The Space Between: A Narrative Inquiry into three practitioners' experiences of leading professional learning in gifted education

By

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Contents

Abbreviations used in this thesis

The full term will be written when it is used for the first time in the thesis (not counting the Abstract). Except where the term is included in a heading, sub-heading or quotation, subsequent instances of the term will use the abbreviation.

AAEGT	Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented
ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APST	Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
CHIP	Children with High Intellectual Potential
DMGT	Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagné, 1985, 2018)
GCGE	Graduate Certificate of Gifted Education (Flinders University)
GE	Gifted Education
GTCASA	Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
PL	Professional Learning
SA	South Australia
SHIP	Students with High Intellectual Potential
WCGTC	World Council for Gifted and Talented Children

Acknowledgements

It has been an ongoing challenge for me to make time for my own study and research over the past years, with competing demands from family and full-time work seeming so much more important and deserving of my attention, and my own health suffering under workplace stress. It was not until my health improved, and the necessity to complete my doctorate became an urgent priority, that I was able to focus entirely on writing. I was personally driven to finish this thesis, but also encouraged wholeheartedly by colleagues and family to achieve what I had set out to accomplish.

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry gives voice to the stories of three gifted education specialists who have led professional learning in gifted education for many years. It aims to provide an interpretive analysis of their careers within the South Australian context and provide insights into how they have bridged the gap between gifted education theory and practice. Why there is a contested space between gifted education theory, professional learning, implementation of gifted education and positive outcomes for gifted students provides part of the research puzzle for this study. How these participants have bridged that gap is the other part of the research puzzle. Field texts were gathered through a series of interviews with each participant. Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) is used as a framework to view the participants' personal qualities, career development and motivations and construct an interpretive and comparative analysis of key themes that explain their experience. Participant checking of the interview transcripts, detailed field notes, an extensive literature review and peer checking ensures verisimilitude of the narrative. The results of this research are significant in the telling of the participants' stories, and in the construction of a narrative with an interpretation of the past and a vision for the future of professional learning about gifted education in South Australia. Selected as participants in this study because of their "key informant" positioning (Marshall, 1996), their stories will provide rich information about their work, their background and influences. Their stories are presented as "thinking-tools" (Moen, 2006) to provoke the reader to think about and reflect on their own professional relational interactions and their engagement in professional learning and practices that specifically focus on improved outcomes for gifted and talented students.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis: *The Space Between: A Narrative Inquiry into three practitioners'*
experiences of leading professional learning in gifted education:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for
    a degree or diploma in any university;

2. the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma
    without the permission of Flinders University; and

3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis does not contain any material
    previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made
    in the text.

Signed:

Date: 11.10.2023

Chapter 1: The story begins

Between the idea and the reality
Between the motion and the act
Falls the Shadow…
Between the conception and the creation
Between the emotion and the response
Falls the Shadow…
(T. S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*)

The underachievement and under-serving of gifted students is endemic and well-documented (Bennett-Rappell & Northcote, 2016; Cathcart, 2005; Collins, 2001; Geake & Gross, 2008; Griffin, 2015; Pirozzo, 1982; Rimm, 2003; Steenbergen-Hu, et al., 2020; White, et al., 2018). Underachievement is best understood as the significant discrepancy between a student's measured capabilities and their academic achievement (Reis & McCoach, 2000), that is not explained by any learning disabilities. Recent research estimates that more than 50 percent of all gifted Australian students underachieve in schools (Jackson & Jung, 2022). Rather than situating underachievement as a deficit within the student, Funk-Werblo (2003) suggested that underachievement should be viewed as a deficit within the environment (e.g., schools and teachers). Jackson and Jung (2022, p. 1154) observed that:

> Such an approach to the evaluation of the educational 'health' of schools, or the effectiveness of teachers, may have significant advantages over some of the contemporary approaches that are used (e.g., standardized achievement test results), which may be subject to manipulation (e.g., the exclusive enrolment of high achievers), are likely impacted by socio-economic factors (Smith, 2010), and may systematically ignore the underachievement of gifted students (who may nevertheless achieve highly; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003).

Underachievement therefore can be viewed as a failure of the educational system to make adequate provision for the gifted student, rather than viewing the student as the problem. The solution then depends on change at the system level. If gifted students are to achieve at levels commensurate with their capabilities, it is a matter of social justice that they be provided with an

education that meets their needs. Equitable educational provision requires deliberate action within schools. Educators must know about the characteristics of this group of students, understand how they learn and design appropriate educational opportunities to ensure their learning and wellbeing. The school as a whole must be accountable for optimising *all* students' learning and achievement, *in*clusive, not *ex*clusive, of gifted learners.

To achieve this, teachers' professional learning (PL) about giftedness is essential but is curiously not included as a formal aspect of initial teacher education (ITE) courses in South Australia (SA). This leaves a gap between gifted education (GE) in theory and in practice that requires PL beyond graduation to overcome. Leadership to ensure that PL about GE occurs is imperative. The space between the ideology and the implementation of GE is the place where GE specialists invest their knowledge, skills and creativity into designing and delivering PL about GE. Their leadership can bring about the necessary changes to teachers' attitudes and practices which ultimately can effect positive educational outcomes for academically gifted and talented students in schools and sites over time and across contexts. What happens in this space is not fully explained in the literature. The role of GE specialists can be obscured by a focus on the activities and outcomes of gifted programs rather than on the expertise and leadership of the practitioner designing and implementing those programs and enabling colleagues through leading PL about GE.

This narrative inquiry shines a light on the reflections of three GE specialists whose stories of their experiences, particularly in leading PL about GE, are interpreted in order to better understand the nature of PL interactions and leadership for GE. The main significance of this study lies in discerning insights into effective expertise for GE practitioners who work with teachers of gifted students through an analysis of their stories. This will provide ideas about how

the theory-practice divide might be bridged through their leadership of PL. Ultimately, the

significance of this study will be to challenge ideas about the implementation of GE in schools

and sites where gifted students are underserved. Provocations to think critically about teachers'

practices and school cultures that achieve positive outcomes for gifted students point to the need

for action.

The idea of the "space between" (Buber, 1970) is suggestive of the potential for

creatively seeking and generating knowledge and understanding in a complex relational process.

T. S. Eliot's "hollow men" (in the quote from his poem introducing this chapter) are desolate and

the "shadow" for them suggests a dark and brooding place (Eliot, 1925). However, *the space*

between can also be seen as a place of possibilities, of seeking and finding, of learning and

becoming. In the context of this thesis, the *space between* is where PL about GE takes place

through the interactions between experts and educators. It is the space between theoretical ideas

and the applied teacher practices that address gifted student underachievement and improve

outcomes for gifted and talented students. The theoretical ideas are what we know about PL,

what we know about gifted students and what we know about effective teaching practices and

provisions for gifted students in schools. The applied GE practices are necessarily varied across

different contexts and diverse students, but include higher order thinking and problem-solving,

depth and complexity of content and advanced pace of learning through a differentiated and

sometimes accelerated curriculum (Jarvis, 2018; Robinson, et al., 2007).

Assuming that giftedness is a naturally occurring characteristic across all geographic,

socio-economic and cultural population (VanTassel-Baska, 2007b), there are gifted and talented

students in every school. Although not a precise statistic, the estimate is ten percent of all

students (Gagné, 1986, 2018). In spite of the prevalence of giftedness, not every teacher

understands this trait and how these students learn (Henderson & Jarvis, 2016), and not every

teacher is positive in their attitude towards giftedness (Carman, 2011; Galitis, 2009; Lassig,

2009; McCoach & Siegle, 2007; Plunkett & Kronborg, 2011). The Davidson Institute for Talent

Development in America (Davidson Institute | Programs & Support for the Profoundly Gifted

(davidsongifted.org) was founded in 1999 as a philanthropic gesture by the Davidsons who

explained (2005, p. 2) that they "searched for the population that traditional schools serve least,

the population that is least likely to learn and achieve its potential" and determined that "highly

gifted students are that population. …They are the most likely to underachieve, to suffer the

greatest gap between their potential and what is asked of them." Masters (2015) referred to the

most able learners in Australian schools as the most disadvantaged group of students. He claimed

that little is being done at a systemic level to progress these students' learning, achievement and

well-being. This is particularly problematic in the current educational context with its strong

emphasis on standardised grade-level achievement and prioritising learning for struggling

students, rather than challenging students who are at or above grade-level standards (Peters &

Jolly, 2018).

　　　This highlights the need for all teachers to undertake PL about GE to bridge that space

between what the research tells us should be happening and what is actually taking place (or not)

in schools and sites. When done well, PL about GE can increase educators' understanding about

giftedness, reverse negativity towards giftedness, and enhance their effectiveness as teachers of

the gifted and talented (Dettmer, et al., 2006; Guskey, 2014; Lassig, 2009; Wycoff, et al., 2003).

　　　The shadowy unknown "space between" is worthy of being studied, evaluated and

explored to better understand the transition from theory to practice, from the idea to the reality.

Killion (2017, p. 26) has written about evaluating that PL space to "illuminate the interactions

that occur in the implementation of planned learning experiences and the necessary supports

designed to improve professional practice and its effects on students." She talked about the

difference between "black box evaluation", which does not reveal how a PL program achieves

improved student outcomes, and "glass box evaluation", which clearly demonstrates the links

between specific components and the outcomes (Killion, 2008, pp. 24–25). While this thesis

does not intend to consider all of the components within the PL space—such as curriculum,

resources and student-level factors—an assumption made by the author is that the GE specialist

is the essential driver and facilitator of PL about giftedness and GE in the PL space, and thus a

critical factor in determining change.

This thesis, then, is concerned with a "glass box evaluation" positioned as an in-depth

exploration and analysis of what the dedicated and passionate gifted educator does in that PL

space – the practitioner who is determined to make a difference for gifted and talented students

and works with educators in schools and sites to provide PL about giftedness and GE. It is the

career stories of three long-serving specialists that will be explored in this thesis, and it is their

experiences that will shed light on these interactions. These individuals are the protagonists in

the stories this thesis will investigate, resulting in a narrative that is designed to challenge both

specialists and educators to critically reflect on and reimagine their own PL intentions and

interactions. It is hoped that the findings from this research will be of interest to school leaders,

GE specialists and educators in general, and will provoke thought and discussion about the

processes and leadership of effective PL to change teachers' pedagogy and bring about improved

outcomes for gifted and talented students.

The following sections of this chapter will step through the elements of the narrative to

be elaborated in the subsequent chapters. The context of GE in SA will be outlined and the

research puzzle at the heart of this narrative inquiry will be explained. Firstly, though, it is

necessary to clarify the key terms used throughout the thesis, as different words may hold

different meanings for different people in different contexts, and the language of narrative

inquiry in particular applies quite specific meanings to certain words.

The language of the story: Definition of terms

Research questions vs research puzzle

As a researcher new to narrative inquiry at the outset of this study, when writing and

presenting my research proposal I followed protocol in establishing the *research problem* and

framing *research questions* to guide my doctoral study. Through further immersion in narrative

inquiry, particularly inspired by the methods of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I was led to an

appreciation of the concept of a *research puzzle* at the heart of my narrative research study.

According to Clandinin (2013, p. 42), rather than the researcher objectively posing research

questions that require an answer, the narrative inquirer frames a research *puzzle* with:

> Each narrative inquiry …composed around a particular wonder, and, rather than thinking
> about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer,
> narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle.

The puzzle of what helps to make PL effectively bridge the space between the theory and

practice of GE is central to this narrative study. The outcome of the narrative inquiry then is to

construct a narrative based on the experiences of the participants and their interpreted messages,

to frame a significant multi-faceted story of experience and to identify key life themes that have

inspired their careers. True to the spirit of narrative inquiry as an iterative, organic and relational

research method, the idea of wondering and puzzling throughout the entire process, rather than a

linear progression from problem to question to answer, is better expressed using more holistic

terminology.

Story vs narrative

Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) made a distinction between the terms *story* and *narrative* explaining that "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of experience". In this thesis, the lived *stories* of the participants gathered through interviews and subsequently transcribed and re-storied provide the *story* of their experiences. The *narrative* is the researcher's interpretation of their stories, focusing on the themes and ideas that emerge from the stories, which convey the personal, relational and professional significance of the participants' experiences.

Gifted and talented vs high-ability learners

Although the term *gifted* is commonly attributed to students with high intellectual ability (Subotnik, et al., 2011), it is fraught with controversy, both because there are many different definitions of giftedness, and also because there are conflicting philosophical and political views about gifted students and their education (see Sapon-Shevin, 1994 for criticism of GE and Subotnik, et al., 2011 for discussion of the controversy and justification of the field; or at the local level, refer to Krisjansen & Lapins, 2001 for a criticism and Jewell, 2005 for a response). The term *talented* is sometimes used synonymously with *gifted*. However, Gagné's (1985, 2018) definitions of giftedness as natural ability and talent as high-level performance differentiate between the two words in terms of potential (giftedness) and achievement (talent). The use of terms such as *high-ability learners* and *academically advanced students* may be attempts to describe gifted and talented students without using a label that may be divisive or evoke negativity (Smithers & Robinson, 2012). However, it can be argued that to deny the term *gifted* denies the existence of a legitimate field of research into giftedness that extends back to the early

1900s (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). In particular to when Lewis Terman commenced his seminal

longitudinal study of gifted individuals in 1921, published as the *Genetic Studies of Genius*

(Terman, 1925, 1954; Terman & Oden, 1947, 1959). From the same perspective, it can be

argued that a failure to provide programs for gifted and talented students is to either deny their

existence in our schools, or to deny that they have special educational needs and thus deny them

their equitable entitlement to appropriate educational provisions.

   While there is no federal policy defining the nature of giftedness, in the Australian

context Gagné's definitions of giftedness and talent are most commonly applied (Kronborg,

2018). The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) uses the term

gifted and talented students in the Australian Curriculum's (v.8.3) student diversity advice

(ACARA, n.d.). National standards for teachers defined by the Australian Institute for Teaching

and School Leadership (AITSL) (2011) includes focus area 1.5 which specifies that teachers

must "differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range

of abilities." This implies high ability learners, although it does not specifically name them.

   In the South Australian context, state government GE policies since 1995 refer to

Gagné's definitions of giftedness and talent, which he first proposed in 1985 and updated

periodically. According to Gagné's (2018, p. 57) definitions, there is a difference between the

two terms in the following way:

> *Giftedness* designates the possession and use of outstanding natural abilities, called
> aptitudes, in at least one ability domain to a degree that places an individual at least
> among the top 10% of age peers.
> *Talent* designates the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities, called
> competencies (knowledge and skills), in at least one field of human activity to a degree
> that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers who are or have been
> active in that field.

Gagné's (1985, 2009, 2018) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) proposes

that giftedness may develop into talent through purposeful environmental investments and

intentional personal commitment to the talent development process. His model explains how it is

possible for gifted individuals to underachieve – to start out with high natural ability, but not

have the necessary environmental provisions or motivation to develop their aptitude into talent.

The DMGT dispels the common misconception that gifted students will succeed on their own

without any special educational or motivational intervention.

   In this thesis, the term *gifted* will be used to be consistent with relevant educational

documentation in this context, and because the participants in this study use the same

terminology and conceptualisation in their stories. The term *gifted* in the context of this thesis

refers to all students with high intellectual ability, regardless of their actual level of academic

achievement. Although Gagné's definitions of giftedness and talent refer to all valued domains

of human ability and performance, including physical and practical domains, gifted athletes,

musicians and performing artists are not considered within the scope of high intellectual ability.

These students' practical forms of giftedness are typically well-provided for in terms of specialist

programs, appropriately qualified specialist teachers and extension opportunities both at school

and within the wider community. Generally speaking, students with high intellectual ability are

the ones who are least likely to experience appropriate challenge and rigorous learning

opportunities at school (Griffin, 2015; Masters, 2015; Peters & Jolly, 2018).So this study will

focus in particular on PL that enables teachers to understand and provide for the needs of

intellectually gifted and talented students.

Professional learning vs professional development

The terms *professional learning* and *professional development* are often used

synonymously to denote the in-service studies that qualified, practising teachers undertake in

order to fulfil their professional obligations and to extend their knowledge and skills in diverse

areas relevant to their practice (Mayer & Lloyd, 2011). It may also imply that as a result of

undertaking such programs, teachers become more effective in achieving positive student

outcomes as they develop knowledge and skills relevant to teaching and learning. However,

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009, p. 56) made a clear distinction between the two terms:

> While 'professional development' was seen as a process whereby teachers passively
> absorbed information and ideas determined by 'experts' and transmitted via lectures and
> workshops, 'professional learning' was positioned as a more reflexive, active process in
> which teachers were engaged in collaboration, self-determination of learning goals and
> local knowledge creation.

 Elaborating, then, on Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's distinction between mere participation

and more committed personal engagement, professional development (PD) may be viewed as

something that is done *to* teachers, while professional learning (PL) is more transformative as it

indicates a *personal connection* with the material that results in shifts in attitudes, practices and

understanding (Timperley, 2011).

In this research, the term *professional learning* (PL) is used to refer to all learning

experiences designed for and undertaken by school personnel that aim to enhance educators'

attitudes, knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly as these relate to improving gifted

and talented students and their education. This view of PL is informed by Day and Sach's (2004,

p. 34) definition that incorporated:

> ... all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are
> intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which
> contribute ... to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which,
> alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change

agents to the moral purposes of teaching and by which they acquire and develop
critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional
thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through
each phase of their teaching lives.

Key informant vs leader

Because of their passion, knowledge and skills to make a difference for gifted students,

the research participants have taken on roles of responsibility for facilitating PL about GE for

teachers. They qualify as "key informants" in this inquiry, which is a term that Marshall (1996,

p. 92) defined as "an expert source of information" because of the following characteristics:

- *Role in community*. Their formal role should expose them to the kind of information being sought by the researcher.
- *Knowledge*. In addition to having access to the information desired, the informant should have absorbed the information meaningfully.
- *Willingness*. The informant should be willing to communicate their knowledge to the interviewer and to cooperate as fully as possible.
- *Communicability*. They should be able to communicate their knowledge in a manner that is intelligible to the interviewer.

The participants in this study have extensive *knowledge* about the field, a *willingness* to

communicate this knowledge and are articulate in their *communicability*. Their *formal role*

referred to in Marshall's list of characteristics, is that of facilitator or provider of PL for teachers,

which can be described as a leadership role. However, the notion of leadership is a frequently

researched, complex concept, and it is not the nature or style of the leadership role, nor its social

or cultural significance, that is at the heart of this inquiry.

What the key informants in this study can provide insights into are the "private contexts

of practice" (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p. 226) and the nature of relational and strategic interactions

with teachers in the PL space over time and in the context of GE in SA. Where any terms

relating to leadership are used in this thesis, it is in a descriptive rather than a conceptual context.

The plot: What might be learnt about professional learning for gifted education?

Many researchers, including Hattie (2009), have concluded that teachers make the

difference for students' outcomes. Tiri (2017) confirmed that teachers who are trained in GE

make the difference for gifted students' outcomes. However, in spite of two federal Senate

inquiries into the education of gifted students (Collins, 2001; Senate Select Committee, 1988)

recognising the importance of teacher training in GE and recommending that all ITE courses

include a semester study of GE, none of the general ITE courses in SA include a mandated topic

specifically intended to help teachers understand and provide for gifted students. Walsh and Jolly

(2018, p. 87) concluded that:

> The results of the Senate inquiries demonstrate that when politicians take the time to
> listen to experts in the area, the students themselves and their parents, they are convinced
> of the merits of educating the most academically able students. However, the failure of
> the state education systems to implement the recommendations of the inquiries shows
> that educational dogma triumphs over research.

The gap between the research that supports GE and the PL that equips teachers with the

knowledge and skills to be effective teachers for gifted students seems to be reinforced at the

systems level.

A repeated focus of research in Australia over time has been the examination of teachers'

attitudes to gifted students (Geake & Gross, 2008; Kronborg & Plunkett, 2013; Lassig, 2009;

Plunkett & Kronborg, 2011; Pohl, 1998). The findings of this body of research reveal that

without PL about GE, teachers' attitudes and beliefs are misinformed and often negative.

However, this can change with PL, with teachers' self-reported attitudes towards GE becoming

more positive and their effectiveness as teachers of gifted and talented students increasing when

the PL intervention is done well (Geake & Gross, 2008; Kronborg & Plunkett, 2013). However,

more research is required that involves on-going observation of classroom practice over time to

evaluate and confirm that GE PL produces measurable changes in teachers' enacted beliefs and

practices that result in improved outcomes for gifted students.

Here lies a conundrum at the heart of the research puzzle: teachers need PL about GE in

order to understand, value and effectively educate gifted and talented students, but they graduate

as teachers without any professional knowledge, skills or understanding of gifted students and

how they learn. While ITE courses in SA convey to pre-service teachers the importance of

inclusive philosophy and practice, the lack of GE in ITE degrees effectively *excludes* gifted

students from pre-service teachers' understanding of student diversity. Knowing students and

how they learn is foundational to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)

(AITSL, 2011) and gifted and talented students have specific characteristics and needs that

teachers have a responsibility to know (Henderson & Jarvis, 2016). The student diversity advice

in the Australian Curriculum (v8.3) (ACARA, n.d.) states that teachers have an "obligation" to

make appropriate provisions for diverse students, including gifted and talented students.

However, unless teachers come to the realisation themselves that they need to undertake PL

about GE, they are not necessarily going to seek out this option. Dixon (2006, p. 562) stated that

"if secondary teachers are offered the choice of which courses to undertake from a smorgasbord

of professional development choices, most of them go directly to their content domain." This

suggests that teachers prioritise PL options that focus on building their knowledge of teaching

area content rather than on building their understanding of diverse learners. If teachers are

uninformed, misinformed about, or negative towards giftedness and GE, they are not likely to

prioritise PL in this area. How is it that the academic outcomes of approximately ten percent of

students (according to Gagné's DMGT that is applied in SA) are jeopardised because teachers

are not equipped with GE knowledge and skills? And how does PL about gifted students and

their education come to be seen as a moral imperative and a justifiable obligation for teacher

PL,w and a priority in schools and sites?

The 'plot' of this narrative inquiry seeks to convey and analyse how the selected sample

of effective GE practitioners became so passionate about the education of gifted students. It

explores the ways in which they have worked to advocate for gifted students and change teachers'

practices and school cultures to bring about more positive outcomes for gifted and talented

students.

Translating the research into teaching approaches that lead to improved outcomes for

gifted students requires purposeful intent. Leadership for PL about GE can be seen as an

important bridge between the research and teachers' practice. This bridge may lead to more

effective teaching and learning for gifted students, resulting in more positive outcomes for these

students of diversity. Some studies have highlighted the importance of leadership for PL (e.g.,

Hurford, 2013). However, there is no research that has focused specifically on this area of

leadership for PL about GE in SA, although Jarvis and Henderson's (2012) survey of provisions

for high-ability learners in South Australian schools revealed some details of the leadership role

and the low uptake of professional development about GE amongst teachers in those schools.

Henderson and Jarvis (2016) outlined the elaborations of the APST (AITSL, 2011) for gifted

students, which could inform a PL program, but there is scant research that evaluates the

effectiveness of PL programs for GE in Australia. The literature review in Chapter two will

evaluate and synthesise the separate (but related) bodies of research about PL, GE and gifted

students to examine what is currently known about PL and GE and the role of the GE specialist

in order to provide important contextual background to this study.

The style: Narrative inquiry as a means of conveying a significant story

Riley and Hawe (2005, p. 227) suggested that "narrative methods may give new and deeper insights into the complexity of practice contexts". With the range of responsibilities, school and sector situations and individual experiences, the role of the GE specialist is complex. Applying narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study sheds light on the complexity of the work of GE practitioners who have facilitated transformative change within teachers and schools. In the analysis and interpretation of their stories, a narrative of their experiences situated within a specific place and historical context emerges.

This study provides an original contribution to knowledge and aims to provoke critical and constructive thinking and discussion about the provision of PL about GE. This thesis will be of importance to GE specialists, teachers, principals and school leadership personnel who pursue the goals of excellence and equity for *all* students through high quality teaching and learning. Chapter three of this thesis will explore in greater depth narrative inquiry as a research methodology and how it has been applied in this study.

The characters: The protagonists of the stories and the focus of the narrative

This qualitative research gathers the stories of three practitioners who have provided PL about GE and have been instrumental in the development of the field in SA. As their stories will reveal, each participant has held a number of different educational roles throughout their careers and has undertaken a number of different responsibilities. These have included classroom teacher roles, special needs coordination, GE coordination, curriculum specialist roles and higher education provision. Jarvis and Henderson's (2012) research identified a number of different titles given to educators with GE responsibilities in South Australian schools, including *key teacher*, *special education coordinator* and *learning support coordinator*. The participants in this

research will generally be referred to throughout the thesis as GE *specialists* or GE *practitioners* whose extensive experience in the field positions them to provide information relating to what they have learned during their careers about leading PL in GE.

The characters' motivations, values, beliefs and backgrounds are also revealed in their stories, as these factors strongly influence what they have brought to their professional lives that has enabled them to adapt and succeed in their careers. Their effectiveness as teachers and educators of teachers is something this research seeks to explore and understand. Measures of teacher effectiveness abound (including standardised assessments and subjective perceptions) (Churchward & Willis, 2019). Effective practices and curriculum adjustments for teaching gifted students are the subject of many books and resources published over decades but are not necessarily widely applied in SA classrooms (Jarvis & Henderson, 2015). Leading PL for teachers requires knowledge and skills relating to adult education and appreciation of context and diversity. So the role of the GE specialist requires a complex repertoire of knowledge, skills and understandings to be effective. The concept of effectiveness in the context of this study relates to the participants' ability to make positive impacts on learning growth and change within their field of influence. It is not within the remit of this research to measure their effectiveness statistically, but to enable them to relate their career stories to reveal their own understanding of how and why they have been effective. Also, to consider why they may not have been effective in some instances and how they manage failure as well as success.

