

# Why Do Gifted Students Lose Their Motivation to Excel?

By

Nancy Buckley, PhD



# Today we are going to explore:

- Children's perceptions of their giftedness
- Their reactions to the instructional settings they encounter
- The effects of these educational encounters on their motivation
- Strategies that can maintain (and/or increase) motivation

## Through the voices of the children!



# Giftedness is defined as:

- Pennsylvania Code (22 Pa. Code §16.21d) and *Gifted Guidelines* (retrieved from [www.portal.state.pa.us](http://www.portal.state.pa.us))
  - IQ of 130 or higher
  - Other criteria including high level of achievement, creative thinking skills, rapid acquisition and retention of skills
  - Students whose giftedness is masked by socio/cultural factors, English as a second language, learning disability
- Joseph Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness
  - Above average ability
  - Creativity
  - Task commitment



Adapted from "Emerging Conceptions of Giftedness: Building a Bridge to the New Century," by J. S. Renzulli, 2012, *Exceptionality*, 10, p. 67.

# We are gifted students



We are

Intelligent

creative

inquisitive

intense

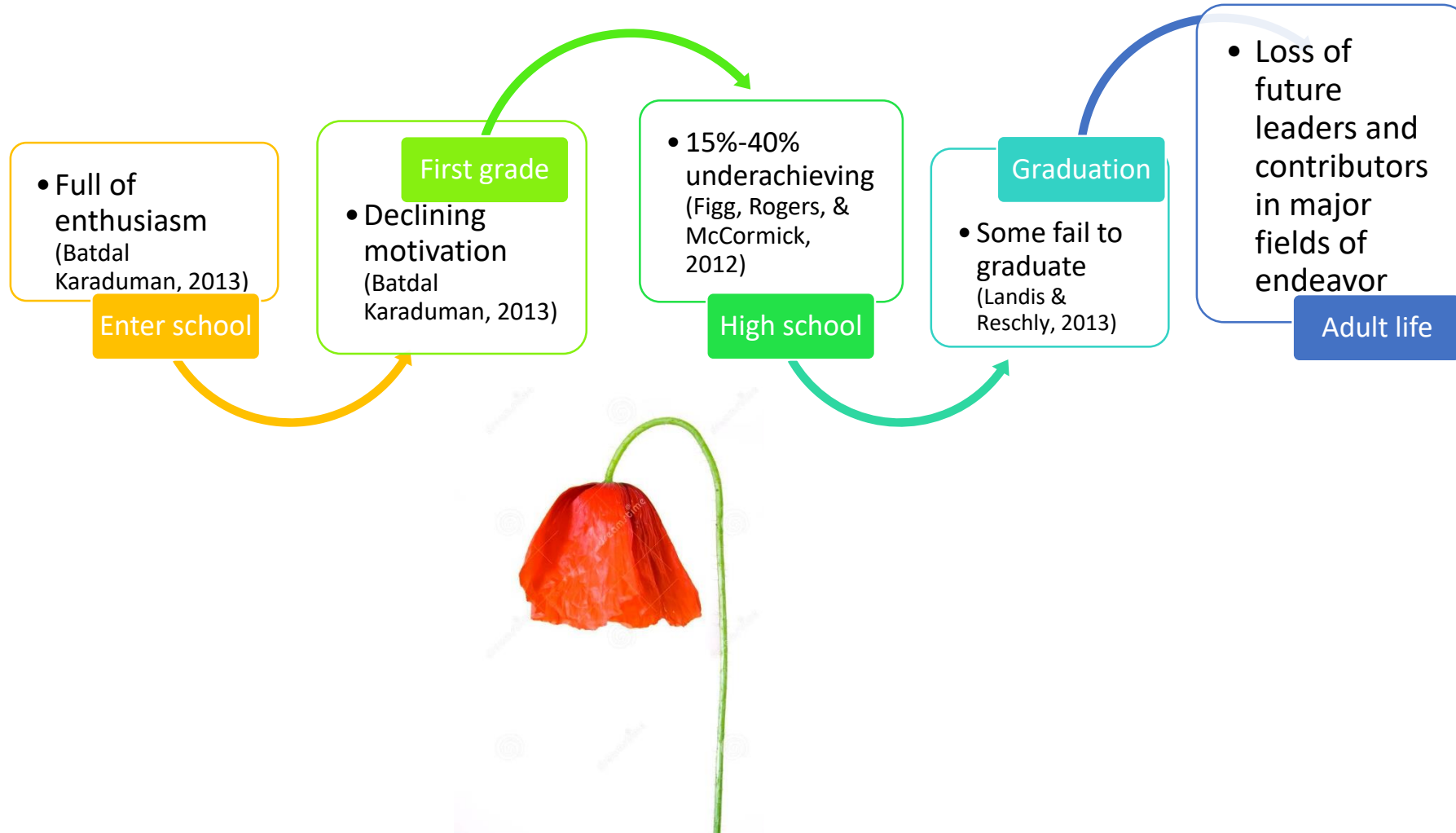
logical

enthusiastic

We are TALL POPPIES!



# Over time, some of us lose our enthusiasm for learning

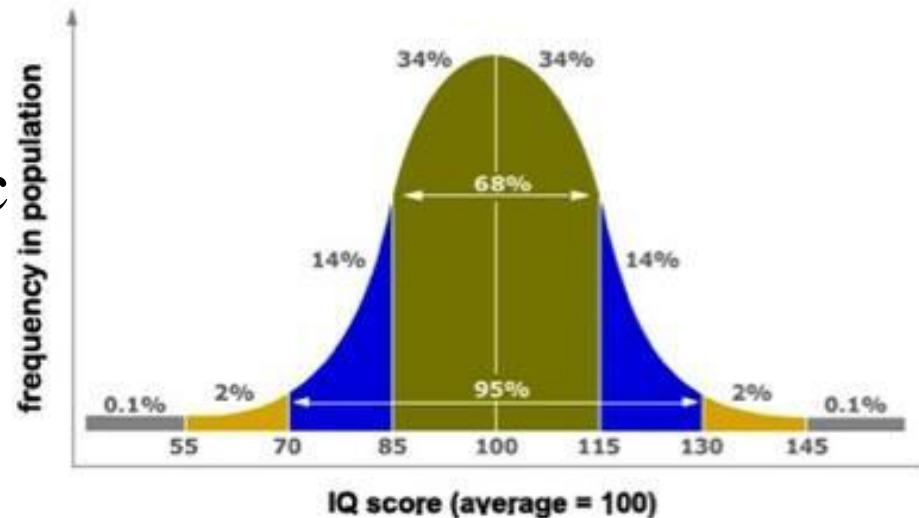


# Among the signs of gifted underachievement are:

- Regression to the mean (Vygotsky, 2011)
