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# Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum: an analysis of impact on gifted instruction during its primary implementation year

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LOUISIANA'S COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM:  
AN ANALYSIS OF IMPACT ON GIFTED INSTRUCTION  
DURING ITS PRIMARY IMPLEMENTATION YEAR

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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## DEDICATION

Each stage of the experience presented new demands, yet the reward always seemed greater than the requirements. A quote by Anais Nin reminded me to consistently move forward despite difficulties and doubts, because “life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.” The meaning continues to be relevant in my life as I move toward new goals.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Rita Culross, my major advisor, who guided me through my doctoral journey. Her knowledge, advice, and reassurance throughout this study were immeasurably valuable. Her insightful supervision contributed to my growth as a professional and aided in my gaining proficiency in the field. Grateful appreciation is offered to my committee members: Dr. Earl Cheek, Dr. Paul Mooney, Dr. Pam Blanchard, and Dr. Katia Madsen. I also appreciate the efforts and advice of Dr. James Wandersee, who served earlier on my committee. My decision to select LSU as institution of choice for doctoral study was due to powerful learning experiences in reading classes with Dr. Cheek. Other members also influenced my academic pursuits through discussions, classroom instruction and professional example.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their support. Encouragement from my parents, Carla, brothers and sisters-in-law made the long journey easier to bear. To my children, your sincere questioning of educational issues prompted me to seek answers; I am grateful that you directed me toward a passionate endeavor. Most of all, I wish to thank Tim for his understanding, patience, steadfastness, and solid comfort. This accomplishment is ours.

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## ABSTRACT

In the midst of a national focus on improving student achievement, gifted educators within Louisiana were required to implement some or all aspects of a curriculum with a prescribed content structure. The study measured the perceptions of educators and administrators as they analyzed curricular expectations, program options, method of implementation for the Comprehensive Curriculum, a provided common curriculum, and strengths and weaknesses of the identified curriculum. Findings indicated that implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum had a significant impact on gifted instruction delivered through Advanced Placement/Acceleration program models, and it created a slight shift toward use of enrichment models at the elementary and middle school levels. Findings also suggested factors that either increase or decrease curricular reform efforts at the school and district level of implementation. A measurement of the scope and nature of existing views provided a call for analysis of alternative curriculum models and showed the necessity for a curricular focus on differentiation toward the identified needs of gifted learners.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

“The No Child Left Behind Act calls for sweeping education reform by turning federal spending on schools into a federal investment in improved student performance” (Bush, n.d., topic 22). With the American nation’s focus on improving student achievement, educators or “agents of reform” (Bush, n.d., topic 9) are restructuring curriculum at the state and district level to meet the demands of parents, politicians, and the larger public. Instructors, in an attempt to manage the daunting task, are reverting back to the basic concept of curriculum as a set path of study. From this foundation of a defined course, reform efforts focus on the content level where key concepts, principles, and facts are organized into measurable frameworks for study.

Typically, a discipline’s curriculum is further ordered according to grade levels; with each subsequent level presenting achievement expectations more demanding than the preceding. Curricular frameworks are linked to standards, while student attainment and achievement are measured against those touchstones accordingly in the current age of accountability. Such frameworks comprise the general education to which every student is entitled.

As all states are required to set high standards of achievement and to create a system of accountability to measure results, every child in grades 3-8 must be tested to ensure sufficient progress. Student attainment of identified grade level skills, as measured by either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced test formats, reflects a certain standard of achievement acceptable for promotion. Louisiana has a rigorous high stakes testing program; one that excels when measured against federal requirements (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006b; McCabe, 2006). Currently, Louisiana students in

grades 10 and 11 are also tested to measure student progress toward improved performance in identified basic skill areas.

To further exemplify the state's transition toward higher standards, Louisiana has developed a K-12 curricular framework based upon existing content-area standards. The framework, entitled Comprehensive Curriculum, was created to reflect grade-level expectations and was authorized by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) for the 2005-06 academic year (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005, Comprehensive Curriculum; Louisiana Department of Education, Comprehensive Curriculum: Preface to ELA). The Comprehensive Curriculum provides an explicit context and instructional design within which students are to grasp the structure of a particular discipline at a specified grade. Additionally, the Comprehensive Curriculum is directly linked to the state's high stakes testing program as it provides criterion items to be tested. All students will be held accountable for grade-level expectations.

In contrast, the field of gifted education has not focused historically on a strong content emphasis in its curricular models. Instead, teachers combined eclectic approaches for development of creativity and higher order processing within programs for the gifted and have paid little attention to traditional content frameworks (Clark, 2002; Tomlinson et al., 2002; VanTassel-Baska and Little, 2003). VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) summarize the continuing situation as a lack of sustained application of planned curricular experiences and a deficit of systematic challenging curricular interventions. In particular, Louisiana's gifted and talented curriculum emphasizes "enrichment, acceleration, higher level thinking skills...abstract thinking skills," and multidisciplinary content with a higher degree of complexity than that of the general curriculum (Louisiana Department of Education, 2003, topic 6).

There is a marked difference between the two attitudes toward content acquisition. In light of the current reform movement in general education, the challenge for teachers of the gifted is to critically examine curricular expectations within prescribed content structures. Theoretical underpinnings of curriculum development are present within the Comprehensive Curriculum in its focus on creating a required or prescribed content structure appropriate for all students. Its basic intent is for students to work in a zone of proximal development and at a developmentally-appropriate level of difficulty. That intent, based on goals of equity for all, reflects an assumption that age peers exhibit similar ability and readiness levels.

VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) have stated the need for educators of gifted to examine whether curricular expectations for grade levels are sufficiently challenging and whether or not the contextual settings in which the work is carried out will promote sufficient student growth. Clark (2002) has noted the underachievement of those educated within a *total* approach. To date, no known studies have addressed the types of instructional settings or practices offered to gifted students when instructed within a prescribed, common curriculum.

It is important for educators to analyze curricular expectations, methods of implementation of prescribed curriculum, and strengths and weaknesses of alternative curriculum models to determine effective ways to teach gifted individuals. Successful instruction means matching the level and complexity of the curriculum with the ability, emotional readiness, and motivation of the student.

#### Goal of Study

The goal of this study was to examine the impact of the Comprehensive Curriculum on instruction for gifted students. To establish foundational data within an



atmosphere of district autonomy, two data-gathering techniques were utilized: survey and case study. Through survey of a selected population of teachers of the gifted, data was analyzed and categorized to establish major issues in instructing within a standardized curriculum. By also surveying parish personnel responsible for determining methods of gifted programming, results were categorized to determine a baseline indicator of program options during the initial year of use. Additionally, indicators of factors affecting program selection were measured. Through follow-up interviews of random participants in the survey, dialogue clarified perceptions and factors influencing identified trends. Through interviews of a single case study, context variables which affected instruction of the gifted within a classroom setting were established. Resulting descriptive data from combined sources identified if and when instruction focused upon the Comprehensive Curriculum offered sufficient differentiation in all aspects of instruction for gifted learners.

### Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study is:

What impact does implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum have on the inclusive instruction of gifted students?

The subquestions are:

1. What types of delivery models are present in parish programs?
2. What types of instructional grouping practices offer increased differentiation of curriculum?
3. To what degree does use of the Comprehensive Curriculum meet differentiation needs of gifted students?
4. What context variables affect instruction of gifted students?
5. What factors will determine whether alternative curriculum models for gifted learners are selected to complement the Comprehensive Curriculum?

## Significance of the Study

### How Curriculum Affects Gifted Learners

The instructional needs of gifted learners result from characteristics that they exhibit, which set them apart from typical learners. To meet those needs, instructors must select and create curriculum that nurtures the development of student characteristics.

Curriculum involves content and instructional strategies which cultivate advanced abilities. Barbara Clark (2002) emphasizes S. Kaplan's view of curriculum as materials and strategies designed with the goal of differentiation from a core curriculum; such differentiation would recognize "the characteristics of the gifted, [provide] reinforcement or practice for the development of these characteristics, and [extend] the recognized characteristics to further levels of development" (p. 448). Students need to be challenged to make connections between what they learn and their own life experiences. To move toward a goal of differentiation the following five areas of need must be addressed:

#### **1. Academic needs of gifted learners**

A report of historic significance, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993) explains that the term "gifted" refers to a developing ability which must be cultivated to amplify potential within a student. Cultivation of need occurs when gifted students are given curriculum reflecting modifications from the general one. Davis and Rimm (2004) note the unfairness of ignoring or preventing the development of special abilities as such actions often lead to frustration and behaviors stemming from non-motivation.

## **2. Academic timeframe needs of gifted learners**

Prompted by pressing calls in the 1990's for more stringent content in instruction for all students, Sally M. Reis and associates conducted a seminal study which noted the need for curriculum compacting for high ability students. Findings of the study indicated that an average of 40-50% of content material in mathematics, language arts, science and social studies could be eliminated for targeted students with no difference in achievement test results, as measured by pre and post tests of treatment and control groups (Reis et al., 1993). In a review of literature, Reis succinctly expressed the general tone of earlier research regarding textbook readability levels, teacher use of instructional strategies promoting differentiation, and repetition in grade level content. As a result, Reis and associates called for students to start school at a later point in the school year, since those who are exposed to a grade level curriculum do not learn anything new until January. Similarly, Meghan Coates (2005) argues in an article in a newsletter of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented that elementary gifted students, *prior* to the beginning of the school year, have generally mastered from 30 to 50 percent of the basic curriculum to which they will be exposed. In a supporting article of the same newsletter, Megan Dobyns (2005) notes that exceptional learners identify school-level decisions for them to put in seat time in classrooms where content is already known as being the opposite of learning time where they can proceed at their own level.

## **3. Academic measurement needs of gifted learners**

The *National Excellence Report* (United States Department of Education, 1993) underscores that schools generally aim for academic adequacy, rather than academic excellence. Gifted students who are not challenged to do excellent work do not live up to their potential. Examples where gifted students are said to succeed in the classroom

without differentiated programming usually are based on good grades. If one considers that these students are likely to have mastered the grade level material during the previous 1-2 school years, the good grades only offer the appearance of academic success. Lack of rigorous demands within curriculum materials promotes ease in earning grades which may cause students to question the value of exerting oneself to learn.

#### **4. Motivation needs of gifted learners**

When the intellectual abilities of students are not recognized, interest in school declines. Some may attend school physically, but they have dropped out intellectually. Others may perform perfunctorily with little notice of what they are doing. Underachievement is an observable fact for many gifted children. Clark (2002) defines the underachieving student as “someone who has shown exceptional performance on a standardized test of intellectual ability or achievement and who, nevertheless, does not perform as well as expected on school-related tasks as evidenced by grades or teacher reports” (p. 541). Citing a study by J. Whitmore, Clark (2002) further notes that the unproductive element, “personally unrewarding curriculum and required activities,” was identified by students as a significant contributor to the development of their underachievement (p. 546).

#### **5. Affective needs of gifted learners**

Students who do not identify themselves as scholars and thinkers need the identification experience and the label to adequately adjust personal expectations of self. The realistic and humbling effect of relating with similar ability peers forces gifted learners to recognize and embrace their abilities (Coates, 2005). Additionally, such self-recognition causes students to calibrate expectations for talent and to exhibit, rather than hide, their abilities.

Students who do not value themselves as students, learners, and thinkers will struggle with difficult curriculum. By not encountering challenges while learning, students may associate being smart with effortless success (Coleman and Cross, 2001). High performing students, particularly gifted students, frequently base their self-concept on academic successes. When these students ultimately encounter new and strenuous material, they internalize their experienced failure to immediately understand the concepts and, therefore, suffer from low self esteem. Without adequate coping skills, the disappointment may be so devastating that students withdraw to the safety of known ideas and concepts, often forgoing future opportunities to learn complex information (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002).

#### Status of Curriculum for Gifted

Development of curriculum requires much time and expertise. Typically, curriculum for gifted is developed by teachers responding to specific classroom and student needs. The resulting materials are not easily replicated or utilized by other teachers. VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) promote a more efficient use of resources by selecting and integrating materials that have been successfully reviewed and selected by appropriately-trained staff. Curricular review criteria assist in the process of selection by focusing on important elements, such as clear alignment with standards, engaging style or multiple perspectives, to name a few. The researchers cite personal experience in finding evidence that materials are effective with high-ability learners; it is also noted that materials rarely have “empirical evidence that documents learning gains tied to the use of the [selected] curriculum” (VanTassel-Baska and Little, 2003, p. 275). Additionally, the researchers note that although the National Association hosts an annual

competition to identify exemplary curriculum to promote learning effectiveness, the quality of the research to investigate student impact has been uneven at best.

Through an extensive search to date, it appears that two models of curriculum development for grades K-12 align with the larger curricular reform paradigm and are responsive to needs of students with high ability in traditional academic areas. The first model is the Integrated Curriculum Model which identifies differentiation of existing curriculum as key to extending learning and the development of thematic and conceptual instruction as crucial to developing higher order thought. The second is the Parallel Curriculum Model which offers four parallel approaches to curriculum development for use in both heterogeneous and homogeneous classroom settings. The parallel processes for guiding teacher development of rich curricular experiences begin with discipline area content and incorporate methods to address motivation and affective needs. The approaches seek to increase possibility of advanced learning within existing curriculum frameworks.

Both models bridge the divide between complex content and higher order processing resulting in creative products. Equally, the two models emphasize a strong content emphasis and good curricular design, and they offer ways in which subject matter knowledge must become a prerequisite of development of student potential. Either model could offer teachers of the gifted and district personnel a viable option for interfacing sufficiently challenging curriculum with a prescribed curriculum, such as the Comprehensive Curriculum, thus promoting higher academic achievement for students.

#### Need for the Study

The selection of alternative models of instruction, however, will not occur if need to do so is not established. To date, little or no known empirical data exists to show how

districts are choosing to implement the authorized Comprehensive Curriculum with regard to programmatic options for the gifted. Additionally, no record exists of either administrator or teacher perceptions of how the new standardized curriculum impacts instruction for advanced learners. To study both will explore the complex phenomena associated with curriculum reform efforts aimed at student attainment of grade-level standards within a prescribed curriculum. The intersecting but distinct relationships created by individual and administrative-entity interpretation of state-level mandates must be documented during initial implementation efforts to create a foundation upon which further investigation can occur.

The policy implications of an analysis of factors affecting the all-encompassing instruction for gifted students are recognizable. As the state has indicated that all content of the curriculum must be taught and that districts are responsible for implementation and monitoring, the role of instruction, noted in the overall purpose of aligning content, instruction and assessment, must be critically examined for emerging impact (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005b). Given that teachers who have gifted students are simultaneously offered the opportunity to “teach more than the content of the Comprehensive Curriculum,” but cautioned that the “GLEs for that grade and content area take first priority,” timing of this research analysis becomes significant for early identification of any factors which may impact student opportunity to work to potential (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005b). Based upon possible findings, recommendations for clarification of uses of the Comprehensive Curriculum could occur in time for the planned evaluation and revision slated October of 2006. Acknowledged recommendations for instruction of the gifted could increase the likelihood of learning challenges for students.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### No Child Left Behind

President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on January 8, 2002. The law, with its emphasis on grades K-12, enhanced the role of federal government in public education. President Bush's plan to reform the nation's elementary and secondary schools seeks to ensure that all children are proficient in reading and math by the 2013-14 school year. Four basic principles reflect the law's commitment to real education reform: stronger accountability requirements for results and expanded federal help to reach requirements, increased flexibility and control at the local district level, expanded information and options for parents, and consistent assessment of higher standards (Bush, n.d., ¶ 9). These principles will secure educational excellence for every child.

States are empowered to direct block grants of federal money in return for greater accountability for student learning as measured by annual assessment. Each state has the responsibility to develop standards of what a child should learn and know at each grade level. Reform efforts focus on reading and math, with increasing emphasis on science. The law's mandatory requirements are driving educators to increasingly refine standards to specific mastery skills and to create curriculum that shapes instruction in relation to those skills.

### Curriculum Development

The field of curriculum development in America, after a period of stasis, is currently characterized by fluid movement. Indicative of this changeable movement is the ill-defined use of *curriculum* to describe the developmental process being utilized.



Curriculum has come to mean both the defined path of study and the larger symbolic representation of practice, structure, experience and reflection. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) indicate that curriculum as symbolic representation defines the contemporary field. In reality, there is dissonance between the definition of the contemporary field and the practice of its constituents. While efforts to understand curriculum at the broader, denser symbolic level should direct instructional practice, efforts at the institutional level to establish set paths for study become the reform movements within education.