These participants are known to the researcher, who is aware of their professional reputation of effectiveness, their career contribution to the field and the general esteem with which they are regarded by their colleagues and the GE community. The researcher, working in relationship with the participants, also becomes a character in the stories, as "narrative inquirers

cannot subtract themselves from the inquiry relationship" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 41). All involved

in the research will be impacted by the stories and the process of critical reflection and analysis

of the lived experiences. Chapter four will include the stories of the participants and the

researcher and will be written in the first person to convey authentic voice in the telling of their

stories.

The message: The significance of the story

Bear, et al. (2001, p. 45) cited the neurophysicist and Nobel Prize winner (1963), Sir John

Eccles, who said that "you can generate enormous amounts of data and never have an impact on

the field. The trick is to develop a story." While the life stories considered in this thesis are not

intended to be generalisable, stories from experienced individuals can serve an instructive

function (Delisle, 2006; Dewey, 1916; Moen, 2006; Riley & Hawe, 2005). In telling the story of

the past and imagining a vision for the future, it will be left to the reader to take from this

research any insights that they deem relevant or applicable to themselves. There are important

lessons to be learned from these key informants, but it is up to the reader to find the lessons that

they can apply to their own context. According to Coleman, et al. (2007, p. 54–55) "qualitative

research …involves entering the data with the intent to extract the meaning of participants from

their perspectives in that local context" that then narrates a "well-told story" to provide others

with resolutions from which arise original and potentially instructive truths. It is within the

power of a credible and trustworthy narrative to be thought-provoking and thus significant.

Narratives used as a means for the reader to examine their own practice "are understood

as cultural scaffolds or thinking tools that can be used to develop the profession and the field of

practice" (Moen, 2006, p. 9). If the narrative can connect with readers and have an impact, it can

be said that there has been a transfer of ideas. Transferability can be regarded as one criteria of

quality in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

While these stories will be located in the South Australian context, there may be parallels

to other contexts drawn by a wider audience, since the education of highly-able students has been

raised as a systemic educational issue in other states (Southwick, 2012; Watters & Deizmann,

2008) and other countries, such as the United States (Assouline, Colangelo & VanTassel-Baska,

2015), New Zealand (Riley & Bicknell, 2013) and the United Kingdom (Bailey et al., 2012).

Besides which, a good story is always valuable, as Delisle (2006, p. viii) highlighted in saying

that:

> Stories of people; sagas of lives; situations of humor, heart and depth; these are what
> make the field of gifted child education – or any field, for that matter – memorable and
> important for future generations to read about and understand.

Chapter four will present a re-telling of the stories of real people's experiences and

reflections on their experiences as they relate to and influence their leadership of PL about GE.

The themes: Justifications emerging from the research puzzle

In the design of a narrative inquiry, Clandinin (2013, p. 43) claimed that the researcher is

positioned within the experience of the participants, "in the midst of experience", experiencing

with them their remembered lives, trying to understand and interpret the experiences and their

personal, social and practical implications.

This narrative inquiry began with the researcher *wondering* about what the effective GE

practitioner has done and might do in the PL space to bridge the theory and practice divide. In

addition, the researcher has *wondered* what might be done to change teachers' attitudes and

practices that positively impact on gifted and talented students' outcomes. Pieces of the research

puzzle that the researcher found to be of particular interest relate to how the key informants

shaped and have been shaped by their experiences; what their stories reveal about significant factors in the provision of PL about GE; and how their experiences might inform and contribute to the development of PL in GE in SA into the future. Clandinin (2013, p. 43) explained that:

> When our lives come together in an inquiry relationship, … their lives and ours are also shaped by attending to past, present and future unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic and familial narratives.

In considering the research puzzle at the heart of this research, it is important that the researcher remains open to the complexity of experience, but also mindful of the responsibility to faithfully present the participants' stories with clarity and to provide visibility and coherence in the narrative. While Chapter four of this thesis will tell the participants' stories, Chapter five will discuss the emergent themes and implications of the stories.

The setting: Gifted Education in South Australia

The context of a story – the place and time within which it is set – is important. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 50) explained that:

> Any particular (narrative) inquiry is defined by a three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places.

Ricoeur (1980, p. 170) referred to the temporal dimension as "the 'threefold present' in which the past and the future co-exist with the present in the mind of the narrator, through memory in the first case and expectation in the second." This links to Rothberg's (2009) hermeneutic model of multidirectional memory, linking past, present and future through an interpretation of experience that sets an expectation of what is possible in the future. Unless we have a clear understanding of the way forward, and how to bring about positive outcomes for gifted and talented students, we are at risk of reinventing the same conditions that created the mistakes of

the past and relegating our most able students to Healey's (1986, p. 264) "exile in an educational ghetto".

The story of GE in Australia has seen an ebb and flow of support – of times where political support saw funding flow and programs flourish and other times where funding for programs and leadership positions dried up (Braggett, 1993; Gross, 1999; McCann, 2005; Plunkett & Kronborg, 2007; Walsh & Jolly, 2018; Wilson, 1996). The story of GE in SA, which has parallels with, but also differences to the other states of Australia, will be glimpsed through the experiences of the participants in this research study as it is the setting for their stories and provides important contextual background to their experiences. However, the focus of this thesis is not to provide a detailed account of the history of GE in SA.

SA was the first of the Australian states to form a professional gifted association. The Gifted and Talented Children's Association of SA (GTCASA) was founded in 1975 by a committed group of educators who continued to be highly influential within the state for a number of years. The first GE policy introduced by the state government's education department in 1988. This was the same year that the first Australian Senate Inquiry into the education of gifted children was held. The 1988 SA policy implied that all children are gifted, much to the frustration of the GTCASA committee and GE proponents. However, with their political lobbying and advocacy, the Students with High Intellectual Potential (SHIP) program was established in 1993, and a new government policy was launched in 1995 (DECS, 1995). A guide to policy implementation (DECS, 1996) was written, printed and distributed to every government school in SA, followed in 1997 by a publication addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students (DECS, 1997). The DECS (1996, p. 2) definition of giftedness stated that:

> A gifted child or student will possess, to an outstanding degree, demonstrated ability or
> potential in one or more of the following areas:

- General intelligence
- Specific academic areas
- Visual and performing arts
- Psychomotor ability
- Leadership
- Creative thinking
- Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Appropriate intervention by the family, community, schools and children's services can help a gifted child or student to reach their full potential.

Although this definition used the term *gifted*, the policy specified that "the term 'gifted' is used to refer to individuals with high potential. The term 'gifted and talented' is also commonly used" (DECS, 1995, p.2). The idea of giftedness as potential that could only be developed into talent through "appropriate intervention" demonstrated the belief expressed in this policy in the developmental nature of giftedness, consistent with Gagné's (1985) definition. The list of areas, or types of giftedness, was influenced both by Gardner's (1983) concept of multiple intelligences (popular at the time), and the Marland Report (1972, p. 10) definition, with the first six dot points taken directly from the Marland Report and the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills including two of Gardner's multiple intelligences. One of the ten intended outcomes of this policy was that "gifted individuals' learning outcomes improve when teachers and other personnel have appropriate training in gifted education" (Outcome 8, DECS, 1995, p. 6).

The state government-funded SHIP program operated in seven primary schools, each with a SHIP Director working with a local cluster of schools, from 1993 until 1997. This initiative also provided PL opportunities and guidance to teachers in those schools. 1995 saw the establishment of postgraduate courses in GE at Flinders University, with the SHIP Directors gaining certification through both university studies and PL programs conducted by the university lecturer at the SHIP schools. The government funding to primary schools stopped in 1997 and was then shifted to the establishment of a SHIP program in three metropolitan

secondary schools, starting in 1998, with each school still continuing (at the time of writing) to offer selective classes and programs for gifted and talented students who apply and are selected to attend. The name of the SHIP program was changed to the Ignite Program in 2018.

There are a number of government schools in SA which offer specialist studies in a range of learning areas and a variety of sports, including Languages, Music, Science, Mathematics, and STEM (Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology integrated). Although these are not gifted and talented programs, they provide opportunities for students who have strengths in these areas to progress their subject-specific knowledge and skills and develop their talent in these prioritised areas of learning. State government policies are, by definition, mandated, but they are not supported by any legislation to compel schools to provide differentiated educational programs for gifted students.

SA has a strong non-government school sector, with about 35 percent of students attending either Catholic or independent fee-paying schools, which vary greatly in size and resources (ABS, 2018). The independent schools are each autonomous, and may or may not have a GE coordinator, policy or program. One independent school for gifted students was established in metropolitan Adelaide in 2017 by a group of educators and parents who were discouraged by the lack of provision for gifted students. This school has experienced tremendous growth to meet the demand for GE and also coordinates a PL program. The Catholic Education Office dictates policy to its schools, but no GE policy is found on their website, although a number of Catholic schools offer GE programs and employ a GE coordinator. In total, SA has approximately 240,000 students attending 785 schools (DECD, 2018). Applying Gagné's ten percent estimation, it can be claimed that there are about 24,000 gifted students in South Australian schools. Most of these students are educated in regular classrooms and may or may not be taught by teachers who

have GE knowledge and skills. This is consistent with Walsh and Jolly's (2018) claim that most

gifted students spend most, if not all of their time in mainstream classrooms, so in this respect,

the situation in SA is relevant to all states in Australia, and perhaps to other nations as well.

Although most teachers in SA have had little or no in-service PL about gifted and

talented students and appropriate educational provisions for them (Jarvis & Henderson, 2012),

the picture is not completely bleak. There *are* teachers who have postgraduate qualifications in

GE, teachers who are passionate about GE and have sought out PL in this area, and there are

some schools that have committed to improving outcomes for gifted or highly able students

(Henderson, et al., 2021). From time to time over the past 40 years, the three educational sectors

have provided a series of GE PL opportunities, but these have very much depended on funding

allocation and available expertise.

Specific research is needed to determine whether the development of GE in SA has

incrementally built in strength over time, or suffered the ebbs and flows that the literature

relating to the Australian history of GE describes (Walsh & Jolly, 2018). Part of the story of the

GE movement in SA can be traced through the experiences of the practitioners in this inquiry,

who have each contributed in their own ways to its development. Chapter five will include a

section that elaborates on participants' insights into and vision for future developments for GE in

SA, informed by their experience and reflection.

Chapter 1 Summary

This introductory chapter has located this research study within the field of PL about GE,

highlighting the need for gifted students to receive an equitable education through improved

teacher practices. The research puzzle at the heart of this study questions what can be done to

bridge the gap between the theory and practice of GE. Chapter one has also outlined the

language of the thesis, the elements of the narrative and the context of the research study. It has provided a brief description of how each chapter of this thesis contributes to the story of this narrative inquiry.

This thesis uses a life-story approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2013) with key informants (Marshall, 1996) and a thematic analysis, set in SA. The aim of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to make visible the long-serving practitioners' experiences and perspectives relating to GE and PL about GE in SA over the past forty years. In making their ideas visible, other practitioners may question and consider what might happen in this *space between* into the future – personally, professionally and relationally. The aim is also to tell an interesting and informative story through an interpretive analysis of the participants' own stories, which may provoke other educators to critically reflect on how these ideas might relate to their own contexts and which will make an original contribution to the literature.

Chapter two provides a literature review, Chapter three explains the methodology, Chapter four contains the stories of the participants and the researcher, while Chapter five discusses the analysis and interpretation of the stories and the development of the narrative. Chapter two follows with an examination of the existing literature relating to PL about GE and the role of the GE specialist in schools and sites that can help to close the gap between GE theory and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions,
binding together people who never knew each other,
citizens of distant epochs.
Books break the shackles of time.
A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic.
Carl Sagan (1980) *Cosmos, Part 11: The Persistence of Memory*

This qualitative narrative inquiry will draw from literature across several fields as

relevant to the interpretation of the participants' stories, including the fields of GE and PL for

educators. Unlike in a quantitative study, where the literature is discussed extensively at the

beginning of a study, in qualitative studies, "authors do not discuss the literature extensively at

the beginning of a study. This allows the views of the participants to emerge without being

constrained by the views of others from the literature" (Creswell, 2008, pp. 89–90). The

literature review presented in this chapter will provide some important context for understanding

the participants' stories. The literature review will outline what is already known theoretically

about PL and the leadership of PL, particularly in the area of GE.

Framework for Professional Learning in Australia

To be clear, the prime intention of PL for educators is to improve teaching and raise

achievement outcomes for students. Killion, Director of Special Projects for the National Staff

Development Council (in Killion & Ottem, 2002) stated that:

> [T]he ultimate goal of any educational professional development is to improve student
> achievement, which can be accomplished in three ways: (1) increasing teacher content
> knowledge, (2) changing teachers' attitudes about their content areas, and (3)
> expanding the teacher's repertoire of instructional practices.

It would seem, from the research in GE, that changing teachers' attitudes about students and how

they learn is also an important goal (Kronborg & Plunkett, 2013). Changing teachers' attitudes

about their learners may occur prior to changing their practices, or as a result of implementing

changes and critically reflecting on improved student outcomes. Guskey (2002, p. 382) wrote

that, "If the primary purpose of professional development is to improve learning outcomes of

students, then the first goal of any professional development model should be to change the way

each teacher actually teaches." Hirsch (2005, p. 38) framed the importance of PL as "closing the

achievement gap" for all students, given that teachers have been shown to have the greatest

influence on student outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Haycock, 1998).

In the Australian context, the causal link between teacher PL and enhanced student

outcomes is described by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL,

2014) in a systemic and inter-related view:

> As a result of considering context at the national, state, territory and local levels, teachers
> and school leaders can engage in learning that will result in changes in teacher knowledge,
> practice and engagement and an improved learning culture that will result in successful
> learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.

ITE courses in Australia are accredited by local Teacher Registration Boards on the evidence that

the graduate level knowledge and skills relating to each of the 35 focus areas contained within

the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) (AITSL, 2011) are taught, practised

and assessed prior to graduation. The APST framework provides a developmental continuum

from graduate to lead teacher levels. The cumulative learning outcomes can guide the design and

delivery of continuing PL programs for teachers throughout their careers. Teacher PL, then, is

identified in the APST (AITSL, 2011) as essential in ensuring that teachers continue to learn and

develop beyond their ITE qualification.

APST Standard 1 requires that teachers "know students and how they learn", and the six

focus areas within this Standard emphasise the fact that students are diverse. Elaborations for

learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students were developed and

published by AITSL (2015) in conjunction with the Australian Council of Teachers of English as

a Second or Other Language (TESOL) Associations. These elaborations acknowledge that

EAL/D learners experience additional challenges to their learning which demand that their

teachers develop specific knowledge and skills relating to EAL/D students. In the same way,

Henderson and Jarvis (2016) proposed that a set of elaborations of the APST for gifted and

talented learners should be published. This would enable teachers to be better informed about

how to "differentiate teaching to meet the specific needs of students across the full range of

abilities" (APST focus area 1.5, AITSL, 2011) including students with high abilities well in

advance of their same-age peers. Their recommendations have not been addressed to date.

Considering the learner at the heart of the teaching-learning process is essential. It is

essential for the teacher to know their students. It is just as critical for educators who design and

implement PL to consider the teachers as learners and to tailor the PL to their specific needs and

context. Focusing on the teachers as the learners for whom the PL is intended requires

knowledge of their attitudes, beliefs, prior knowledge, interests and PL goals. While a strong

framework of professional standards provides direction and encourages quality in the *content* of

teacher PL, a focus purely on the standards might blind educators to the importance of *learners*,

their *contexts* and *relationships* in the design and delivery of PL.

Need for PL to understand gifted students and how they learn

Gifted students are not a homogenous group. They differ in their area or areas of ability

and in their levels of giftedness. They also differ in terms of their social and emotional sensitivity

and adjustment, in addition to a wide range of differences such as personality, culture, socio-

economic status, interests and motivation. Consequently, there is no single form of identification

nor a single form of provision that will be appropriate for every gifted student in every context.

However, there are some general principles that teachers might apply. Intellectually gifted

students require challenging curriculum that may be more advanced than the standard age level

curriculum, provide greater depth and complexity or be learnt within a shorter period of time

than what their same-age peers would be capable of undertaking. It is critical, then, that teachers

are adept at both assessing each student's current knowledge and skills in order to establish their

entry point into the continuum of learning (Vygotsky, 1979) and at designing learning tasks that

are differentiated according to each student's current understanding. With a classroom full of

diverse learners, potentially with six year levels of difference within the one class (Masters,

2015) curriculum differentiation is an essential aspect of teachers' pedagogy. According to

Frankling et al. (2017, p. 72–73):

> Differentiation … can be understood as a holistic, principle-based approach to teaching
> and learning in heterogeneous settings through which teachers proactively plan for
> student differences in current knowledge and skill, content-related interests, and
> preferences for engaging with the curriculum. … It is well-documented that many
> teachers struggle to effectively embrace and implement the practicalities of a
> differentiated approach in their work contexts.

Successful differentiation depends on having high quality curriculum to begin with, in addition

to a variety of thinking and processing strategies, as a starting point. As Frankling, et al. (2017, p.

82) stated, "differentiation does not 'fix' a poor curriculum, or poorly designed learning tasks."

A framework of ten global principles for PL in GE was developed by the World Council

for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC) (2021, p. 2) "intended to help remedy this pervasive

gap in educator preparation by guiding policy and practice in PL about gifted education". These

include practical aspects of content (e.g., that the PL is evidence-informed and comprehensive)

and delivery (e.g., that the PL is differentiated to meet diverse educators' needs) as well as being

aspirational (e.g., that PL is sustainable and empowering). The *gap* has been frequently reported

and researched in the American context (e.g., Colangelo et al., 2004; Farkas & Duffett, 2008).

Brigandi, et al. (2019, p. 283) stated that:

These deficiencies in preservice and in-service training create a gap between what teachers know and what teachers need to know when working with students who have advanced capabilities. This knowledge gap is a problem, as teachers are an essential factor to creating learning environments where students with high academic ability encounter challenge, complexity, and choice.

This study is situated in the current Australian educational climate where concerns are also being raised about high-ability and gifted students being under-served and under-performing at school (Curtis, 2018; Griffin, 2015; Jackson & Jung, 2022; Jolly, 2015; Masters, 2015; Rowley, 2012). Because gifted and talented students' outcomes are regarded as determined largely by teachers (Croft, 2003; Hattie, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 2005), and teachers in SA receive no mandated courses on GE in their ITE degree, it is not surprising that concerns about gifted students' education are being raised. Without mandated GE courses or even clarity about gifted students and how they learn, teachers are not likely to have any knowledge of GE methodology, nor the skills to challenge and support high-ability learners. An international study investigating the relationship between Australian and German pre-service teachers' beliefs about gifted students and their motivation to teach gifted students (Margolis et al., 2018. p. 1) found that "pre-service teachers from both countries associated maladjustment with giftedness and showed lower self-efficacy for teaching the gifted." Negative attitudes towards giftedness and gifted programs are well documented in the literature, although not within the scope of this study to elaborate. In addition, misconceptions persist that these students will succeed on their own (Plunkett & Kronborg, 2012; Subotnik et al., 2011), further exacerbating the perception that teachers do not need to make any special effort on their behalf (Gallagher, 2003; Lassig, 2009; Margolis et al., 2018; Moon, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 1997).

An assumption that one might reasonably make is that all teachers graduate with expertise about teaching and learning processes in general and theories and practices that are

inclusive of all diverse learners, such as curriculum differentiation. Based on this assumption,

in-service PL about GE should be able to build on this foundation to challenge and extend

teachers' knowledge and skills relating to *gifted* learners. However, one of the findings of

Henderson, et al.'s (2021) research was that not all teachers who participated in their GE PL

program were knowledgeable nor confident about either the science of learning (as explained by,

e.g., the Australian Research Council website) nor about curriculum differentiation, nor about

gifted learners. They therefore required more individualised coaching, in some cases at quite a

basic level.

Trying to address the complexities of diverse student needs in large classes without

adequate skills or supports for teachers (such as mentoring and PL) can make teachers feel

inadequate and want to leave the profession (Windle, et al., 2022). Indeed, questions must be

raised about teachers' levels of expertise and confidence in teaching diverse students and

managing complex behaviours in the classroom when looking at the literature examining the

high attrition rate of teachers in Australia. Research (such as Cobb, 2022 in New Zealand) is

essential to understand why some teachers are able to manage career pressures and thrive as

teachers (again, not within the scope of this current study to examine). There are implications

here for ITE course design, but of particular relevance to this study is the clear need for high-

quality PL targeting these areas and on-going in-service supports for teachers.

Gifted and talented students are to be found in all geographical, social and economic

populations (Collins, 2001; Reis & Renzulli, 2023), and comprise approximately ten percent of

the population (Gagné, 2018). Therefore, all teachers in mainstream settings are teachers of the

gifted and talented. However, this is not often recognised by teachers. Dettmer, et al. (2006, p.

617) observed that "highly able students will find themselves in general classrooms for most of

their school day whether their teachers are ready for them or not." Numerous studies have

asserted that PL about GE is essential if teachers are to be effective in understanding and meeting

the needs of high ability (gifted and talented) students (Collins, 2001; Croft, 2003; Rowley,

2002; VanTassel-Baska, 2005). While 60 hours of PL over three years is necessary for teachers

in SA to remain registered by the Teachers' Registration Board (TRB), there are no consistent

directives as to the content, conduct or quality of PL. Schools may impose a PL agenda on

teachers, or teachers may pursue their own interests and document their learning.

Since 1995, PL in GE has been available for teachers in SA through Flinders University

in the form of both postgraduate degree courses and also through PL sessions delivered by

university academics. (Online courses are also available at interstate universities.) However,

postgraduate GE courses are under threat of being discontinued because of low enrolments and

as GE academics resign or retire from universities, there is no guarantee that they will be

replaced. Beveridge, et al. (2018, p. 25) observed that:

> When there is 'good fit' between academic partners and schools and when structures are
> in place to support academic partners in their work, the academic partner role in schools
> can contribute to sustained educational change.

While the concept of universities partnering with industry is often supported in principle, the

relationship potential needs to be actively developed and promoted. For sustainability purposes,

the partnerships need to be formalised at the institutional rather than at the individual levels. That

way, when staff leave, the partnership remains in place. Further research is required to

determine how GE might be more valued within both the university and the industry. The

academic partner role could be strengthened and formalised as a way to provide high-quality

schoolwide PL programs and tailored interventions in GE to support teachers in changing

practices over time. Partnering with university academics to provide PL programs can also

provide a pathway for teachers into postgraduate qualifications, which increases the viability of retaining university courses in GE.

There is evidence that few teachers in South Australian schools have undertaken PL about GE. Jarvis and Henderson (2012) found that only two schools who responded to their survey had a majority of their teachers who had participated in some form of PL about GE. 80 percent of schools had less than a third of their staff with any background in GE at all. Of particular concern was the finding that "many responses suggested that no professional development in this area has been offered by the school, or that workshops tend to be 'ad hoc' rather than part of any systematic plan integrated with other school priorities" (Jarvis & Henderson, 2012, p. 14). Although only 71 schools in SA responded to the survey, and it is not possible to generalise the findings to all schools in SA, the snapshot gained from the small percentage of schools who *did* respond was bleak.

Another point of interest to note from the literature is that GE PL may give teachers theoretical knowledge and skills related to gifted students and appropriate educational provisions, but it may not actually change their practice (and therefore result in improved outcomes for gifted students). PL must also address and alter teachers' underlying beliefs about gifted children and the value of GE. For example, Peters and Jolly (2018, p. 473) found their hypothesis "that higher levels of professional development would result in higher levels of self-reported teacher practices, was not supported by the data." Even though their research focused on one case study in depth, Brigandi, et al. (2019) found that undertaking approximately twenty hours of GE PL over a six-month period did little to change the teacher's classroom practice. One reason for this could be that the PL programs did not address change management, nor did they

fundamentally challenge the teachers' beliefs about gifted learners and the value and importance of GE as it relates to their own personal teaching philosophy and approach.

Leadership for PL about GE in schools

Limited research has been published about the role of leading PL about GE in schools. Henderson and Riley (2018) noted that gifted programs require a champion to drive the program, and advocated that schools and sites appoint a GE specialist as a leader. Henderson and Jarvis (2021) explored the role of the GE specialist and identified that leading PL about GE was an integral part of this role. Changing teachers' beliefs and practices requires organisational leadership for change management. Pedder (2006, p. 171) found that "organizational conditions, understood in terms of school management practices and systems, appear to influence what happens in classrooms through the mediation of teachers' learning." Jenkins' (2008) study compared leadership for GE by principals in the United States with principals in New South Wales, but his findings were vague, and his report lacked depth, even though it was an acknowledgement of the importance of leadership for GE.

Several studies in the United States have investigated the role of the school principal in relation to the education of gifted and talented students. For example, Weber, et al. (2003) investigated the desirable characteristics, skills and competencies for school principals to be effective in supporting GE. McDonald's (2014) doctoral thesis investigated the principal's role as stakeholder or gatekeeper, facilitating or restricting educational opportunities for gifted students in Ohio. McDonald found that the principals identified their need for more high-quality PL opportunities about GE. In Australia, Long, Barnett and Rogers (2015) investigated the role of the school principal in implementing the Department for Education and Training (DET)

(2004) policy for gifted and talented students in New South Wales. Long et al.'s (2015, p. 122)

findings suggested that:

> Principals directly influence the scope of gifted programs in their schools and indirectly influence the quality of gifted programs through their relationship with teachers. In addition, teachers directly influence the quality of gifted programs through their knowledge, attitudes, context and self-efficacy beliefs.