- Discrepancy between standardized achievement test scores and actual achievement (Siegle, 2013)
- One standard deviation below expected classroom performance that has negative consequences and lasts long enough to cause concern (Siegle, 2013)
- Can be domain specific (Matthews, 2009b)

## Population and Sample

- Sampling method: Snowball (chain) sampling
- Participants: Ten students in Grades 3 – 5
  - IQ 130 or higher (PA Department of Education, 2010)
  - Involved in gifted education in York County, PA schools
- Diverse school environments
- Similar socio-economic backgrounds



## *Participant Background Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Gifted Accommodation</b>	<b>Other Relevant Information</b>
<b>Ava</b>	9	3	White	Public	Pullout Differentiation	
<b>Doug</b>	11	5	White	Public	Pullout	Reads at grade level
<b>Elizabeth</b>	11	5	Asian- American	Public	Dropped from program	Level 1 autism
<b>Frances</b>	11	5	White	Public	Differentiation	Cyber school through 4 <sup>th</sup> gr.
<b>Jonah</b>	9	4	White	Public	Pullout Differentiation	
<b>Natalie</b>	11	5	White	Public	Pullout Differentiation	Home school Next year
<b>Nathaniel</b>	11	5	White	Public	Cluster grouping	Cyber school through 4 <sup>th</sup> gr.
<b>Olivia</b>	11	5	White	Charter	Pullout	International baccalaureate
<b>Sarah</b>	9	3	White	Public	Pullout Differentiation	
<b>Timmy</b>	8	3	White	Private	Pullout Differentiation	Montessori through 2 <sup>nd</sup> gr.