### Grade Level Expectations

A Grade-Level Expectation (GLE) is a statement that defines **what *all* students should know or be able to do** at the **end** of a given **grade level**. Statements of expectations were developed for the four core areas of English, Math, Science and Social Studies and were defined for grade levels Pre-Kindergarten to Twelfth. The all-inclusive set of statements is commonly referred to as Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). As stated in a training presentation to district-level personnel (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004b), the GLEs have a three-fold purpose:

- To meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which mandates that states develop grade-by-grade standards
- To guide the development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the four core content areas in Louisiana schools
- To provide uniformity in core content taught across Louisiana

To add an extra dimension to the definition of Grade Level Expectations, it is helpful to examine what GLEs are not. They are not curriculum, and they are not inclusive of everything that should be covered in a grade's content.

An established process was followed to develop the GLEs (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004b). Multiple stages were planned to involve as large a number of participants as possible. The initial step involved the formation of development committees. There were a total of 120 participants selected. Classroom teachers, administrators, special-populations teachers, and resource teachers were chosen for their knowledge of standards and curriculum. Committees of 30 Louisiana educators per content area were divided into cluster groups of PK-4, 5-8, and 9-12 grade levels. The committees drafted initial statements of skills that students should master by the end of a given grade.

A secondary action involved adjusting the drafted GLEs. The drafting process was informed by unidentified national consultants in several ways. First, consultants advised committees during the selection of skills to be measured at a certain grade level. Second, the group monitored the writing process to ensure alignment of identified skills with national standards within each of the core areas. Finally, the consulting company worked between cluster groups to limit repetition and to seek an increase in difficulty of the skills across grade levels.

The following step called for an evaluation of the existing work. The completed draft versions were evaluated in the summer of 2003 by focus groups of teachers who had been selected by their districts for participation. Two groups of 80 reviewers were formed, one representing north Louisiana areas and the other for those areas in south Louisiana. Focus group reviewers examined the GLEs for horizontal and vertical alignment.

The next phase involved the larger public. Revised documents were posted on the Louisiana Department of Education's website, so that any interested party could review the documents and then post comments and/or suggestions. The LDE solicited feedback

from all audiences by making schools and districts aware, as well as using newspaper reports to inform the general population of the opportunity. In addition to the public review, the draft GLEs then underwent review by national content experts. These external experts, selected by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), provided a national, unbiased perspective to the review process.

The following phase called for the GLEs to be returned to the initial committees. Input from the focus groups, public review and external expert review was considered to create the finalized form. Two major outcomes were reflected in the final GLE statements. The first outcome was that the number of GLEs had been drastically reduced for each content area. The second outcome was that GLEs were more grade appropriate in nature and amount.

The final step was to submit the draft documents to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Documents were sent to BESE in September of 2003. The documents were approved in October of 2003. With approval secure, the development process was complete. To extend the timeline to the distribution stage, districts received documents in February of 2004 and were instructed to develop new curriculum guides, using the GLEs to identify what should be taught.

GLEs are significant to the understanding of curricular decisions affecting instruction correlated to desired skill mastery. Grade level expectations are significantly related to state standards and benchmarks. Content standards are broad statements that represent the overarching goals that describe what students should know and be able to do. Benchmarks are more specific statements of what all students should know and be able to do that are written for specific grade clusters. Grade-Level Expectations are directly related to benchmarks and define what the benchmark means for a given grade. The

increasingly narrowed focus on student attainment of skills allows increased measurability of mastery. Furthermore, GLEs relate to curriculum because they articulate the core content that ALL students should master. In adherence with the NCLB directive to show Adequate Yearly Progress towards the mastery goal for each student, GLEs assist educators in developing curriculum. Stated end products of using the GLEs will be more consistency in the curricula across the state and better alignment between what is taught and what is tested.

### Model Curriculum Framework

To further meet requirements of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which mandates that states assist in the development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment of the four core content areas, Louisiana secured a consulting firm to develop the Model Curriculum Framework (MCF). The MCF was organized into units of GLE-based instruction. The units provided activities that aligned instruction with standards, benchmarks, and grade-level expectations. As the MCF was proposed for development, overall grade frameworks within each content area were to address each GLE at least once.

A brief history of the MCF begins with its inception and ends with its displacement. As sample units were distributed to parishes in the fall of 2004, BESE responded to public and district demands for a more complete, defined document (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005a). Plans were drawn for the creation of a comprehensive curriculum to be ready for the 2005-06 school year. In the intervening time, districts were given three options for developing a GLE-based curriculum to meet NCLB mandates (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004a).

Option I required districts to develop a GLE-based curriculum using the MCF as a guide. By using the MCF as a model, district personnel would identify required components for curricula, evaluate criteria for locally developed curricula and create activities for specific types of classroom instruction. Option II asked districts to expand the MCF into a comprehensive guide based on local needs. Personnel could use the MCF document as a sequential outline to which modified and additional activities could be added. In comparison, Option III stated that districts could prepare for implementation of the state's forthcoming comprehensive curriculum by examining the MCF in an in-depth manner. Such examination would assist in identifying textbook and resource gaps and would provide practice in using unit activities. As of August 5, 2004, seventy-seven districts and charter schools initially selected Option III (Singletary, 2004). As the proposed Comprehensive Curriculum would replace the Model Curriculum Framework, use of the MCF was basically limited to the single school year (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004a).

### Comprehensive Curriculum

The purpose of the Comprehensive Curriculum is “to align content, instruction, and assessment” and to provide “uniformity in content taught across the state in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies” (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005b, Part I, number 1). Its intent is to align the three critical aspects to increase academic achievement of students. A secondary purpose is to use best practices for instruction towards standards. Documents were released to districts in April of 2005, so that preparation for its implementation might begin. Timing of implementation is considered critical due to deadlines from the No Child Left Behind act, which mandates

testing of grade-level standards for spring 2006 (Louisiana Department of Education, GLEs: Frequently Asked Questions).

As the Grade-Level Expectations identify the essential content for each grade, the activities of the Comprehensive Curriculum reveal best instructional practices through its selected strategies and performance-based assessments (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005b, Part I, number 2). The development process for the curriculum followed a similar, but simplified path from that of earlier components, as outlined in the following overview (Singletary, 2004). At the outset in August 2004, draft committees for the four core discipline areas were formed. Creation of the unit documents occurred from August until October, during which time peer reviews and coordinator assistance were ongoing. These preliminary documents were then reviewed by LDE content coordinators and program coordinators in early November. On November 10, 2004, the documents were presented to teacher committees, comprised of teachers recommended from districts across the state. Teacher committees of 2-3 members per content area utilized checklists, rating scales and comment pages to evaluate draft copies.

Then, LDE personnel reviewed evaluation documents to compile summary evaluations for each grade level content area. Writers met in mid-November to discuss suggested changes. Final revisions of units occurred from December 2004 to January 2005 (Singletary, 2004). The documents were approved by BESE in February and released to districts in April of 2005. Districts studied documents and planned curriculum training meetings in May, and developed lists of needed teacher resources in June; consecutively, LDE staff conducted training conference for district personnel in July in preparation for implementation by the beginning of the 2005-06 school year

(Louisiana Department of Education, 2004a; Louisiana Department of Education, GLEs: Frequently Asked Questions).

The course documents were written by Louisiana educators, who were to follow the same topical structure of the Model Curriculum Framework, but the texts provide more activities and assessment examples. Writers were to create activities within each unit as he/she would teach them and to select the sequence of the activities to promote retention and understanding (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004a). All measurements of progress toward mastery were planned to be aided by the arrangement of units, which also supports teaching of content assessed by state tests before designated testing dates. Writers were also to address GLEs “enough times to allow for mastery” (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004a, slide 13).

Policies concerning the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum reflect the NCLB’s emphasis of district and state-level responsibilities. The state of Louisiana has “indicated that all content of the curriculum must be taught” within the implementation and monitoring guidelines (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005b, Part I, number 4). In district usage guidelines, the LDE reiterated that districts must teach the content of the curriculum, but that they are not mandated to teach the curriculum exactly as presented or to teach the same lesson on the same day across the district (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005a). Districts have been given the responsibility of deciding if units are to be taught in the sequenced, published order and of whether substitutions of equivalent activities are to be allowed. An additional responsibility includes determining if fewer activities than presented in the document should be taught, as long as each indicated GLE has been adequately addressed by the activities selected.

The district also determines which entity-- teacher, school or district-- makes the decision to substitute or delete activities.

The state's overall plan for implementation of a consistently taught, GLE-aligned, and district-monitored curriculum is given the name of Curriculum Management System. The system is composed of four separate plans which heavily involve both teachers and administrators to ensure an increased likelihood of student, school and district success.

The four plans are as follows:

- Curriculum Implementation Plan
- The Monitoring Plan
- The Curriculum Improvement Plan
- The Professional Development Plan

As stated in the Curriculum Management System's definitions (Louisiana Department of Education, Management System Definitions), the purpose of the Curriculum Implementation Plan is to guide the district's process for ensuring that all district teachers know what they are expected to teach. A Curriculum Implementation Plan includes the steps that a school and/or district will take to ensure that the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (or other approved curriculum) guides the taught curriculum. Likewise, the purpose of the Curriculum Monitoring Plan is to establish the district's process for ensuring that the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (or other approved curriculum) guides the taught curriculum in the classroom and includes steps and a timeline for activating such a monitoring system. Furthermore, the Curriculum Improvement Plan has the purpose of establishing a process to be used by the schools and/or the district to analyze assessment data and identify and remedy weaknesses in the curriculum, while the final Professional Development Plan's purpose is to ensure that



teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to teach the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (or other approved curriculum).

### The Integrated Curriculum Model

The Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) was “first proposed by Joyce VanTassel-Baska in 1986” and continually clarified through subsequent publications (VanTassel-Baska and Little, 2003, p. 7). VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) see the current state of affairs in education as the “time to consider an integrated model of curricula for gifted learners, one that is sensitive to all aspects of their learning needs” (p. 6). The authors assert that what the field of gifted education has lacked in comprehensive and cohesive curricular frameworks can be filled with one, specifically the ICM, which uses good curricular design, considers disciplinary features for content framework, and differentiates for high academic ability.

Though the focal rationale presents an overview of the cognitive and affective dimensions related to educating gifted learners, three supporting reasons for its use are also provided. First, an integrated curriculum approach relates to current delivery models. VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) note a decrease in pull-out programs as “more gifted students are being served in heterogeneous or self-contained settings” (p. 7). To use the ICM would avoid an add-on curriculum, by differentiating the one already required for students. Second, recent research on learning reveals that better transfer of learning occurs when higher order thinking skills are embedded in subject matter. It follows, according to VanTassel-Baska and Little, that teaching concepts within a selected discipline avoid fragmentation caused by teaching facts and rules. Third, use of the ICM correlates to a larger shift in emphasis in the educational field. Curricular principles once thought most appropriate for gifted have become favored for developing

all learners. The researchers highlight the importance of aligning meaningful subject matter with the seemingly inevitable manipulation of higher order thinking skills and interdisciplinary ideas within the regular classroom.

Further support for its use can be found in the three interrelated dimensions of the ICM. In the first, advanced content knowledge is emphasized and measured by diagnostic-prescriptive approaches to ensure that new learning is occurring. The second dimension provides another facet by promoting opportunities for higher order thinking and processing. The authors suggest both generic and content-specific cognitive models for promoting higher order thought. Finally, dimension three focuses learning experiences around major or key issues, themes and concepts representing both real-world and theoretical applications.

The relationship between ICM and best practice as applied to gifted learners is most evident when one examines current research in the field of curriculum development. The ICM fuses an accelerative approach with content modification to generate development principles that are responsive to student needs. The principles or design elements also demonstrate key features of curricular reform used to develop national standards. Design elements are as follows: meaning-based depth in content, higher order thinking, intra and interdisciplinary connections developed through key concepts and themes, metacognition, cultivation of field-related habits of mind, inquiry-based learning and problem solving, real-world application of learning outcomes, authentic assessment, global and multicultural issues and concerns, overarching concept framework, multiple resources and materials, and substantive content. VanTassel-Baska and associates at the Center for Gifted Education researched, developed and tested a number of units of study in the areas of English language arts, science, and social studies. Data from curriculum

effectiveness studies have shown statistically significant results with students in the experimental classrooms consistently outperforming other non-treatment classrooms on posttests and performance-based measurements, according to which discipline was being measured.

### The Parallel Curriculum Model

The Parallel Curriculum Model offers four parallel approaches to curriculum development for use in both heterogeneous and homogeneous classroom settings. Tomlinson and associates (2002) illustrate how to develop a foundational base of content, an interaction of processes to form interdisciplinary connections and self-identified life relations, and an opportunity to practice toward an end-product. The term *parallel* indicates “several formats through which educators can approach curriculum design in the same subject or discipline” (Tomlinson, et al., 2002, p. 17). The four ways of thinking about curriculum development are to be used singly or simultaneously to create a cohesive and challenging continuum for learning.

As all curriculums take basic definition and form from the essential nature of the discipline area, the first format is called “The Core Curriculum”. The second parallel extends the foundation of the Core one to guide students to make connections within and across disciplinary concepts. It is necessarily labeled the “The Curriculum of Connections.” Once that ascending spiral of knowledge is built, the third format requires learners to apply elements of the discipline. “The Curriculum of Practice” promotes student growth toward expertise. The final format is “The Curriculum of Identity,” which “guides students in coming to understand their own strengths, preferences, values, and commitment by reflecting on their own development” in comparison to those principles and powers of experts in the selected field (Tomlinson, et al., 2002, p. 17).

Tomlinson and associates identify the value of having multiple, but related approaches to developing curriculum by using three metaphors. Considering the growth process of teachers as they gain experience and wisdom, the first metaphor relates the continual move toward in-depth comprehension as movement along a novice to expert continuum. As teachers' professional knowledge deepens, their view about curriculum and its relationship to disciplines, topics, and students evolves toward expertise. Alternative options can be a catalyst for growth and change.

The second metaphor reveals how growth in expertise promotes a broader perspective. This all-encompassing approach indicates a teacher's ability to recognize that various development approaches "serve different purposes and address different needs," so that "form follows function" (Tomlinson, et al., 2002, p. 84). Selection of the appropriate form indicates recognition of the intended purpose and singular needs of intended audience.

Just as curriculum requires purposeful design, the third metaphor compares the role of the teacher to that of an architect drafting blueprints. The framework or design creates a sound and functional document. Tomlinson's group shows how the "basic framework of a commercial building remains constant while the form of the building varies according to its function, [likewise] the key curriculum components and framework remain constant while the form and model of these components vary according to the function and purpose" intended for the curriculum (p. 84).

Intended to promote coherence whether students need to operate at the core level or are ready to move toward the application and identity format, the Parallel Curriculum provides guidelines for developing rich curricular experiences and "layers of possibility" for all learners, but especially advanced ones (Tomlinson, et al., 2002, p. 209).

## Ability Grouping Practices

The responsibility of classroom teachers is to teach material in an effective and productive manner to students of diverse needs. According to Pare (2005), tracking and ability-grouped classes are designed to account for the differences among students by matching a student's needs with appropriate instruction. The difficulty in doing so lies in implementation.

Pare (2005) maintains that ability grouping is more than a one-dimensional program with different levels, intensities, and perceptions. Citing Kulik's 1992 analysis of grouping perspectives, Pare identifies five different grouping plans commonly utilized by educational systems. The plans are as follows:

- XYZ classes-a single grade is divided into several ability levels for a particular subject, and each ability level is instructed in a separate classroom.
- Cross-Grade Grouping-students of the same ability level but ranging across several grade levels are grouped for instruction exclusively with peers.
- Intra-class Grouping-each classroom includes students with a wide range of abilities. There is whole-group instruction and small-group instruction when ability differences indicate need. Teachers offer separate instruction to each ability group, while others are engaged in ability-appropriate individual assignments.
- Advanced Placement and Accelerated Classes-specialized instruction and accelerated classes are offered exclusively to gifted and talented students in specific subject areas.
- Enrichment Programs-gifted students are provided more varied and richer experiences than those that are offered in the regular classroom.