Lewis, et al. (2007) interviewed principals known to be supportive of GE in Scotland,

who raised particular issues for managing education for gifted students in remote and rural

contexts. The Scottish Network for Able Pupils (SNAP) has undertaken research through the

University of Glasgow examining school leadership for gifted pupils, to whom they refer as

highly able pupils. They noted that "there is still a lack of understanding as to how schools

manage learning for highly able pupils" (Bailey, et al., 2012, p. 1). Consistent with this is a lack

of understanding about how schools manage teachers' PL about teaching highly able pupils.

Stack, et al. (2014) conducted a cross-cultural study of head teachers in the United States,

Scotland and Ireland. They found that a combined picture across these countries highlighted the

important role that principals played in all settings as models of good practice and supporting

teachers to engage in PL aimed at improving gifted students' achievement.

In South Africa, Oswald and de Villiers (2013, p. 7) interviewed principals and classroom

teachers in public primary schools as "important proximal influences within the outer

environment of gifted learners." Their findings indicated (2012, p. 1) that the leadership

responsibility went beyond the teacher and principal to the broader education system, stating

that:

> Gifted learners were most often those who were not receiving appropriate education and support and data suggested that a particular drive for the inclusion of gifted learners was absent in the agenda of education authorities.

At the national level in Australia, there have been two Senate inquiries into the education

of gifted students (Collins 2001; Senate Select Committee, 1988), although little change was

noted during the intervening period and there has been no Federal inquiry in the decades since.

There is no national GE Policy, and no legislation to protect the rights of high-ability children to

an education equitable to their needs. Persson (2017) referred to the problem of *systems inertia*,

where it is difficult to achieve change in education. Given that there have been two federal senate

inquiries into the education of the gifted in Australia, whose recommendations remain largely

unimplemented, is it because education as a system in inherently lacking the ability to move

forward, or because GE is being held back through a lack of belief in its importance? To what

extent can the leadership for change provided by an individual effect long-term, sustainable

change if the system remains locked in inertia?

The Role of GE Coordinators in the delivery of PL in GE

At the local level, school principals may or may not prioritise GE within their PL agenda.

While the principal's role in allocating priority, resources and personnel to PL about giftedness is

essential, it is rarely the principal who delivers the PL program about GE. The role that is the

focus of this study is that of the person who in fact engages with the staff in PL about GE; "an

individual combining both power and knowledge" (Brighton, et al., 2005 p. 348) but who does

not have the diverse portfolio of responsibilities within the school that the principal carries.

While every school has a principal or leadership team, few schools employ a GE

coordinator. Henderson and Riley (2018) stressed the importance of the role of the GE

coordinator in both the Australian and New Zealand contexts. In SA, Jarvis and Henderson

(2012) found that less than five percent of schools surveyed employed a teacher with GE

coordination as part of their role. Very little research into the role of the GE coordinator has been

undertaken. However, Henderson and Jarvis (2021) reported on their exploratory study which found that the GE coordinator role varies between schools and typically involves no formal role description. GE coordinators (or whatever their job title was assigned in different school contexts) seemed to be held responsible for everything relating to giftedness. This included gifted student identification, counseling, within-class extension, out-of-class gifted programs, teacher PL, policy development, parent interviews and education, budgeting and reporting, amongst other responsibilities. Given that an average time allocation for completing these tasks was one half-day per week, the expectations relating to this role are unrealistic and often challenging. Henderson and Jarvis (2021, p. 1235) found that:

> GE Coordinators typically reported being very motivated and passionate, derived much satisfaction from their perceived impact and engagement with students, felt that their role was insufficiently valued, received inadequate administrative support and felt frustrated by resistance from other teachers.

Arguably the most critical responsibility of the GE Coordinator in effecting whole-school change is to arrange/design and, in many cases, to deliver PL about GE. In addition, their role requires them to sustain this PL over time with modelling and mentoring support so that teachers implement GE provisions consistently in their classrooms. However, Henderson and Jarvis's (2021, p. 1234) study found that "dealing with teachers featured strongly in lists of the most challenging aspects" cited by the GE coordinators of their role. It may be that they find it difficult to take on a pedagogical leadership role in their schools unless they are supported by their principals to have "both the power of accountability and the power of knowledge, the ability to be both a light source and a heat source for teachers engaged in the change process" (Brighton et al., 2005, p. 348). In a study examining staff development programs designed to improve teachers' use of differentiation strategies for gifted students, Brighton et al. (2005, p. 358) found that:

> To provide teachers with the on-going, informed support that they need, the on-site presence of an individual combining both power and knowledge of the initiative is necessary. On-site coaches provide one source of impetus and guidance for change, but a (leader) who is thoroughly trained in the initiative is most likely a key factor in effective approaches to supporting and encouraging teacher change.

That staff need PL about GE is apparent, and for changes to school culture and teachers' practices over time, schools need a staff member with GE knowledge to be placed in a leadership position to teach and support staff using GE methodologies (shining a light for them), but also to hold them accountable for GE provision (applying the heat). It is this leadership role with which each of the proposed participants in this study has engaged over a sustained period of time.

The literature strongly suggests that support for GE provided by the education authorities and school principals is critical in achieving positive learning outcomes for gifted students. For example, Hurford's (2013, p. iv) case study of six GE coordinators in New Zealand schools concluded that:

> Knowledge and passion to do their best for gifted and talented students, although important, was not sufficient. The leadership actions and support provided by others in their setting and beyond their setting were likewise needed.

Quality criteria for effective PL

Because PL for teachers encompasses a wide and diverse range of content, context and methods, it is important when selecting or designing PL to ensure that it represents high-quality learning. At its heart, PL for teachers should focus on bringing about changes, both for the teachers and for the students they teach. However, change can be challenging. And change takes time. It is important that PL is designed to focus not only on delivering quality content, but also on addressing change, and that supports are in place to facilitate teachers' efforts to make changes over time.

There is a large body of research relating to the quality criteria for effective teacher PL that presents different perspectives from which to evaluate effectiveness (e.g., from teachers' self-evaluations, from independent observations of teachers' implementation of learning, or from students' perceptions or outcomes relating to changed teachers' practice). AITSL (2023) stated that:

> Regardless of mode, to be genuinely effective, professional learning should be relevant, collaborative and future-focused, and based on a strong foundation of reflective practice that is guided by the Teacher and Principal Standards.

Desimone (2009) identified five critical features of effective professional development as demonstrating content-specific learning; active learning approaches; coherence with contextual considerations; sustained duration and collaboration. However, even if a PL program includes each of these features, it may still not be effective in changing teachers' practices that improve student outcomes. For example, conducting PL over a period of time might satisfy the requirement for PL to be sustained in duration, but unless the teacher is engaged with the learning, the time spent might not achieve the intended learning outcomes. Opfer and Pedder (2011) highlighted the necessity to understand that teacher PL is nested within series of subsystems (including the teacher, the school and the PL activities over time) that are interdependent and inter-influential. Determining its effectiveness, then, is similarly complex. While the design and delivery of a planned program of teacher PL may be faithful to the critical features of effectiveness, it may fail to achieve changed teacher practice if it does not take into account the interactions between one or more subsystems. For example, to be effective, the PL program should also be differentiated to meet the specific learning needs, goals, interests and existing knowledge of the teachers for whom it is intended.

Chapter 2 Summary

   This chapter has reviewed literature relating to PL and leadership for PL, particularly as it relates to GE. It has provided some contextual background ideas to consider when interpreting the career stories of the GE specialists in this narrative inquiry. Chapter three will elucidate the theories and processes of narrative inquiry used in this study, drawing on additional literature to explain this method.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience.
It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time,
in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus.
An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit,
concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling,
re-living and re-telling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives,
both individual and social.
(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Introduction

The narrative account of experience – people's stories that they relate, and the meanings and understandings derived from their stories – provides both a method of research as well as a contribution to a body of knowledge. I chose to use narrative inquiry in this research study in order to engage with three experienced GE practitioners whose stories could provide rich and detailed information and to co-construct with them a narrative of that experience. Having studied and taught GE for over twenty years, in formal postgraduate courses as well as in in-service programs, I still wonder about what makes PL about GE effective in changing teachers' attitudes, practices and school culture to bring about improved outcomes for gifted and talented students. This is the research puzzle at the heart of my inquiry: what happens in the PL 'space between' theory and practice; what do the participants' stories reveal about significant factors in the provision of PL; and how might their experiences be shaped by and contribute to the development of GE in SA?

This chapter provides details of my research design and process, using life-story interviews with three participants to gather their stories, undertake a thematic analysis and develop an interpretive narrative of their experience. I explain why I selected the three practitioners as "key informants" (Marshall, 1996) and how I worked with them to co-construct

the narrative account of their experiences. I begin with a consideration of narrative inquiry, its

theoretical constructs and place in qualitative research methodology.

Locating Narrative Inquiry within qualitative research methods

Qualitative research encompasses a wide diversity of methodological approaches,

theoretical frameworks, data collection and analysis procedures and philosophical backgrounds.

Punch and Oancea (2104, p. 144) described it as a field that is "complex, changing and contested

– a site of multiple methodologies and research practices." Atkinson, et al. (2001, p. 7) referred

to qualitative research as an "umbrella term", encompassing as it does a range of approaches that

generally seek to explore and interpret the lived experience of individuals in their world. Its

strength lies in its capacity to capture a rich depth of data, fine graining the understanding of

people, events and phenomena. Its weakness lies in its complexity and assumed subjectivity –

qualitative research is often difficult to replicate or generalise, and the same measures of validity

and reliability as measures of quality are difficult to assert. Quantitative research often has the

objective clarity of measurable data, and many qualitative studies seem to begin with a

justification of their method as being a legitimate and credible research design. Pinnegar and

Daynes (2007, p. 3) stated that "most academic work is non-narrative, and in many disciplines

the most prominent theories, methods, and practitioners continue to do work that is based on

quantitative data and positivist assumptions about cause, effect, and proof." Whilst not all

researchers would agree with their evaluation, such sentiments help to understand why

researchers applying narrative inquiry may feel the need to justify the legitimacy of their

approach.

Qualitative researchers may criticise quantitative research as being limited "because it

neglects the participants' perspectives within the context of their lives" (Holloway & Wheeler,

2010, p. 6). However, the two broad approaches are based on different theoretical paradigms, and each approach offers a means of investigating different types of research questions. Quantitative approaches *tend* to be grounded in a positivist, natural science paradigm that seeks to establish an objective reality, or theory, that can be generalised across similar contexts. Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, *tend* to be interpretivist in nature (although not always) in the belief that there are many complex variables and interactions that impact on the data, which need to be analysed and explained (Creswell, 2008). In educational research, Pring (2000) called the clash between quantitative and qualitative research approaches a "false dualism", examining the philosophical positions each take in understanding the nature of truth and reality. And as Blumer (1979, p. xxiii) stated, "any research procedure which can tell us something about the subjective orientation of human actors has a claim to scholarly consideration."

Narrative inquiry, as a form of qualitative research, also takes a range of forms depending on the theoretical framework, field of inquiry, data collection approach, methods of analysis and purpose applied to any one of a variety of fields (Creswell, 2007). Chase (2005, p. 651) called it a "field in the making" as there is no single form, with different disciplines and indeed different individuals applying narrative research methods in bespoke ways. What has become apparent in light of this diversity of understandings and applications of narrative research is the need for each researcher to be explicit about their design of narrative inquiry and their theoretical perspective. This establishes a clear outline of the method and the internal consistency of that method then becomes one measure of quality in this approach to research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) are credited with clarifying and defining narrative inquiry as both a research method and a phenomenon. It is their approach that has resonated with me and informed this

study. However, my analysis of the participants' stories has drawn on additional approaches

described below, given that Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work has been criticised on the

basis that it "does not offer more insight into the thorny problems of analysis and

trustworthiness" (Wood, 2000, p. 2).

A narrative approach enables multi-faceted and complex insights into the participants'

lives that are steeped in context and rich in detail. At its heart is the use of individuals' stories as

data and the use of story as a means of communicating and interpreting that data. Clandinin, et

al. (2007, p. 21) acknowledged "the comfort that comes from thinking about telling and listening

to stories" but assert that narrative research is "much more than the telling of stories".

The narrative in this study is framed by Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005, p.

43), which "asserts that individuals construct their careers by imposing meaning on their

vocational behaviour and occupational experiences … (involving) the patterning of these

experiences into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story." The narrative approach I

have undertaken is interpretivist in nature. It is underpinned by the belief that there are many

truths because social reality cannot be independent of the different life experiences,

understandings and subjective perceptions of the individuals at the centre of the research study

(Creswell, 2008).

Narrative Inquiry

In narrative inquiry, the assumption is that there is no universal truth, as each individual

constructs their own understanding of their world, resulting in a multiplicity of truths. As an

explanation of narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 375) wrote that:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret
> their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a
> person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and
> made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is

> first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a
> methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is
> to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.

This places narrative inquiry within an interpretivist rather than a positivist paradigm in terms of

a world view. Rather than considering there to be one objective truth or reality, narrative inquiry

seeks to understand different individuals' understanding of reality. Applying this method in this

research study enables the participants' stories to be told, giving voice to their experience,

understanding, insights and concerns. Rather than focusing on educational policy, or educational

structures and institutions as abstract and theoretical concepts, narrative inquiry in the

educational context focuses on the contextualised experiences of the people who are stakeholders

in education, and in this study these people are GE practitioners. In a sense, these individuals

can provide a unique insider's perspective because of the stories they can tell about their lived

experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) looked at the application of narrative inquiry

to educational studies with the view that "education is the construction and reconstruction of

personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and

others' stories".

In terms of the scope of this narrative inquiry, the stories told happen in a three-

dimensional space comprised of the individual's affective and professional interactions, over

time and within a particular context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 50) explained that "any

particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions

and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and social in a balance appropriate to

the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places." So, this approach to

research requires the researcher to locate themselves within the experience of the storytelling in

order to understand, explain and interpret the participants' stories, paying attention to these three elements.

Psychological theories informing Narrative Inquiry

There is a clear belief in narrative inquiry that individuals, who naturally frame their experiences using stories, provide critical data to inform the research puzzle. The researcher is also integral to the study, so their own personal beliefs, paradigms, knowledge and skills need to be acknowledged and woven into the narrative. The knowledge that is generated by narrative research is co-constructed by the researcher in relation with the participants. If the researcher takes a sociological perspective, or a psychological perspective, or a practitioner perspective, the nature of the study will differ because of the theoretical lens through which the problem, the participants, the inquiry space and the stories are viewed and interpreted. Any theoretical foundation therefore that underpins the study will inform the nature of the research and the particular 'shape' that the narrative inquiry takes.

Working as I am from a psychological perspective, I have considered a number of theories that contribute to my understanding of the nature of the individual, their place in society, the role of society in their development and the nature of knowledge and how it is formed. For instance, a constructivist view that individuals construct knowledge by building mental models to understand their world, with new knowledge building on existing knowledge, is informed by cognitive theorists such as Piaget (1970), Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978). Bruner's (1986, 1990, 2004) explanation of the narrative means of knowing ourselves, our world and our place within it puts stories, or *narrative cognition* at the heart of learning and the construction of knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on language as a cultural tool that shapes cognition, contributes to an understanding of how narrative uses language to form, tell and communicate

meanings derived from individuals' experiences and so contributes to the theoretical

underpinnings of this research study. His ideas about an individual's inter- and intra-mental

processes stress the role of self with others in the development of the individual's cognitive

development. Added to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bakhtin's (1986) concept of dialogue

stressed that individuals are in constant dialogue with self and others.So the concept of an

individual's *voice* through story is layered and imbued with multiple voices, including the

individual's past self, as well as others who have influenced and informed the individual.

Habermas's (1984) concept of using the medium of communicative action to depict and

reproduce the complexity of individuals' *lifeworlds* provides a philosophical and rational

foundation to my understanding of the use of story to capture and analyse experience. The

multidimensionality of Habermas's concept of lifeworlds can be viewed in connection with

Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1994) ecological theory, which situates the individual in relation to

others over time, with interdependent and mutually influential relationships existing between the

individual and their different, nested spheres of social interaction throughout their lives. In this

view, individuals shape and are shaped by their experiences of the world.

Savickas' (2005) Career Construction Theory has also guided my understanding and

analysis of the participants' narratives. While typically applied in the field of vocational

counselling, this theory "asserts that individuals construct their careers by imposing meaning on

their vocational behaviour and occupational experiences … (involving) the patterning of these

experiences into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story" (Savickas, 2005, p. 42).

Career Construction Theory structures the narrative into three stages: the development of

vocational personality traits, the career adaptation stage and the life themes emerging through

reflection. Savickas (2005, p. 58) explained that:

In chronicling the recursive interplay between self and society, career stories explain why individuals make the choices they do and the private meaning that guides these choices. They tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow. Thus, career tells the story of an individual's dispositional continuity and psychosocial change.

While it may seem that the stage development model proposed is linear, Savickas emphasises the "recursive interplay" that explains the dynamic nature of career development. It would seem that the individual's reflection back on the "self of yesterday" helps them to understand their careers and themselves through their career stories in a way that makes them cognisant of their choices. This provides them with agency as an active determinant of their own self-development.

In all of these cognitive, constructivist theories within a largely psychological perspective, the individual is active in the process of thinking, learning and making meaning, in proximity with others, within a specific context over time. They provide a theoretical foundation or lens through which I am able to understand and interpret the experiences of the participants and their stories, and navigate my own role as a narrative inquirer in the relational research space.

As a broad generalisation, psychology seeks to understand the individual, taking into account the various influences on their development. While the field has a strong tradition of quantitative, positivist research following the scientific method, there is a legitimate place for, and a growing tradition of, the use of qualitative, interpretivist, research methods. Wertz (2014, p. 4) made an historical study of the application of qualitative research in psychology, noting that "between the 1990s and the present, a revolutionary institutionalization of qualitative methods has taken place in publications, educational curricula, and professional organisations". Biggerstaff (2012) dated the acceptance of narrative research methods within the field of psychology in terms of when the British Psychological Society held an inaugural conference in 2008 for Qualitative Methods in Psychology (QMiP), while the American Psychological

Association (APA) included qualitative methods in Section 5 of the APA during 2011. Josselson

(2006, p. 4) identified what narrative inquiry brings to psychology in terms of understanding

human experience:

> This approach has allowed psychology to view and analyze people's lives as lived,
> people whose life experience had been lost in the search for central tendencies, for
> statistically significant group differences on oversimplified measures or in contrived
> experimental conditions.

Biggerstaff (2012) identified Bruner (1990), Crossley (2000), Polkinghorne (1988),

Ricoeur (1981) and Reissman (2008) as researchers whose work has advanced the use of

narrative and meaning in psychology, with an emphasis on "narrative as a cognitive structure" (p.

181). Polkinghorne (1988, p. 119) wrote that:

> People use self-stories to interpret and account for their lives. The basic dimension of
> human existence is temporality, and narrative transforms the mere passing away of time
> into a meaningful unity, the self. The study of a person's own experience of her or his
> lifespan requires attending to the operations of the narrative form and how this life story
> is related to the stories of others.

If psychology seeks to understand the individual, studying the individual's self-stories is clearly

relevant to psychology. Narrative inquiry as a qualitative research approach fits well within a

psychological perspective, even though it is likely to take a different form or focus on different

aspects of participants' stories than narrative studies informed by sociological theories, for

example.

The interconnected nature of the research space in narrative inquiry intertwines the

relational space (both personal and interpersonal) with the temporal space (past, present and

future) in the context of the physical space. Clandinin (2013, p. 50) explained the significance of

this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space by saying that:

> When we make all three dimensions of the inquiry space visible to audiences and
> continue to think narratively, we make the complexity of storied lives visible.

Steps in the Narrative Inquiry process

In terms of describing "good" narrative research, Creswell (2007, pp. 214–5) stated that

the author:

- Focuses on a single individual (or two or three individuals)
- Collects stories about a significant issue related to this individual's life
- Develops a chronology that connects different phases or aspects of a story
- Tells a story that re-stories the story of the participant in the study
- Tells a persuasive story told in a literary way
- Possibly reports themes that build from the story to tell a broader analysis
- Reflexively brings himself or herself into the study.

These steps have been addressed in this research study, although Clandinin and Connelly's

(2000) series of steps in the narrative research method have provided more specific guidance.

Although not intended to be prescriptive, and certainly not linear, the research process

undertaken has followed their model. The five sub-sections to follow in this chapter will use

these five steps to describe my approach to narrative inquiry in this study:

1. Determine if the research problem or question best fits narrative research.

2. Select one or more individuals who have stories or life experiences to tell and spend
   considerable time with them gathering their stories and recording their experiences.

3. Collect information about the context of these stories (personal, cultural and historical
   contexts).

4. Analyse the participants' stories, and then restory them into a framework that makes
   sense.

5. Collaborate with participants by actively involving them in the research.

1. Determining narrative inquiry as the 'best fit' for the research study

Narrative inquiry was selected as the research approach for this study for a number of

reasons. Firstly, the research problem or puzzle was such that the best source of information

would likely be found in the experiences of effective and long-serving GE specialists. While theories relating to PL about GE and effective GE practices have been available for some time, the problem is that they are not systemically or consistently applied. Where they have been applied successfully, it is the experiences and stories of the GE specialists that will reveal what has happened to bring about positive outcomes. The practitioners themselves may or may not be aware of exactly what it is that they have done to achieve positive outcomes, but through a process of telling their stories and reflecting back on their experiences with the researcher, the pieces of the puzzle are likely to emerge. The research puzzle about why *some* practitioners have been able to influence changes to teachers' practices and school cultures that bring about improved outcomes for gifted students fitted best with a narrative inquiry approach.

Secondly, Creswell (2008, p. 63) advised that "the choice of approach must relate to the personal skills, training and experiences of the researcher." While this is the first narrative inquiry I have undertaken, and the learning curve has been very steep, through a process of critical self-evaluation the skills of writing stories, building relationships and critically reflecting on, analysing and interpreting stories were identified as personal strengths that would support this research approach. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 118) talked about the necessary levels of "openness and trust between participant and researcher" that are required to encourage people to tell their stories. Individuals can feel vulnerable in telling their stories but are more likely to reveal depth, complexity and more intimate details if there is a trusting relationship with the researcher. I considered narrative inquiry to be an effective approach in this study because of the well-established personal and professional relationship I enjoy with each of the participants.

Thirdly, I have made an assumption that educators learn from experienced practitioners almost as much as (or perhaps more than) they learn from theories and would therefore be

interested in and informed by the stories of real experiences in practice. Stories bring abstract

ideas into a more concrete and memorable form. Stories are recognised as being powerful tools

in the teaching and learning process, even when working with adults (Huber, et al., 2014; Miley,

et al., 2012) and in relation to professional development for teachers (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Goodson and Sikes (2001, p. 57) wrote that:

> Whilst studies of teachers' lives and careers are informative and fascinating in their own
> right, they can play an important part in furthering understanding of a wide range of
> topics to do with education and schooling. This is because, as Goodson (1981: 69) has
> written, 'in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we
> know about the person the teacher is.'

> From a personal perspective, I have a strong interest in the life stories of these

experienced GE specialists. Even though I have extensive knowledge of the theories and

literature relating to GE, how to influence teachers' practices most effectively through delivering

PL has been a topic of concern to me. Witherall and Noddings (1991, p. 280) saw the power of

telling life stories as not simply empowering the person telling the story but also as providing

salutary lessons for others who would listen:

> Telling our stories can be cathartic and liberating. But it is more than that. Stories are
> powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations,
> struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples,
> treatments and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed
> and with what effect. And, of course, they invite us to remember that we are in the
> business of teaching, learning and researching to improve the human condition.

While stories are not necessarily prescriptive of actions in a positivist sense, they can compel

others to reflect, interpret and re-consider their own choices and possibilities. The choice of

narrative inquiry as a research approach for this study seemed to be the 'best fit' to address the

research puzzle, to work to my strengths and to have the potential to positively impact educators

in the field.

2. Recruitment and selection of participants

Josselson (2007, p. 538) described the work of the narrative researcher in terms of:

(politely) intruding on people in the course of living real lives and asking them to help us learn something. We do this in hopes that what we learn will be of some benefit to others or will contribute to basic knowledge about aspects of human experience. Those people who agree to talk to us about their lives … become our 'participants.'

Several GE practitioners were identified as potential participants in this study, and three were approached to take part. Narrative inquiry typically focuses in depth on one, two or three individuals (Creswell, 2007). I selected three participants and assigned to each a pseudonym. Each participant taught in a different sector of education: Anna has taught in government schools, Jane mostly in independent schools and Theresa mostly in the higher education field. All three are female, retired, and have spent most of their professional lives in SA. As I have worked in GE in SA for nearly thirty years, and this is a niche field, I know most GE practitioners currently working in schools. I purposively selected these three participants for this study based on the criteria that they:

- have extensive experience of leading PL for teachers about GE

- have been influential in the development of the field in SA and

- are widely regarded as having had an impact on changing school cultures and teachers' pedagogy in relation to teaching gifted students.

Plummer (1983) would ask whether the participants selected are representative and as such would make reliable witnesses. Based on my extensive knowledge of the field and of these selected participants, I consider them to represent three of the most reliable and significant individuals capable of telling important and relevant stories in the South Australian context. The participants meet the criteria to be regarded as *key informants* (Marshall, 1996) whose stories are able to provide important insights. Each participant was personally invited to participate in the

research study and formally invited with a letter sent by email from my research supervisors. The

formal letter provided information about the research study and process, in addition to providing

contact details for my supervisors to ensure that the participants were able to ask questions and

make an independent and informed decision whether or not to participate. It was important that

they did not feel coerced or in any way pressured to participate. To the contrary, I felt buoyed

and encouraged by the enthusiastic support of the participants and their willingness to contribute

to this research study.

