, relationship skills, decision-making, and/or self-management of anxiety and stress.

Conclusion

This study provided a description and a deeper understanding of the experiences and practices of elementary school counselors as they provide counseling services with their gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program. This research study intended to help fill the gap that existed in the literature by exploring elementary school counselors work with students identified as gifted, in hopes to inform, and empower counseling practice for the betterment of students. Utilizing a qualitative design, it was determined that five findings were represented in the data. These findings were (1) intentionality and accountability, (2) collaboration, (3) knowledge, training, and professional experience, (4) identifying students’ nonacademic barriers and (5) core curriculum and small group effectiveness. Much of what was discovered in the research confirms the current literature. Other researchers could further investigate any of these concepts.

There is still a vast amount to learn about the experiences of elementary school counselors’ work with gifted students that will continue to guide and inform practice.
This research study will conceivably spark an interest in both the academic and practitioner worlds of school counseling. It is the scholars who crave to investigate what happens, but it is the practitioner who actually makes it happen. Only through a comprehensive, intentional approach in which professional school counselors come together in support of the unique needs of this population will the school counseling research begin to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of professional practices when counseling gifted students in schools. Without such practitioner-based inquiries available to inform practice, we may never fully become the leaders so desperately needed to advocate for and on behalf of gifted students.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Adult Consent Form for Research
University of Cincinnati
Department: College of Education, Criminal Justice, & Human Services
Principal Investigator: Jill S. Minor
Faculty Advisor: Mei Tang, Ph.D.

Title of Study: Elementary School Counselors’ Professional Experiences and Practices
Working With Students Identified as Gifted: A Qualitative Study

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask
questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Jill S. Minor of the University of Cincinnati (UC)
Department of Human Services. She is guided in this research by Dr. Mei Tang.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to explore school counselors’ experiences and practices
working with gifted students by identifying how professional elementary school counselor work
with gifted students within their comprehensive school counseling program.

Who will be in this research study?
About six people will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you:
(1) Are employed as an elementary school counselor in Ohio;
(2) Identify with American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model;
(3) Are employed in an elementary school where there is a gifted intervention specialist or
teacher of the gifted;
(4) Are employed in an elementary school that identifies and serves gifted student.

What if you are an employee where the research study is done?
Taking part in this research study is not part of your job. Refusing to be in the study will not
affect your job. You will not be offered any special work-related benefits if you take part in this
study.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to participate in a semistructured interview. It will take about 5 minutes to
complete a demographic questionnaire and then a 45 minute interview. All interviews will be
audio recorded. The interview questions will be regarding your experiences and practices
working with gifted students. The research will take place at your school or any other agreed
upon location outside of your typical work day.
Are there any risks to being in this research study?
It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by being in this research.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
You will probably not get any benefit because of being in this study. But, being in this study may help elementary school counselors better understand counseling practices when working with students who are identified as gifted.

What will you get because of being in this research study?
You will not be paid to take part in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?
If you do not want to take part in this research study, you may simply not participate. If you do not want to be recorded, you should choose not to take part in this research.

How will your research information be kept confidential?
Information about you will be kept private in this study that could identify you such as your name, years of experience, or other personal information. A pseudo name will be assigned to each participant in the study. In any written publications, you will not be identified by name.

Recordings of interviews will be made on a digital recorder. The interviews will be transcribed. The transcription will be kept in a password-protected computer. If the documents are printed out in a paper copy, the researcher will keep the information in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s residence for a period of three years. After that it will be deleted or destroyed by the researcher. Additionally, the signed consent forms and the master list of participants’ names and pseudonyms will be kept in a separate locked cabinet. These documents will be kept for a period of three years and then destroyed.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

Sometimes confidentiality cannot be assured because of technology limitations such as email correspondence. The researcher cannot promise that information sent by the Internet or email will be private.

Sometimes confidentiality must be broken to protect participants or others. Your identity and information will be kept confidential unless the authorities have to be notified about abuse or immediate harm that may come to you or others.

What are your legal rights in this research study?
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?
If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Jill Minor at (513) 520.8717 or you may contact Dr. Mei Tang at 513.556.3716.

The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

**Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?**
No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell the researcher.

**Agreement:**
I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ________________________________________________

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _________________ Date ______
Appendix B

Interview Guide

Demographic Information

Instructions: Please answer the following background questions by circling the most appropriate response.

(1) **Do you identify as**
   (a) Female   (b) Male   (c) Other

(2) **What is your race:** __________________________

(3) **Please indicate the number of years as a professional school counselor.**
   (a) Less than 1 year
   (b) 1-5 years
   (c) 6-10 years
   (d) 11-15 years
   (e) 16-20 years
   (f) 21+ years

(4) **Please indicate your age range:**
   (a) Under 24 or under
   (b) 25-35
   (c) 36-46
   (d) 47-57
   (f) 58-64
   (g) over 65

(5) **Please indicate the number of years as an elementary professional school counselor.**
(a) Less than 1 year  
(b) 1-5 years  
(c) 6-10 years  
(d) 11-15 years  
(e) 16-20 years  
(f) 21+ years  

(6) **What is your highest academic degree?**

(a) Associate’s degree (AA)  
(b) Bachelor’s degree (BA, BS)  
(c) Master’s degree (MA, MS, M.Ed)  
(d) Educational Specialist’s degree (EDS)  
(e) Doctorate degree (PhD, Ed.D)  

(7) **Was your training program CACREP accredited?**

(a) Yes  
(b) No  
(c) Don’t Know  

(8) **Have you ever received training regarding social and emotional needs of gifted students?**

(a) Yes  
(b) No  

(9) **Which choice best describes how you have obtained information about gifted education?** (Circle all that apply).

(a) Graduate Training Program  
(b) Practicum/Internship  
(c) On the job training  
(d) Workshops or Seminars
(e) Literature and/or Internet
(f) Other ________________

(10) Is there a gifted program in your school?

(a) Yes

(b) No

(11) Is there a gifted specialist or teacher of the gifted in your school?

(a) Yes

(b) No

(12) Check all that describe you

____ Licensed professional school counselor

____ Licensed professional counselor

____ Other: _________________________

(13) Your school districts strategic plan states the school district promotes academic, career and personal/social development for every student through a comprehensive school counseling model. Additionally, the professional school counselors: Implement the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) counseling model. Do you agree?

(a) Yes

(b) No
Interview Guide

(1) Discuss your experiences, if any, working with gifted students.

(2) Discuss the needs or issues, if any, your gifted students experience.

(3) Discuss the counseling interventions or strategies, if any, you have used with your gifted students.
   
   (3a) From your experiences and practices, describe the interventions that are effective in addressing their social and emotional needs.

(4) Discuss your experiences, if any, working with the gifted intervention specialist or teacher of the gifted in your school.

(5) Do you have experiences as an advocate for gifted students?
    If yes, (5a) Describe how you serve as an advocate for and with gifted students in light of the ASCA National Model.

(6) Do you have experiences as a leader for gifted students?
    If yes, (6a) Describe how you serve as a leader for gifted students in light of the ASCA National Model.

(7) What observations and/or experiences have shaped your attitudes concerning gifted students?

(8) How has the ASCA National Model supported your efforts, if at all, in prevention or intervention activities with students who are gifted?

(9) Discuss the barriers, if any, you have experienced in working with students who are gifted.

(10) Is there anything else you would like to add?