In an examination of the implications of the five plans, Pare states the XYZ classes and cross-grade grouping are typically associated with tracking structures for college preparatory, general, and vocational targets. Associations related to intra-class grouping are that students, regardless of ability, have the same teacher, comfortable small-group environments, and the increased possibility of enrichment. Although this theory offers much promise, Pare emphasizes there is no complete analysis of techniques that would make it work to its potential. Both positive and balanced perceptions of self image are more strongly associated for those students participating in advanced placement, accelerated classes, and enrichment programs.

The ideology driving ability grouping is to “raise the achievement level of all students by creating an environment that is most suitable to fit their needs” (Pare, 2005, p. 13). Noting Kulik’s work, Pare highlights that the most positive outcomes of ability grouping are exhibited by the high aptitude students. Exposure, to advanced material beyond that measured by standard achievement tests and taught in statewide curriculum, has inspirational effects on achievement that are not easily quantified.

### The Constructivist Learning Theory

The Constructivist Learning Theory or Constructivism suggests that in-depth learning of concepts and supporting ideas occurs when students actively construct knowledge through experience, inquiry, and exploration. Important in the process of constructing knowledge is the role of dialogue and cooperative learning. Spark-Langer and associates (2004) give credit to the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner for the foundations of this theory. Constructivism depicts learning as an active building of schemata to enhance understanding, rather than passively absorbing information.

General principles of instruction have developed through use of the theory in classrooms. A foundational principle states that “learning is development” (Spark-Langer, et al., 2004, p. 147). To learn, then, requires students to actively organize information to spark invention of new ideas. This gives rise to the second principle of accepting, exploring and questioning when disequilibrium occurs. Third, learners must engage in reflective abstraction to reach those highest levels of cognitive functioning. Fourth, dialogue within a community of learners generates further thinking. Finally, learning proceeds toward the development of structures or “big ideas”. Meaning making occurs when learners develop a large concept after progressively connecting all formative pieces of information.

The above stated general principles of instruction give rise to the role of a teacher engaged in constructivist teaching. The teacher must “seek and value students’ points of view” as well as create learning activities that challenge students’ suppositions (Spark-Langer, et al., 2004, p. 148). Additionally, the teacher should build lessons around key concepts, so that relevant problems emerge to prompt inquiry and exploration. Ultimately, teachers must assess student learning on a daily contextual basis. To facilitate student learning is the overarching goal of Constructivism.

### A Nation Deceived

In *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students* (2004), Nicholas Colangelo, Susan Assouline, and Miraca Gross examine acceleration and its effectiveness as a strategy for providing educational alternatives for high-ability students. To identify the need for challenging options, the authors assert students are ready for more challenge than the educational system provides, for more *yes* responses than negative ones when seeking complex learning opportunities and innovative settings,

and for more motivation to move toward excellence rather than competence.

Acceleration is defined as “an intervention that moves students through an educational program at rates faster, or at younger ages, than typical (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, V. 1, p. xi). Furthermore, they argue that schools should match the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum to the readiness and motivation of the student.

Decisions of placement can represent any of eighteen different types and can include entering school early, skipping grades, curriculum compacting in one or more subject areas, self-paced instruction, extracurricular programs, Advanced Placement (AP), or early entrance to college. The authors provide historic references to the one-room schoolhouse where “individualized education was standard practice,” until replaced by a more collective and standardized cultural and procedural approach (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, V. 1, p. 11). Furthermore, the researchers note that what was more subtly lost was the student right to direct one’s own education based on a personal rate of learning complex, new material. Despite various forms of acceleration, the underlying assumption is one of differentiation for each individual and situation.

To assist schools in administering acceleration programs effectively, the writers developed three guiding questions: 1) Has comprehensive assessment identified the child’s readiness level? 2) What is the best type of acceleration to be implemented? 3) What supports are needed to maximize success of the child? Upon questioning actions that should aid in administration of the strategy, responsibility for putting acceleration into action becomes shared by students and parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, and policy makers. Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross (2004) continue by identifying the ultimate benefit of acting upon their reported research: gifted



students avoid boredom which occurs when forced to follow a curriculum developed for age-peers.

### Connections Found within the Literature

As arguments for interventions, such as acceleration or innovative models, support the deliberate matching of curriculum to student need, research indicates that educators of the gifted should examine adopted curricular plans and instructional context variables for potential relationships. Tomlinson (2005) argues that curriculum and instruction should work in tandem for students to be consistently engaged with high-quality thought through exposure to excellent processes for learning; therefore, the correlation between a theory driving one's selection of curriculum along with its aligned instructive practices and the theory's resulting degree of student movement toward expertise and high performance becomes clear. If Constructivism's premise of learning is accepted as a learner's active building of schemata, then decisions about grouping gifted students for instruction and selecting appropriate curriculum will affect student opportunity for the intended reflective abstraction and higher cognitive functioning proposed by the theory. The degree of negative or positive learner effect depends on how much those decisions about grouping and curriculum allow the students to actively construct rich meaning. Furthermore, the proposed role of dialogue and cooperative learning in this theory highlights the importance of gifted students having interaction with peers who are identified at a similar level of intellectual ability. At that point, students would be encouraged to build new knowledge and understanding. Not only should the content of curriculum challenge each student toward generation of new ideas, but also it should maximize one's chances for regular occurrence of disequilibrium among ideas.

The current status of curriculum within the field of gifted education not only reflects the call and intent of present reform movements, but also poses a problem in defining appropriate curriculum that differentiates for needs of the gifted. If one adheres to the current shift in emphasis toward measurable frameworks for content acquisition, then a danger arises that curriculum at the programmatic level becomes either enriching, additional text to the existing standardized curriculum or accelerative matter within the established, prescribed program of study. It must be noted by this researcher that content of any recent curriculum model, gifted or otherwise, is increasingly derived from standards-based reform needs. Examples to date of two models of curriculum development, the Parallel Curriculum Model (2002) and the Integrated Curriculum Model (2003), indicate conformity to a national emphasis that curriculum for the gifted must meld with or fit into the larger, standards-based entity for it to be productive and part of the total approach. Yet the two models also assume teacher autonomy in curricular design, implementation, and control of context variables, such as pacing, materials, classroom settings, etc. Additionally, acceleration, as defined by Colangelo and associates (2004), acknowledges student requirements for differentiation in only one identified area of need--academics. Thus, limitations exist in research literature on how to address motivational, social and emotional, assessment, and advancement needs of gifted learners within a prescribed curriculum. Since efforts at the institutional level have established curriculum as a defined or set path of study for which all students must be accountable, as exemplified in the Comprehensive Curriculum, questions arise about how to organize programs for gifted instruction where curriculum supports content acquisition, yet differentiates for the other four areas of student need. Either model, the Parallel Curriculum Model (2002) or the Integrated Curriculum Model (2003), represents

a way to incorporate the four areas of need, but will also interface with the Comprehensive Curriculum to complement content acquisition.

Though acceleration is but one effective strategy for providing educational alternatives and complex learning opportunities for high-ability students, research provides evidence that innovative settings, as determined by selection of grouping plans or delivery models, increase student motivation to move toward academic excellence (Johnson & Shiu, 2006). Johnson and Shiu (2006) denote that “delivery models are ways that school administrators organize programs to serve gifted students and meet state guidelines” (p. 27). Within a summary of 22 research articles identifying the effects of administrative models on gifted students at different levels, i.e., elementary, middle, high and all grades, the researchers reported findings of increased achievement among homogeneously grouped students. Similar results across program service delivery models, such as pull-out enrichment programs, cross-grade groups, etc. showed that gifted students performed at higher levels when grouped with gifted peers, rather than those delivery service models that focused on heterogeneous grouping of students. District decisions about program delivery models, therefore, do have a direct impact on gifted students’ academic achievement and social development, given the academic timeframe, motivation, and affective needs of the gifted discussed in the research of Clark (2002), Reis, et al., (1993 ), and Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon (2002).

Furthermore, Johnson and Shiu (2006) conclusively found that the “critical characteristic of the service delivery model [selected] was the match between the curriculum and the student” (p.27). Their findings demonstrated social benefits of homogeneous groupings within delivery models when tied with curricular interventions, such as a mentorship or collaborations with museums, and curricular adjustments, e.g.,

advanced content with autonomy and individualized instructional techniques, distance learning and university offerings. Summarized benefits included an increased valuing of advanced learning and of diversity, increased communication skills, and improved personal views of self. Analogous to Pare's (2005) identification of grouping plans that more easily allow classroom teachers to individualize techniques, materials and methods for effective instruction of high aptitude students, Johnson and Shiu (2006) indicate that the essential aim of gifted education should be to differentiate for student learning. The matching of curriculum to student need causes increased learning and higher personal perception of scholastic ability, since "gifted students' learning is directly related to the extent [of] differentiation they experienced" within appropriate program and curricular practices (p. 32).

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Rationale and Design

Primary concerns of the researcher about the instructional options for gifted children surfaced during preliminary preparations for the development of the Comprehensive Curriculum to identify a topic for study. As those concerns could not be easily investigated by one technique, a more multipart framework was needed for understanding and quantifying the complex phenomena associated with restructuring curriculum at the state, district and practitioner level. The researcher developed multiple measures, as implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum would require change at each level of power involved with the usage process.

Additionally, a mixed methodology, as later explained, was selected because it could more accurately describe the intersecting but distinct relationships between those who made the policy and those who executed it. The three-fold approach, i.e. two parallel surveys and a case study of a single teacher, collected and analyzed data during the initial year of implementation for the Comprehensive Curriculum. The method of survey, to include follow-up interviews, was selected to measure perceptions of teachers and of district coordinators, to collect information to generate hypotheses, and to gauge opinions which might affect expectations for differentiation, while the method of case study interview was chosen to provide description against which to evaluate developed hypotheses and researcher inferences. Each approach was not only selected to provide significant data about the discrete entities responsible for utilizing the Comprehensive Curriculum, but also selected to create a complete, current picture of inclusive instruction for the gifted through data triangulation. To imply knowledge of one's precise position within an area of study by "verification of the facts" is N.K. Denzin's concept of data

triangulation, as discussed by Bogdan and Biklen (2003). The researcher elected to use multiple sources to achieve a fuller, blended understanding of the phenomena studied.

Selection of format for each instrument was a critical decision. The researcher chose a self-administered email format for each of the two survey instruments. With rising costs in postal fees, use of an electronic survey was a cost-effective mode for data collection. Advantages of email surveys are faster transmission of survey, less chance of survey being ignored by recipient as junk mail, increased participant perception of the mode as environmentally-friendly, rapid completion of survey, and lower administration cost (Fraze, Hardin, Brashears, Smith, & Lockaby, 2002).

The researcher chose a case study defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) as a “detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 54). To examine in detail as required by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), the researcher further utilized an interview format, because it would allow the researcher to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words and to develop insights on how subjects interpreted the identified topic. The researcher asked questions, probed for clarification and observed non-verbal responses. Additionally, upon asking a question, the researcher noted if the question was relatively easy for the participant to answer, if frustration occurred, or if redirection was needed. Another advantage of the selected format was that it permitted the researcher to ask “more complex questions...than in other types of data collection” (“Designing Structured Interviews,” 1997). The rich data obtained allowed a detailed analysis of how the selected participant perceived and identified the effect of implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum within her classroom.

The researcher developed instruments as needed to support the study's design. An introductory message for each survey and the two surveys are included in the Appendix section as items A, B, C, and D. Assurance statements utilized for oral permission to interview the case study participant and assurance statements utilized for oral permission to conduct follow-up interviews are labeled as items E and F within the Appendix section. Likewise, the note-taking guide developed for document analysis is included as item G.

### Research Methodology

Within the past 25 years, there has been an ongoing competition between research paradigms in the field of education. Some researchers advocate a quantitative approach while others promote a qualitative stance (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Phillips, D.C., 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Those researchers argue for the methods and operational languages that lead toward the desired data type and result formats. Methodology guides the research process for "certain methods are more congenial to each paradigm" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 11).

Several researchers, however, argue for a pragmatic view of research where neither qualitative nor quantitative is the "only" approach. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), Howe and Eisenhart (1990), and Firestone (1987) all contend that the research question should guide the study, rather than the methodology. Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) contend that choice of position depends on what is being studied and what is to be questioned.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) suggest the use of mixed methods, an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative tactics for a total methodology. Some phases of the research process are allocated for a qualitative approach, while others are better

handled with a quantitative method. The researchers imply that sole reliance on a particular stance will not yield data that is most representative of the cases found in social and behavioral sciences. Moreover, the authors advise selecting methods to best answer one's questions within a chosen research area, so that the results are informative and can be used in ways to "bring about positive consequences" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 30). The current study utilized a mixed methods design, in that both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to develop a descriptive statistical analysis of the data. The context variables and perceived impact of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum were investigated through qualitative methods of interview and questioning. Analysis of survey data provided quantitative significance of perceptions about the curriculum. All three approaches were analyzed singly in the traditional parallel fashion, but then integrated through interpretation and inference to provide a thickly descriptive composite.

### Teacher Survey

#### Teacher Population Characteristics

For the first approach within the study, the target group encompassed all teachers (N=1016) of the gifted from across Louisiana who are listed in the member directory of [lagifted.com](http://lagifted.com), a website designed to provide policy updates for gifted issues, professional development information, and sites for teaching materials, free resources, current events, and research. Any teacher of the gifted may have access to the site. The population size was then reduced by this researcher (N=930), because teachers from Orleans parish were displaced due to Hurricane Katrina in August, 2005, and their current status as state employees is not known (McIntyre, 2006). As any teacher of the gifted may have on-demand access to the site, the researcher anticipated that a random sample would be



generated from the number of teachers who saw the survey on the website and responded upon will.

On March 17, 2006, a link to the developed electronic survey instrument was placed on the state's gifted website. Initial participant response was low, due to technical delays by the website administrator in linking the instrument and to the subsequent release of the survey item during the week of statewide standardized testing efforts. The researcher determined that a sample could not be generated within the needed timeframe and that the whole population must be sampled. She then created a list of email addresses of all teacher members. To do so was labor intensive and time consuming, but the researcher's secondary action offered additional means of securing adequate data. Email messages, which included attachments of the survey, were sent to all members of the population.

#### The Survey Instrument

Within the electronic file of the survey instrument (Appendix D) as placed on the state-level website for gifted educators and as sent in emails, an introductory message (Appendix C) was included to address informed consent needs. The introductory message advised of intended investigation and its purpose, narrowed the scope of the study to two selected academic years, stated the participant selection process, described potential benefits and provided contact information for submission of document and questioning purposes. The survey document also repeated the aforementioned information as a secondary introduction to the research items. The survey clarified the extent to which records would be kept confidential. Finally, it was stated in the document that permission to conduct the survey would be implied by the return of survey data from participants.

Questions developed for the survey were derived from the researcher's own questions during development of Comprehensive Curriculum units. Survey items were crafted to additionally gauge the relationship of the Comprehensive Curriculum to the five areas of need identified in current research as vital for differentiation purposes (Tomlinson et al., 2002; United States Department of Education, 1993; VanTassel-Baska and Little, 2003). The developed instrument documented perceptions of teachers as they evaluated curriculum utilized within the two selected academic years of 2004-05 and 2005-06.

#### Data Collection

The collection of data from the teacher survey was affected by the sampling procedure, as described earlier, and two attempts were made to survey the intended audience. Teachers of the gifted from across Louisiana, who are listed in the member directory of lagifted.com, were made aware of the research effort either through personal access to the website or by receipt of an email. Upon creating a master list of email addresses, the researcher then produced smaller lists of 20-25 addresses, with member addresses usually arranged by parish affiliation. The smaller lists were necessary to meet email service provider technical restrictions, as email could only be sent in batches of 25 intended recipients or less. Emails were distributed research-created groups within a six-week period due to the time consuming nature of the task.

Responses were returned across a two-month period. The researcher had a return rate of 45 surveys or 5% of the total population. Most surveys were completed correctly, but the researcher did have to contact four participants to ask for missing information, corrections, and/or clarifications. All responded with the needed information. The

researcher made hand-written adjustments to the survey documents according to the information supplied by participants.

#### Coding of Teacher Survey Data

Upon receipt of an email reply, copies of the email message page, the attached survey, and any attached comments were printed. Each survey packet was numbered consecutively for anonymity, i.e., Teacher Survey Instrument 5 (TSI5). Each packet then received a color coding to indicate whether supplementary commentary was included or not. Additional coding indicated grade level of responses, type of indicated program options, whether the commentary indicated support or opposition to the Comprehensive Curriculum and whether commentary provided description of implementation solutions.