As each participant has retired, they are at a stage in their lives where reflecting on and

evaluating their contribution to the field is an important developmental task (Erikson, 1980),

facilitated by their involvement in this research. They are also articulate and critically self-

reflective, and consummately capable of communicating their stories of experience through life-

story interviews. Atkinson (2002, p. 126) attributed the value of the life-story interview to its

ability to "always bring order and meaning to the life being told, for both the teller and the

listener. It is a way to understand the past and the present more fully, and a way to leave a

personal legacy for the future."

3. Data collection: Developing field texts

Clandinin (2013, p. 46) used the term *field texts* in place of *data* "to signal that the texts

we compose in narrative inquiry are experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts."

The idea of being in the *field of play* (Richardson, 1997) with the participants and being part of

the process of story construction underscores the concept of the results of the inquiry being

stories, jottings, thoughts and impressions that unfold when we *play* together in the narrative

inquiry space. The *field texts*, then, which in other approaches to research might be referred to as

the *data*, include the recorded interviews, the written transcripts of those stories, my own field

notes, margin notes and critical reflections on these prior to the analysis and interpretation of the transcripts and field texts, although I reiterate that separating the collection from the interpretation of the stories in describing a step-by-step process mitigates against the understanding of narrative inquiry as an organic, iterative process.

In gathering the participants' stories, a series of life-story interviews with each participant was conducted to explore the development of the three individuals over time. Atkinson (2007, p. 224) proposed that "the life story interview offers a way, perhaps more than any other, for another to step inside the personal world of the storyteller and discover larger worlds." Rather than answering a prescribed set of interview questions, I used open-ended focus questions, such as "tell me about…"; probing questions to clarify, such as "what makes you say that?"; and questions seeking elaboration, such as "why do you think that?" to encourage participants to relate their stories.

The three-interview method I used is adapted from Dolbeare and Schuman's model (1982, described in Seidman, 2013). Each interview focused on a particular theme: the first on the participant's personal story and acquaintance with giftedness; the second on their professional story and the third on their reflections on, vision for and insights into PL about GE for teachers.

The first interview in particular probed the participants' personal stories, listening for personal and situational factors that have mattered to them. In understanding the lives and work of these individuals, it is important to gain insight into who they are and what motivates and inspires them. Cremin (1976 in Dhunpath, 2010, p. 544) said that:

> Individuals come to educational institutions with their own temperaments, histories and purposes, and different individuals will obviously interact with a given configuration of Education in different ways and with different outcomes.

A GE coordinator working interstate once remarked to me in conversation that, "No one else could do what I do – it's all in my head". This prompted me to consider whether it is indeed possible to determine what constitutes effective practice in facilitating PL about GE in schools, or whether the success of the GE specialist lies in their unique individual characteristics – what is in effect 'in their head' and cannot be taught to anyone else. The process of gathering the key informants' personal stories will make what is tacit visible and subject to critical analysis and reflection.

The second and third interviews related to the participants' professional lives and their historical context. Individuals experience life in association with others situated within a time and place, so the interaction between these elements provides a wider meaning and opportunity for establishing some common ground. Focusing on the participants' professional lives and involvement with GE (interview two) and reflecting on their experiences and what insights they have gained (interview three) provided a rich depth of knowledge about their views of teaching and learning and leadership of PL. Taken as a series of three interviews, the data provides an holistic perspective of the individuals and their work within the context chosen for this study. The series of three interviews also intended to provide the participants with the opportunity to see their lives more clearly and "by understanding [their] past and present, [to] also gain a clearer perspective of goals for the future" (Atkinson, 2007, p.6).

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. With multiple interviews conducted with each participant, in total over twelve hours of interview were recorded and transcribed. I also made field notes on each interview prior to, during and following each interview.

The participants were given the choice of where the interviews were conducted, and all chose for the interview to be conducted in their own home, which enabled them to feel

comfortable and have no external distractions. The interviews were arranged at mutually

convenient times and allowed ample time for participants to feel relaxed and unhurried in

relating their stories. It was my responsibility to ensure that the participants felt comfortable,

confident and unconstrained in their responses during the interviews, and were reassured that

they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were given the written narrative

prior to thematic analysis so that they could withdraw any details that they considered may

compromise their confidentiality and check for accuracy.

The field notes taken during the interviews and following the interviews helped me to

remain sensitive to and reflective about the well-being of the participants. The interviews were

conducted with sensitivity and respect for the participants, particularly considering that the

research sought to probe the participants' personal lives and experiences. Ethics of care (Lipman,

1995; Witherall & Noddings, 1991) applied throughout, both in the interpersonal interactions and

in the transcription and interpretation of the stories. Even though informed consent to participate

was sought at the outset of the research (see Appendix), the entire process of research required

on-going negotiation of ethical considerations in a relational collaboration.

4. Data Analysis and re-storying: From field texts to narrative research texts

Twelve hours of interviews resulted in 90 single-spaced pages of transcripts. Having

listened to the participants' stories during the interviews, and repeatedly listening to them as I

transcribed them, their stories were familiar to me. In addition, I was very aware of their tone and

manner of speaking that also conveyed meaning and emotion as the stories were told. This

helped me to not just know the stories but also to understand the storyteller and the impact of the

stories on them personally. Field notes taken during and following the interviews recorded my

impressions and reactions at the time, and margin notes made on the transcripts continued to

provide ongoing ideas as I interacted with the stories. The way that Creswell (2008, pp. 250–260) described the qualitative data analysis process made it seem to be discrete and linear as the researcher stepped from transcribing the data to conducting a preliminary exploratory analysis, to coding the data and then to describing and developing themes from the data. However, in narrative inquiry, I found that the researcher is far more immersed in the stories or data.The idea of conducting a "preliminary exploratory analysis" (Creswell, 2008, p. 250) of the transcriptions made no sense to me in this study because I had been constantly probing understanding and critically reflecting on ideas and impressions throughout the interviews and transcription process.Themes had emerged and re-emerged and jostled for attention while I was listening and responding to the participants' stories. In this way, the data analysis process was not a discrete stage of the research process, but was more holistically entwined with the re-reading, re-storying and narrative writing processes.I was continually checking and interrogating the participants' stories for themes, ideas and meanings and listening again to the interview recordings and checking back with the participants where necessary. This is consistent with Etheridge's (2020, p. 87) understanding that "the process of 'data gathering', 'transcribing' and 'analysis' thereby becomes a continuous harmonious and organic process".

The first analysis of the data is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, the stories need to be reduced in length, so it was necessary to select only the passages that were directly relevant to the research puzzle. Secondly, the transcripts include hesitations, stops and starts, and a more casual use of language which may hamper the written version, so the narrative necessarily removes these to produce a more articulate story. Thirdly, the stories need to be structured as a chronological narrative. Stories are not always told in a chronological, and straightforward manner. My first analysis following the transcription of the recorded interviews was to extract

the storylines and select from the hours of stories and pages of transcriptions the best way of

telling the main storylines in a manner that was faithful to each participant's style and voice.

This led to a re-storying of their stories into a series of chronological episodes that faithfully

captured the key elements of their experiences relevant to this study. Deciding which details to

retain and which to edit assisted me to crystallise the meanings emerging from the stories and

recognise the patterns and themes within the stories that were significant. Table 1 depicts an

example of how the participant's original words were converted into a narrative, and some of the

ways in which the researcher used their field texts and critical reflections throughout that first

data analysis process.

Interview reference	Transcript of interview	Field notes	Re-storied narrative	Reflection notes on analysis
Anna, interview #1 – early years (19:25) Anna, interview #1 – early years (48:10)	As a student as school, English was my second language & we always spoke Polish at home. We did not speak English. I'll give you an example of how much that disadvantaged me. *pause* I married at 26 & was cooking one day & said to (my husband), can you go & get me the…and he said, what? And I did not know the word for a …, you know that thing you scoop up soup with? (LH: A ladle?) Yeah! *Giggle* We call it a 'hopna' now, it's a standing joke! What it meant was that there were a lot of things that, particularly Australian English, that excluded me out of conversations. I'd be thinking, what are they saying? Slang, colloquialisms used to always throw me. (LH: Were you born in Australia?) No… Poland. We came… came out here when I was nearly 9. I really didn't get a full grasp of English until I'd say I was 10. Maybe even 11. Because it is… It is very different to Polish. Very.	Non-English-speaking background. Interesting that she makes light of the issue – she clearly suffered because of the disadvantage of not speaking English as a 9yr old in school, but illustrates this with a resolved/ humorous anecdote. Personal quality perhaps of overcoming problems through good humour? Positive attitude?	I was born in Poland. We came out here [Australia] when I was nearly nine. English was my second language and we always spoke Polish at home. We did not speak English. I really didn't get a full grasp of English until I'd say I was ten, maybe even eleven. Because it is very different to Polish. Very. And this was a real disadvantage. What this meant was that there were a lot of things, particularly Australian English, that excluded me out of conversations. I'd be thinking, "What are they saying?" Slang, colloquialisms used to always throw me.	Where in the interview transcripts does she mention not speaking English? Does it make sense to add the later comments to this part of the narrative? What is gained from telling this aspect of the story in this way? What is lost through leaving out some of the text? She also mentions later that she doesn't consider herself to be gifted. Why? Is that based on only achieving B grades? But she learnt in a foreign language, so would she expect A grades to reflect giftedness? Look for mentions of husbands in the interviews – to what extent might family relationships enable or empower professionals to be successful?

Table 1: Example of first analysis of interview data

Because of my personal immersion with the stories, a deliberate choice was made to manually analyse the data. Through listening, transcribing, reading and re-reading their stories, I noted elements in particular that related to their career stages which helped to focus my interpretative analysis. This second step in the narrative analysis focused on discerning influential personality traits, career adaptability factors and life themes (Savickas, 2005) through the participants' stories. Etheridge (2020, p. 88) referred to this organic process as involving the researcher thinking *with, across* and *about* stories during the research process, showing "the blurring between analysis and re-presentation, and the blurring between gathering the stories and analysis."

Reissman (2003) identified a number of different approaches to analysis: thematic, structural, interactional and performance analysis. In thematic analysis, Reissman (2003, p. 2) wrote that the "emphasis is on the content of a text, 'what' is said more than 'how' it is said, the 'told' rather than the 'telling'". I determined that thematic analysis suited both the nature of this research study, the research puzzle and my style as a researcher. However, in the process of listening to the stories and reading through the field notes and margin notes that I had made as I listened, I also considered that the participants' expressions, body language, gestures, emphases and pauses were also important in conveying the meaning and message of the storyteller. Reissman's (2003, p. 2) description of structural analysis seemed relevant where the thematic analysis is enriched by a shift of emphasis "to the telling, the *way* a story is told." In writing the narrative of their stories, then, I drew on both thematic and structural analysis of the participants' career stages to interpret their stories.

   5. **Collaboration and co-construction**

   The collaborative and relational nature of a narrative approach to research requires careful ethical considerations. Moen (2006, p. 3) explored Bakhtin's (1986) concept of dialogue in relation to narrative inquiry, stating that "an individual always exists in relation to others, and living means being in an endless dialogue with others". When talking about relations with others in society, the issue of ethics becomes apparent, for, as Durkheim (1925, p. 61) said, "the domain of the moral begins where the domain of the social begins."

   Clandinin (2013, p. 51) cautioned that "as we live within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with participants throughout an inquiry, we acknowledge that neither researchers nor participants walk away from the inquiry unchanged." Attending to those changes and supporting the participants within the relational space of the research study were important relational responsibilities for me as a narrative inquirer.

   Assumed in the final step of collaboration is the explanation of the researcher's role. One of the key steps in narrative inquiry is for the researcher to critically reflect on their own perspective within the research. Far from remaining objective or distanced from the participants, their stories and the process of analysis, in narrative inquiry the researcher is immersed in the research, in relation with the participants and is integral in the development of the narrative. For that reason, an account of my own story is included with the participants' stories in Chapter four of this thesis.

Quality criteria for narrative research

   With diverse approaches to narrative inquiry, there are no clearly defined criteria for evaluating the quality of narrative research. In quantitative approaches, which tend to seek generalisable truths, the key criteria are regarded to be objectivity, validity, and reliability, which

Spencer, et al. (2003, p. 59) referred to as the "holy trinity". By contrast, qualitative approaches

have over a hundred identified sets of criteria (Stige, et al., 2009) and researchers in each type of

qualitative research approach have debated which set of quality criteria apply. Evaluating

whether a research study is "good" or has merit is essential for the researcher to focus on

conducting high quality research, to gain acceptance for their work amongst colleagues and to be

able to publish their work in high quality journals, which can then disseminate their findings to a

wider audience and potentially have an impact on their field.

One way to think about evaluating narrative inquiry is to firstly consider what Clandinin

(2013, p. 212) referred to as "touchstones for narrative inquiry" and to then use these touchstones

as "criteria to ask questions about whether, and how, each touchstone has been taken up and has

shaped the inquiry". These touchstones are listed below:

1. Relational responsibilities
2. In the midst
3. Negotiation of relationships
4. Narrative beginnings
5. Negotiating entry to the field
6. Moving from the field to field texts
7. Moving from field texts to interim and final research texts
8. Representing narratives of experience in ways that show temporality, sociality and place
9. Relational response communities
10. Justifications – personal, practical, social
11. Attentive to multiple audiences
12. Commitment to understanding lives in motion

What this suggests then is that in order for researchers to conduct narrative research, they

need to not only have a very clear understanding of narrative research, but also to be aware of

their responsibility to explain their approach clearly and comprehensively. While Moen (2006, p.

8) suggested that "each researcher must seek and defend the criteria that best apply to her or his

work", such an approach to determining quality criteria for narrative research surely fragments

the field? Narrative research without clear quality criteria may be dismissed as being merely

stories with no relatable truths, only small-scale individual truths.

Josselson (2006, p. 4) raised the problem of whether the field of narrative research is able

to amalgamate the knowledge gained through multiple individual and context-specific studies.

She asked:

> As scholars…are we working together to put together a joint multilayered jigsaw puzzle, each one contributing a piece – or are we instead creating a long gallery of finely wrought miniatures, inviting the onlooker to visit and make of it whatever they will?

Brockmeier (2009 in Biggerstaff, 2012, p. 190) used the analogy of "the river in which you never

step twice" to capture the unique meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences. Using

this analogy, even though a researcher may be examining multiple cases of the same

phenomenon (the river connecting all the cases) each case will provide a different interpretation

of that phenomenon. However, it is exactly this nuanced meaning that is the strength in narrative

inquiry as it enables the researcher to step into the narrative flow with the participants and

explore and interpret the meaning of each individual's experience within a particular time, place

and relationship. But perhaps if there was consensus with regards to quality criteria for narrative

inquiry, comparisons across cases relating to similar contexts, issues or historical events might

be possible?

Atkinson et al. (2001, p. 5) emphasised the need for "methodological rigour" in research

to ensure that a study is trustworthy, an opinion shared by Biggerstaff (2012) in relation to

qualitative studies in the field of psychology. Any research study should clearly explain the

method and apply it well, providing a clear rationale for selection of participants, paying

attention to ethical principles and evaluating the researcher's interface with the participants and

the data. Rigorous research methods assist in establishing the credibility or trustworthiness of

the research findings. For Atkinson (1998) trustworthiness included three elements of internal consistency that I have addressed in this study. Firstly, trustworthiness comes through establishing the credibility of the research. Secondly, the research process demonstrates corroboration to ensure that the narrative and analysis are faithful to the participants' intentions. And thirdly, trustworthiness is apparent through developing a persuasive, readable and meaningful narrative that interests the reader and provokes them to reflect on their own career and purpose. Bruner (1991. p. 4) stated that "unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve 'verisimilitude'". While this is not the same as establishing validity, it indicates that narrative research should aim to reveal meaning from stories that have been faithfully co-constructed in the process of interpretative analysis.

It seems that the essential quality criteria and value of a narrative is to provide a rich and multi-layered interpretation of an individual's experience in such a way as to provide the reader with the possibility of connecting with and being transformed by the story. This is what Moen (2006) referred to as story providing a *thinking tool*: story has the power to bring about changed understandings within the participants, the researcher and the reader. Etherington (2013) posed six questions that can be used to evaluate the quality of a narrative inquiry that invite the reader to step inside the narrative and connect with its meaning at a deeper level. The questions ask:

- Does the work make a substantive contribution to my understanding of social life?

- Does the work have aesthetic merit?

- Is the work reflexive enough to make the author sufficiently visible for me to make judgements about the point of view?

- What is the impact of this work on me?

- Does the work provide me with a sense of 'lived experience'?

Andrews (2021, pp. 363–364) listed what she "consider(s) to be important aspects of narrative scholarship" including (but not necessarily limited to) truthfulness, trustworthiness, critical reflexivity, scholarship and accessibility, ethical sensitivity, co-construction of meaning, attention to the untold, awareness of temporal fluidity, multi-layered stories and contextualisation of the research. These elements can serve as quality indicators for narrative research to the extent that they are achieved and resolved satisfactorily within a particular research study. Considering Etherington's (2013) evaluative questions and Andrews' (2021) quality criteria enabled me to constantly focus on the importance of conveying the significance of this research puzzle and its implications in a manner that would honour the participants and their stories. An informed consideration of the nature, conduct and quality criteria that define narrative inquiry as the research approach applied in this doctoral research, guided and shaped my narrative inquiry.

If the aim of narrative inquiry is to elicit an individual's unique perception of and understanding of themselves (and their careers) in relation with others within a particular time and place, then an evaluation of its quality should seek to ascertain if indeed the narrative has achieved its primary aim. Is the narrative truthful and trustworthy? Stories of the participants' careers documented in this study have significance beyond just the personal. Savickas (2005, p. 59) believed that "career construction revolves around turning a personal problem into a public strength and then even a social contribution." Stories have the power to frame and re-frame experience, and once written they have the potential to connect with individuals beyond the limits of time and place. Bruner (2004, p. 708) believed in the significance of forming and sharing stories, proposing that:

> The ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future.

The appeal and value of narrative research rests in the universal appeal and significance of story and storying, acknowledging that "humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Clandinin, 2013. p. 13) and learn from stories lived, shared and told.

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter located narrative inquiry within a qualitative research paradigm and discussed the nature of this research method and its essential design considerations using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) five-step process. The theoretical underpinnings of this approach to research from a psychological perspective were clarified, and the process of narrative inquiry framed by social constructivism and Career Construction Theory applied in this research study was explained. Relevant criteria relating to trustworthiness for evaluating the quality of a narrative inquiry were discussed as they informed the conduct and process of this narrative inquiry. The stories of the participants are to follow in Chapter four.

Chapter 4: Stories told

The stories we tell literally make the world.
If you want to change the world, you need to change your story.
This truth applies both to individuals and institutions.
Michael Margolis (2009)

Positioning the researcher within the study

My own introduction to the field of GE was through my eldest son, Tom, who was diagnosed by a psychologist as being highly gifted at age seven. Perhaps that helped to explain his anxiety, his social isolation, his introversion and also his advanced vocabulary, his extensive memory, his sensitivity to issues of social justice and his intellectual advancement. But it didn't make life any easier. The psychologist's report clearly stated that Tom wasn't being challenged at school and made recommendations for changes in his educational provisions. His school really wasn't interested. "All of our students are gifted!" the principal stated. "No need for any special treatment for Tom." I didn't believe the principal, nor trust that the school knew what was best for gifted children. I set about finding out as much as I could about giftedness so that I could better understand Tom's needs and become an articulate and informed advocate for him. Thirty years later, I am still finding out more about giftedness, and what began as a personal quest became my professional career.

Along the way I have learned from and been assisted by a number of people. I think of them as "merchants of light" (Bacon, 1627) as they have guided my inquiry. I am grateful for their generosity and enlightenment. They include the participants, the key informants, in this narrative inquiry. I cannot be dispassionate about this study. It matters to me, personally and professionally. It worries me that there are so many children, like my Tom, desperate to learn and who look forward with excitement to starting school, only to be disappointed and confused by a lack of intellectual challenge and even hostility and resentment towards them because of

their differences. Coleman (2011) found that the most common experience for gifted students in

school was waiting. Waiting for the rest of the class to catch up, waiting to be given something to

learn that they didn't already know, waiting for the teacher to move on… And what might

happen when they get fed up of waiting? Cross (2014, p. 264) referred to the "chronic

educational malnourishment" that gifted students suffer in schools and believed that "the single

greatest threat to the psychological well-being of gifted students is the mismatch between the

school's curriculum and the student's needs." Tom, like many other gifted students, certainly

experienced that chronic malnourishment at school, and suffered great anxiety and stress because

of it.

        In my experience, and supported by the research, not enough teachers understand gifted

and talented students and how they learn. Parents' experiences of this are shared in the "mummy

blogs" that flourish on the internet (Jolly, 2017). Here parents convey their desperation and

frustration because of a lack of provision in their gifted children's schools. In my roles as a

university academic in GE and as a volunteer on state, national and international gifted

associations, I frequently received emails from worried parents, desperately trying to find

schools and teachers who will nurture their gifted children. From the perspective of these

students and their families, it is clear that many more teachers need to learn about gifted students

and how to teach them. From other educators I have encountered, I have learned that GE is not

their priority, and even something to be undermined (Henderson & Jarvis, 2012; McEwin, 2003).

        Through this research study I sought to find out how GE practitioners can positively

influence their school culture and their colleagues' practices and beliefs through facilitating GE

PL. I want to know what happens in that PL space, what are the complexities of their

interactions, what has worked for them, what hasn't worked, what they might do differently and

why. I want to tell the stories of my *merchants of light* and analyse and interpret their messages.

The three participants in this study are connected by their shared involvement in GE in SA over

five decades. I am part of the story also. I am connected to the participants both professionally

and personally, so I drew on this relational strength to build positive and open communication as

they confided their stories. Together we will use stories to build knowledge and to gain insights.

This is consistent with a social-constructivist paradigm which emphasises the collaborative

nature of learning, where knowledge is constructed through interactions with others using

language as a tool. This paradigm asserts that reality is constructed by individuals as they

experience life within a specific time and place amongst the society of others. According to

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 109), "realities are local, specific and constructed; they are socially

and experientially based, and depend on the individuals or groups holding them."

  I am influenced by Shank's (2006) idea of the use of the analogies of the *mirror*, the

window and the *lantern* to highlight the insights to be gained from qualitative research, which

help to explain how I see the significance of my proposed study in furthering knowledge and

understanding about the complex intersections of PL and GE. In narrative research, the *mirror*

analogy suggests that the reflective function of the narrative will "help us to see ourselves and

the world in fresh and new ways" (Shank, 2006, p. 182). The narrative provides a *window*

through which to frame a view of the storyline within a particular time and place. The *lantern*

suggests the interpretative nature of narrative to "move into the dark corners and shed light

where no light has been shed before" (p. 182). In other words, to probe more deeply into the

participants' stories to look for insights and to illuminate previously unrevealed aspects of

practice.

I am positioning myself within the proposed research as a listener and a teller of stories; as an investigator, analysing and interpreting meaning and knowledge in developing a narrative. I am endeavouring to move between the subjective and intersubjective views of the storyline as I faithfully capture their stories and analyse and interpret their meanings.

"Anna's" story

Anna's early years as an "invisible" student who found her voice

I was born in Poland. We came out here [Australia] when I was nearly nine. English was my second language and we always spoke Polish at home. We did not speak English. I really didn't get a full grasp of English until I'd say I was ten, maybe even eleven. Because it is very different to Polish. Very. And this was a real disadvantage. What this meant was that there were a lot of things, particularly Australian English, that excluded me out of conversations. I'd be thinking, "What are they saying?" Slang, colloquialisms used to always throw me. Until one year I got a teacher who used a lot of Australian colloquialisms, so I made him teach me one a week so I could work out what people were saying at times. But there were often times when I just didn't understand what was happening. I had no idea and I was just in the background. I became invisible and I got away with it. I was invisible in class. You just melt in, you put your head down, you don't smile.

I started secondary school at a newly established Catholic girls' school. There were only about twelve of us in that class and we became very close. I felt like I was somebody in the class when I was in year ten, from the time I had Sister Teresa. Sister Teresa was my saviour. I can remember our first term of English, Sister Teresa taught us *King Lear* and I had no idea what the hell was going on! Sister Teresa realised because my results were so low that I just didn't understand what was happening. So, the next term she totally changed the way we did *Macbeth*.

And, all of a sudden things made sense, and it was just because she changed her teaching strategies. We were so much more involved and we acted and we'd take a segment and she'd pull it to shreds, and then she'd say to me, "You don't have to understand every word, you just need to get the gist of the context." Her ability to help me make connections helped me to engage more in the learning and it was from then on I was far more successful. Up until then it was just strange – I was there, but I was invisible. She made me visible and I started speaking up and felt in control. So I got reasonably good results. I never got As but I was always happy if I ever got a B. Oh my gosh! Sister Teresa would always tell me where I went wrong, what I could have said. She made me read. I remember the first novel she gave me, *Sara Dane*, she made me read it, and after school I had to come and tell her about each chapter, what did I think was happening, what was he thinking, what was she thinking, what were their motives, what did I think it was really about? She made me read and that's where my confidence in writing and in talking to people improved as well. She was just magical.

I wanted always to be an architect, always, and my father talked me out of it, as did my mother. They believed that education was important and that being a teacher was an important job. My father always had a really high regard for teachers. He regarded them as being on the same level as doctors. He used to say (in Polish) that teaching is a job that has high integrity, it's a job that's highly valued. Teachers make a difference. Dad kept pushing. Until finally I started thinking about teaching.