Gifted students are the best barometer we have to tell us what works and what does not.

(Delisle, 2012, p.68)

- Grounded theory
- Survey: *A Scale of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Orientation in the Classroom* (Harter, 1981)
- Interview: Open-ended questions

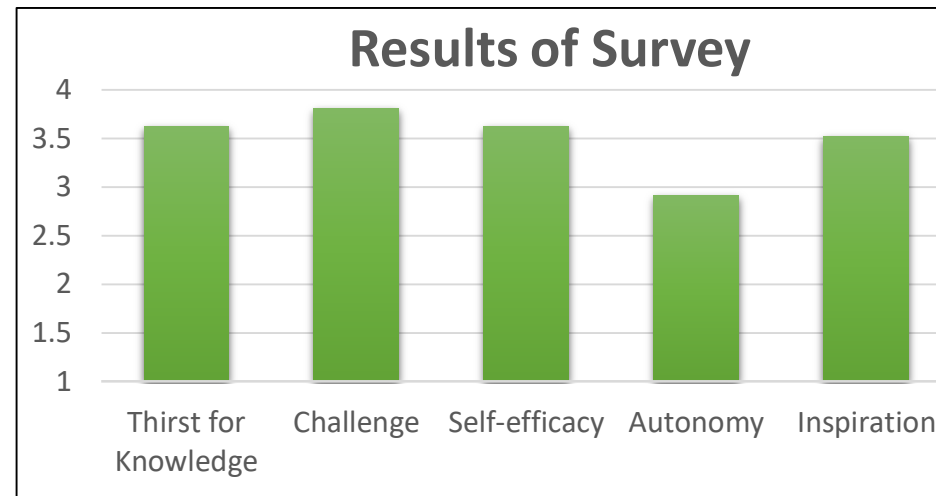
A grounded theory approach, guided by the following research questions, allowed the voices of the children to be heard.

- How do gifted elementary school students perceive the role of motivation in their academic achievement?
- How can an understanding of students' perceptions of motivation and achievement inform the development of instructional practices that will more effectively motivate gifted elementary school students to achieve their potential?
- What theoretical understandings emerge from gifted elementary school students' perceptions of motivation and achievement?

## Research Question 1

How do gifted elementary school students perceive the role of motivation in their academic achievement?

1. The gifted elementary school students participating in this study are intrinsically motivated.



1 – extrinsic pole      4 – intrinsic pole

A New Self-Report Scale of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Orientation in the Classroom  
(Harter, 1981b) Scores reflect group mean.

## Research Question 1

2. Thirst for knowledge, intellectual challenge, self-efficacy, autonomy, and inspiration are significant sources of motivation for gifted elementary school students.

Always get to  
choose equals  
always satisfied.  
(Doug)

If I set my mind to it, I  
could do it!  
(Sarah)

3. Lack of challenge can be a major deterrent to achievement.

Practice makes  
perfect but  
repetition is  
boring (Timmy)

Bleh!  
(Elizabeth)

Whatever I'm  
learning, I  
pretty much  
know already  
(Doug)

## Research Question 2

How can an understanding of students' perceptions of motivation and achievement inform the development of instructional practices that will more effectively motivate gifted elementary school students to achieve their potential?