#### Follow-up Interviews

From the pool of email respondents, a random drawing provided two names of teachers who were contacted for follow-up interviews. The procedure was not repeated, as the first two participants orally granted permission to be questioned. Interviews were scheduled to accommodate each participant's personal and instructional schedule. The researcher reviewed the intended purpose of the study, explained the random selection process, identified potential benefits and time factors, and provided contact information for questioning purposes. Following Carol Wein's (2004) emphasis for interview, the researcher asked each participant to identify what was significant in decisions made at any level concerning programmatic design. The researcher collected data in a brief running record of descriptive and inferential field notes which related new information to previously received survey commentary. Both interviews continued for about 15 minutes, which was the agreed upon timeframe of both researcher and participant. Participants' instructional settings and evaluative comments about instruction for gifted

students were noted by the researcher. Follow-up interviews allowed the researcher a broader opportunity for interpretation of situations which had prompted contributor responses.

## District Survey

### District Population Characteristics

For the second approach, a survey of district personnel was selected. The target study group consisted of district and system personnel responsible for gifted programming and instructional decisions within Louisiana. Coordinators were identified from the list on the LDE's website for gifted program information; the list updated as of 2005 contains current phone and email information (Louisiana Department of Education, Gifted and Talented Contacts 2005). The contact list of gifted and talented personnel was cross-referenced with the lagifted.com membership directory and a compiled list of district standardized test results as provided on the LDE's accountability website to determine those matched districts accountable for implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum (N=66) when gauged by standardized test administration (Louisiana Department of Education, Multi-year State/district Test Results Summary).

### The Survey Instrument

Questions of the researcher about how the curriculum would be utilized for gifted children identified a primary need for quantified measures, as little or no empirical data existed to show how districts were choosing to use the mandated curriculum. An electronic file of the survey instrument (Appendix B) was developed for transmission via email. The survey required participants to identify program options utilized prior to and as related to implementation of the curricular unit. Previous experience of the researcher in school improvement initiatives prompted a desire to identify issues, such as the need

for staff development, which might affect the tone of instructions for implementation provided to teachers of the gifted. Another question was then created to measure related administrative factors affecting decision making for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. Selected academic years were those which came immediately before and during the initial implementation phase of the Comprehensive Curriculum. To assess programmatic decisions in a manner that would result in information that could be useful to a school improvement initiative, the researcher determined that grade levels of elementary, middle and high school designations would be set according to the same grade-level designations as those subgroups whose performance is measured by the LDE for Adequate Yearly Progress.

#### Data Collection

First the researcher divided the list of coordinators for gifted and talented programs into three smaller lists by alphabetically grouping parishes. The smaller lists of addresses were necessary to meet email service provider technical restrictions, as email could only be sent in batches of 25 intended recipients or less. The lists were saved and readied for distribution of group email.

Next, an email containing an introductory message (Appendix A) and an attached survey instrument was prepared by the researcher. The overview message advised of intended investigation and its purpose, narrowed the scope of the study to two selected academic years, explained the participant selection process, described potential benefits and provided contact information for questioning purposes. The survey attachment repeated the aforementioned information as a secondary introduction to the research items. Additionally, the survey clarified the extent to which records were kept

confidential. Finally, it was stated in the document that participant permission to participate in the survey would be implied by completion and return of the instrument.

Addresses were added to the message as needed, and the emails were sent in a single day. The researcher made attempts to secure additional contact information if emails were returned as undeliverable due to changes caused by weather factors. Another email with updated or secondary addresses was sent within three days to the updated or secondary addresses. According to received replies, some emails were delayed in delivery due to virus scan actions performed by the various operating systems used by parishes.

Participants who chose to respond sent replies within two-weeks. The researcher had a return rate of 12 surveys or 18% of the population. The researcher made attempts to call those who did not respond in any way. Such efforts revealed that one coordinator was away on medical leave, while at least three other coordinators from parishes affected by the hurricanes could not be reached by phone or email. Some could not be reached within the researcher's timetable for unknown reasons. Still a few others indicated that they would not participate, as described in the study's delimitations.

#### Coding of District Coordinator Survey Data

Upon receipt of an email reply, copies of the email message page, the attached survey, and any attached comments were printed. Each survey packet was numbered consecutively for anonymity, i.e., District Survey Instrument 5 (DSI5). Each packet then received a color coding to indicate whether supplementary information was included or not. Additional researcher-developed coding indicated type of indicated program options, grade levels affected, and whether change had occurred in programmatic options due to implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum.

## Follow-Up Interviews

From the pool of email respondents submitting completed survey documents, a random drawing provided names of two district personnel to be contacted for follow-up interviews. The procedure did not have to be repeated, as both coordinators orally agreed to answer questions. Phone interviews were conducted to accommodate each participant's work schedule. The researcher reviewed the assurance statement (Appendix F) which included the intended purpose of the study, explained the random selection process, identified potential benefits and time factors, and provided contact information for questioning purposes. Trends noted through coding of the returned survey instruments guided the questioning procedure during interview. Data was collected in a running record with descriptions of work settings, distractions, and evaluative comments noted in detail. The first interview continued for approximately 20 minutes, while the second one was completed in approximately 12 minutes.

## Case Study

### Case Study Participant Characteristics

For the third approach, a case study was conducted with a single subject from a school in Louisiana. The teacher's basic daily instruction had been guided by the Comprehensive Curriculum during the 2005-06 academic year and had been directed by a curriculum related to GLEs and linked standards and benchmarks during the previous school year, which was considered by the researcher as a primary matter of determining the feasibility of selection. Coupled with that first matter, the classroom was a typical representative of gifted settings in its larger parish setting. As a secondary consideration for selection, the subject exhibited all three experiential factors identified as important.

First, amount of teaching experience within the field was taken into account. The participant selected reflected mid-level stages of behavior, as described in the Concerns-Based Adoption model (Hall & Hord, 2001), a staff development tool that addresses educators' common concerns about change. The model identifies seven stages of behavior exhibited by those experiencing change within school settings. The stages are as follows: 0-Awareness, 1- Informational, 2-Personal, 3-Management, 4-Consequence, 5-Collaboration, and 6-Refocusing. Having been trained to coach school-level educators participating in change initiatives, the researcher thought it necessary to identify a participant who had already moved through stages 0-1 to have enough awareness and information about the Comprehensive Curriculum to ask questions or mimic behavior related to stage 2. Simultaneously, the participant exhibited competent management skills, stage 3, to effectively implement activities and lessons of the Comprehensive Curriculum in practice. Adequate implementation practices allowed the subject to more accurately assess the program's impact on one's instructional actions and the resulting effect on overall instruction. Therefore, the participant was approaching the consequence level or stage 4 of behavior during change. Outcomes of reaching that stage were participant ability to analyze the impact of the implemented practices and to provide accurate, unbiased feedback. To do so promoted a positive response when attempts to administer curricular components failed due to incorrect administration of components.

Second, timing of experience was considered. It was determined that the participant was able to compare instruction before and after implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum. Due to the nature of the campaign-like preparation for implementation of the GLEs and then the Comprehensive Curriculum, it was important that the participant taught within school settings both years to hear the larger



conversation about the coming curricular changes. The exposure to initial DOE promotion of the GLEs and suggested implementation strategies for schools allowed the participant to quickly move through the awareness and informational stages of change.

Third, the participant's stage of experience was contemplated by the researcher. Studies have indicated that grief is a key part of change that results when people are required to stop doing things that they know how to do well (Hall & Hord, 2001). By selecting a participant with moderate experience, one who has not yet confirmed behaviors of Collaboration and Refocusing at stages 5 and 6, or who has not had extensive time to establish comfortable, favorite ways of instructing, the level of grief felt by her still allowed for careful consideration of impact. It is proposed by this researcher that the level of grief experienced due to the large change in curriculum would be lessened in proportion to level of experience and stage of practitioner behavior. Additionally, the researcher asserted that identification of a participant with average levels of experience offered more flexibility and open-mindedness toward change of curriculum, thereby increasing validity of responses.

The selected participant had experience teaching both with the sequence, scope, and identification of self-selected curricular materials and with the scope, sequence, and identified materials of prescribed curricular activities. Due to this experience, she was at the desired stages of behavior within settings of change. Likewise, timing of the participant's experience matched the most wanted timeframe, thereby promoting characteristics of the appropriate stage of experience. Coded information about three possible participants, their levels of experience, and teaching situations was shared with two peers of the researcher to establish rater reliability. The blind review of each potential candidate's information ensured selection of one who most closely met

identified selection factors. Finally, questioning skills and emotional commentary of the selected participant was evaluated during interviews and participant observations, so that adequate assessment of stage of experience occurred.

#### Data Collection

Data was collected by using in-depth interviewing and modified participant observation. Additionally, data gathering was supplemented by informal discussions and review of teacher documents, such as reflections on planning. Information was recorded as a running record or within a researcher-created form (Appendix G) to maintain an atmosphere conducive to reflection. Open-ended questions were utilized to discover any anticipated, as well as hidden, paths to understanding the practitioner's experience with implementation.

#### Interview

Prior to the interview, ethical considerations of informed consent and participant anonymity were addressed. Despite the fact that the study addressed normal practice, an oral type of permission was selected to assure the participant of researcher discretion. Such action was necessary since participant reflections and analysis of the impact of the Comprehensive Curriculum could entail criticism of decisions made at a higher level of authority. The teacher read the assurance statements (Appendix E) and indicated that she had no questions. In addition to an explanation of the teacher's role in the study, the researcher discussed participant concerns of time demands and potential difficulty of scheduling visits. The researcher attempted to ascertain the level of participant understanding by asking questions and prompting a retelling of the basic intent of the study. The subject agreed to participate in the study. To maintain a level of confidentiality, the participant was assigned a pseudonym, and all information shared

and/or obtained through interviews and observations was kept secure. During all subsequent interviews, notes and reflections were shared for participant evaluation and comments.

The first interview began with conversation to identify basic, informational data and to strengthen rapport. The researcher inquired as to the teacher's approach to teaching and how he/she instructs with the standardized curriculum, so that a clearer picture could be established of the teacher's particular situation. The researcher intentionally questioned daily events relating to the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum, for it is recognized that "values, beliefs, feelings, and reactions to [one's] own work are all embedded in the detail of the daily events..." (Wein, 2004, p. 157). Following Carol Wein's (2004) selected format for interview, the researcher then asked the participant to identify what was significant in daily instruction. Reflection on the recent teaching and learning occurring within her classroom allowed the teacher to evaluate the curriculum's components and implementation procedures, to assess personal reaction, and to judge student response. The interview took approximately 30 minutes.

The second interview occurred two weeks later. The teacher described the development of lessons over the past weeks. A unit assessment had been given and results analyzed. By monitoring student progress and behavior, the teacher expressed concerns that gifted students had performed well, but had done so with little preparation for the test. This brief conversation revealed her concerns and her awareness of indirect student impact. The dialog also established a concise pattern for the teacher to report further thoughts and observations. The teacher noted slight changes in her preparation system due to her more acute focus on use of planning time and a subtle refinement of

organizational skills. Her personal monitoring of actions provided a check on my observation. The interview proceeded as a discussion about the new curricular unit and perceived changes that it required for planning. During the approximately 40 minute time period, the researcher continued to prompt conversation about daily events relating to the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum and reflection on what was significant in ongoing instruction.

The third interview followed within three weeks due to the school system's spring break. The teacher had mentally noted some student responses which encouraged immediate discussion. The teacher's input created a shared awareness of her values and feelings that caused her to be conscious of implied student perspectives. The researcher focused on how the teacher talked about student gain and attitude, rather than on what the student responses were. By doing so, the researcher gained a stronger indication of how the teacher was working with the standardized curriculum to inform her instructional cycle of assess, plan, teach, assess, etc. The matching of teacher talk with observed actions during the modified observations of planning and preparation provided a richer understanding of the teacher's context. Once again, the researcher continued to prompt conversation about daily events relating to the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum and reflection on what was significant in ongoing instruction to more fully evaluate themes within implementation.

For each interview, the obtained data was handwritten in a running record format to create and maintain a more comfortable atmosphere. Such a record allowed the researcher to record as much detail as possible within a comfortable flow of information. The first and second batch of field notes were reviewed and rewritten within a one-week timeframe to enhance interpretation and fleshing out of inferences noted during the

interview. Notes from the final interview were reviewed and interpreted within a two-week timeframe due to personal needs of the researcher. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note the critical need to understand human behavior and experience, field notes were analyzed for categories of concerns by using naturalistic generalization. Stake (1978) states that such generalizations are “arrived at by recognizing the similarities of [both] objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural co-variations of happenings” (p. 6). Similar content was labeled and compared against survey items which measured teacher perceptions of the capacity of the Comprehensive Curriculum to offer differentiation options for students.

#### Modified Observations

Qualitative researchers use empirical observation “because it is with concrete incidents of human behavior that investigators can think more clearly and deeply about the human condition” within an identified area of study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The researcher observed the participant’s behavior during planning and creation of materials for the following day’s lessons, as each modified observation followed a scheduled interview visits. To maintain credibility, the researcher followed a similar pattern of actions and questioning for all observations; she initiated conversations related specifically to the impact of Comprehensive Curriculum implementation on preparation for instruction. Initial topics required the participant to consider time and material procurement factors, but they were later expanded through teacher prompts to include costs, student perception, peer interactions, and attitudinal factors. The data was collected by continuing the day’s running record of descriptive and inferential field notes. The researcher attempted to capture the setting, the teacher’s behavior and evaluative comments during analysis of previous instruction and to describe the teacher’s behavior

and conversations while planning future instruction. Notes were written by the researcher following observation to allow for a relaxed atmosphere and more acute observation. Due to the need for uninterrupted conversations with the teacher, observations took place after school hours and in 15 minute segments, as suggested by the participant.

#### Analysis of Participant Documents

Due to an increasing influence of discourse theory, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note the increasing use of documents as primary sources of data not easily revealed by other sources. Personal documents created for educational documentation purposes, such as reflective written comments to self or adjustments made to daily lesson plans, can be analyzed for supporting evidence of data gained during interviews and observations. It was the intention of the researcher to use such mini-narratives created by the participant to aid in meaning construction and to create a more accurate context of the teacher's lived experience. However, with the advent of parish directives to maintain a planned pace and document every GLE and activity, the teacher was hesitant to make many changes to the predetermined daily plan. Very few comments or instructional adjustments occurred, so that this source of data was limited.

#### Coding of Case Study Data

Data from the case study came from the three main research actions. First, notes were taken, compiled, coded and categorized from each interview. Second, field notes from modified observations were taken and organized. Third, documents, such as self-evaluations of progress, were analyzed for data relevant to observer notes, comments, and/or interview reflections.

To best analyze the data from the case study, the researcher utilized critical thinking skills to interpret and connect the data within the field notes, as well as to identify any emergent trends found in teacher behavior or conversation. Coding involved the series of coding families formulated by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) and emphasized the categories of subject attitude, time management, and planning, with the addition of researcher narrative codes to more accurately record pertinent teacher actions. Once the information had been sorted and coded, identified trends were further examined for interconnectedness of effects on teacher instruction and instructional behavior. All relationships among data were recorded in chart form and cross-referenced to provide documentation to reduce researcher bias.

#### Trustworthiness of Data

##### Creditability

Consistent schedules of interview and contact assured that data was obtained in a recurring manner, which also increased reliability of the findings from observations. By observing in a one-on-one situation, the interaction between the participant and the researcher reflected an ease of interaction which ensured honest, open responses. The direct nature of conversations allowed the researcher to determine inconsistencies between information received from the various methods. Data triangulation and participant review of portrayals were utilized to check credibility of researcher interpretation.

##### Validity

Measurement error was controlled by establishing face validity and content validity for survey instruments through field testing. A field test sample (n=5) consisted of teachers of the gifted, but some not included in the target population. The participants

received a personal explanation by the researcher and a hard copy of the survey.

Participants submitted comments and questions about the survey as a whole and about individual items, if such caused specific questions. Based on the results of the field test, minor adaptations were made to the questionnaire. Due to small numbers of available teachers not included in the target population, reliability measures of the instrument were not calculated.