I started looking at some of the nuns and working out what I liked about them as teachers. When I was in year ten, Sister Teresa made such a big difference to me as far as English and History went. I loved her as a teacher and I thought that's who I would want to be like. She showed me there's integrity in being a teacher. You do make a difference. She made a

difference to me. She had a good relationship with all the students, she had a sense of humour, she knew what she was talking about, she was always able to engage you in the learning. She used to ask questions. I remember the first couple of weeks she used to ask me questions, and I would go into a blinding panic. "She's looking at me, she's going to want me to think!" Once I got over that fear, I'd actually look for it. I would be wondering when she was going to look at me and ask me a question because I wanted to tell her what I was thinking. She taught me that you shouldn't always have to have the answers. I should listen and ask questions. She was so good at it. So, she modelled for me what a good teacher with integrity looks like.

I don't consider myself gifted, but I am a hard worker. I've often said to kids, "I am not as fortunate as you being gifted but I have something else up my sleeve – I apply effort." And I've talked to kids about the importance of it. I've said to them that the reason I am where I am, one of the biggest reasons, is that I was conscientious, I never let go, I was persistent. When I was knocked down, I picked myself up and I kept going. My father would not *let* me spit the dummy. He was hard on me. My mother was the one who would bring the soft side and he'd bring the firm side. Throughout my childhood, from my parents, I learned that you've got to work for what you want.

Anna finds her identity as a teacher passionate about learning

The whole experience of going through Teachers' College was just a wonderful learning activity for me. I was really lucky because John, my coordinator who was in charge of my group of students, was also of that same ilk as Sister Teresa. He listened, asked questions, didn't pass judgement. He was my lecturer for Geology and he was just lovely, so I got another example of what a good teacher is.

And then when I went into schools for my practical experience there were some good teachers and some not so good ones. And the ones that were not so good always convinced me what I didn't want to be, and the ones who I thought were good reinforced my beliefs about the sort of teacher I wanted to be. Again, it was the relationships, knowing their stuff, using good questioning. I know good questions are touted now as important, but it was there then as well. So, my experiences were wonderful. I just started learning about what I wanted to be, what sort of teacher I wanted to be.

My first posting was to a northern suburbs school and that was a lovely experience. I was pretty shy, no one would believe that now, but I was exceedingly timid. I can remember one day during my second year of teaching my principal saying to me, "Now enough of this, you're just moseying along. You've got to look at what else you want to do in your teaching." He encouraged me to do extra studies, remedial education as it was called then. He encouraged me to do that and take on a leadership role in the school. He took me out of my comfort zone. Whilst I was comfortable in the class, he took me to another level.

I worked with some fabulous principals – one who showed me that while you can have a real passion for teaching, you've also got to get a balance between home life and teaching, so that was a good education because I would pour everything into getting ready, so pulling back was good. Another principal really shocked me to the core in the sense that he said, "There's no time for you to be a shy little fly on the wall, you really have just got to start coming to the fore." So, he pushed me left, right and centre. He pushed me to take on leadership roles in the school, and to share what I was doing in the classroom. He encouraged me to look at observation in other schools and in other classes, and vice versa, he said that you've got to let people come into your class.

So that whole world of opening up parameters of how other people were doing things and not just the way I was doing things opened up possibilities. I started having critical friends. One of my dearest friends and I talked together. We actually had a marvellous growth curve as far as curriculum goes. So, working with her really made me passionate about curriculum. I do have a strong belief that you've got to know your curriculum. You've got to know what you really want the kids to understand. Today we call that your *learning intentions*. I don't know what we called it, but we were always very clear that if we were going to do something with the kids, why would it make a difference, what did we want them to come away with at the end? Whatever curriculum we planned, we'd always do that. And then the second component was how are we going to get the kids involved and interested? For example, I was trying to convince the kids why time was important for them. So my husband and I made a ten hour clock. I came in Monday and the kids were to use new time – a ten-hour clock not a twelve-hour clock. And that made them curious about time and start asking questions. So, we started doing all sorts of things to make the kids want to learn.

So, I had a lot of fabulous leadership. I had a fabulous colleague that I worked with. What I got out of that always was know what you are on about, know what difference it will make for the kids. And the most important part for me out of all that also was that I wasn't to be a friend of the kids, but I was to be someone they could rely on and they knew that they would always learn something, that I would always support them. I didn't go in there to be a friend, to be a mate. I went in there saying, "I am your teacher, together we will learn". So that's always been my motto. And even now, if I ever go into a classroom, to do a lesson with kids, I always will say, "Let me explain to you why I am here and what I am hoping you will get out of me being here. I'm going to do various things, and ask you questions, but I'm hoping that at the end of this,

this is what you'll get out of it." That's what I always saw that was what I wanted out of my

teaching, to make sure the kids got something out of it.

To me, teaching isn't a nine-to-three job. You come home and you plan your program.

And that's where I think some people have found teaching difficult because they see it as, "I'm

just going to stand and deliver." Whereas teaching is looking at all those possibilities, really

getting to know the content well so that you can have an idea of where you can go with it, and

that takes time in planning.

Anna encounters gifted students and gifted education

I really started to understand and know about GE when I got to work with a principal

who was very involved in GE. So was his wife. She was also a principal and she was politically

involved. Through her work with the gifted and talented association, the Minister for Education

came to meetings. It was the Minister's support that brought about the SHIP program in 1993. I

would say both of those principals were gifted. They were very focused and passionate people

for gifted kids, exceedingly passionate. And it wasn't for their own status, they truly believed it,

and that was to be admired about them. In a big way.

They introduced me to the concept of CHIP, Children with High Intellectual Potential.

Up until I watched how they worked with the gifted students, I had always focused on the other

end, the kids needing remedial help. I didn't really know too much about the specifics of gifted

students until seeing the advanced level of reasoning they were using with students and the

things they were coming up with and how they treated them. The way my principal spoke to

them was at a totally different level. He wasn't talking to students as if he was in charge, he was

talking to them as equals. He took them to another level of thinking and I was in awe of him.

There were times when I thought, "Isn't that a bit hard for them?" He did philosophy with the

kids and I would be in awe of what the kids came out with in the dialogue, their level of thinking.

So that was my introduction to gifted kids – their level of reasoning, their level of thinking – and

that was through those principals, working with my principal in particular with the gifted kids. I

can remember one student, Peter, didn't turn up at school one day and someone heard him on the

radio arguing with Jeremy Cordeaux about a particular political issue. And when he came to

school the next day, he was talking to all these students and he went on about his political beliefs

and reasoning, and my jaw just dropped and I thought, "That's what a gifted kid is!" Their level

of thinking. And he wasn't being a smart-arse. His levels of reasoning, understanding and

thinking were just so high. It was just a part of who Peter was. It was the International Year of

Water, and Peter wanted to know what heavy water was, at a level that was philosophical, so we

had to look at what we would do for Peter. That's when working with my principal was just an

eye-opener about GE. That was a turning point for me.

Anna moves into a leadership position for gifted education

So, when the SHIP program was announced and advertised by the state government, I

applied and got a cap to be part of that (as a State SHIP Coordinator) and it was a huge growth

spurt. The seven coordinators learnt together about gifted kids and how unique they were, their

behaviours, their characteristics, their needs and how you had to address them in the classroom

because they were just so different. Then there were the anomalies. Whilst you can be gifted in

one area, you don't have to be gifted in another area, and that made me think again, "Oh we

thought we knew it all." And then you've got a kid who's got a learning disability in one area

and gifted in another area. Then you've got to think, "So what do we do now?"

The SHIP Coordinators became involved with the GE course at Flinders, and that was

another learning curve. Then we each got our focus schools and we each worked with fifteen

network schools attached to each of the seven SHIP schools. That taught us about some of the

constraints there were in the system. While we were so eager to go out and conquer, it brought us

back into reality and we realised just how hard a task it was to convince people that these kids

weren't just special, they were gifted and they needed a differentiated program. That was a hard

battle.

That made me realise just how naïve I was as well, because you think you believe

something but it's not necessarily the belief and understanding or the commitment that other

teachers have. It was just like a slap in the face. I remember going to one school and this

principal sat opposite me and was trying to convince me why I shouldn't be there, and he said to

me, "Anna, *all* of our students are special creatures. We do *not* need to do anything different for

these people that you call gifted. They're *all* special." No matter what I said, and no matter what

I did, there was a constant block there. And because I didn't have the leadership at that school in

support, whatever I did at that school, it was just like banging my head against a brick wall, I just

got nowhere. But there were principals who were open and listened. Maybe they didn't agree

with me, but they were open, and slowly a lot of them came on board. And we got a lot of

support in terms of release time for staff to work with us, and staff meeting times, but it was a

short-term project, and like anything, there was an end time to it (1997).

That's when the principal of my SHIP focus school, who believed in GE, approached me

and said, "I don't believe that we can stop now. Are you interested in taking on a role?' So, he

got eight other schools, got them to commit funds and he started a three-year project so I would

continue as GE coordinator for a cluster of schools. It was a big salary – it was .2 from each

school. Even though one of the schools was a small school that didn't have a big budget, the

principal committed herself to it.

And when that three-year contract finished, my principal had moved to another Primary

School and he started it there, with another five schools. Again, he had strong beliefs. His view

was it was important for gifted students, but the thinking skills were also important for *all* of the

students, so he saw it as benefiting the whole school, but in different ways. He was so committed

to it. He even had learning teams that met once a fortnight. He committed funds for that. So

everyone was released for 80 minutes in teams. The emphasis was on addressing giftedness and

thinking skills through planning and programming. My role was to work in the learning teams, to

do planning and programming with the staff, integrating higher order thinking (HOT) strategies,

what's now called *transforming tasks*, that's what we were doing. And then I'd say, "If this is

your program, where's your differentiation for gifted students?" The second component was to

identify gifted students and to make sure that they had individual learning plans (IEPs). That was

at all the schools, but only school had learning teams as well. It was good because having access

to staff and curriculum meant that you could actually do the integration through the curriculum.

Just to meet someone now and then to say, "Well what are you doing?" that just doesn't work.

You've actually got to see their program as it unfolds, ask them about their learning intentions,

what they will do for the kids here who already know it or pick it up quickly. And then you've

got these students down this end who will need to do it at a different level again. Being released

to work with staff on curriculum and looking at the program is what I've found, in all of the

years, that's worked the best. It's not just pulling aside someone perhaps once a term saying,

"Well, this is your student, this is where he/she's been found to be gifted, this is what's been

done in the past…" Within an hour, you cannot do that well. But if I've got people sitting in the

team, I can say, "Ok, this is your curriculum, you've integrated subjects, you're looking at

commonalities, here's your assessment, now do your learning outcomes address different levels,

do your assessment tasks address different levels, As to Es…", and I'm still doing that today because it works.

In working with learning teams, it *is* good for all students because we're very clear about the curriculum, what the intention is, where we're taking them. We talk about what are the big ideas, what's the intent, what is critical, what is it that the kids have got to get out of this? Once you've got that big picture stuff, then you actually know, well, if Fred over here, or Mary over here, I know he or she is going to pick this up quickly, where can I take this concept to that next level? But if you don't know what the curriculum is, or if it's a hit and miss, if you don't understand what the real critical factors are, then how can you extend or differentiate the program – you can't! If you don't understand a mathematical concept, then how do you know where to extend the kid who knows that and more than you already – how do you know where you can take them? Apart from taking them to acceleration, how do you know where to get that depth of understanding if you don't understand the Mathematics yourself, or if it's something in History or Geography? So that's why I think it is critical that you know your curriculum, that you know what you're really on about, what's the journey you want to take the kids on? Once you know that, anytime someone asks you a question, you think, "I didn't think of that, but it could fit in", and you're open to possibilities, you're not just running from day to day.

We were working on a Statistics unit and I had to learn everything I could about Statistics, firstly the big ideas – what are the big ideas in Statistics that we have to get over to the kids? Once I was really clear about that, then I went to the Australian Curriculum and I looked to see what the curriculum looks like from Foundation to Year seven, and I was able to see the growth progressions, then I worked with the staff. But if I didn't understand it, there was no way I was going to talk to staff about it because I'd be blah blah blah blah. I had to be really clear. I could

go to a classroom now and I could teach that topic because I know it, and I am open to digressing because I understand the big picture. Yep, people could go there, that's where I could differentiate for that gifted student, or the one who's down there. I don't do it perfectly well, but I'm always reading. If I am going to take something on, I always research it to make sure that I have a reasonable, sound understanding of where this sits. And that I think came about with my experiences with watching some brilliant operators, that it's important to know what you're on about.

Anna's mission in leading professional learning for teachers about gifted education

When we had the state SHIP program, the seven of us (State SHIP Directors) used to facilitate workshops for teachers on thinking skills; characteristics, behaviours, needs of gifted students; differentiation. Then when I developed the Department for Education and Children's Services (DECS) Publishing gifted course, (that course was a flow-on from the state SHIP project), I would go overseas and facilitate workshops using that course in Hong Kong. It was a train-the-trainer project, and here in Adelaide I did the 24-hour gifted course with our staff. It was compulsory to do this course for every teacher in the cluster schools in that three-year project following on after the SHIP project. Over the years I've revamped it, because I've tried it and I knew it needed to be changed, so I've changed it. All the teachers in those schools did the 24-hour course spread over eight three-hour sessions after school. The course involved the concept of giftedness; characteristics, behaviours; social emotional needs; critical and creative thinking; and differentiation. Some staff did it three times, because they said that each time they came back they heard something different. Because it was so intense. You don't pick up everything at once, but I always try to make it practical. I work through an example. If I was going to do the characteristics of gifted students, for example, I would read up on everything, I'd

go and get every resource I possibly could and my kitchen and dining room tables would end up

being full of stuff. I have to start with a visual and then I look to see where the common threads

are, and then I'll order it, I'll discard things, (now that's just in too great a depth), put papers in

row, I'll number them, and then I'll look to see, "Well what sorts of activity could I do where I

don't talk but they actually have to either read or discuss, and which part will I actually have to

summarise?" So, then I do a yellow post-it note to mark the activity, a blue post-it note is what

would I do to sum it up. And then I'll check articles about the characteristics and I'll highlight

where I got this information, these are the sites and these are the people that have said these

things. So, there's an acknowledgement of the theory and evidence where we get this idea from.

Then, usually at something like four o'clock in the morning I'll wake up and I'll re-order and I'll

take things out. I almost see myself delivering it. I actually have a cycle that I go through. I'll re-

order it, no, that's too much, that's overload, that's almost the same, why would you repeat it,…

There's got to be practicals. Sometimes it's just me doing an overview and then let's go and do

some planning. The next part I start to think, "but are these characteristics always true?" and

that's when the behaviours came in. Giftedness is not always manifested in a positive way, well,

it can actually be in a negative way. So then I think about what it looks like and how I can

integrate that into the workshop without overload. And then the next bit I come up with is what

underpins that, and the next thing I come up with is the emotional aspects, so it starts to evolve.

So as I am planning it I start to think of whether this is always true, what else do I need to

consider. So, planning for a workshop can take me almost two months. And that dining room

will be full of papers, and then I'll lock myself in there, and then I'll just close my eyes and think,

"Does it flow have I covered everything, what's missing, what questions are people likely to ask,

do I have the answer?" and I'll leave it alone for a couple of days and I'll come back to it and say,

"Yes, that works" and then I'll start building the power point. I always include activities for the teachers and discussion points.

The last few years in particular I've got to allow more time for discussion because as I listen to people, the conversations have been so fruitful, engaging, and I think, "I didn't think of that!" and I ask, "Can you share that with the whole group?" Because that's something that I missed. So I've learnt that I have to walk around and listen, but to be able to do that I've got to allow time, because if I'm so engrossed in delivering and not listening, there are bits that I miss and they're really important because it either exposes a negative view or a bizarre view or, something that's perfectly logical. So, that's something that I've learnt in the last couple of years – allow time. Also, walking around you can also pick up if someone's off task, or they're all off task and I can cut it short. Most times it works.

Other workshops I've done recently have been about different forms of assessment and I've tied that into curriculum differentiation, so when they were doing learning intentions and success criteria, I tied that in with thinking tools and then also questioned them about how they would differentiate that for their gifted kids and those who have learning disabilities. I would do that in groups in the workshops.

I still facilitate. I don't teach the GE course anymore. With another person now taking on the role of the SHIP coordinator, I feel that it's time to back off, so that other people take on a leadership role. I've given them all the workshop resources and anything else that I had and I've backed off. If they need something in particular, well I'll help, but I'm not wanting to be seen as someone who knows all the answers, because I don't! Whilst I might have experiences, you develop… The only way I started developing my experiences was because I was thrown in the deep end. And I started tuning in.

Anna reflects on what she has learnt from her leadership role in gifted education

There are degrees and variations in barriers to GE. Some of them are expressed as, "We're only doing this, Anna, because it'll bring kids to the school, but I'm really not going to do it otherwise". So, you target particular teachers in faculty areas, or learning areas or year levels, and you support them in their classroom, model in their classroom, get them to share in staff meetings and hopefully another teacher will ask, "Could you come and do that in my classroom?" So sometimes, often, it has to be through practical support, I actually have to go into the classroom and do something, or I actually have to release a teacher – I'll take the class and the teacher can go and meet with the parent and discuss what the student is doing at home. I've actually sat with a principal and just said, "I don't think you really need me here; I feel like I am a waste of space, I might as well be somewhere else". "Oh no no Anna, don't say that". So, they've given me a bit of leeway, they've let me have staff time, but I've always found that I've got to make it worthwhile. If I was ever going to do something like differentiating for a student in English for example, I'd always take it on the avenue of, "Here is the English curriculum, these are the different aspects of it, so what would the learning intentions be now, so then what would you do for the students that picked that up really quickly? What would you do for your mainstream, what would you do for this student?" I'd always come at GE through the backroads, tying it always into their curriculum focus. As soon as I just push my own barrel, I wouldn't get there. I have to come in from a supportive angle, that was based on whatever the foci was at the school. So if the foci was science, well then we went through science. I couldn't be seen as "the gifted woman". You had to be seen as someone who will help with the program and look at how we might do some interesting things for kids who finish their work a bit faster. Eventually we got into the conversation of, "Well, there's your gifted kid". I had to do it that way. It pushed the

barrel that I knew my curriculum, and if I didn't know I'd find out. I had to work through the

curriculum.

It surprises me how many people still don't believe in GE after all these years. I keep

thinking, "You haven't heard a word I've said!" I suppose for me it's "what's their motive?" I

know one person in particular who is philosophically against a SHIP class. However, when she

sees the advantages, how beneficial it has been for the kids, she is slowly starting to come around.

For example, she saw what the English teacher was doing for the gifted students in the SHIP

class as opposed to what the mainstream classes were doing, and she said, "My year elevens

wouldn't be able to do that!" So sometimes she says she's against it philosophically, but she can

see the dividends. You can talk to that teacher and after a while you can see she's agreeing with

you but it's the philosophical stuff. I don't see her as an issue. She loves an argument and after a

while I realise we're actually talking about the same thing. She's an excellent teacher and if she

sees that a student has the need for extension, enrichment, whatever you want to call it, she will

do it, she just doesn't give them a label. She really does address the needs of gifted kids. She

believes in differentiation, but she's philosophically against the concept of giftedness, or SHIP.

Then there's a group who will poo-hah anything … I'm just looking, I can see them

sitting over there and I'm presenting and everything that's coming out of my mouth I know what

they're saying to each other because there's a constant hiss hiss hiss, you know, they're pulling a

face and they're folding their arms, and every time I would ask them to do something, do an

assignment, because staff had to have assignments to do in-between workshops, I know I

wouldn't get it, and I used to wonder what was the problem. Two of them in particular at this one

school. I'd hear what they were saying, and I realised what the problem was – they just hated

teaching. And anything at all that required change in their thinking, anything at all, they would

oppose. It wasn't really GE they were opposed to, it was anything that would take them out of their comfort zone, where they would actually have to think about what they did, why they did it, and prepare for it. So, they felt they were under threat. There was one particular woman who gave me hell, and there was nothing you could do, not even the principal. But I did see her a few years later and she said, "gee Anna you really did some great work with us". I felt like telling her, well you made it very difficult for me!

There was another one who would give me strife in workshops all the time, and she would question everything I'd say. She now teaches a selective gifted class! She's highly gifted herself, and she didn't take anything as gospel truth. So, her supposed resistance and angst was not about the concept, it was about who said so and why is this so, so this teacher was a typical gifted person who questioned things. If you were prepared to give her an answer or share some research with her or go to her classroom and model something for her or get her to work with a gifted kid, and she'd go for it, oh my god! She's a brilliant operator. She'd be your biggest advocate now for GE.

And then there's another group that gives you a hard time because they actually don't have confidence in teaching and don't know what to do or how to do it. So, you support them through the curriculum. So, I've had a few of those who say, "Anna, I've never really sat down with anyone who's taught me how to program". So we've programmed, and I've done that for a whole year and the next year I'd work with them on differentiation. I've always had to be there to support them.

There's different reasons for resistance. Some of them you just don't win over! I've learnt that I don't lose sleep over them anymore. There's other people that you <u>can</u> be proactive with to make a difference.

I think some people have found teaching difficult because they see it as just planning and delivering, whereas teaching is about looking at all those possibilities, really getting to know the content well so that you can have an idea of where you can go with it, and that takes time. The perfect teacher for me for gifted students is one who knows the curriculum but also is eager to know more. And just loves the teaching. But if you don't want to do a lot of that work and you're just looking in one way, then you're not a good teacher. All you are doing is preparing to present, you're not preparing to teach. But if someone does all that preparation and looks at the possibilities, retains a focus on the core learning intentions and then considers different paths for the students, that teacher will go into the classroom and have the kids eating out of their hand. You do need to look at the needs of gifted students, but it also is about our teachers and that's critical, because there are some teachers I'd never put with gifted kids. I should be able to. It shouldn't make a difference. You're a teacher. I should be able to put you in the classroom with gifted kids. No, no I couldn't do it for the reason that they couldn't see the big picture stuff and they weren't prepared to be flexible with the curriculum in response to the students' needs and interests.

Gifted coordinators have got to believe in giftedness and gifted students. You don't do it as a steppingstone in your own career. You've got to believe in these kids' rights. You've got to believe in GE. You've got to know. Do some reading about gifted students – the way they behave, they're not all successful, they're not all engaged. Be really informed about gifted kids, positive/negative aspects of giftedness… Be well informed so you do actually believe in it. Be organised. You've got to be organised, and that involves planning. Every night I would plan. Maintain a diary and take notes. When I am at a school, I give 100 percent to that school, but I know exactly what's happening because the previous week I had made all the bookings. So, you

organise, plan ahead, with your notes and your diaries, and you keep to it. Each night I would get everything ready so I knew exactly what was happening. Be on time. Do not say you're going to do something and then pull out because it's too hard. Even when it's hard, you've got to keep to the plan. There were times when I'd think that I was too tired to do another workshop, I've had it because I'd been working from seven-thirty when I got to the school and then I'd finish about five-thirty, then I'd start a workshop and I'd be thinking, "I don't want to do this anymore." But if you've committed yourself you've got to do it no matter what. And you don't complain. You do it. You get yourself someone that is a sounding board, a critical friend, you must have that. This is the person you can vent to when you need it, that you can ask questions, that you can appear to have lost the plot. That's the person, nobody else, you don't go around complaining, you don't go around saying, "So-and-so drove me nuts today!" You just don't! Use that critical friend. My critical friend would get a phone call at nine o'clock at night, and I'd go "ahhhhhh…" and then I'd feel really good. "Right! Now I'm over that. Let's keep going. Stay focused". You must have a critical friend.

Don't assume that you know everything because you've read it, because no sooner have you read it then something new comes up and you think, "I didn't know that!" So you keep your ear to the ground, and actually that's been harder and harder. I have had to go on the internet so much to see what was happening. So, you've got to have a network to make sure that you're keeping in touch with what's around and updating your own information.

Be prepared for knock-backs and brick walls but don't take it personally, because it's not about you, it's about what you're delivering. There have been times that I've thought, "Well, what did I do wrong?" Maybe it's not something I've done wrong, it's just that there are differences of opinion.

But always be prepared to go into classrooms to practise what you preach. Because if I'm telling a teacher that they could do this or they should do that, then I've got to demonstrate how you do it. You've got to tie it in with the curriculum. You've got to be prepared to go into the classroom and do it.

You've got to know and keep abreast with the curriculum. So, keep abreast with what's there. Read. And enjoy it! You've got to… there are times when you just want to do something with the staff, and you have to have empathy with the staff, because the job has changed. I know we could all argue that teaching's just teaching, but it isn't. There are so many pressures on classroom teachers that sometimes you just have to stand back and say, "My job says I've got to do this, but that teacher has different pressures, so how do I either support her or him or back off?" So, it's having empathy and an understanding for teachers. It's not always about, "I've got a job to do, I'm here for the gifted kids." Hang on, I need to back off a bit and support the teacher also.

One of the teachers I worked with was struggling because his wife was ill, so it was basically me saying to him, "ok what is it that you would like me to do for you to make your life easier, tell me all the things you've got to do, which one of those do you want me to do?" This then develops trust so that when you eventually do want them to do something, they are much more willing to do it. It's about give and take, it's not just about saying "you will" and expecting people to do it. It's about sometimes it doesn't happen. It might take time. And you don't take it personally. I've developed a thick skin. But now and then there's a little bit of an eruption and I go to my critical friend and I'll offload and I'm ok again.

So be informed, be organised, have empathy, don't take it personally. You've got to believe in these kids because they're just so different. And then some kids you think, "I don't

actually like you" and then you realise you can understand why they are the way they are –

there's a lot of things that have happened for one reason or another, so you start to look at what

else is going around, how else can you approach this person. So, it's about knowing your people

and the kids in particular.