1. Differentiation can be an effective means of accommodating the academic needs of gifted students in the general classroom
  - a. Cluster grouping (Nathaniel)
  - b. Work stations with “big choices” (Ava)
  - c. Ability grouping for specific subjects (Jonah)

## 2. Lack of differentiation can lead to frustration

a. More time consuming work does not necessarily involve new skills (Jonah)

differentiation  
does not mean  
more... it means  
different

b. Accommodation is needed in all subject areas (Olivia and Natalie)

c. Unassigned independent work needs to be acknowledged

We've been writing poetry at home . . .but the teacher doesn't even look at it (Frances)

### 3. Pullout enrichment programs satisfy the need for challenge

The best part of the day! Without the gifted class in my school, I probably wouldn't really like school as much as I do.  
(Doug)

### 4. Some programs function under less than ideal conditions

#### a. Inadequate space

I'm not happy in my school. We have groups in closets.  
(Ava's mother, a teacher)

This one tiny room – we need a REAL room!  
(Jonah)

b. Sufficient resources

We need tools to  
work – enough for  
everyone.  
(Sarah)

Sometimes the teacher needs to  
get (equipment) from another  
school.  
(Jonah)

c. Guidance – No one, not even gifted education teachers, can be experts in every field and not all experts can “understand the gifted mind” (Jonah).

d. Time

I’m half finished and the clock says it’s time to go. And when I  
come back, six days later, how do you know what you are doing?  
(Jonah)



### Research Question 3

What theoretical understandings emerge from gifted elementary school students' perceptions of motivation and achievement?

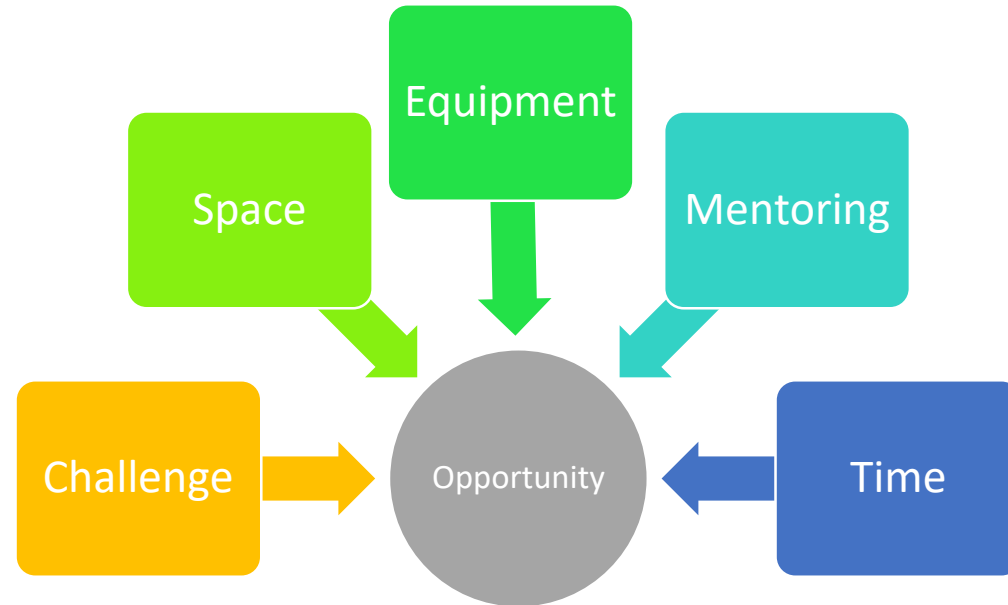
1. The participants in the study do exhibit the traits that comprise Joseph Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness

Okay, let me think. What was creativity now? . . . Right now we're working on making an app and my one partner blows me apart! Yeah, everyone in my gifted class seems to be higher in math than the other kids and in science and social studies. Task commitment most of the time. That's all kinda true!  
(Doug)

That sounds like me!!!!  
(Sarah)