### Transferability

The researcher provided accurate and adequate descriptive data of the setting, methods of data collection, findings and conclusions, to allow readers to judge the level of transferability of the study. The degree of transferability of this study may be measured by any of three groups: other educators interested in implementing a similar curriculum as a reform effort, readers seeking research to support or oppose a theory of curriculum supplementation or development for instruction of the gifted, or researchers interested in designing a comparable study. As a result of the thick, rich description, Louisiana educators in districts can determine if the research findings transfer to their particular context and implementation plan.

### Dependability and Confirmability

To establish an acceptable level of confirmability, the researcher endeavored to interpret data in as subjective a manner possible. Field notes of the interviews and observations were shared at the conclusion of each visit with the participant teacher for comments and feedback. Upon doing so, revisions were made immediately and were reflected in the finalized portrayals. The researcher constantly measured any personal opinions or prejudices against the triangulated data collected to ensure dependability.



The level of trustworthiness established in other steps also provided reliability and further established confirmability.

### Summary

The study analyzed the impact on instruction for the gifted during the primary implementation year of the Comprehensive Curriculum. The investigation sought to establish a foundation, to include perceptions of participants, of data that identified factors affecting instruction and ascertained a baseline indicator of program options for the initial year of use. Additionally, the study provided a basis for developing an instructional theory to be tested through further study. Resulting descriptive data examined whether instruction focused upon the Comprehensive Curriculum offers sufficient differentiation in all aspects of learning for gifted students.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Findings on Various Approaches

The primary emphasis of this study was to determine the impact of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum on the inclusive instruction of gifted students. Information was compiled from the three larger sources of teacher survey, district personnel survey and case study, as well as from additional follow-up interviews and supplementary data. The succeeding information clarified original trends and patterns, and it provided details for in-depth analysis. Information from Nan and Sid, pseudonyms assigned to the two teachers participating in follow-up interviews, provided explanation of instructional choices that had been necessitated and resulting student impact. Information from Mary and Meg, pseudonyms assigned to the two district coordinators participating in follow-up interviews, supplied a different perspective of what was intended for programmatic instruction and the factors that produced directives to change. Case study information from Jana, the pseudonym assigned to the participant, offered contextual insights as filtered through personal experience.

#### Teacher Survey

Within the teacher survey, participants identified primary grouping plans utilized during the targeted academic years and whether or not the program option utilized a curriculum reflecting standards and benchmarks. Participants indicated information pertaining to all grade levels addressed within their districts and indicated degrees to which utilized curriculum addressed differentiation areas of advanced material, pacing, individualized format, motivation factors and learning behaviors. While teachers at all three grade clusters showed curriculum utilized during the 2004-05 school year offered students exposure to advanced material and opportunity for accelerated pace of learning,

those teachers showed a difference in responses when analyzing the Comprehensive Curriculum. For instance, 64% of those utilizing the new curriculum at the elementary level indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed about student exposure to advanced content material and skill mastery. Likewise, 77% of middle school participants reported similar attitudes. In contrast, 25% of high school respondents reported attitudes of non-agreement. Percentages may not equal the number of survey respondents due to large variations in the types of program options offered across districts and to the number of participants who may teach at more than one grade level. This proviso is noted to recognize those teachers who may serve in either K-12 school settings or who serve in itinerant positions. Further discussion of accelerated pacing occurs in findings on research questions. Findings were similar for student performance toward potential.

When considering how utilized curriculum stimulated study and learning behaviors which would help each student value self as a learner and thinker, results varied across the two targeted school years (Figure 4.1).

Grade Level	Academic Year	Attitude (f)				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PreK-5 <sup>th</sup>	2004-05	3	6	2	3	2
	2005-06	2	1	2	7	2
6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	2004-05	4	7	2	2	1
	2005-06	1	1	4	4	3
9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	2004-05	5	4	1	0	1
	2005-06	1	1	2	3	1

Figure 4.1 Stimulation of Student Study and Learning Behaviors

Teachers agreed that curriculum utilized the previous year had stimulated the desired study and learning behaviors in gifted students. Combined percentages are as follows: elementary – 56.2, middle – 68.7, and secondary – 81.8. Findings indicated that the

Comprehensive Curriculum did not stimulate study and learning behaviors which aided student development of a learner/thinker image. Those reporting at the elementary level showed a 21.4% combined agreement indicator, while middle school participants indicated 14.2% agreement. Participants at the secondary level indicated a combined agreement factor of 25%. Findings again were similar to those of student performance toward potential.

#### Coordinator Survey

District coordinators were surveyed to determine primary grouping plans utilized during the targeted academic years and whether or not the program option utilized a curriculum reflecting standards and benchmarks. Participants indicated information pertaining to all grade levels addressed within their districts and identified reasons at each grade cluster for selecting the instructional designs. For PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grades, more selected enrichment as a primary option in 2004-05 and in 2005-06 at 75% and 83% respectively. A similar trend existed at 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades with enrichment being selected in the first year at a rate of 58%, while it was selected at 67% for the second year. Though not as many participants offered gifted program options at the secondary level, those responding indicated 40% selection rate for both years. Findings differed most at the middle school level with selections split among XYZ classes, cross-grade groups, enrichment, and Advanced placement/acceleration options. Additionally, one instance of variety in options was reported at the secondary level with a parish offering gifted elective courses designed to earn Carnegie Units.

When coordinators were asked to identify program design options for which they had received professional development, more had received training in types of acceleration than other given models (Figure 4.2). The same amount of respondents

indicated that they had not received professional development. Yet when asked to identify types of program design options for which they had delivered or provided professional development to teachers, the frequency of replies was split between acceleration options and other options, such as Four-Square Writing, Higher Order Thinking and Renzulli Interest Inventory (Figure 4.2). It must be noted that during a follow-up interview, Meg explained that she had served as an educational consultant and had offered professional development on a more regular basis than might normally be expected. Her answers reflect the delivery of professional development on The Integrated Curriculum Model and The Parallel Curriculum Model. The reported frequency of none received or delivered may be more typical. Similar amounts of respondents indicated that they had neither received nor delivered professional development. Additional comments offered one explanation that the coordinator was new to the position, which must be taken into consideration for purposes of analysis.

<u>Design Options</u>	<u>Received (f)</u>	<u>Delivered/Provided (f)</u>
Types of Acceleration	4	3
The Integrated Curriculum Model	3	1
The Parallel Curriculum Model	0	1
Other	1	3
None	4	5

Figure 4.2 Professional Development Received and Provided by Coordinators

### Case Study

In an attempt to capture the teacher’s particular situation through case study interview, the researcher asked Jana to identify her approach to teaching. Jana (2006) responded that teaching was an ongoing process. When asked to pinpoint factors

influencing the discussed approach to teaching, Jana described a change in her personal reaction toward daily responsibilities. She currently felt that she was inadequately preparing students when compared to her expectations for academic development. In clarification, she felt that rigor and demand in lessons was missing. Additional demands on preparation time and material acquisition are explained in findings on research questions.

Through Jana's discussion of student academic gains and attitude toward learning, the researcher focused on how student response caused the teacher to adjust her instructional cycle. Most notable was the emerging pattern toward a particular cycle of 1 day of introduction, 2-2.5 days of teacher-guided instruction, 1 day of activity and an assessment activity. Jana commented that prior to the Comprehensive Curriculum she had not experienced such structure. Not only did Jana perceive that structure as limiting creativity in lesson development, but also that it reduced student creativity as evidenced in products. After probing for more detail, Jana commented that student interest and intellectual need had driven instruction in previous years, while now teacher need to meet GLE requirements was the prime stimulus for instructional decisions.

In an attempt to examine personal documents, such as lesson plans, for study of daily notes to self, the researcher used current weekly plans, as well as two prior units. Small comments jotted in desk copies of lesson plans, from the researcher's experience, usually provide a colorful rendering of a teacher's thought processes during a busy day. The researcher found few of the expected arrows, cross outs, smiley faces or check marks indicating plans for redirection of the lessons. Upon inquiry, the teacher explained that the parish expected plans with extensive detail of progress toward its larger curriculum map. Due to the planned pace, Jana was hesitant to make many changes to the

predetermined daily plans. She identified school-wide events and personal illness as district-provided examples of acceptable reasons for making changes. According to Jana, her plans were not significantly different from those teachers of regular education in the department. This finding supported Jana's identified perception of limited student development toward potential.

### Findings on Research Questions

Auxiliary information was gleaned from comments voluntarily added by teachers and administrators to completed survey instruments. The survey instruments were numbered for anonymity, i.e., Teacher Survey Instrument 5 (TSI5) or District Survey Instrument 5 (DSI5), and the corresponding supplementary data was included in the reported findings. When research results were analyzed to establish a whole picture of the current educational setting for advanced learners, impressions were noted, coded for trends, and categorized for the following populations: administrative personnel, teachers of the gifted, teachers of general education, and students.

District personnel, those identified as the highest level of authority in the implementation process, reported a broad range of perceptions. Their actions as decision makers and authorities were questioned by others and in self-examinations. Through provided comments, one teacher noted that administrators had limited knowledge of gifted education and what it means for instruction of identified children, as evidenced by expectations for her to perform within regular education contexts (TSI37). Self-questioning of personal judgment occurred as administrators themselves observed limited experience on the job and/or limited background preparation as decision maker for gifted education (DSI4; DSI10; Mary, 2006). Another teacher identified the district decision to test biweekly all students for mastery of skills as a direct cause of undue teacher focus on

skill attainment, rather than thematic expansion and conceptual emphasis; she questioned the parish objective and its wisdom as implied for gifted instruction (TSI18). Others expressed reservations about whose interests were best served within recent district program and curricular decisions. Examples were a limiting of acceleration opportunities for students when district decisions were made to cut gifted classes in certain subject areas or to allow advanced content classes only in district-identified focus subjects as measured by high stakes accountability tests, e.g., Math and English (Jana; TSI11; TSI18; TSI20).

Several issues of creativity, time, materials, change factors, and alteration of perceptions were identified by teachers of the gifted as an impact of using the Comprehensive Curriculum. References to loss of creativity in planning, preparation and delivery of instruction, and change in student products occurred most often in teacher comments (Jana, 2006; TSI18; TSI29). A simple increase in time required to prepare lessons plans occurred several times in comments, while Jana (2006) noted that her district's required lesson plan format which documents Comprehensive Curriculum activities and corresponding GLEs more complexly does not reflect how teachers use a continuous process of learning about students' needs and interests to guide instruction needs of students (TSI17; TSI29). Similarly, another teacher declared that mandated use of the Comprehensive Curriculum negated her professional competency in determining best practice and instruction for gifted learners (TSI3), while one more summarized the degree of perceived change as the curriculum's failure to address the way that teachers of the gifted *want* to teach (TSI18). Interrelated to the issue of time is the need to provide one's own materials and supplies when choosing to supplement or differentiate beyond the common curriculum (Jana, 2006; TSI1; TSI18).



Perhaps the most complex issue for teachers of gifted learners involved altered perceptions of self. Jana (2006) noted a change in perception of self as a teacher due to her own measurement of self-worth against role expectations. She further identified current district restrictions, such as teaching at the exact pace of teachers of general education, as cause for not performing to her expectations for that position and for imposing limitations on instructional offerings to children. Similarly, an added teacher stated that she was “treated like a regular education teacher,” which the researcher inferred as disconcerting to her identity as a teacher of gifted students (TSI37). Finally, uncertainty about job security as educators of the gifted caused some teachers to decline to participate in the survey at all, to use cautious language in provided comments, or to limit replies when follow-up questions were posed (Singletary, 2006; TSI11).

Additionally influencing teachers of general education, the impact of curricular implementation on them is more subtle. One teacher of gifted acknowledged that he did not discuss lesson planning with teachers of general classes, because gifted students were already ahead of the planned curriculum (TSI37). The same teacher indicated that some teachers welcomed the inclusion of a teacher of gifted in classrooms, while others did not. Another noted administrative expectations for her to collaboratively develop lesson plans and write curriculum with general educators teaching at a similar grade level, so that the group might determine the best use of the mandated Comprehensive Curriculum units at the school level; these collaborative requirements limit the respondent’s time to creatively plan for differentiation beyond the general curriculum (TSI29).

Student impact is also evident in limiting of classes in which they can accelerate (Jana, 2006; Singletary, 2006; TSI11; TSI18; TSI20). Furthermore, some students are repeating content in instances where gifted students were allowed to accelerate during the

2004-05 school year within certain subjects, but were not allowed to continue in the progression of content during 2005-06 (Jana, 2006). The students are taking the same courses over with little differentiation of curriculum. Limitations of a similar nature are evident when students are bound by two-week timetables for skill mastery testing schedules and are not offered instruction to move beyond presented/tested materials (TSI18). A final influence is indicated as the lack of challenge for students in regular classes in which they must now spend more time (TSI11; TSI36).

Findings indicate that implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum has affected all aspects of instruction for gifted learners within settings reporting use of the document. One teacher argues that implementation, in the strictest sense of requiring teachers of gifted to teach the same units at the same time as those instructing general education classes, nullifies the need or justification for gifted programs (TSI3). Another educator succinctly expressed the overall impact on instruction as a “tying of hands” (TSI11). Teacher perception of such limiting measures may be due to general education’s identification of the prescribed curriculum as good for all.

#### Research Subquestion 1

What types of delivery models are present in parish programs?

When asked to identify the primary grouping plan utilized to deliver instruction to various age groups, both target survey groups were provided the same classification system by Pare (2005) from which to make selections. It must be noted by this researcher that more teacher responses required follow-up for clarification than did those responses of district personnel; teachers tended to identify multiple models, rather than a single descriptor that best described the utilized delivery model.

By comparing the results across target groups and academic years, variations emerged between each group’s reported data. District personnel identified a significant proportion of enrichment options for elementary, a slight shift toward acceleration in the percentage of options for middle grades, and a balanced quantity of enrichment and advanced placement/acceleration for high school (Figure 4.3). Yet, teachers indicated a slight trend toward enrichment options for elementary, either enrichment or acceleration models for middle grades, and advanced placement/acceleration options for high school. It is not known if factors other than a small number of participants affected variation in responses.

Note: All numbers refer to percentages								
		Survey Items						
		XYZ classes	Cross-Grade grouping	Intra-class grouping	Advanced Placement/ Acceleration	Enrichment	Other	Utilized Curriculum
<b>Grade Level: PreK-5th</b>								
2004-05	N=12	8.3	16.6	0	0	75	0	Reflect GLEs Y=50 N=50
2005-06	N=12	8.3	8.3	0	0	83.3	0	Core Use of Comprehensive Curriculum Y=50 N=50
<b>Grade Level: 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup></b>								
2004-05	N=12	16.6	8.3	0	16.6	58.3	0	Reflect GLEs Y=58.3 N=41.6
2005-06	N=12	16.6	0	0	16.6	66.6	0	Core Use of Comprehensive Curriculum Y= 58.3 N=41.6
<b>Grade Level: 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup></b>								
2004-05	N=10	0	10	0	50	40	0	Reflect GLEs Y=60 N=40
2005-06	N=10	0	0	0	50	40	10	Core Use of Comprehensive Curriculum Y=50 N=50

Figure 4.3 District Coordinator Instructional Survey

District personnel identified four factors of implementation cost, student academic/intellectual needs, teacher availability, and difficulty in scheduling as the ones that most affect selection of program design options. The selection of implementation cost was the item selected most often. Choices of need of and viability of success in example models, student social/emotional needs, and parental involvement were not selected. In contrast, teachers of the gifted identified the three factors of student academic/intellectual needs, cost to implement and difficulty in scheduling as the ones that most affect selection of program design options. Of those three, student academic/intellectual needs was selected most often. An additional factor of inadequate time to plan new options was chosen almost as much as scheduling difficulty. This concern corresponds with perceptions within volunteered teacher comments of time restraints and reduced effectiveness of overall instruction. Choices of transportation and parental involvement were not selected.

Supplementary issues identified by teachers of the gifted that affect decisions about selected delivery models were small numbers of gifted learners served in programs and rural settings, while those identified by district personnel were the Annual School Report, state monitoring efforts, and financial issues (Mary, 2006; DSI1; TSI11; TSI36; TSI45; Meg, 2006). One teacher (TSI11) noted that low numbers of gifted students from rural settings qualify for AP coursework, while another noted that many teachers of middle and high school students have elementary certification which may impact curricular instruction at the middle and high school level (TSI6). Likewise Meg (2006) noted the difficulty in obtaining and retaining teachers with gifted certification, as well as the difficulty in persuading school-level administrators to select strong teachers to shift from general education to gifted education. Both Meg (2006) and Mary (2006) noted

high costs of providing instruction through itinerant teachers to small groups of students spread across districts.