Building positive relationships with the principal is critical, because if you don't have

leadership that believes in the position, that is prepared to fund it, you're struggling. From the

mid-1980s on, my school principals believed in GE. My first SHIP school principal believed in

the thinking tools for all students. He believed it made a difference. We had data showing it had

made a difference to students' achievement. I would come in to school and he'd be there to greet

me. I'd have a meeting with him once a month to do a report. He found money to release people,

either to work in the learning teams, or to attend workshops, or to be released to meet with

parents when we did an IEP. He funded it. Once a term we would have a cluster meeting and I

had to write a report so they all knew what was happening. At those meetings I would be asked

the question, "What support are you getting, what support are you NOT getting?' and it was all

agreed with the principals that that would be rectified if I wasn't getting something I needed.

So, the principal has got to know what's happening. Also, in the staff performance

management meeting the principal has to ask the teachers how they are supporting the gifted

students, and what support are they receiving from me. So, I've actually given principals a list –

these are the things I want you at least to ask your teachers when you have performance review

meetings with them about the SHIP program. What are we getting out of it? How is it benefiting

the students? If someone is committing themselves to that role as a GE coordinator, teachers

don't have to tell them how to do their job, but they need to say what the coordinator can so to

help them so if it's not happening, how do we make it happen? There's got to be accountability,

for the person who's got the role, for the classroom teachers. The principal has got to be that force – not to *do* the job, but to over-view. There's got to be accountability on the part of the GE coordinator. And if you're not motivated, if you're not organised, if you're not committed to that, you could quite easily just breeze in and breeze out and not make a difference. There's also got to be development. I think the principal's support and oversight of the program is vital. If you don't have that, you're working on your own.

Accountability includes reviewing the IEPs for gifted students with the teachers and involving teachers in keeping these documents updated. I talk to the students about what they are doing in their lessons, how their projects are progressing, and what they have learned from that. So, talking to the kids, asking them questions, is important. You've got to make time to meet with the kids. Meet with the parents and you'll soon find out if something's not working. "Well, you know that state program that whatshername was supposed to be working on, well that's not had anything happening for months." Because I had negotiated that with the teachers, I've got to go back to them and find out where they're up to.

Talking to the staff, looking at IEPs, talking to the students, talking to the parents, gives me information that the gifted program is working. Looking at teachers' programs, seeing that, oh that thinking tool has been used, and also the way kids have responded – it *has* worked, I think, "Ooh, that's interesting!"

Do I have any data that says empirically that the GE PL has been successful? No, I don't. But from observations, from listening to people, yes it has, but it's taken a long time. And when a student says to me, "Oh I love my teacher this year, we do so many interesting things," and I say to them," What have you learnt?" and they prattle off a whole series of things, I think, "H'm, it's working!" We've had recently a family of three children move from another school and the

mother has met me several times, and she's said this is the first time all three kids are happy.

They just love school, absolutely love school. And another parent said that her daughter, highly

gifted in mathematics, was going home saying, "This is doing my head in!" because the teacher's

differentiating the program and she's learning and it's challenging. It's been hard work for the

teacher. The teacher's told me, "Anna, she can do what I can't!" so I say, "Well, what is it that I

can do to support you?"

So, yes, the gifted program *has* made a difference. If that was to go, there would be a

huge uproar from not only the staff, but also from parents. And the students. It has been

maintained because the parents believe in it, as do the teachers, and the principals are very

involved, and also believe in it.

The leadership chain has to be in place, but change happens in the classroom – that's

where you've got to target. It's what teachers do day to day in the classroom that helps gifted

kids to learn. I didn't want to be seen as the gifted teacher. It was not about that. My job has been

to empower teachers to work with gifted kids, and to make sure that things were being done.

That makes gifted programs sustainable. Tying GE to the curriculum, having clear learning

intentions for all students and pathways that extend gifted students' learning, that's what it's

about. So GE is everyone's responsibility. Not just the GE coordinator.

Summary of some relevant themes emerging in relation to the research puzzle:

Career stage	Anna's themes
Reasons for career choice – How did she come to be a teacher & a GE specialist?	• Value of education – father in particular valued teaching as a career • Teacher who made a difference • Worked hard – determined, persistent • EAL/D student – respected teachers who differentiated for her • Teacher who made a difference • Inquisitive – learning to ask questions & think • Reading – became an avid reader
Career development	• Stay informed – read about learning/curriculum/GE

– What did she learn about how to bridge the gap between theory & practice through GL PE?	- Translate theory into practical applications for teachers - Good teaching & planning for teaching comes first - Remain positive – understand/accept teacher's situation - Leadership support – pushed out of comfort zone - Carrot and stick – support and accountability for teachers to change - Critical friend/s
Life themes – What enduring qualities & factors sustained her throughout her career?	- Belief in giftedness & gifted students – important work & everyone's responsibility - Positivity & optimism - Self as learner – building knowledge - Effort, hard work, persistence - Planning & organisation - Individuality – be prepared to swim against the tide, thick skin Learn to deal with blockers - Identify supports

Table 2: Summary of Anna's career story themes

"Jane's" story

Early years: Conflict, cleverness and conquest

I was born in Swan Hill surrounded by fruit blocks and lived in a little place out of Swan Hill until I was four. What had happened was that my mother lost her father and brother in the war and then she married my father. My mother was highly intelligent, my father was too, but mum had glandular fever for years and dad went to the war and couldn't continue the architecture he wanted to do when he came back. So, they both wanted us to have an education. My father was a bushman and a larrikin. He sold Holdens. He was general manager for GMH in Bushtown (*pseudonym*) and had to come to Melbourne every six weeks or so to bring back cars. He'd often take me with him, and he'd take me to the movies. I remember seeing *Alice in Wonderland* – it was the first movie I'd ever seen and I loved it! I've loved movies ever since. I loved the city.

So, when I was four, we moved to Bushtown where my father's brothers were and my grandparents on my father's side. I lived in Bushtown until I went away to Boarding school in Year eleven.

I've been working out, doing the arithmetic working back, and basically what happened was, and this is very interesting, I turned five at the end of my first year at school. My birthday is in November, so I started school when I was four years and two months. Isn't that interesting? And I learnt to play the piano at the same time, and that is important, because they said that my hands couldn't span the piano, which they couldn't, and I didn't care. I *had* to learn to play the piano. Why? Because my friend's sister could play the piano like a dream, so could my cousin, who was four years older than me. Listening to them play the piano was like watching the sunrise. And I was absolutely determined to play the piano like those two. And usually when I was determined to do something, that's exactly what happened. So, I started school at four years and two months so I was always, right through to university, the youngest in my year, always. The tallest and the youngest.

So, I learnt the piano at the same time, and unlike other kids, I kept at it and kept at it. I was still having music lessons in Year twelve but I had to give it up because I couldn't do the swimming and the music and the study at the same time. And about that time, when I was fifteen, I started dropping things. I only found out in 1996 why, because I had a degenerative spinal condition. My mother also had it.

The Olympics were held in Melbourne in 1956, and by that time I had become the Bushtown swimming champion. Once again, just quite an amazing thing, I just beat my best friend in a race. Except she was the local champion. She had set up the race because she always won, but I beat her. So, I became the school swimming champion. At the time I was eleven they

honestly believed that I could be as good as the Olympians. It was a big thing. So, what I had to

do, and this is unbelievable, that my father and his brother, who built the Bushtown swimming

pool, they realised I was a champion, but I could only go down to Melbourne for coaching in the

school holidays at the Melbourne baths. They'd put me on the Overland at Dimboola at two

o'clock in the morning and my grandmother would meet me in Melbourne. And I trained in the

Olympic pool. I met Dawn Fraser. But the rest of the training at home I was on my own. This is

what I used to do at age eleven. I was given the key to the swimming pool and I used to ride my

bike over the railway tracks at five in the morning and I'd open the gate and I'd swim five miles.

I'd stand there on the edge of the pool and it was absolute glass. Nobody else was around. Then

after school I'd ride to my music teacher's house and I'd play the piano. So she'd feed me and

then I'd ride home and get home about eight o'clock, go to bed and get up and I'd do it all again

the next day. What I learnt to do with my swimming and my music was that I used to do all my

homework in my head. I used to be able to just think it all through while I was swimming those

five miles and playing music. I'd think it all through and then I'd write it all down.

    I still remember quite a lot about primary school. There was one thing that really annoyed

me in Year three. Brian Hoffman was accelerated. I can remember this, this is important. One

day, the teacher, who didn't like me or my family, came in and took Brian Hoffman out and put

him in the next year level. I was so upset about it because I thought I was as clever as he was,

why didn't they put me up? They put Brian Hoffman up, but they didn't put me up, so there you

go. I remember that because I had the same teacher in Year six, and this is where it all happened.

    Now, my mother had a friend who was dying of cancer. This was when I was in Years

five and six. I don't know why, because my mother didn't usually spend time with me, but my

mother used to take me with her when she visited her friend. Her friend's son, Michael, was a

few years older than me, and something he had that we didn't have was a set of encyclopaedias.

Now, up until then, there had always been books in my house, and I had always been reading,

right? Always. All the old classics. But I had never come across a set of encyclopaedias in my

life. So, I read them. Don't ask. I just did. And that must have gone on for quite a period of time.

So clearly I was a good reader, wasn't I.

And so the thing that really changed my life was a science test. After that test, I was

accused of cheating by that teacher, the one who didn't like me, and who didn't accelerate me in

Year three, who still didn't like me. And I was accused of cheating. Now remember that at this

time, the teacher had control of all the books. You didn't have a textbook. So the only notes that

I would have had were the teacher's notes from the blackboard. Except the teacher had lent me

the book three days before. What I had done without knowing was that I had reproduced the text

from the book in the science test. I didn't copy it, because I had returned the book. It was

impossible for me to have cheated. This is the most amazing thing about me, and the most

difficult thing. I was able to reproduce that book. Some experts were brought in and I was given

some sort of a test, probably an IQ test, and that's when they found out I was very clever. I had

this very unusual ability to read something, internalise it and reproduce it.

Books were always important to me. You can see in my bookshelves there's every book

that's been published on the Holocaust for example, and every cookbook, it just depends what

particular stage I'm going through. I have to have every book that's been written on it. If there's

a book on something I have to have it. That's never left me, never. And technology's made that

urge so much easier to deal with.

And then I won a scholarship. And I realised that I must have been an utter pain in the

neck. There were three scholarship winners and we were told we could go home early, so I was

instructed by this teacher to go straight home. But I got into a discussion with him that it was impossible for me to go straight home, right, because I had to go around the corner, up the hill and down there… you can just imagine what sort of a smart-arse kid that I was. Anyway, he kept me in for a good hour after that. So that served me right for giving him cheek. But I never liked him. Not even as an adult.

I realise I used to polarise people. Why? Because I was arrogant. I was always the clever one. I was also the town swimming champion. You see, one of the things that was quite interesting was that I always came second in running, so I knew what it was like to fail. And I was never good at Maths. My memory doesn't hold for Maths. It does for dates but not for numbers. I wasn't good at everything.

Then I had another teacher who disliked me. He didn't like me or my family. But he actually differentiated the curriculum for me. When the other kids were reading *I can jump puddles* I was given *Merchant of Venice*. I know now that he was differentiating, but back then I saw it as punishment. I was put at the front of the class with my back to the other kids, so I wasn't such a nuisance. I remember I was the tea monitor, so I had to go into the staffroom to make the tea and there he was complaining to the other teachers that he had to set a different exam for me, and I didn't understand the reason.

By that stage I knew I was clever and I wanted to do well. I knew I was going to boarding school. When my grandmother moved to Melbourne I was sent to Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC). They were going to send me somewhere else, but the headmistress of that school accused me of cockiness. You can't believe it, but that was the 50s. So, I was sent to PLC for Years eleven and twelve. My parents had high ambitions for me. They wanted me to be a pharmacist, for God's sake! So, there I was in Year eleven studying Maths 1, Maths 2, Physics, Chemistry

and French. I didn't understand a word of it. I'm sure they let me pass Year eleven so they didn't

have to teach me again! I really struggled. I went from being the top of the class to nearly the

bottom. I felt so stupid. I couldn't understand Physics. I knew I didn't want to spend my time in a

laboratory. Why would anyone bother about the periodic table! Now, I could have learnt that if I

could have bothered. But I didn't want to deal with that, I wanted to deal with people and ideas,

not periodic tables.

I realised that the only chance I had of getting out of a small country town and getting to

university was if I changed over to the Humanities. So, I changed my subject choices. I forged

my father's signature on the subject choice form. When they found out that I had forged my

father's signature, it was about the same time that they found out that I hadn't been baptised,

because mum and dad hadn't got around to it after the war, and they only found *that* out because

the boarding house mistress noticed I wasn't taking communion when I was sitting next to her in

church one day. This was PLC of course! So, I was sent home in disgrace and they were

threatening to expel me. And I'll never forget this, it was such an insult, because the principal

said that I was anti-science, anti-history (which was ridiculous because I was second top). She

said I was anti-sport (and I'm in the top hockey team and swimming team and I've got a white

jumper in my first year there – this is the most important honour you can get in the sport) and she

said I was anti-quated. And she said I would never amount to anything. And my father, bless him,

said it was their fault, because they hadn't managed me well, so I wasn't expelled. Dad told me

that if I failed Year twelve I would be sent back to PLC to repeat. Do you think that I didn't work

like you wouldn't believe! I worked so hard to stop that happening. I was the only boarder that

passed Year twelve that year. I do extremely well in English and the Histories and I get by in

Maths. Not enough to get a Commonwealth Scholarship but enough to get a studentship. For the

first time in my life, I worked so hard. And I've never given it up since. I've always been so

goal-directed and that was where it all started. I just had to find myself and I did – I just had to

work so hard to pass Year twelve and get myself out of Bushtown and to the university, and I

realised that I was only going to get there from my own hard work. I loved my home town, I

loved the place, but the city was for me. So, this was a turning point. And I saw what I could

become.

University: Ideas taking shape

I turned 17 at the end of my Year twelve, so I am still the youngest. That's when I started

going out with Brian. He was three years older than me and he had ideas. He was studying at

Caulfield, so I go to Monash and I do an Arts degree. But it was a very interesting Arts degree,

because this was 1962 and all the world had changed. What they wanted to do was to turn out

graduates who were equally as good in the Sciences as they were in the Humanities. C.P. Snow

had this idea about bridging the disciplines. I ended up doing a combination of English, History,

Economics and Statistics in my first year.

I spent an awful lot of time demonstrating against the Vietnam War. Everyone in the

country watched the ABC and I lived in fear of my father seeing me on the television coverage

of the protesters. My father would have been absolutely horrified if he knew.

So, the long and short of it was that I did very well at Monash University and I won the

History prize in my third year, and that was pretty big deal, really. I hadn't worked hard at

everything, for example, in Economics I had summarised it and learnt it in the September and

forgotten it again. My Economics professor said to me, "You got through with God's grace and a

heavy push, didn't you?" He knew that I had skated very close to the edge and he told me not to

do Economics, so I did Economic History. So, there I am writing essays predicting the next

depression in Australia. I had the most amazing lecturer. His real passion was the Industrial

Revolution and Economic History, and I've still got the lecture notes, I just loved it, loved it!

Then I got my Diploma of Education. I'd done extremely well in that as well. I was

ranked number one. What they wanted me to do was to stay at university and become an

academic. But at the age of twenty I had enough of school and wanted to get out into the world.

The lecturers I had were some of the best teachers in the country – I really was exposed

to great minds and great thinking. They ended up becoming some of the great academics in

Australia. It was a new age and we were all inspired by these ideas and great minds. We just

were determined to change things, it was bred into us at university. We were going to change the

world. And I met so many fabulous people and was exposed to some of the finest minds of my

generation. They were just as crazy about ideas as I was. I learnt about people who had given up

their lives for what they believed in. I'd never met people like that before. Monash was all about

ideas, about change, about people who were brave enough to be who they were, to live their

beliefs. Looking back on it all now, very few people have ever had that chance.

Teaching: Early connections

I had the idea that that I could teach quite early. You know, you look at my class back in

Bushtown. None of them had the opportunity to go to university. Yet at least two of them could

have. One thing that happened when I was at the local high school before I went away to PLC,

was that we had a student who people would say was a few kangaroos short of the top paddock,

right? And he was given to violent rages and then hiding on top of the lockers and the only

person that could get him down from a locker was me. In the whole school. I was the only one

who could calm him down and get him off the lockers and back to class. So, I realised very early

that I really had an ability to teach, no, that I had a connection with other people. I didn't know, I

still don't know what that connection is, but it works, and that boy is the one that showed me that.

I'm sure he became a successful farmer, that's what I heard, but that's when I realised I could

teach. And when I was in Year eleven at PLC, I was in the first hockey team and they let me

coach the Year eights and that was actually unheard of.

Teaching: Inspiration to make a difference

Henry P. Schoenheimer was one of my lecturers and I was attracted to his ideas about

alternative education, innovative schools and educational reform. About five of us were going to

try and establish an ERA school, just as Henry advocated. I mean, we were twenty, twenty-one

and we were filled with zeal to change the Education Department. So, we were going to change

the world. We were going to change the world for everybody, not just us. We didn't start the

school because we had to go and learn to be teachers in the real world. And later, Schoenheimer

committed suicide. Isn't that awful? He still remained a source of inspiration for me as I built my

career in education.

So here I am, I come out of the university, I've won the History prize, I'm not going to

become an academic although I did work in the History Department during the holidays. I was

twenty-one, I'd been in school since I was four and I wanted to get out into the world. And to

everybody's absolute horror I was sent to a Technical School in the coal district in Victoria. And

everybody tried to save me from it. Seriously. I'd graduated top of my course – you'd think that

I would be sent out to far more prestigious sort of schools. They sent the men out to the

prestigious schools. For example, Robert - he was number ten or something and he got a far

better posting than I did. And I was really resentful about all of that. Really resentful. I mean,

Professor Legge wrote to the Education Department. Everybody tried to save me from it. But, I

couldn't be saved.

So, I go to the Tech and what did I find at there? It would just appall you. So here I am, I'm teaching fifty kids. The only way we could seat them all was to have them on the floor, we didn't have enough desks. It was appalling. I wasn't allowed to teach night school even though I was the most qualified teacher because they couldn't guarantee my safety on the campus after dark. Seriously. And they'd only just put in a women's toilet. So here I am teaching fifty kids, luckily at least ten of them are away most of the time because they were on remand. And if they misbehaved in my class, they were sent out and the History senior would belt them with a strap. A nearby high school had closed because they were going to dig it up for coal basically. And so they had all the desks still in that abandoned school. We broke into it, right, climbed over the cyclone fences and whatever, and we broke into it and we actually got a ute from someone to transport desks to the Tech school so that we had enough desks for all the kids.

So, here I am in this god-forsaken school and I'm young, and it's all male aside from the librarian. But something happened with my class. I had kids in there who were really brilliant. I don't know why they were in a technical college. Remember, techs were lower than high schools, you know, everybody looked down on them. And so I decided to teach them as if they were bright and – I just remember I was doing *Henry V*. The speeches. And when the inspectors came I was promoted immediately, like literally. Because I really took these kids and I ran with them. I don't know why I did, I was just so thrilled to see young minds who, they're poor, that's why they're at a tech and people have given up on them. And I truly believed that I had kids there that would be able to go to university, I really did. And you know, I wanted everybody to have that chance because it opened up the world to me. Like I already had the world because I'd read all those encyclopaedias remember? But I just gobbled it up.

However, it got me down. The kids being belted, the marking load was appalling, and you know, I don't think I was really supported by my colleagues enough and I remember one Friday afternoon, I was just at the lowest ebb ever. My psych lecturer from university used to go around visiting all of the teachers like me and he pulled up and found me crying there. And I told him that I was going to give up teaching, I just couldn't do this anymore and he talked to me for an hour and talked me back into it. I've never forgotten it as long as I live. It was a real genuine care there. Real genuine affection. Anyway, so he talked me into staying.

So then, I got promoted. I got promoted and went to a country high school east of Melbourne. It too doesn't exist anymore. But this is the most wonderful thing in the world – how did I know. Here I am at this high school and everything's different, you know – all the migrant labour, but so it's really interesting. So I'm given a Year twelve class. It was my second year out. I'm given 18th century History. And in those days, I had to type all the notes up out of my text book because the kids didn't have text books and then I'd run it off on a gestetner machine. And the principal's daughter was in that class and she won the state History Prize that year, the year that I taught her in Year twelve. And that had never ever happened, that a country kid had won the History Prize! She is a university Professor of History now.

So, I was already on the map you might say, academically, because you know, encouraging bright children. But what I need to tell you about this high school, this is how it operated. On Wednesdays, the Year twelves did not attend school. Seriously. They were able to come in and have conferences with their teachers, but they could decide to come in or do what they wanted to. They could go and play footy or they could work. Can you believe it? Unbelievable. There were no examinations. The Principal wouldn't allow it. He was a real renegade. The Department did not know what to do with him. So, we had all of this teaching

taking place on Wednesdays with the kids who wanted to learn something, and nobody is making

the kids learn rubbish. You know, for exam purposes only. So, we're actually educating the kids.

And then another string to my bow in a sense was that the girls were leaving at the end of Year

ten. And I was really upset because many of the migrant and poorer families didn't think that the

girls needed to be educated. And I had really bright girls and I remember begging some of their

parents to allow them to do Year twelve. And so, the long and short of it all was when I was at

the local shops I can tell you, I got the best service ever because of these kids who I've tried to

save to send to universities. So, you can see I already had zeal in all of this area. Making sure

that kids had a chance even if they were from the country and even if they were poor or female.

And in most schools, you have a fund where you give presents to staff when they're leaving, that

sort of stuff. Instead, our fund was to raise enough money to feed the kids breakfast, whose

families were too poor to give them breakfast, and give them warm clothes in what was a very

cold place. So, we had a whole group of teachers that were really radical, wanting to change the

world. So once again I found my mirror. People who wanted to change the world like I did.

With a headmaster who wanted to do it too. So, do you know what the foreign language was that

was taught there? It was Esperanto. He said we're all citizens of the world, we all had to learn

Esperanto. And most people thought he was an utter nut. But now when I look back, it was

absolutely prescient what he did. So, there I was, I became assistant to the Deputy Principal, who

was a woman, in my third year of teaching.

So that was fine, except I got pregnant. That was towards the end of my third year of

teaching. Brian and I were married in 1967, when I was twenty-two, after my first year of

teaching, and he was working at the Power Station and we were living in a little country town in

Gippsland. So, I was allowed to work until I was five months' pregnant, then I had to leave. I

had to resign my job. Isn't that ridiculous? So, I really felt I achieved a lot. I'd been teaching

Year twelve and using all of the material that I've had from these excellent teachers I've had, and

I had all these bright kids, you know, who really lapped up everything I did. They were just

dying for somebody to teach them ... and I had other colleagues who were trying to teach them.

We bought text books, I've still got copies of them, and they were wonderful ones from Britain

that use sources analysis and thinking skills, and this is what I'm teaching in Years eight and

nine. They are remarkable. I can't bring myself to throw them away. And it was just wonderful

teaching them that and English. We changed the way we taught English as well. We allowed the

kids to have choices and oh, it was just wonderful. So, there I was with all these people who

wanted to change the world and we were. We were. Then I became pregnant and that was the

end of it. I had to resign my job.

I could have gone back when my son turned four. But that didn't happen because my

daughter was born. She was born ill. So, my whole life was consumed by keeping this child alive.

So, what did I do while I was looking after this sick child? Well, I really got myself up to date

with Ancient History and I read every book on it in the library and I really polished off American

History at the same time because we didn't have baby alarms in those days. If she stopped

breathing at night she could die, so I used to sit with her all through the night and read.

Brian was working for a local engineering firm at that point and they wanted to open up a

business in Adelaide and that's why we came. And I didn't go back to teaching until 1981 when

I started tutoring a Year twelve girl who wasn't doing well. This girl had been getting a C. I

started teaching her, she gets an A. I was told by several people that I was the best History

teacher that they had ever seen, with my passion for taking kids and bringing out the best in them.

Now I don't know why I got it or how I got it, but I just wanted it to happen. Because I had to

fight for it all, I wanted to make it easier for others.

My son was at the local government primary school. They said I couldn't enroll my

daughter because the staff couldn't take responsibility for her illness, but a local private school

said they could and would, and they did. And that's one of the reasons why I went back to work,

to make sure this child went to the private school. She only went to school for half a day for the

first two years. So, basically speaking, she's accelerated and she's young for her age too. And

so I've got this child that can read and write and everything before she goes to school, has got

quite remarkable abilities, but has health problems. And my son was at the trendy school where

Miraca Gross taught, but he was not identified as being gifted because he also had a disability, he

was dyslexic. That's where I met Miraca, who was a big name in GE. Anyway, we had a

diagnosis from the psychologist who said this child had an IQ over 130 and that he was also

dyslexic – I think I cried for a week. So here I've got a gifted son who is dyslexic. And I've got

a sick child at home and I'm tutoring a private school girl. And so gradually we made the

decision that I'm going to go back to work in 1981. And this is where, once again, my life sort

of changed because in the meantime, I had met Sue Kirsten who was one of the founding

members of the Gifted and Talented Association (GTCASA).

So, I get a job at an independent girls' school and here I am, the first year I am given the

worst Year nine class that they have ever had, right, who have spent all of Year eight standing

outside the door of the classroom – half of them. And I teach them History in a Chemistry lab.

So, this is what I'm expected to do. I'm expected to take R. J. Coote's *History of the Middle*

Ages and I am supposed to summarise the points on the feudal system. I am supposed to write

them on the board and then the kids are supposed to copy down the notes and then I give them a

test on it. I couldn't stand it. So, I procured some of the UK textbooks I'd used before and taught

them my way. For the first time the kids had agency. Those kids happened to be extremely

bright. There was one girl in this class who was less able, and I was able to teach her at the same

time too. So, here's a teacher that within the constraints of this really traditional structure

actually helps students learn. And what happens is, the "worst" class in the school turns into the

best class! So, once again I have a reputation for being able to get to kids and make them learn

or encourage them to learn. I learnt from my son's learning disability and my own struggle with

learning numbers in Maths. So I learnt how to deal with less able kids. So, I'm teaching for two

years at this school and by the second year these kids are transformed. So, I had a reputation of

being able to handle really difficult kids, which means I just get more difficult kids. But they

were very bright children, in most cases. Very bright children who were bored.