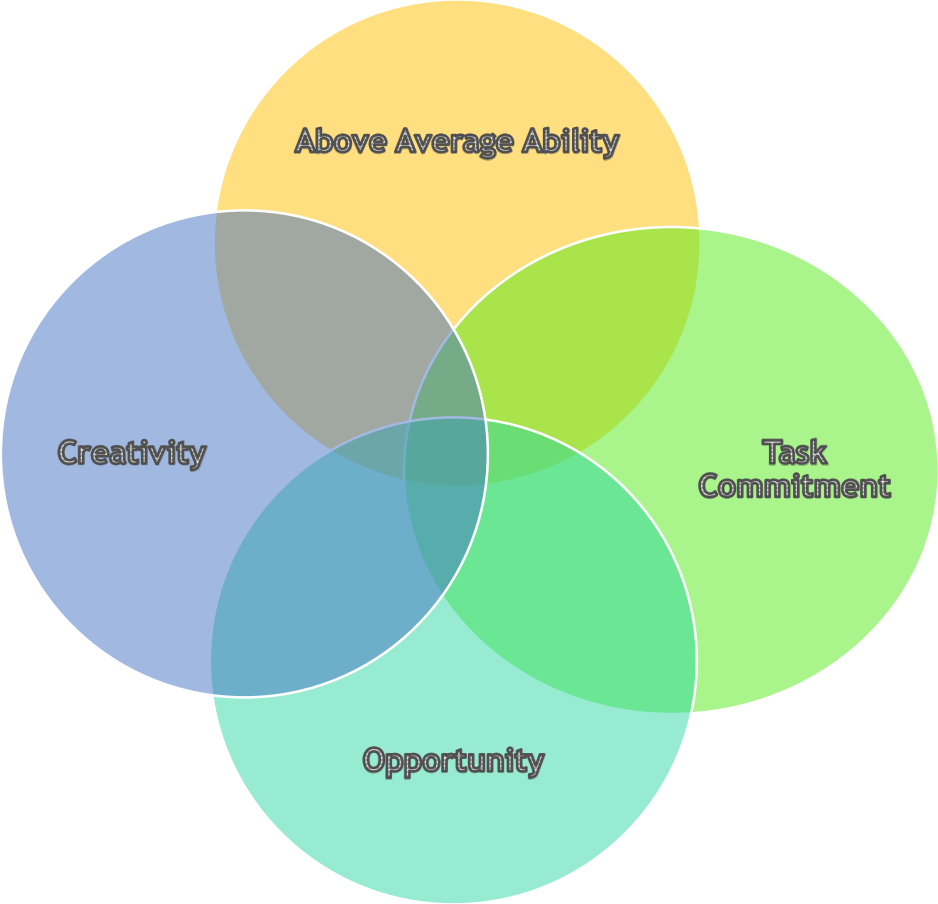
### Research Question 3

2. Lack of opportunity to engage in challenging activity frustrates gifted learners.



3. Opportunity to engage in challenging activity is enhanced when gifted students are provided with adequate space, appropriate equipment, qualified mentors, and ample time.

4. For gifted behavior to occur, students with advanced ability need opportunity to engage in challenging activity in a motivating environment that fosters creativity.



## Implications

- Challenge motivates achievement.
- Task commitment diminishes when challenge is lacking.
- Differentiation in the general education classroom does not provide sufficient challenge to maintain motivation.
- Pullout enrichment programs more effectively meet the needs of gifted students when ample time, space, equipment, and guidance are available to facilitate challenging work.
- Greater emphasis on improving accommodation of gifted students in differentiated classrooms and in pullout enrichment programs would stimulate motivation and achievement.

## Recommendations

- More challenge in the differentiated classroom
  - Better training for classroom teacher
  - Coordination with gifted education specialists
- More effective pullout programs
  - Space
  - Equipment
  - Time
  - Mentoring



The children have spoken. Now it is your  
turn!

What are you as administrators, teachers, or parents doing or wish that you could do to provide gifted students with the opportunity to excel? Students, what do you perceive to be the future of gifted education?

**Encourage all the poppies in your  
classroom, tall or small, to grow and  
thrive!**





Thank you for attending