#### Research Subquestion 2

What types of instructional grouping practices offer increased differentiation of curriculum?

Instructional grouping practices of Advanced Placement/Acceleration and Enrichment were identified by teachers as ones utilized to meet student needs. A middle school teacher (TSI30) explained how specialized instruction in math allowed seventh grade students to accelerate to an eighth grade level by utilizing the Comprehensive Curriculum. The teacher clarified that she must make sure that all GLEs for seventh and eighth grade math are taught. Likewise an added teacher (TSI20) noted an increase in differentiation within groupings for subject areas when the Comprehensive Curriculum was used as a framework for instruction and advanced materials were added. Another (TSI17) indicated success with acceleration at the middle school level, but related that success to her own development of a standards-based curriculum rather than use of the prescribed curriculum. As a further explanation, the teacher stated she had been able to better direct pacing of instruction and development of activities for student need when she used GLEs as a framework during the 2004-05 year. Moreover, a teacher at the secondary level identified the added benefit of affective support when utilizing Advanced Placement/Acceleration programmatic options; he noted that students received advanced content within a familiar setting, had continued contact with age cohorts for emotional development, and could have ongoing participation in school-level extracurricular activities (Sid, 2006).

A similar sense of affective support was indicated by Nan (2006) as an important element of enrichment settings. When selected as a program option, students receive

school-to-world connections of content interwoven across disciplines through a teacher-generated, info-rich curriculum. Correspondingly, Nan (2006) linked increased student interest and motivation to a curriculum which allowed student-directed expansion of those topics encountered within regular coursework. She noted that students within enrichment classes tended to perfect details of big concepts learned in other classes, so that the resulting sense of learner satisfaction enhanced their behavior overall. To examine the academic aspect of “pull out” enrichment programs, another teacher (TSI45) identified her adaptations of curriculum as instruction delivered through cross-curricular thematic units that correlated to GLEs of an advanced grade level.

### Research Subquestion 3

To what degree does use of the Comprehensive Curriculum meet differentiation needs of gifted students?

When asked to determine a degree to which use of the Comprehensive Curriculum meets differentiation needs of the gifted, more teachers indicated that it offered a modest degree of differentiation.

However, upon analysis of teacher survey comments, their focus on certain factors revealed a continuum of perceptions. One teacher (TSI3) stated that use of the Comprehensive Curriculum “negates individualization” of instruction because it neither provides students with an opportunity to accelerate nor an appropriate pace for gifted learners. Another (TSI17) emphasized that to follow the suggested timeframe of the curricular document does not allow acceleration to occur. Yet, the same teacher seemingly bridged the potential of the Comprehensive Curriculum with its resulting uses. In doing so, she noted that the curriculum does provide good challenge for students, but that it does not allow enough individualized instructional decisions for responsive teaching to occur. Likewise, another instructor (TSI18) identified those activities and

skills intended by benchmarks, which are the foundation of the Comprehensive Curriculum, as most appropriate for students who are academically gifted. Finally, one teacher (TSI4) identified a strong degree of differentiation when the Comprehensive Curriculum is used within an enrichment setting to “expand the depth” of a topic or unit introduced in regular coursework. In her situation of instruction for learners’ enrichment, such expansion occurred through research of the topics as guided by student interest and strengths or needs in a content area. This teacher reported that she had the flexibility to decide when to correlate curricular activities with the Comprehensive Curriculum.

Despite the fact that there was range within volunteered comments on returned teacher surveys, responses to the survey items (Figure 4.4-4.6) suggested a consensus, within designated grade levels, toward identification of the curriculum as one which does not offer opportunity for students to accelerate the pace of learning.

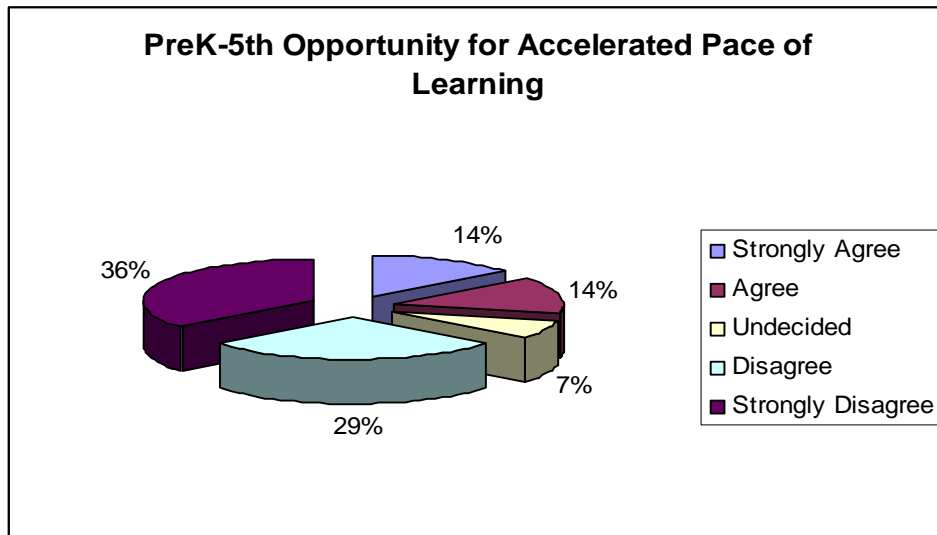


Figure 4.4 PreK-5<sup>th</sup> Opportunity for Accelerated Pace of Learning

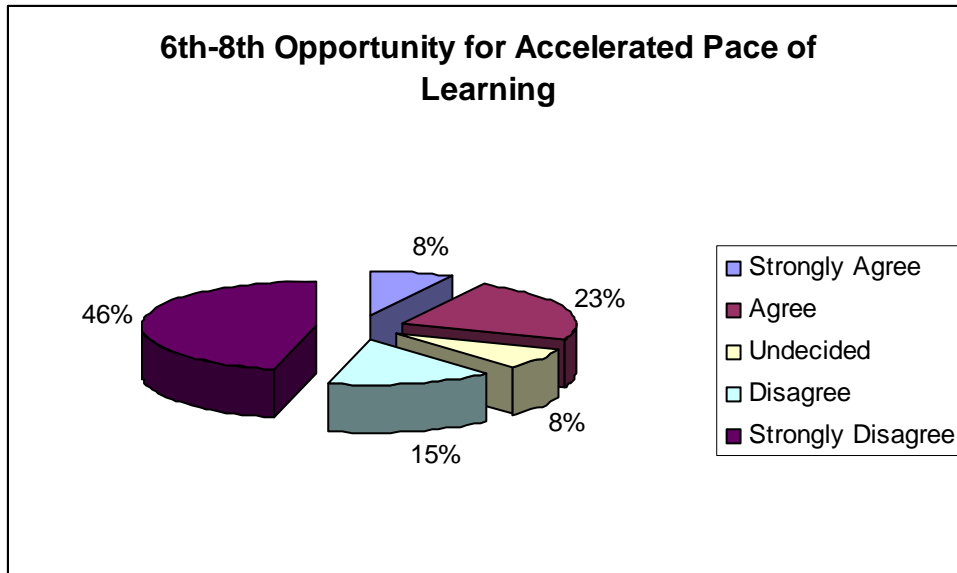


Figure 4.5 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Opportunity for Accelerated Pace of Learning

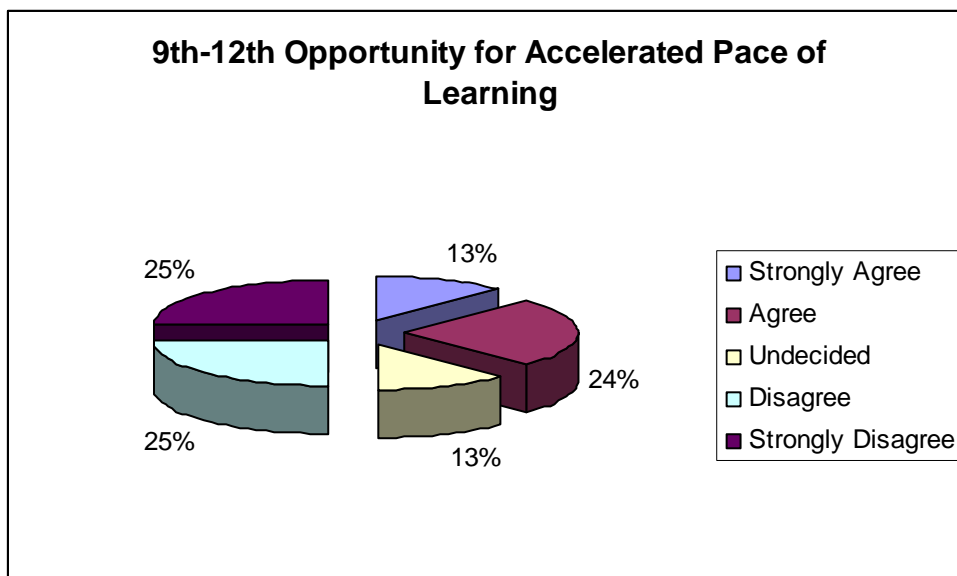


Figure 4.6 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Opportunity for Accelerated Pace of Learning

#### Research Subquestion 4

What context variables affect instruction of gifted students?

Three general context variables were pinpointed by teachers as ones that affect instruction for gifted learners. First, constriction in planning was identified by several teachers. A teacher discussed the need to spend much extra time and work to develop an added curriculum to adequately meet student needs. Others mentioned the loss of



opportunity for field trips due to cost of gasoline and structured instructional time prior to standardized testing (Jana, 2006; TSI34; Nan, 2006). Parallel to this, Jana (2006) commented on the need for flexibility and freedom in preparing for students. Second, a belief of teachers that the educational philosophy is sound for gifted learners is critical. One (TSI3) avowed a belief in the need for GLEs and set requirements for grade levels, while another (Sid, 2006) identified GLEs and the Comprehensive Curriculum as a “road map” for teachers. Both, however, linked their belief with an enhanced role of the teacher of gifted learners to make appropriate decisions for student differentiation. Third, student belief in the educational setting to meet their needs is becoming increasingly necessary. A teacher (TSI34) lamented student perception that one’s senior year must be a half-day; this student view caused them to avoid honors and elective classes, such as Biology II. In contrast, this same teacher’s students in middle school were guided by her to seek competitions in writing, art, etc. and to participate in Duke University’s Talent Program. Similarly, Jana (2006) discussed a loss of creativity in students due to her perceived limiting of curricular acceleration. The researcher inferred a possible shift in student attitude as progressing toward upper grade levels, but no other contributing factors were identified by survey and interview participants.

#### Research Subquestion 5

What factors will determine whether alternative curriculum models for gifted learners are selected to complement the Comprehensive Curriculum?

Classification of teacher and personnel perceptions and comments revealed two categories of factors influencing whether alternative curriculum models might be selected to complement the Comprehensive Curriculum. The researcher classified one factor as economic considerations, while she identified another as inconsistent communication.

At the district level, limited funding to support gifted education contributes to the designation of it as a “neglected service,” particularly in rural parishes where other services within the Special Education realm makes exorbitant demands on time, e.g. projections of 99% of total time (DSI10 ; Sid, 2006; Mary, 2006). Within the district survey, analysis of reasons for selecting a program design indicated teacher availability as a consistent concern across grade levels and academic years; such indication supports the interviewed coordinators’ perception of neglect. Additionally, one teacher stated that once an educator had earned certification, there was no professional development available to improve curriculum and instruction for the students, while another observed that most teachers of gifted appear to be elementary certified and of the female gender (TSI6; TSI17). Likewise, Jana (2006) indicated that she felt inadequate to differentiate instruction within a provided curriculum for individual students because of limited professional training to do so.

At the school level, Sid (2006) charged that gifted educators must recognize the bridge between a student’s junior/senior years in high school and future college/career needs. He expressed a need for more teachers who are qualified to teach advanced content at the upper grade levels. Similarly, another teacher (TSI20) noted a reduction in number of gifted students and the loss or “flight” of gifted students from rural schools to private ones due to limited availability of differentiation in coursework, while Mary (2006) also noted a reduction in numbers of gifted students which was embedded within a larger general flight of students due to the district’s low academic reputation.

With regard to the issue classified as inconsistent communication, one teacher (TSI1) identified a disparity between district directives about curriculum that are disseminated and what curricular activities a teacher actually plans for instruction. One

resultant condition may be present in teachers' perception that decisions about implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum were made without teacher input, as evidenced by multiple comments on survey instruments, such as "thank you for the opportunity to say something about the Comprehensive Curriculum and gifted education," "thanks for including GT, [as] much more info needs to be gathered to maximize learning experiences for this population," and statements of "hope this helps to make a difference" (Jana, 2006; TSI2; TSI17; TSI18; TSI22; TSI26; TSI29; TSI37).

#### Abridgement

After analysis of all data, the researcher identified inappropriate and appropriate uses of the Comprehensive Curriculum, when measured against the five goals of differentiation for instruction of the gifted.

Inappropriate use of the curriculum occurs when districts follow the letter or guidelines of policy for identification of giftedness, but then fail to meet the policy's intent for service models when they do not evaluate inclusive instructional factors. One teacher labeled actions of her district as intent to "lump all students" together based upon classification [as gifted] rather than on individualized student needs (TSI17).

Additionally, the teacher shared that she had left teaching during the first semester of the 2005-06 academic year because she felt that she could not maintain personal standards for gifted instruction. The researcher inferred, that despite district-identification of grouping plans and school-level scheduling of classes for gifted students, little differentiation of curriculum could occur at the instructional level due to either real or teacher-perceived restrictions.

Examples of current teacher practices during the initial year of use provide strong examples of appropriate use of the Comprehensive Curriculum for purposes of

differentiation. One teacher (TSI4) of enrichment included, within her planned objectives, two research projects based on her students' regular education assignments from the Comprehensive Curriculum. Examples ranged across all three grade levels and varied in discipline and topic, i.e., a fourth grade Science project on hurricanes or a sixth grade Social Studies project on feudalism. Similarly, one secondary teacher of accelerated classes (TSI1) developed a semester course of study to include activities from the Comprehensive Curriculum, but also offered student choice in how to study or approach skills to be mastered, which addressed learner motivation. A different teacher (TSI20) utilized the Comprehensive Curriculum as a framework within Advanced Placement ELA and math classes at the elementary level and within Advanced Placement math classes at the middle school level. She uses "lots of pre-assessment" to differentiate; she noted that most students test out of each unit rapidly which allows her to move on to next year's related GLEs or to offer other types of enrichment within the unit. Research, presentation and utilization of extensive resources are components of an extension activity which measures related GLEs at a different level of challenge. The researcher inferred that this approach offers both breadth and depth of subject matter, and it highlights the significant need for teacher expertise in selection of advanced materials. To be able to offer such opportunities and to meet parish expectations, this teacher must document in lesson plans how she addresses GLEs and units of the Comprehensive Curriculum. Furthermore, she emphasized that it could be problematic within a gifted instructional setting, if someone were limited to the sequence and rate of the curriculum. The teacher (TSI20) stated that "these children must be allowed to move at their own pace, or they will begin to have motivational and behavioral problems."

## Discussion

Upon analysis of the instructional survey instrument administered to district coordinators, the researcher noted a pattern among certain program options and reasons given for selecting identified options. When indicating enrichment programs as the primary grouping plan utilized for instruction of gifted students, the availability of teachers was the top reason for selection of that instructional design. During 2004-05, those providing enrichment options at the PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade levels indicated teacher availability as the main reason with ease of implementation and low implementation cost sharing the secondary slot. More so, those providing enrichment options during 2005-06 school year at the same grade levels were the only respondents indicating teacher availability as the main reason, while little or no cost to implement was the second identified reason for selection. As the entry level and early grades are considered by many educators as formative, the researcher noted that student need was marked with limited frequency.

Across both target academic years, those providing enrichment as an option at the middle and high school levels tended to identify reasons of district accountability plans and interpretation of state curriculum plan at the same rate as those of teacher availability and cost of implementation for selection of an instructional design at grade level designations. This is in contrast to the placement of student intellectual needs as the second factor most affecting decisions about overall selection of program design options. The contrast may be best explained by noting that those coordinators indicating Advanced Placement/Acceleration or XYZ class options were the same ones who indicated student intellectual needs as a major decision factor. The researcher observed

that academic needs of students were considered more within selection of this specific grouping plan, while there is no indication of how it meets other needs for differentiation.

As VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) noted a decrease in pull-out programs because “more gifted students are being served in heterogeneous or self-contained settings” (p. 7), the above rationales for selection of program options may be more noteworthy than they first appear. Due to familiarity with the mentioned assertion of VanTassel-Baska and Little, the researcher anticipated finding one of two possible

PreK-5th			
Program Option	Year	%	(f)
XYZ	2004-05	8.3	Y =1 N
	2005-06	8.3	Y =1 N
Cross-Grade	2004-05	16.6	Y =1 N =1
	2005-06	8.3	Y =1 N
Intra-Class	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N
Advanced Placement/Acceleration	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N
Enrichment	2004-05	75	Y =4 N =5
	2005-06	83.3	Y =4 N =6
Other	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N

Figure 4.7 Comparison of Program Options for PreK-5<sup>th</sup> Grade

outcomes. There could have been a decline in enrichment program options due to federal mandates that no child must be left behind. Achievement of such a goal would be ensured by a gifted student spending more time in regular classrooms that offered

increased exposure to standardized curriculum, thereby enhancing preparation for standardized assessment. With increased teacher responsibility for all students, enriching lesson alternatives for gifted students would decrease as teachers chose easier ways to instruct everyone to meet requirements. If not that result, then there could have been an increase in enrichment program options where students were offered required services, but who had little scheduled time or instructional incentive to participate.

6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade			
Program Option	Year	%	(f)
XYZ	2004-05	16.6	Y =2 N
	2005-06	16.6	Y =2 N
Cross-Grade	2004-05	8.3	Y N =1
	2005-06	0	Y N
Intra-Class	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N
Advanced Placement/Acceleration	2004-05	16.6	Y =2 N
	2005-06	16.6	Y =2 N
Enrichment	2004-05	58.3	Y =3 N =4
	2005-06	66.6	Y =3 N =5
Other	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N

Figure 4.8 Comparison of Program Options for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Findings reveal that there has been a slight shift toward enrichment, as shown by the percentages in the provided tables (Figures 4.7-4.9). Upon further analysis of the indicated frequency of whether enrichment options utilized a curriculum designed to reflect standards and benchmarks for core discipline areas, there has been a slight trend at

the elementary and middle school level toward instruction that does not reflect either a design toward GLEs or one utilizing the Comprehensive Curriculum.

There was no change indicated in use of a standards-based curriculum at the high school level, although it must be noted that limitations already existed. As more high

9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade			
Program Option	Year	%	(f)
XYZ	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N
Cross-Grade	2004-05	10	Y N=1
	2005-06	0	Y N
Intra-Class	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	0	Y N
Advanced Placement/Acceleration	2004-05	50	Y =5 N
	2005-06	50	Y =4 N =1
Enrichment	2004-05	40	Y =1 N =1
	2005-06	40	Y =1 N =3
Other	2004-05	0	Y N
	2005-06	10	Y N =1

Figure 4.9 Comparison of Program Options for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

school students are shown to be served through the Advanced Placement program, measurement of special curricular provisions for gifted learners would indicate how that option is being used for specific student needs. It is not known how curriculum is structured or how differentiation of instruction for individual needs occurs.

Even though there was a slight increase in enrichment programs, there was less emphasis at both levels of implementation on designing its curriculum to reflect GLEs



and standards. It is not known if this would hold true with a larger return rate, or if it is indicative only of situations that caused the most change in teacher perception and/or instructional context. Overall findings seem to indicate that an enrichment program option is selected by administrators because it requires little funding to do so and it is easy to put into place as long as a teacher is available. Little data exists to show either student achievement levels or student perception of perceived instructional value and its related level of challenge when offered this programmatic option. Yet, teacher surveys, supplemental teacher commentary and Jana's insights show this to be an effective option when the teacher is allowed to create or modify curriculum toward student intellectual ability and interests within a homogenous peer setting.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### Statement of the Problem

In the midst of a national focus on improving student achievement, gifted educators within Louisiana not only are required to implement some or all aspects of a curriculum with a prescribed content structure, but also are expected to act without any analysis of the resulting impact on what will be learned by students and whether individual needs for instructional differentiation can be addressed through implementation of the prescribed curriculum.

### Purpose of the Study

As it is vital for educators to analyze curricular expectations, methods of implementation for common curriculum, and strengths and weaknesses of alternative curriculum models to determine effective ways to teach gifted individuals, this study sought to identify perceptions of teachers and district personnel, which might either increase or decrease the likelihood of such analysis. A measurement of the scope and nature of existing views could provide a prompt for further curricular reform that focuses on needs of gifted learners and/or identifies program options to offer increased opportunity for differentiation.

### Delimitation of the Study

The broad delimitation of this study is that it relates to a specific state's plan to meet national mandates for the larger education of all students. More specific limits of this study are wide-ranging in effect. First, the target population of gifted teachers who are listed as members of the state website is representative of the larger population of teachers of gifted within Louisiana, but the target group's list of teachers is not inclusive.

The researcher spoke with several teachers currently in the field of gifted education who are not members of the directory and who had no knowledge of the website. Second, the membership list of the website of the target population of gifted teachers has not been updated annually, as indicated by a significant amount of received notices of delivery failure (Singletary, 2006). Several teachers notified the researcher via email that they would not be participating in the survey due to a change in instructional status for the 2005-06 school year; one was now employed as a librarian and two were reassigned to teach regular education classes due to budget cuts (Singletary, 2006). It is not known if there were others who experienced a similar adjustment in employment position, but who did not notify the researcher of a change. Third, timing of both surveys was determined by procedural timelines required of the researcher's dissertation program, which caused each survey to be distributed during a period that most teachers and administrators consider their busiest time of the academic year, i.e., standardized testing and its pre and post procedures. Upon second or third contact by the researcher, three teachers and three district personnel or their staff indicated non-participation due to time and schedule constraints; some contact points could not be completed via email or phone (Singletary, 2006). The timing of distribution may have attributed to the low response rate for each survey.

## Methods

This study employed Tashakkori and Teddlie's (1998) mixed methods research design. Two basic techniques of survey and interview were used to gather data. One electronic survey for teachers of the gifted measured types of grouping plans utilized for instruction and analyzed perceptions of challenge in utilized curriculum, resultant student learning, and instructional outcomes promoted by a curriculum. A second and separate

electronic survey for district coordinators of gifted programming measured programming options, rationales for selection of options, and status of professional development occasions. Both surveys examined curriculum as utilized in the 2004-05 and the 2005-06 school years. Surveying in this manner quantitatively assessed the situations through an inductive focus (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Follow-up interviews conducted individually with two participants from the teacher survey group and two participants from the district personnel survey group provided comprehensive detail about individuals' situations and perceptions which had prompted survey responses.

Interviewing was again used, but in a more in-depth manner within the case study. Rich data was revealed through the subject's description of perceived changes in curriculum, discussion of approaches to instruction before and within a standardized curriculum and dialogue signifying daily events which inform the instructional cycle. The case study supplemented the first approach of teacher survey, yet offered singular data to comprehend the context variables within a classroom setting which affected curricular implementation and subsequent daily instruction. The rich data was coded on researcher-created instruments and investigated qualitatively with quantitative interpretation through use of measures of central tendency displayed in tables and graphs. Findings gained from a practitioner's point of view expanded potential findings from the survey, as well as identified consistencies and inconsistencies between results.

#### Summary of Findings on Research Questions

Implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum had a significant impact on gifted instruction delivered through Advanced Placement/Acceleration program models. Results also indicated a slight shift toward use of enrichment models at the elementary and middle school levels.

## Conclusions

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers a strong basis of content from which instruction can meet goals of skill mastery and of high achievement as measured by standardized tests for each gifted student. It does not, however, offer gifted learners a holistic design that will meet either academic needs for adjusted timeframes, excellence and rigor, or for affective needs which include motivation. In the overall teacher discussion of instructional practices before and during implementation, the given curriculum increases the likelihood that an educator will choose strategies and objectives that are easy and efficient to implement, rather than creatively design differentiated ones. As indicated by findings, few qualitative changes were made, upon implementation, to the curriculum due to time constraints and perceived directions from district personnel to use “as is” for all students. Measurement of the impact of the curriculum within its initial implementation year provides a foundational basis for revision of the curriculum to better address differentiation needs of gifted learners.

## Implications

As qualitative data revealed potential trends in gifted education, one could anticipate that the core impact of the Comprehensive Curriculum is yet to come. Meg (2006) projected that gifted programming will become an urban phenomenon in Louisiana, as rural districts become increasingly concerned with high stakes testing and its associated financial influence. Data also revealed that other factors besides statewide mandates for curricular implementation affected gifted instruction during the past academic year. Districts identified deficiencies in state monitoring reports, low priority of the gifted program, and limited student participation as reasons that curricular change either did or did not occur (DSI10; Mary, 2006). Teachers indicated that mandated

change in curricular emphasis was limited in effect to those grouping plans related to instruction in core content areas (TSI4; TSI11; TSI18; TSI20; TSI36). In addition, one teacher (TSI34) stated that she did not have an opinion on the subject because she only taught enrichment classes. Upon further probing via emailed questions, she indicated that she supplemented core content, especially science, with concept application activities and instruction in art and computer technology. The researcher inferred that some districts did not include gifted classes in curriculum implementation directives, because such classes were perceived as non-contributors to current reform efforts within the targeted four core subject areas.

This researcher asserts that the achievement of gifted students should be identified as a subgroup whose annual academic performance is tracked by the Louisiana Department of Education for purposes of Adequate Yearly Progress. This study provides primary data as programmatic options and perceptions of related instruction were measured in grade-level subgroups that correspond to those grade-level designations of other monitored subgroups. Moreover, it is projected by this researcher that once districts, who are justifiably concerned with district and school performance scores, become accountable for measuring annual academic performance of advanced learners, programming and all decisions related to its selection, adopted theories of learning, and instruction will assume a more appropriate level of priority.

One may also infer openness among survey participants toward other curricular models. By a large margin of 95.5%, teachers reported that they wanted information about other program design options to more effectively differentiate instruction for gifted learners (Figure 5.1). Teacher comments indicate a desire to accommodate for student academic and intellectual needs; which corresponds to TSI data identifying student

intellectual needs as the factor most affecting program decisions. Both comments and numbers may imply a low satisfaction level with current models.

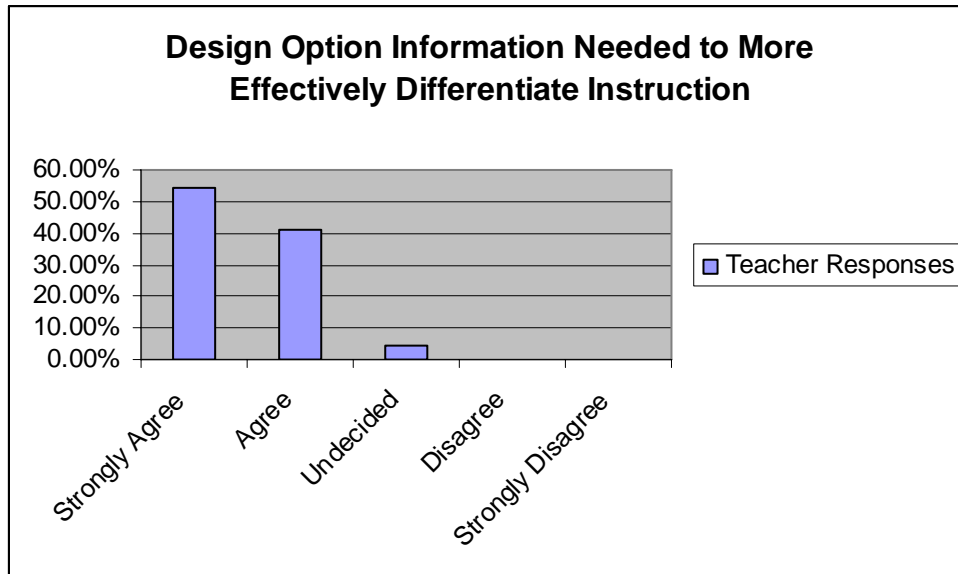


Figure 5.1 Design Option Information Needed to More Effectively Differentiate Instruction

In addition to academic concerns, research findings indicate a need for curricular components that specifically address affective aspects of learning. Repeated teacher references to small numbers of gifted students may indicate that students are choosing instruction delivered in regular classroom settings because of motivation issues or emotional conflict.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Foremost, efforts should be made to examine achievement rates of gifted students on standardized tests when the state's Curriculum Implementation Plan, one of the four parts of the Curriculum Management System, is fully put into place. Delays in implementation procedures and in intended state department monitoring activities occurred with the advent of two natural disasters in the fall of 2005: Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. Since statewide accountability could not be measured with validity,

districts were given more autonomy to decide if students were to be held accountable for high stakes testing for the 2005-06 academic year (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006a). Within an atmosphere of academic disruption, the decision offered districts choice in establishing promotional standards and, consequently, in determining how closely each would apply the prescribed, but now less monitored Comprehensive Curriculum. As a result, 16 school districts chose to retain the established high stakes testing policy, 46 districts retained the policy with modifications, and 6 districts chose to fully suspend the policy (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006a). This study established the status of reporting districts' decisions to implement the Comprehensive Curriculum and described the inclusive impact on teachers' instruction.

Corresponding to the first recommendation, the resulting data can be used to inform plans for adjustments to the current Implementation Plan, so that teachers who have gifted students are *expected*, rather than *offered* the opportunity to “teach more than the content of the Comprehensive Curriculum,” and that cautions to prioritize “GLEs for that grade and content area” are replaced by an endorsement to assess first student opportunity to work to potential (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005b). Additionally, if the Implementation Plan had been enacted as intended within original timelines, a baseline measurement of student scores could have been taken in the March 2006 testing period for a future correlation study of the effect of the Comprehensive Curriculum. This was formerly part of the researcher's plan until forces of weather intervened. As a consequence, the needed establishment of the baseline measurement of student achievement offers the researcher a sequence of actions for future study. Such study is needed, as indicated by VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003), to collect empirical



evidence that documents learning gains tied to the use of *any* curriculum, but needed more so, this researcher asserts, when tied to the use of a common curriculum.

Secondly, if the current form of the Comprehensive Curriculum remains in place, as projected by departmental responses pointing to delays in executing the overall Curriculum Management System and disaster-related budget cuts, studies should be conducted to measure student perception of degree of challenge in the curriculum and its implicit expectations for academic excellence (Singletary, 2006). Resulting data would inform teacher efforts to identify instructional techniques to strengthen positive student affective response and would ultimately impact student achievement and school improvement and reform initiatives.

Third, a pilot study of curriculum models, such as the Parallel Curriculum Model (2002) or the Integrated Curriculum Model (2003), identified in this study as better program options because they would complement the Comprehensive Curriculum, is needed to provide research findings to more strongly inform the state's projected Curriculum Improvement Plan, step three of the larger Curriculum Management System. Since the system is composed of four separate plans, which heavily involve both teachers and administrators to ensure an increased likelihood of student, school and district success, the identification of curricular options is necessary. Following that premise, one must select options with a strong content emphasis and a potential for affective components, such as the discussed models, and then prepare to include essential professional development needed to move toward VanTassel-Baska and Little's (2003) suggested system of challenging curricular interventions. Each curriculum and its interventions would embed within Louisiana's current attempts to align content, instruction, and assessment, would enhance national efforts to increase academic

achievement of students, and would embrace the intended goal of Clark's (2002) gifted instruction, defined by its extension of recognized student characteristics to further levels of development through differentiation.

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## APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE FOR COORDINATOR SURVEY

Your help is needed to determine how gifted education is responding to changes in curricular strategies within our state.

I wish to investigate instructional practices pertaining to gifted education for a doctoral dissertation project. I am contacting district personnel identified as coordinators for gifted and talented education to invite participation in the research effort. The attached survey will relate to program options and associated instruction offered in your district during the 2004-05 and the 2005-06 school years.