So, I'm teaching part time and my daughter is better. She's not in hospital like she is

before, and we decide that I can go back full time. And I was given a Year twelve class in 1983

in Modern History because of my pedigree in History. And there was a child who had won a

scholarship and her parents asked about what provisions for gifted and talented education were

going to be put in place for their daughter. So, I get called in on a Tuesday morning, second

lesson, to the principal and she tells me that I have to do something about "that brusque child

from Whyalla". She's still brusque, that girl! Also, in private schools in those days the

Registration Board would send in a team to analyse whether you're meeting your children's

needs, and this team said that we were looking after learning support children really well, but we

weren't handling gifted very well, we weren't handling the bright children very well, and

certainly all the evidence was there because of the Year nine History class referred to above. So

that was 1983 and remember the first National Gifted Conference takes place in Melbourne in 1983.

So, the long and short of it all, what happens is that I set up the gifted program. I don't know what to do with these kids. So, I join GTCASA and start going to the meetings. All right, so here we are – I've been appointed GE coordinator so what I do is to work with them from Year nine right through to Year twelve. I was more or less governed by what the kids wanted to do and what other people said to do and that was to teach them thinking skills. So, the brusque child from Whyalla continued to be difficult but at least she was tame, do you see what I mean, the same effect happened, and those girls still love me, now, 40 years after the event, so it was real. Those girls are still in touch with me to this day.

Another thing I decided to do when I came to South Australia was I was going to leave my radical past behind me, right, I was leaving that behind. I realised that if I wanted reform, I had to do it through the system not try and overthrow it. So, I'd grown up a bit – motherhood made me grow up a bit at least. By 1985, I realised that I needed power and status in order to make changes. So, in 1985, I was made Head of Department in Extended Curriculum which gave me enormous sway. I also needed a qualification in Gifted Education, so that I truly understood what I was offering in the gifted program. Influenced by Eddie Braggett and Louise Mares, I enrolled in a Diploma of Education: Teaching Gifted Children at Charles Sturt University in NSW. The advantage of this course was that I could do it by correspondence. After two years' study during 1989 and 1990, I graduated top of my class.

Leadership: power to make a difference

In my whole teaching career, I had principals who supported me, and I don't see how you can do the job without the support of the principals and the leadership team. There was nobody

undermining me. I was always supported. And that really does make a difference because you

can go about your job confidently. I always had to watch my back, but generally speaking as I

said the principals were really good.

One of the things that we did early on in the 1990s was a pretty big analysis of who was

enrolling in our school and why. So we found out that 80 percent enrol through word of mouth,

so that is just, you know you can't do anything about that, that is your community, so really you

have only got that 20 percent to play with. In the analysis that they did, the gifted program was

bringing in 5 percent of the enrolments. Now you think about that for a minute out of 20 percent

they're bringing in a quarter of those enrolments. So the gifted program was important. It paid

for itself.

I had strong credibility because of being a leader but also because in my university

education I was trained in English and History all the way through. I am teaching in both the

English and History faculties, which were the largest in the school, and then I am in GE. I later

became Head of Extended Curriculum. So basically I am in three faculties. And so I have the

ability in faculties, and so I was able to influence people. I realised when I did a coaching course

that I am only going to influence 80 percent of them, I had to let go of the 20 percent who were

agin me and concentrate on the people who either were with me or wanted to be with me and use

my techniques. And I wasn't the only change agent there, there were others. Like the ICT

Department. I was an early adopter of technology and the ICT department as a general rule loved

me because I was always in with the technology. I saw what could happen with gifted children

and technology. So, and then of course there was the library. Now the librararians loved me as

well. So the reading of the books and seeing the potential of the resources, you know, like other

teachers just didn't have that, because I was doing the reading all the time as well, and the library

would get the books in. And the point is that other people were interested in my ideas. So that is how it worked, at a staff sort of level. Then I started doing more formalised PD encouraged by the Principal. I would invite any teachers who were interested and able to come on Mondays in lesson three to learn about the *Harvard Thinking Routines*, for example. And I'd teach a routine or someone would trial it in their classroom and share with the group the results of the trial, and that went on for two or three years. And not only that, we wrote up what we did and shared it on the intranet. We wrote teaching plans. So you can see how technology is really helping me here, right? But this was helping teachers to learn about embedding thinking skills in their lessons and they could go back and teach their faculties and the resources were being developed so they could go back to the information later.

I am also going off to national conferences and doing presentations and the same with Asia, Singapore, China, Indonesia. So when I was going off to some GE conference and I was delivering a paper, I delivered that to the staff first. I would bring back new approaches to the school that I learned and I would read the research and think about how that worked with gifted children. So for example, the first growth mindset workshop I did for our staff was in 2008 and you just think how early that was (*two years after Dweck's book was published)*. When I did that growth mindset workshop, people told me that I changed their lives, they have understood their children for the first time, their bright children and why they are getting an A one minute and a zero the next.

And looking over the whole period of time that was unusual because I also had kudos outside the school. I am not just doing PL at my school, I'm being imported interstate to work with high-ranking schools who wanted me to show them how to be in the top twenty schools. Another thing that was happening was that people were visiting the school, people who were

international figures in gifted education, like Prof. Lannie Kanevsky. And this is how I

influenced the staff. I had status. And alright, I can see that the drama teacher was resentful and

said I was up myself and, but many of the staff were really proud of me. Most teachers wanted to

learn what I was providing for them in PL because my students, irrespective of ability, did better

than anybody else's. I had credibility. So this becomes really obvious, so other people want to be

like me as well and they want to work with me, right, so, and, I just did. And I started just

concentrating on the 80 percent and I didn't worry about the others, but what is really interesting

is that the 20 percent started to come around too.

   I think that teachers as a general rule, if they can see that something is going to improve

the outcomes for children then they will do it, that is what I think. You know I love most of my

colleagues, I've hardly ever met a person who wasn't trying to do their best for them even

though sometimes they've fallen short. They still loved the kids but loving the kids is not

enough, you have got to challenge them as well. And that was the thing, that children were not

complaining about boredom in my classes. They knew that I would do my best to get them to

their best, and kids believed me. Like teachers believe me. The school counsellor was on my

side too, because when we read Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*, that was in 1996, we realised

that well-being was as important as everything else. So we set up the Resilience Program. The

school counsellor didn't want to take responsibility for the program because she hadn't been

trained in counselling gifted children, but I had those qualifications. That's something I am proud

of, what we did for those gifted girls with issues. That was fantastic. They're still alive. All of

them are happy, we're really very proud of that, we can't even talk about it. And working closely

with the school counsellor brought in a whole new group of people in many ways, I think.

Through all of this I worked hard, right. If you asked anybody at the school, they would tell you how hard I worked. During term I worked seven days a week, right? I worked so hard and that worked. So first of all there is that example I set. Other teachers knew they had to work hard. But also, there was my absolute insistence that all students be catered for and that's what brought about the thinking and learning curriculum. Ron Ritchhart talks about his culture of thinking, you know like establishing a culture whereby all of these things are accepted.

So, getting back to gifted children again, this was a decision that the principal took. She said that the things that we valued like, that represented what we believed in, had to be at the forefront of everything we did. You have to be explicit. You can't just think that it is going to happen. We had a PL group who worked on developing the values and then we had protocols for meetings, for example, to ensure the value of respectful relationships was enacted. So one of my aims I know was to encourage the gifted students to develop their own talents and the talents of others. Lannie Kanevsky commented when she observed the classes, that she could not believe the spirit of cooperation and collaboration amongst those Year twelve students, instead of the fierce competition that she sees in other schools. She said she just couldn't believe how different it was from other schools that she had visited. The school values are front and centre in every classroom. And that's achieved through leadership, through working with staff and through seeing the students' improved outcomes that convinces everyone of its importance.

Jane reflects on what she has learnt from her leadership role in gifted education

The gifted coordinator has to be trained in GE, but they also have to be good teachers. If you can't teach, you can't teach gifted students. All you do is give the program a bad name. It's no good if you have a Masters or PhD in GE if you can't teach. So hiring the right person who is capable of the work is essential. The research shows that gifted kids love teachers with passion –

we know about the characteristics of teachers for gifted. You've got to have that 'whatever it is' that means you can communicate. Students come first. The teacher's belief and effort helps the student believe that they can be a successful learner. What did I do for these students that other teachers didn't do? I assisted them to become good learners. I'd ask them questions – have you got the right evidence here? Is this a sound topic sentence? I kept them thinking. I've come to think that you have to be intelligent yourself to teach gifted students, have a wide and deep knowledge base, and continue to build on it. And then it's about relationships. You've got to get buy-in from other members of staff, you really have to think about the way people feel. So, if you are abrasive and a little bit elitist and a little bit…, you're going to find yourself in trouble with your colleagues.

You have to have status as the GE coordinator. There's not too much you can do with low status because people won't take any notice of you. And that's all there is to it. Because most teachers like things the way they are. Even though they want to do things for their kids, quite often they think that what they're already doing *is* the best thing for their kids and they don't see the need to change.

Changing teachers' practice is the way to go. I'd try and get the teachers to change their methodology. Just please use a Bloom's Taxonomy unit, just please use de Bono's six hat thinking, just focus on one thing at a time to help them bring deeper thinking into their classrooms. Identify the research, teach the staff, apply the ideas into the classroom and then evaluate it. I don't understand why people don't DO what the research recommends. You can't push research down other people's throats. The way I handled that was to provide executive summaries of recommended books. And that was why the thinking and learning curriculum was so good because I could put all of that into practical resources and teachers could access it. So,

what we've got is a building up of resources, and the library was fabulous buying up books to support it, and teachers had resources they could use. One of the things that I think, and the reason why my colleagues all came on board here, is that nobody minded the gifted anymore because they were being extended IN class.

I tried to change teachers' practice and I tried to change it in an area where it's going to make a difference, in the compulsory subjects. At least get English going. I always thought that in a Maths faculty I would hire somebody who was really good at Maths and learning support in that area. This is something that I always wanted schools to do: Have one person who is looking after special needs and extension and enrichment support in each subject area. I think that is a great way for schools to go. Combining learning support and gifted close together. A teacher with expertise in a particular subject can identify the students who are gifted and those who struggle and have the capability to provide learning support *and* subject extension. Acceleration should also be possible within the subject areas.

You have to work hard. You can't do everything and you have got to say that. Like, you just can't be expected to do everything, because you are simply going to go under and it is just unrealistic. People come in and they are all idealistic and they're going to change the world. Well it is just not going to happen if you have spread yourself too far. I think schools are just setting somebody up for failure by giving them only a few lessons per week without being utterly specific about which groups they're going to be dealing with and what the priority is. That has to be negotiated with the principal and there has to be a clear agreement. There's always that tension between achieving everything you set out to do and what is possible within the limitations of the position, such as not having enough time. So you have to prioritise. It's hard to resist doing the things that the schools want to make them look good. The GE coordinator has to

make sure they don't burn out trying to do everything. More people have to come on board. It can't just be the coordinator. One thing I've realised is to surround yourself with a team, don't just be the only person. And learn not to let the 20 percent get to you. You have to chip away gradually.

Start small. There has to be a far more realistic way of thinking about GE coordination and what I think is that you start small. Everywhere I go you'll see me doing things deliberately step by step, right? Don't try and do too much. You need to find out who's in most need. There are usually some children that desperately need help because they're in the library every lunchtime. They've got nowhere to go, right? So first of all, I'd find those children. I would be paying attention to the gifted students who are more vulnerable than the others, students with exceptionally high IQs. Those kids are vulnerable and they may not realise their potential, particularly if their parents have fixed mindsets about what they need to achieve. Start with a difficult child and turn things around for them. And you build a group around them. You've got to realise that it can't just be you. Because sometimes as a gifted coordinator, teachers expect YOU to do it all. You take all of the gifted students into a withdrawal group and the classroom teachers keep on teaching in the ways they always have. But I tried to change what happens in every classroom. Voracious reader

Gifted children need to be identified and looked after. Generally speaking, this is my experience, most kids are in gifted programs with an IQ of around 130. I think with kids around the 90th percentile if teachers differentiate properly they'll do well. As a general rule, if you differentiate the curriculum, right, those kids will be happy. I started to think that maybe we'd be better to work with those on the 95th percentile and above. It's the ones whose IQs are much higher, up to 150 or 160, particularly if they're introverted and teachers think they're on the

Autism spectrum. These are the students who are more likely to be discriminated against. They're more likely to benefit from some special programs that help them to deal with issues.

I would definitely take the time at the outset to understand the context. Understand what matters to the principal. You've got to understand the culture of the school and how things are done. Decide what battles to fight; and always keep the principal on side. Early on, write a gifted learners' policy so that you actually know what you're doing and then develop an implementation plan – there are steps all the way through. That's going to prove to be very useful. Once again, start small. Don't try and do too much to impress people. Make a clear plan for what needs to happen to ensure that GE is embedded in the culture of the school and in teachers' practice. There has to be some sort of training for the staff. GE methodology, growth mindsets, deep thinking, differentiation, challenge and complexity, assessment for learning … must become integral to what every teacher applies in their classroom. When GE is embedded in every classroom, it's not vulnerable to fail if the GE Coordinator leaves the school. And I'm really happy to see this continuing at the school years after I've left.

Summary of some relevant themes emerging in relation to the research puzzle:

Career stage	Jane's themes
Reasons for career choice – How did she come to be a teacher & a GE specialist?	• Parents value education • Individual – gifted, sporty, swimming & time alone/apart • Voracious reader • Great memory • Achievement as a way to move away from country town • Inspirational teacher/lecturers
Career development – What did she learn about how to bridge the gap between theory & practice through GL PE?	• Principal support • Leadership role – status & recognition for achievements • Good teacher – credibility • Continuing to learn, summarise, translate latest ideas/theories into practical applications • Modelling & coaching colleagues
Life themes – What enduring qualities & factors sustained her throughout her career?	• Determination, hard work • Belief & self belief • Lifelong learning • Learning as developmental progressions • Support • Realistic – start small & build

Table 3: Summary of Jane's career story themes

"Theresa's story"

Early years: a family of achievers

Looking back, I had a very happy childhood. I have very happy memories of my childhood – mum and dad, five kids, a dog, lots of reading, lots of music. My father was a meteorologist. My mother was an artist. They met in Sydney and they both joined the air force during the war. I have very vivid memories of my childhood, even from when I was very young. I remember sitting in my highchair while my parents listened to *Blue Hills*. I remember tying the strings on my bonnet when we went to church in Ipswich, when I was only about two. Every Sunday we were very much part of the Catholic community. I used to help dad collecting for St Vincent de Paul on a regular basis. I was a good singer and sang in the church choir. My father in particular was very focused on classical music, and he had a beautiful singing voice. I was in my

30s before I think I registered just how important my father's influence was on my much later

adult life of music, particularly the opera. And my mother definitely inspired my love of art.

There was nothing we ever wanted for. My parents were very diligent. There wasn't a lot

of hugs and kisses. But it was still a very happy childhood. My father grew up in a very poor

Catholic family in Sydney. His father died when he was very young. He held down two jobs

after school from the age of ten, one in the butcher's and one in the local cinema. He won a

scholarship to Sydney University to study pure Maths, but people said that studying pure Maths

would have been such an indulgence when he could have been adding to the war effort. He had

to forego what in a leisurely other life would have been a pure Maths degree for something a lot

more practical that he could use in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). He studied

Meteorology and used that in his time in New Guinea during the war, and then that became his

whole career. He became the leading meteorologist before he retired. Dad once said he would

have regarded himself as a failure if mum had to go out to work once they were married. He was

proud of being a good provider for us all. He was a high achiever. He always said to his children

that education is the most important thing, and that we were all going to finish school and after

that it was up to us.

Mum's father had abandoned her, and she was raised by two maiden aunts. She entered a

closed convent in Sydney aged fifteen. But the nuns said she wasn't robust enough for the work

and sent her home. She trained as a nurse. I think she would have loved to study herself so she

felt a bit robbed of her education. Then during the war, she joined the air force and took

photographs from reconnaissance planes. She later said these were some of her happiest days.

Back in those days as a married woman her job was to be a wife and mother, and she was good at

both. But she really should have gone to uni because she was very intelligent and able, and we all felt that she was a little bit bored homemaking, even though she was very good at it.

Through my early primary school years, I actually found school itself very boring. I remember as a kid thinking, "This is just so much useless information!" I remember the nuns grilling us on useless facts in a rote manner. We had to memorise all sorts of stuff and regurgitate it. I found it very boring. I did enough, but I would never have been regarded as an academic child in primary school. Sport was my great love. That's what I focused on – A grade netball, running…. I felt that was something I could excel at, and it interested me, whereas school was a waste of time. Most of the nuns weren't trained teachers anyway. There was no art, no music. I think I managed to slip through the net a bit when I was in primary school. I didn't hand in homework. When my Year seven report card came home on the last Friday of term, I remember my father calling me in from a cricket game in the street to say, "There are 50 kids in year seven and you've come 28th. Pull your socks up!" To dad, that was just not what "O'Connors" do! That was the harshest thing he ever said to me. I remember really crying after dad said that, and I was not a crying sort of a child.

I probably felt the weight more so because around the same time my older brother and sister, whom I adored, went into religious orders. I remember missing them so much and feeling a great sense of loss. My only brother Nick entered the priesthood. He was flown down to Sydney, but he might as well have been flown to Bombay, he was lost to us. My older sister Margaret entered the convent straight from year twelve. Mum and dad desperately tried to talk them out of it. They had both achieved such brilliant results at school. My parents thought they should have at least one year at university, but Margaret felt she had a vocation. I think mum and dad never quite got over that. Within two days, my sister entered the convent, my brother entered

the priesthood. We all cried for months. The priests and nuns would come and visit and tell mum

and dad that they should be so proud that their bright children, some of the brightest sparks in

Queensland, had a vocation. Margaret had topped the public exams for year ten in Queensland.

Mum and dad felt that a lot of their investment in education in their first two children had

somehow gone to the church. My parents were strict practising Catholics, but they did not want

my older siblings to enter a religious order so young. Dad valued education so strongly that he

put it ahead of religion. So there was a very strong pressure for me and my little sisters to focus

on our education.

I went to St Margaret's College in Year eight. I knew I had to knuckle down because of

what my father had said to me. Secondary school gave me a whole new start. I used to write to

Margaret and Nick every week – long letters. I think that's when I first started to fall in love with

writing. I'd tell them about the books that I was reading. I knew that each of my letters would be

opened and vetted just in case I was pleading with them to come home. I think I'm strong

though, I've got a lot of resilience. Once I got into high school, I started to do what I was

supposed to have done for the last seven years. I started doing homework and I was top of the

class pretty much all through high school. I thought, "Is that all you have to do? Hand in your

homework and read a few books!" I was very good at Latin and Science. I was a voracious

reader. In Year nine I read all of Charles Dickens. I would memorise whole sections of the book.

If I liked a writer, I would read all their books. I discovered Shakespeare and it was like a light

came on. There's not a Shakesperean play that I wouldn't know what the next line was going to

be. I didn't just fossick around the edges. I took on university-level novels. I just loved Joyce.

Once I got into a genre, I could not let go.

I was a prefect, I was very popular, always had good friends, I don't think I was disliked by any other student, I always loved being in a leadership position, a prefect. Really even the nuns gave me a lot of leeway. I got excellent grades. In Queensland you were graded from one to seven. I got sevens basically. I was awarded the Bishop's prize for Year twelve, won a Commonwealth Scholarship and basically sailed into university. I did very good work when I decided to work. I'd top out on tests in high school. There's very few things I can't handle intellectually.

Part of being highly gifted is also that striving, the fire in the belly. And I always had a fire in the belly – determination, perseverance, persistence. To me that's a big marker of having an intellectual edge, a cutting edge. The people who are gifted and then become successful at what they do tend to have that fire. It can make you an unpleasant person to live with, have a much higher incidence of negative experiences which is well documented. It comes at a price. But when I look back on my education, my professional career, and what I believe was very successful, I have to say I must be pretty bright. Every one of my family has topped out in their fields, so I've got that genetic inheritance. And my environment was conducive. With love and opportunity and a bit of luck, it all came together.

I remember the joy when a letter came from Nick after four years saying he wanted to return. I always remember that. It was like I got a brother back again. All of us have multiple university degrees now, and a couple of us have Doctorates. Nick became a meteorologist like dad. Dad, if he was alive, I think would be very very proud that all five of us did excel academically and in our careers and luckily in jobs we've all loved. I said in the acknowledgement in my doctoral thesis, "Dad, I pulled my socks up!"

All five of us now are atheists, even my older sister who was a nun for ten years. We

have respect for all religions, but none of us have retained that religious faith that our parents

brought us up to have. I think religion had a huge influence on my life. I love the history and

colour of religions, the philosophies, I really enjoy the art and architecture of the buildings. I

think it taught me a lot, it just didn't teach me to believe that there is a God, that there is one God.

I don't believe in a God, but religion taught me a lot: the complexities of life, the interesting

stories. I love visiting churches and cathedrals and mosques wherever I travel, they're so

beautiful. You can't tell me that religious buildings are not an elevation of the human spirit, of

our thinking and spirituality and art. I feel comfortable in churches, but I just don't believe in

God. I'm grateful for what religion taught me.

Career aspirations and development

I used to say that I wanted to be a missionary and save the little black babies in Africa.

But after that I was always pretty certain I wanted to be a teacher. My heroes were teachers. I

had an English teacher in Years ten and eleven who wasn't a nun and she was one of the biggest

inspirations to me. I remember wanting to be like her. I remember the day she came in and

slapped Keneally's *Bring larks and heroes* onto my desk and she said to read it. She showed a

real interest in me. She got me submitting stories for publication. She was a great inspiration to

me and I always wanted to be like her. Even though I could have done almost any of the degrees

on offer, I went straight into a four-year Bachelor of Education.

Even in my very first year of teaching, which was at one of the biggest high schools in

Townsville, I remember thinking something was missing and I enrolled in a Masters degree

while I was still teaching full-time. So I started my Masters in Special Education degree, which

took about four years studying part-time and teaching full-time. While I was teaching in

Townsville I also studied for the Outward Bound Certificate and became a trained Outdoor

Education teacher. I found that very useful. You know, you take these boys climbing up a rock

face and it just pays off when you get back into the classroom. These kids know they can trust

you. You say, "Well, you can do this!" and they say, "Yeah, I think I can." I think, in a way, that

it was through Special Education and Outdoor Education that I recognised that some kids are

really bright even though they might not seem so at school. Other teachers would say, "He's the

dumbest kid I've taught!" and I would stop and think, "No, I reckon that kid is pretty bright. It's

just we haven't discovered how to turn that kid into a learner, or someone who loves learning at

school." It was often in environments other than the classroom that I would see… you know, it's

such a joy when you discover the light in a child who's been told all his life that he's dumb. It's

such a joy when you can say, "I think you're really bright, you've done it!" And they start to

believe in themselves. That makes the whole job worthwhile.

    Choosing Special Education was also linked to wanting to work in service to others.

Service to others has always been important to me. I never really looked at a job just for me, or

just to earn money. I'm sure I could have worked in a career that brought in a lot more money,

but that was never important to me.

Lecturing in Gifted Education

    I did some tutoring in Educational Psychology while I was finishing my Masters and then

my husband got a job at Adelaide University, so we moved to SA. I got a tutoring job at

Adelaide University, taught for a short time in a school and then I secured a job as a research

assistant to a Cognitive Psychology lecturer at Flinders University. When I applied for a

lectureship there I got it straight up. Really, I was very lucky. Virtually any job I ever went for I

got.

I actually first became involved in GE when the School Dean asked me into his office and said, "Do you know anything about gifted and talented programs?" And I said that I'd had one lecture on giftedness in my Masters degree, so he said, "Right, you're it! You can write the topic." And that first topic was a three-point topic on special needs for gifted students – that was just half a full topic in the Bachelor of Special Education course. In those days giftedness was seen as a neck-up thing, a brain thing, that you could do an IQ test really well. And it took me a while to register that actually highly talented children are usually very gifted also, that the brain isn't separate from the rest of the body. It took me a while to really click that there are equivalent numbers of children on the upper side of the normal bell-curve as there are on the lower side. We devoted massive training to Disability Studies and Special Education but we had almost nothing about kids on the other side of the curve who were equally not having their needs met in the regular classroom. And gifted kids can have the whole range of disabilities also, with the exception of intellectual disability perhaps, so not to understand their needs or recognise them in the classroom seemed to be missing the whole point of Special Education. So that's really how it began. That's when I went interstate and spent time with GE specialists who were writing and teaching university courses at the time, and I came back to Adelaide and put together that first topic. So GE at Flinders began with a tiny little topic as part of a Special Education degree and then it developed into our own GE postgraduate awards. Roger Moltzen at Waikato University in New Zealand arranged for several cohorts of teachers to enrol into our Graduate Certificate of GE (GCGE), and I flew over there to deliver the topics for a couple of years before they set up their own courses.

I went to my first World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC) conference in Manila in 1983 and I gave a paper about the way I wanted to run my course on gifted children.