As some questions connect to implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum, I hope the research results will generate new knowledge for administrative personnel to use in making curricular decisions. In return for your time and assistance, I would like to share the data per your request, as indicated at the end of the survey instrument.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes. Please save document and mark selected responses with an "X." Return completed document as an attachment to [csingl3@lsu.edu](mailto:csingl3@lsu.edu) (Note that it is a letter "L" which precedes the number 3)

Your consideration is greatly appreciated,  
Cathy Singletary, Ed.S.  
Doctoral candidate at LSU

## APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTIONAL SURVEY

Greetings! My name is Cathy Singletary, and I am a doctoral student within the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. I wish to investigate instructional practices pertaining to gifted education. Information sought will relate to program options offered in your district during the 2004-05 school year prior to the advent of the Comprehensive Curriculum and to those currently offered within the 2005-06 school year during implementation of the specified curricular plan.

Your willingness to answer questions and return the form indicates consent to participate in the survey. Information obtained will be coded and handled in a confidential manner. An anticipated benefit will be new empirical knowledge of how gifted education is responding to changes in curricular strategies within our state. If you would like a copy of the results, please mark your request in the designated section at the end of the survey. If you have questions about the overall study, please contact my major professor, Dr. Culross, at (225) 578-1264.

Grouping plans (Pare, 2005) commonly utilized by educational systems to meet the instructional needs of identified academically gifted students may be defined as follows:

- XYZ classes-a single grade is divided into several ability groups which are instructed in separate classes for a particular subject.
- Cross-Grade grouping-students of the same ability level but ranging across various grade levels are grouped exclusively for peer instruction
- Intra-class grouping-each classroom includes students with a wide range of abilities instructed through whole-group and small-group instruction as indicated by differences in need.
- Advanced Placement and Acceleration-specialized instruction is offered exclusively to gifted and talented students in specific subject areas
- Enrichment-gifted students are provided more varied and richer experiences than those offered in the regular classroom.

1. Within the **2004-05** school year, what was the PRIMARY grouping plan utilized for gifted students and rationale for selection in each of the following grade level ranges:

**Pre-Kindergarten to Fifth grade:** (Select one)

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Was the curriculum utilized for instruction within this grouping plan specifically designed to reflect Grade Level Expectations and linked standards and benchmarks for core discipline areas?

- Yes
- No



What are two main reasons that you selected this instructional design?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability         | <input type="checkbox"/> interpretation of state curriculum plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation          | <input type="checkbox"/> known viability and success             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher certification        | <input type="checkbox"/> ease of implementation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student ability              | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district accountability plan | <input type="checkbox"/> little or no cost to implement          |

**Sixth to Eighth grade:** (Select one)

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Was the curriculum utilized for instruction within this grouping plan specifically designed to reflect Grade Level Expectations and linked standards and benchmarks for core discipline areas?

- Yes
- No

What are two main reasons that you selected this instructional design?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability         | <input type="checkbox"/> interpretation of state curriculum plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation          | <input type="checkbox"/> known viability and success             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher certification        | <input type="checkbox"/> ease of implementation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student ability              | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district accountability plan | <input type="checkbox"/> little or no cost to implement          |

**Ninth to Twelfth grade:** (Select one)

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Was the curriculum utilized for instruction within this grouping plan specifically designed to reflect Grade Level Expectations and linked standards and benchmarks for core discipline areas?

- Yes
- No

What are two main reasons that you selected this instructional design?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability         | <input type="checkbox"/> interpretation of state curriculum plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation          | <input type="checkbox"/> known viability and success             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher certification        | <input type="checkbox"/> ease of implementation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student ability              | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district accountability plan | <input type="checkbox"/> little or no cost to implement          |

2. Within the **2005-06** school year, what was the PRIMARY grouping plan utilized for gifted students in each of the following grade level ranges:

**Pre-Kindergarten to Fifth grade:** (Select one)

- XYZ classes  
 Cross-Grade grouping  
 Intra-class grouping  
 Advanced Placement/Acceleration  
 Enrichment  
 Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Comprehensive Curriculum used as the core curriculum within discipline areas?

- Yes  
 No

What are two main reasons that you selected this instructional design?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability         | <input type="checkbox"/> interpretation of state curriculum plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation          | <input type="checkbox"/> known viability and success             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher certification        | <input type="checkbox"/> ease of implementation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student ability              | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district accountability plan | <input type="checkbox"/> little or no cost to implement          |

**Sixth to Eighth grade:** (Select one)

- XYZ classes  
 Cross-Grade grouping  
 Intra-class grouping  
 Advanced Placement/Acceleration  
 Enrichment  
 Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Comprehensive Curriculum used as the core curriculum within discipline areas?

- Yes  
 No

What are two main reasons that you selected this instructional design?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability         | <input type="checkbox"/> interpretation of state curriculum plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation          | <input type="checkbox"/> known viability and success             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher certification        | <input type="checkbox"/> ease of implementation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student ability              | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district accountability plan | <input type="checkbox"/> little or no cost to implement          |

**Ninth to Twelfth grade:** (Select one)

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Comprehensive Curriculum used as the core curriculum within discipline areas?

- Yes
- No

What are two main reasons that you selected this instructional design?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability         | <input type="checkbox"/> interpretation of state curriculum plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation          | <input type="checkbox"/> known viability and success             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher certification        | <input type="checkbox"/> ease of implementation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student ability              | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district accountability plan | <input type="checkbox"/> little or no cost to implement          |

3. For which of the following program design options for gifted programming have you as administrative personnel received professional development?

- Types of Acceleration
- The Integrated Curriculum Model
- The Parallel Curriculum Model
- Other (specify model) \_\_\_\_\_
- None

For which of the following program design options for gifted programming have you delivered and/or provided professional development to teachers?

- Types of Acceleration
- The Integrated Curriculum Model
- The Parallel Curriculum Model
- Other (specify model) \_\_\_\_\_
- None

4. What three factors most affect decisions about your selection of program design options?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> unsure of viability of success | <input type="checkbox"/> student academic/intellectual needs     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> need for examples of success   | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cost to implement              | <input type="checkbox"/> limited parental involvement            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability           | <input type="checkbox"/> inadequate time for planning new option |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation            | <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty in scheduling                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> transportation                 | <input type="checkbox"/> incomplete knowledge of program options |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student social/emotional needs | <input type="checkbox"/> need for professional development       |

Yes, I would like a copy of the results of the survey. Please email to the following address: (type address)

## APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE FOR TEACHER SURVEY

Your help is needed to determine how gifted education is responding to changes in curricular strategies within our state.

I wish to investigate instructional practices pertaining to gifted education for a doctoral dissertation project. I am contacting teachers of gifted and talented education to invite participation in the research effort. The survey will relate to program options and instruction offered in your district during the 2004-05 and the 2005-06 school year.

As some questions connect to implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum, I hope the research results will generate new knowledge for making curricular decisions. In return for your time and assistance, data will be made available via the website.

The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes. Please save document and mark selected responses with an "X." Return completed document as an attachment to [csingl3@lsu.edu](mailto:csingl3@lsu.edu) (Note that it is a letter L which precedes the number 3)

Your consideration is greatly appreciated,  
Cathy Singletary, Ed.S.  
Doctoral candidate at LSU

## APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONAL SURVEY FOR TEACHERS

Greetings! My name is Cathy Singletary, and I am a doctoral student within the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. I wish to investigate instructional practices pertaining to gifted education. Information sought will relate to instruction offered in your district during the 2004-05 school year prior to the advent of the Comprehensive Curriculum and to that currently offered within the 2005-06 school year during implementation of the specified curricular plan.

Your willingness to answer questions and return the form indicates consent to participate in the survey. Information obtained will be coded for anonymity and handled in a confidential manner. An anticipated benefit will be new knowledge of how gifted education is responding to changes in curricular strategies within our state and recommendations for programmatic options. If you would like a copy of the results, please mark your request in the designated section at the end of the survey. If you have questions about the overall study, please contact my major professor, Dr. Culross, at (225) 578-1264.

Grouping plans (Pare, 2005) commonly utilized by educational systems to meet the instructional needs of identified academically gifted students may be defined as follows:

- XYZ classes—a single grade is divided into several ability groups which are instructed in separate classes for a particular subject.
- Cross-Grade grouping—students of the same ability level but ranging across various grade levels are grouped exclusively for peer instruction
- Intra-class grouping—each classroom includes students with a wide range of abilities instructed through whole-group and small-group instruction as indicated by differences in need.
- Advanced Placement and Acceleration—specialized instruction is offered exclusively to gifted and talented students in specific subject areas
- Enrichment—gifted students are provided more varied and richer experiences than those offered in the regular classroom.

**NOTE: Pre-K thru fifth grade—answer question # 1,4,7,8**

**Sixth thru eighth grade—answer question # 2,5,7,8**

**Ninth thru twelfth grade—answer question # 3,6,7,8**

**Combination of grades—answer ALL appropriate questions**

1. Within the 2004-05 school year, what was the primary grouping plan utilized for gifted students in Pre-K thru fifth grade? Mark one answer that best describes the program.

XYZ classes

Cross-Grade grouping

Intra-class grouping

Advanced Placement/Acceleration

Enrichment

Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Was the curriculum utilized for instruction specifically designed to reflect the Grade Level Expectations and linked standards and benchmarks of core discipline areas?

- Yes (Go to next item)
- No (Skip to question #4)

The curriculum provided students exposure to advanced material which promoted mastery of skills beyond those identified for grade level.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum offered students opportunity for accelerated pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum offered students opportunity for an accelerated, self-directed pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum had a foundational base of content, but could vary in form to meet individual student needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum motivated gifted students to perform to academic potential.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum stimulated study and learning behaviors that would help each student to value self as learner and thinker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2. Within the 2004-05 school year, what was the primary grouping plan utilized for gifted students in sixth thru eighth grade? Mark one answer that best describes the program.

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Was the curriculum utilized for instruction specifically designed to reflect the Grade Level Expectations and linked standards and benchmarks of core discipline areas?

- Yes (Go to next item)
- No (Skip to question #5)

The curriculum provided students exposure to advanced material which promoted mastery of skills beyond those identified for grade level.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum offered students opportunity for accelerated pace of learning as guided by the teacher.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum offered students opportunity for an accelerated, self-directed pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum had a foundational base of content, but could vary in form to meet individual student needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum motivated gifted students to perform to academic potential.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum stimulated study and learning behaviors that would help each student to value self as learner and thinker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. During the 2004-05 academic year, what was the primary grouping plan utilized for gifted students in ninth thru twelfth grade? Mark one answer that best describes the program.

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Was the curriculum utilized for instruction specifically designed to reflect the Grade Level Expectations and linked standards and benchmarks of core discipline areas?

- Yes (Go to next item)
- No (Skip to question #6)

The curriculum provided students exposure to advanced material which promoted mastery of skills beyond those identified for grade level.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



The curriculum offered students opportunity for accelerated pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum offered students opportunity for an accelerated, self-directed pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum had a foundational base of content, but could vary in form to meet individual student needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum motivated gifted students to perform to academic potential.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The curriculum stimulated study and learning behaviors that would help each student to value self as learner and thinker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. Within the 2005-06 school year, what is the primary grouping plan utilized for gifted students in Pre-K thru fifth grade? Mark one answer that best describes the program.

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Comprehensive Curriculum utilized as the core curriculum for instruction within this program?

- Yes (Go to next item)  
 No (Skip to question # 7)

The Comprehensive Curriculum provides a strong foundation of content in core discipline areas.

- Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum provides students exposure to advanced material which promotes mastery of skills beyond those identified for grade level.

- Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers students opportunity for accelerated pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers students opportunity for an accelerated, self-directed pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum has a foundational base of content, but can vary in form to meet individual student needs.

- Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum motivates gifted students to perform to academic potential.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum stimulates study and learning behaviors that would help each student to value self as learner and thinker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. Within the 2005-06 school year, what is the primary grouping plan utilized for gifted students in sixth thru eighth grade? Mark one answer that best describes the program.

- XYZ classes
- Cross-Grade grouping
- Intra-class grouping
- Advanced Placement/Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Comprehensive Curriculum utilized as the core curriculum for instruction within this program?

- Yes (Go to next item)
- No (Skip to question #7)

The Comprehensive Curriculum provides a strong foundation of content in core discipline areas.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum provides students exposure to advanced material which promotes mastery of skills beyond those identified for grade level.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers students opportunity for accelerated pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers students opportunity for an accelerated, self-directed pace of learning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum has a foundational base of content, but can vary in form to meet individual student needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum motivates gifted students to perform to academic potential.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum stimulates study and learning behaviors that would help each student to value self as learner and thinker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. Within the 2005-06 school year, what is the primary grouping plan utilized for gifted students in ninth thru twelfth grade? Mark one answer that best describes the program.

XYZ classes  
 Cross-Grade grouping  
 Intra-class grouping  
 Advanced Placement/Acceleration  
 Enrichment  
 Other (identify district design) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Comprehensive Curriculum utilized as the core curriculum for instruction within this program?

Yes (Go to next item)  
 No (Skip to question #7)

The Comprehensive Curriculum provides a strong foundation of content in core discipline areas.

Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum provides students exposure to advanced material which promotes mastery of skills beyond those identified for grade level.

Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers students opportunity for accelerated pace of learning.

Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum offers students opportunity for an accelerated, self-directed pace of learning.

Strongly Agree  
 Agree  
 Undecided  
 Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum has a foundational base of content, but can vary in form to meet individual student needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum motivates gifted students to perform to academic potential.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Comprehensive Curriculum stimulates study and learning behaviors that would help each student to value self as learner and thinker.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Information about other program design options for gifted instruction is needed to more effectively differentiate instruction for gifted students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. What three factors most affect decisions about selection of program design options?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> unsure of viability of success | <input type="checkbox"/> student academic/intellectual needs     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> need for examples of success   | <input type="checkbox"/> availability of materials/supplies      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cost to implement              | <input type="checkbox"/> limited parental involvement            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher availability           | <input type="checkbox"/> inadequate time for planning new option |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teacher preparation            | <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty in scheduling                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> transportation                 | <input type="checkbox"/> incomplete knowledge of program options |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student social/emotional needs | <input type="checkbox"/> need for professional development       |

## APPENDIX E: PERMISSION FOR INTERVIEW

- You are invited to participate in research pertaining to curriculum and instruction within gifted education.
- This investigation will examine the effect of the Comprehensive Curriculum on instruction for the gifted.
- The study will examine instructional decisions and related factors made during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school year.
- You met criteria for selection by having an appropriate amount of experience in teaching gifted students, having taught the last two consecutive school years, and having developed management skills in implementing curriculum.
- All information will be coded to protect you and to provide anonymity in description. All reasonable efforts will be made to assure confidentiality, such as seeking oral permission, rather than written.
- Potential benefits will be heightened reflection about your personal instructive practices and the availability of new knowledge about the field of instruction for the gifted. As the study will investigate only practices that are already in place, little to no risk to job security through participation is involved.
- Participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. Should questions arise about the study, contact information for the researcher is given on the provided business card.

**After hearing and having an opportunity to discuss the above assurances, your affirmative oral response will be considered as permission to conduct the interview.**

## APPENDIX F: PERMISSION FOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

- You are invited to further participate in research pertaining to the survey of curriculum and instruction within gifted education.
- This investigation will examine the effect of the Comprehensive Curriculum on instruction for the gifted.
- The study will examine instructional decisions and related factors made during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school year.
- You were randomly selected from the pool of survey respondents.
- All information will be coded to protect you and to provide anonymity in description. All reasonable efforts will be made to assure confidentiality, such as seeking oral permission, rather than written.
- Potential benefits will be heightened reflection about instructive decisions and the availability of new knowledge about the field of curriculum for the gifted. As the study will investigate only practices that are already in place, little to no risk to job security through participation is involved.
- Participation is voluntary and the interview may be concluded at any time. Please contact the researcher at the given email address if you have questions.

**After hearing and having an opportunity to discuss the above assurances, your affirmative oral response will be considered as permission to conduct the interview.**



APPENDIX G: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

Date	Location	Document Selected for Analysis	Notes	<b>Comments and/or reflections</b> p=participant comments rc=researcher comments rr=researcher reflections

## VITA

Cathy J. Singletary began her educational career in 1992 upon receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree. She worked for one year as a school librarian before pursuing gifted certification. While gaining practical experience teaching gifted learners across all grade levels in various itinerant positions, Cathy earned a Master of Education degree with gifted emphasis in 1996. An employment position of instructional coordinator later followed and coincided with successful efforts to earn an Educational Specialist degree. Cathy currently serves as an instructor in the College of Education, Curriculum and Instruction Department, at the University of Louisiana at Monroe.