I remember it being well-received. The WCGTC had only been established in 1976. Manila was

the fifth WCGTC conference, with James Gallagher as President. I was very active in the

WCGTC and in particular the Asia Pacific Federation (APF) of the WCGTC, which was

established in 1990. Something I was very proud of was receiving the Eminent Australian Award

awarded by the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) in

2000. Professor Eddie Braggett rang me and said, "Are you feeling eminent?" and that's when he

told me I had been honoured with that award. I gave the keynote address at the AAEGT national

conference in Brisbane that year. I served on the Executive Committee of the WCGTC and in

2001 I was elected Secretary. Meanwhile I held positions on the Executive Committee for the

APF. I was one of the two chairs organising the WCGTC conference in Adelaide in 2003, was

elected Vice-President in 2005 and took on the role of Editor of the *Gifted International Journal.*

until ill-health forced me to resign in 2006.

Professional learning in gifted education

Ann Matison was also involved in GE in SA as well as nationally and internationally and

we were co-chairs of the Adelaide 2003 WCGTC conference organising committee. Back in the

early 1980s when I was establishing my GE credentials, the SHIP program was set up in the

Government schools, first in the six selected primary schools and then in the three secondary

schools. I was given part of my university teaching load to deliver the SHIP teachers' PL

program on a weekly basis, and teachers were able to apply for credit into the GCGE course at

Flinders. So I spent a lot of time in schools delivering GE PL for teachers. I was doing massive

in-service programs. Still to this day there's hardly a school that I drive past that I can't

remember what their staffroom looks like! I'm very proud of that. It's the reason why I got my

PhD so late in my career because I spent so much time teaching. I ran the *Palace of Wisdom*

program during the early 1990s for gifted secondary students across the state who would come to

Flinders and engage with my fantastic colleagues who'd deliver university-level content. The

whole point of the program was fusion – crossing over art, literature, science, music, drama. And

during all this time I was putting together my thoughts about my university courses and the PL I

was delivering to teachers. When I put together the fourth topic on social and emotional

development for gifted children, that's when I felt the whole course had come together. I really

felt that the social and emotional topic was the heart and soul of it all because if you get that bit

wrong, and you don't look out for that, then all the rest – curriculum, creativity, differentiation –

all the rest isn't going to work. This has always been a very strong point I've made.

I always felt that I had something important to say and I got a lot of really good feedback

from my teaching. I was always proud of the fact that I was a good teacher. I know I was a good

teacher. And I think I did a very good job. I spent as much time in schools as I could because I

was always conscious of the fact that I needed classroom experience teaching gifted kids if I was

to have credibility with teachers. They were the ones teaching the gifted students all the time, so

I needed to be able to translate the theory for them into practical applications that were relevant

for them in the classroom. I developed checklists for example that they could use that made the

theory useful. I didn't deliver "tricks" and one-off activities. I always like to think that I educated

teachers so that they would be cognizant of how gifted children learn, what turns them on to

learning, looking out for the kid who might not stand out but who could be very bright. It was

about respect. But things at university started to change and I was told I needed to pull back and

focus on publishing, which I didn't enjoy as much. I felt that teaching was my gift, not research.

But I was then all of a sudden in a workplace where you could be an absolute hot-shot teacher

but it's not going to get you a promotion. I was working with colleagues who were pumping out

papers every other day, and some of them were lousy teachers at university, to be honest. But they got the promotions, so maybe I was wrong.

But GE was just so important, you know. I can remember a minister for education in another state saying (some years ago now, but the sentiment persists) that while there is one disabled child in this state there will never be a program for gifted children. I always remember that. Gifted students have suffered such injustice from educators and policy makers who bang on about inclusion and social justice but somehow exclude gifted students from the imperative. Giftedness has never been about privilege. It's got to be seen as just an ordinary difference that has implications for educational provision, and ALL kids are equally entitled to an education. If I had to predict into the future where GE should focus, I would say it should promote giftedness as a normal difference. The gifted child should be accepted as deserving of special educational provisions just as a child is who doesn't have high intellectual function.

Reflecting on PL for teachers

We don't give teachers IQ tests. Obviously there has to be a certain level of intelligence to get into teaching, but some teachers seem to get through without having that intellect. When I think back to the SHIP programs, all of those teachers who picked up on the GE PL quickly and trained very well I felt they were exceptionally bright themselves and would have made the best teachers for those children. Most teachers would be on the upper side of the bell-curve in intelligence, but all teachers can't be gifted, statistically. And yet some of them have just the right empathy for the child, interest in their learning, a desire to learn more about the gifted child… I'm thinking back through the teachers I worked with across schools through the PL programs, particularly in the specialist schools, some of the teachers I worked with had outstanding expertise in their areas. Gifted children pick up on their teachers' ability and they get

excited by the intellect of their teachers. The teachers' excitement is contagious for their students.

So teachers need depth of knowledge in their subject areas, but GE PL can provide them with

ways to use that deep knowledge to create challenging learning experiences for the really bright

students. Certainly the bedrock of the PL I would take to teachers' work were critical thinking,

creative thinking and caring thinking and I would then go through sometimes a whole semester

on each one. I've always been big on creativity and visual thinking, looking at depth in thinking.

But always thinking using a rich and solid knowledge base as a springboard.

I challenged teachers to think critically about their practices. I remember challenging

some of the popular approaches such as Bloom's Taxonomy. The common belief was that the

really bright kids need to be at the top of the taxonomy doing analysis, synthesis and evaluation

and the not so bright kids could do the lower levels of knowledge and comprehension. And it

took me a while of teaching this and then I thought no, he's got it wrong. You can't evaluate if

you don't have a good knowledge base. If you don't know your stuff, you're just talking waffle.

Knowledge is a really powerful thing, but it's undervalued as a platform for teaching. Kids need

to get some explicit knowledge before they can think deeply and creatively. Teaching thinking

skills requires knowledge that is deep, connected, and conceptual to provide substance. Gifted

students need to think critically, creatively and care about real problems using powerful

knowledge. And teachers need to think deeply about what and how they are teaching. It struck

me as scary when in school programs or even in my own teaching at the university the

assumption is prevalent that gifted kids were born knowing it all. Even as an adult I'm still

learning new things.

I'd deliver weekly PL for the SHIP staff. The one-off workshops can be a teaser or a

provocation I guess, but the real changes for teachers often took months of hearing this stuff and

thinking about what I was delivering and trying it out in their classrooms. Sustained learning was

important, but I also found that conferences were absolute turning points. I don't know if it was

just hearing the research and insights direct from the people, often whose texts I was using in my

teaching. For me, I enjoyed conferences and I was a religious attendee, very rarely missed papers

when I know others were down the pub. I was a bit of a conference tragic; I loved them! Having

said that, I was critical of 20-minute papers and when we ran the WCGTC conference in

Adelaide we planned out much longer sessions where people could really engage and interact in

the breakout sessions. The design of conferences is important in terms of effective PL. I

personally find the energy of the conference, the coming together of people who have similar life

interest and passion – I find the very energy of a conference part of the whole learning

experience. Bringing together the literature, the books and the journals, you can get all that

online or in print, but there's something special about having bookstands and authors and

colleagues there all in one place together where you can interact and talk. The keynotes, papers,

connections… I always felt very comfortable at the end of a conference that a lot had been

achieved. There was something about conferring, coming together, meeting with teachers,

meeting with other colleagues, meeting with academics, meeting with the people whose work so

informed your thinking in the field. I totally support the whole conference atmosphere and

experience. Even the coffee breaks – sometimes you learn a heck of a lot just having a coffee

with someone and discussing a paper, sharing ideas over a coffee, little things you'd pick up. I

really enjoyed it. I always came back to my office with a wealth of really interesting new views

and aspects of GE. I don't think I'd have picked it up just from the books if I had stayed in my

office. What I learned at conferences definitely washed over very much to the work I did in

schools. I put a lot of work into preparing PL for the SHIP schools, as I did for the lectures I

gave in my topics. I tended to over-prepare and not be able to get through everything. Teachers

don't want me just to turn up and chat about bright kids. They want real knowledge, real insights,

they want to know and understand better what creativity is. And because they were bright

themselves, it was a two-way process. I like to think I learned back from the teachers as well.

Generally, the teachers were passionate about the work we did. It was so enjoyable. I really did

love it. I loved it all. I was passionate about it. I am so glad I can look back and say I loved it. It

nearly killed me in the end. But I did love it. You have to be careful – you have to know when to

pull back, so take care!

Summary of some relevant themes emerging in relation to the research puzzle:

Career stage	Theresa's themes
Reasons for career choice – How did she come to be a teacher & a GE specialist?	• Parents' emphasis on education & high academic expectations. • Teachers who made a difference (yr 10) "My heroes were all teachers" (Interview #1) • Religion – service to others • High intelligence – gifted • Selective learner – found learning easy • Avid reader "could not let go" of a book or author • Determination, persistence • Epigenetics – whole family achieved academically within a conducive environment
Career development – What did she learn about how to bridge the gap between theory & practice through GL PE?	• Strong belief in importance of GE • "fire in the belly" to make a difference • Special/outdoor/gifted education connections • Good teacher, particularly for outliers • Principal/leadership support to study & take on leadership roles • Conferences – networking, professional association memberships & leadership positions • Ongoing professional reading & learning • "Educate" teachers through PL (not just give them tricks to use)
Life themes – What enduring qualities & factors sustained her throughout her career?	• Personal resonance with gifted children • Sustained, on-going learning • Introspection – critical reflection on practice • Social and emotional factors – get these right • Importance of supportive friends/colleagues with shared purpose

Table 4: Summary of Theresa's career story themes

Chapter 4 Summary

The stories told in this chapter were compiled from over twelve hours of interviews and multiple pages of transcripts, with participant checking along the way to ensure that what I have selected to tell is faithful to their experience and voice. I have sought to capture the three aspects of their stories: their early years and influences on their career choices, their career development, and their reflections on the values and practices that have inspired their work. In the following chapter, I return to the research puzzle at the heart of this study. I will analyse the participants' stories for career insights and themes and compare these to elucidate the insights that can be gleaned from their experience as GE specialists – what they have done for teachers that might shed light on how we might bridge the space between the theory and the practice of GE.

Chapter 5: From field texts to research texts – a narrative of experience

> *The task of reflecting on the past…events that have shaped our field is both overwhelming and awe-inspiring. It is overwhelming in its scope – trying to understand the whos, whats, whens, and whys of a century of activities related to gifted education. It is awe-inspiring as we realize that history and time are like a river; we are where we are today because of the wisdom and energy of many individuals combined with the events that shaped their time. We are part of this river of time, and just as those before us, we too have helped to shape the coming hundred years. Standing for a moment as the waters rush by, we cannot help but feel the power of those who came before us and the responsibility for those who will come after us.*
> Coleman, M. R. (1999, p. 16)

The metaphor of the river is symbolic in storytelling and a common metaphor in narrative inquiry (e.g., Brockmeier, 2009 in Biggerstaff, 2012, p. 190). Coleman (1999) used it in the quote above to convey the idea of the history of GE moving us along like a river. Flowing towards a destination, stepping into and out of the river, trying to swim against the current, drowning or feeling swamped, or the ability to be flexible in the ways that the river flows around and even erodes obstacles…the imagery and metaphor of the river can be persuasive and evocative in telling a story. In an attempt to "feel the power of those who came before us and the responsibility for those who will come after us" (Coleman, 1999, p. 16), this chapter will return to the research puzzle, wondering what happens in the PL space between theory and practice; what do the participants' stories reveal about significant factors in the provision of PL; and how might their experiences be shaped by and contribute to the development of GE in SA? Chapter five will discuss the final comparative narrative analysis of the key themes emerging from the participants' stories and raise questions for further consideration. The analysis will consider firstly the themes emerging through the three phases of their career development – career

formation, development and reflection – and discuss them in terms of their alignment with and elaboration on the literature. These themes are summarised in Tables 2-4. Limitations to this study will also be considered.

This chapter upholds the process of narrative analysis as not just thinking *about* and *across* stories but also thinking *with* stories (Etheridge, 2020). Throughout the narrative analysis, the participants and the researcher, and now the reader, are offered the opportunity to stop and think and wonder about points in the stories where a new insight, a new possibility may be imagined and grasped and shared. The narrative inquirer needfully remains alert, watchful and thoughtful as they navigate the knowledge landscapes of the participants' stories and reflect on how the stories may offer lessons to be learnt; or perhaps how they may be reframed to imagine new knowledge landscapes emerging with fresh possibilities and new insights into experience. Engaging with narrative inquiry has been described as being *in the midst*, of *experiencing an experience* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and developing the ability to "hold open a space of wonder related to experience – the relational space of others and ourselves" (Clandinin, et al., 2015, ℙ 6). And through adopting that open-minded stance, viewing stories as "cognitive artefacts" (Herman, 2003, p. 163) can provide a wealth of ideas and inspiration to reflect critically on our own understanding and application of theories into practice.

Career Choice: How did the participants come to be teachers and GE specialists?

Theresa said that she could have been anything. She could have been successful in any university course. So why did she choose to become a teacher? The participants are all very capable people who chose to become teachers. Why? Analysing their stories, two main themes emerge. Firstly, their parents, particularly their fathers, valued education highly and respected teaching as a career. They also held high academic expectations for their children. Their

daughters each valued and respected their parents' opinions. Anna initially wanted to be an architect, but her father wanted her to become a teacher. Do parents today have similar respect for teaching as a career, and particularly as a career for their highly able children? It seems that media reports frequently blame teachers and schools for students' poor behaviours and lack of achievement, so is Education still regarded to be a prestigious career choice? Anecdotally, bright children today are often counselled into careers like Law, Medicine and Engineering rather than Education. If the gifted women in this study were selecting their career today, might their parents still counsel them to be teachers? Might they make the same choice? To what extent might gender roles and how perceptions of gender roles over time have changed help to explain a gifted girl's choice of Education as a career?

Multipotentiality – the potential to select from a wide range of possible careers – can be a characteristic of gifted individuals (Kerr, 1999; Jung, 2017) which can be both a blessing (i.e., providing many options from which to choose) and a curse (i.e., making a career decision very difficult and confusing) (Jung, 2019). Rysiew, et al. (1994, p. 41) found that:

> Career decision-making problems accompany multipotentiality only when interests, motivations and opportunities are also abundant. In this case, when motivation to learn is high, an "overchoice syndrome" can be said to exist.

An interest in teaching was cultivated in each of the participants during their high school years. Anna came to respect her teachers through personally experiencing the intellectual challenge that they provided that helped her to have self-confidence, cultivated her abilities and inspired her to learn. Jane similarly was inspired by the special teachers and university lecturers who she admired because they were making a difference for learners. She similarly wanted to become a change agent through teaching. Jung (2017, p. 3) reviewed the literature to identify twelve individual factors associated with gifted individuals' career choices, including high expectations

from others and influence of the family, both relevant to the participants in this study. However,

his list did not include the possibility that gifted children's career choices might be inspired by

their altruistic desire to make a difference. Vötter and Schnell (2019, p. 2) endorsed the

significance of a gifted individual's desire to make a difference, stating that:

> Generative orientation (i.e., the devotion of one's gift or talent to the well-being of others)
> can help gifted individuals to advance a personal sense of meaning and happiness over
> time.

And "over time" might be assumed to mean through a career that enables the individual to

pursue their desire to help others over the course of their career. Theresa's choice of Education

as a career was almost a vocation. Her sense of service to others, cultivated as a child helping her

father in his charity work, was a strong reason for her career choice as a means of helping others.

Education has often been positioned as a way to overcome disadvantage and improve the human

condition. According to The World Bank (n.d.):

> Education is a human right, a powerful driver of development, and one of the strongest
> instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace, and
> stability. It delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income, and is the most important
> factor to ensure equity and inclusion.

Education as a career presents an ideal vehicle for a gifted individual to make a difference in

children's lives. Ambrose and Cross (2009, p. 49) stated that:

> When individuals of high ability…follow their aspirations and exercise their talents in the
> world, their actions can have considerable moral impact.

Perhaps we need a recruitment process into Education as a career that attracts more gifted

graduates? Perhaps entry levels into ITE courses need to be raised to ensure that pre-service

teachers have the intellectual capability to teach across the full range of abilities? And ITE

courses should, as both Senate inquiries recommended, include at least one mandated unit about

gifted students and how they learn. To what extent are ITE courses challenging beginning

teachers to consider their impact on children in a developmental sense beyond simply academic development? And are pre-service teachers challenged to consider their potential role as moral change agents?

The second theme influencing all of the participants to become a teacher was the experience of having a teacher who made a difference for them in their secondary education and inspired them to become a teacher. For all of them, it was a Humanities teacher who they remember for encouraging and challenging their thinking through the provision of advanced texts. These teachers were differentiating the curriculum for students they recognised as being bright and needing extension in an area of interest and potential at a time when differentiation was not taught in ITE courses. It has now gained widespread recognition since the early 1990s, particularly in GE through the work of researchers like Carol-Ann Tomlinson, Sandra Kaplan and Joyce VanTassel-Baska, even though it remains an approach that few teachers understand and apply well (Frankling, et al., 2017). The participants' teachers referred to in this study were more likely to have been responding to their bright students almost intuitively through what we would now call curriculum differentiation. They made a difference, and both inspired the participants' career choices and provided strong role models for the type of teacher the participants wanted to become. The participants' descriptions of what their inspirational teachers did that helped them to learn align with what Rogers (2019) reported that Australian secondary gifted students identify as traits of effective teachers. Rogers (2019, p. 1) observed that these traits, in turn, "also corresponded well with previous international research on teacher effectiveness and marked a distinctive difference from what might be regarded as teacher effectiveness for the general population of secondary learners." It is interesting that Rogers noted the "distinctive difference" between what represents teacher effectiveness for gifted and for

general students. This provides additional support for specific GE PL to be delivered focusing on those qualities that make that distinctive difference, so that teachers might become effective teachers for gifted learners.

Different opinions can be found in the GE literature about whether or not teachers of gifted students need to be gifted themselves (Vidergor, 2015). There is a certain natural empathy teachers seem to have for students who are like them, although they can *learn* to become more empathetic towards a more diverse range of students. Meyers, et al. (2019) for example argued that teacher empathy has a positive impact on student learning and so is a desirable topic for PL. If a teacher is gifted themselves, perhaps they intuitively empathise with gifted students? Perhaps they are more likely to understand some of the frustrations and issues that their gifted students may experience and have greater insights into meeting their educational needs? And perhaps because they are gifted, they are already convinced of the value of GE and so their uptake of GE PL is more successful in changing their practice? Theresa, with her academic background and personal experience of giftedness, strongly believed that teachers who are gifted themselves make the best teachers for gifted students because they can empathise with them, they have powerful thinking and processing skills and rich and deep knowledge of their discipline. Anna, who did not use the word "gifted" to describe herself, emphasised the importance of commitment to learning, understanding of giftedness and gifted methodologies, having a strong and deep content knowledge and working hard as being the critical factors of the effective teacher for gifted students.

Jane found that she polarised teachers who often did not like her and attributed that in part to her arrogance related to being gifted. Gifted children (and adults) are not always likeable! (Geake & Gross, 2008; Hebert, 2020; Neihart, 2002). All of the characteristics of gifted children

may manifest in either positive or negative behaviours, depending in part on the degree of "fit" they experience within their environment. Boredom, for example, can lead to disruptive behaviour in the classroom (Lenvik, et al., 2021). As a teacher, Jane experienced how badly behaved gifted students could be when she was given one of the "worst" Year nine classes to teach, not all of whom were gifted. However, by providing an enriched educational environment and personal encouragement, Jane turned the students' misbehaviour in that class into positive learning behaviours that resulted in high achievement for the gifted students.

Using Gagné's (2018) DMGT as an explanatory model of the development of potential into achievement, the expectation is that the most talented people in any domain would also be gifted. While giftedness conveys the potential to achieve, there are many intra- and inter-personal catalysts that may either help or hinder the individual's development as a gifted child. Important intrapersonal catalysts he identifies are the will or motivation to achieve and the determination to persist. It is clear that all three participants were highly motivated and worked hard to achieve their chosen academic goals. The investment of time and effort is recognised in the talent development literature as being essential to become highly talented in any field (Lubinski & Benbow, 2021). And working long hours means less time to pursue other things, so the personal motivation to work hard at the cost of having less time available for family, friends and other interests must be strong. But the participants also came from environments that supported and encouraged them and they all encountered teachers who inspired and fostered them, which relates to the environmental factors in Gagné's DMGT. An epigenetic evaluation would examine that relationship between genetic and environmental factors when explaining an individual's developmental outcomes, but that goes beyond the purpose of this study. Gagné's (2018) DMGT also includes chance as a factor in development. This raises the question of

whether the participants might still have chosen to become teachers had they not had the good

fortune to be taught by inspirational teachers.

In reviewing their career choices to become teachers, each participant in this study had

the intellectual capability, combined with the intrapersonal factors such as determination and

persistence, in addition to the encouragement and inspiration from significant people in their

lives, to focus on Education as a career. It is interesting also to look at what led them to become

GE specialists.

In the comparative thematic analysis, all of them were able to relate well with the child

who was *different* from the mainstream student. Anna had been the invisible child as a nine-year-

old migrant learning to speak English. Jane could pacify the boy who climbed on top of the

lockers as a primary school child and found ways to support her own children's special

educational needs and help impoverished migrant children aspire to complete their education, in

addition to developing a close bond with "that brusque child from Whyalla." Theresa connected

with the students other teachers considered to be "dumb" by helping them to see themselves as

being capable learners and developing trust in her as a teacher to support their learning. As

practising teachers, they all worked to support students with special needs. Considering the

normal bell-curve distribution of intelligence, Theresa's narrative stressed that there are just as

many intellectually gifted kids on one end of the bell-curve as there are children with intellectual

disability on the other end, and all of them are equally deserving of special educational

provisions. So it seems logical that the participants' transition into the field of GE was a natural

progression, underpinned by their belief in and passion for special educational provisions for

gifted children. Not at the detriment of the struggling learners, but in acknowledgement that the

full range of abilities were equally deserving of appropriate education, and with the mounting

evidence they were finding that the students with the highest intellectual potential were not being catered for.

Once again, the impetus for taking the lead in GE at their sites came from leaders they respected. Anna was encouraged by respected colleagues and her principal. Jane, too, by her principal and Theresa by the Dean of the school. All three had proven to their site leaders that they were able to effectively teach children with special needs and they were already using a personalised, differentiated curriculum approach, so GE seems to have resonated with each of them. They all became passionate advocates for the entitlement of gifted students to an appropriately challenging and supportive education.

From a social constructivist perspective, individuals' stories cannot be examined in isolation from their contexts. During the late 1970s through to the 1990s, when Anna, Jane and Theresa were teaching, there was a positive zeitgeist towards GE. SA was the first state in Australia to establish a gifted association (GTCASA) in 1979 and the first state to introduce a policy for gifted students in that same year (Jolly & Robins, 2021; Urban, 2001). The first National Conference on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children chaired by Brian Start was held at the University of Melbourne in 1983 under the auspices of the Special Projects Program of the Commonwealth Schools Commission. 1983 was also the year when Theresa presented a paper at the fifth WCGTC conference in Manila. There was a Federal Senate Inquiry into the education of gifted children in 1988 and the eighth WCGTC conference was held in Sydney in 1989 where Theresa presented a paper on her *Palace of Wisdom* program (Bailey, et al., 1990). So GE was a part of the educational landscape at this time, with a growing international research base, local political support and the emergence of professional associations and PL opportunities through the 1980s and 1990s. While good teachers had identified our three

participants as gifted students during the 1970s, intuitively it would seem because they had no formal GE credentials, PL courses began to emerge during the years when the participants were beginning their careers. Jane graduated in 1989 from Charles Sturt University in NSW with a Diploma of Education: Teaching Gifted Children after two years of online studies, while Theresa's Graduate Certificate in GE was first offered in 1995 with an initial enrolment of 25 teachers. The SHIP program began in 1993. Anna was one of the first cohort to enrol in Theresa's course, along with the other six State SHIP Directors.

The three participants learned as much as they could about GE, through colleagues in the field, reading the research literature, attending conferences and through undertaking formalised PL in GE. As inquisitive and motivated learners themselves, they brought these new ideas back with them to their sites and applied them in their own contexts. All of them became GE specialists and developed PL programs for teachers, which they then delivered locally and, over time, interstate and internationally. In the comparative analysis of the themes emerging from the narrative, what can be summarised in terms of how their careers became invested in GE and teaching other teachers about GE are the following key factors:

- Their personal qualities of natural ability, determination and love of learning

- Their support and encouragement from others, including family and educators

- Their proven ability to teach well, as recognised by their site leaders

- Their passion to make a difference for learners (and gifted learners)

- The zeitgeist – the growth of the field of GE and its local implementation at this time in SA

Leading PL in GE: What did they learn about how to bridge the gap between theory and practice through GL PE?

The field of GE is a particularly challenging area of PL for a number of reasons, not least because there are multiple definitions of giftedness and numerous models of provision, not to mention philosophical differences in approach. It is one of the reasons why all three of the participants in this study mention that keeping up with the literature and reading widely were such important aspects of their role. Current and evidence-informed deep knowledge is an essential element of effective practice. It enables professional judgement to be sound because it allows the GE specialist to draw from a deep well of wisdom when working with diverse students, teachers, contexts and situations. The participants found that having that GE knowledge expertise also conferred a level of status and credibility when delivering PL. So one important theme to emerge is that the provider of GE PL must have deep knowledge of gifted children and GE models. But the key factor in designing GE PL is to bridge that gap between theory and practice so that teachers understand what they need to do and appreciate how the theory translates into practice. Perhaps teachers who are interested in GE might independently seek to engage with the literature, but the majority of teachers need the research translated into practical examples.

Jane said that one of her strengths was the ability to read the literature and then summarise the key ideas and apply the theory to the classroom in practical ways so that teachers were able to benefit from her research. For example, Jane read Carol Dweck's (2006) book about growth mindsets, provided the principal with a summary and then ran PL workshops for the staff such that this approach became embedded in the language of the classroom and changed the school culture. Anna also made sure that all of her PL workshops included content that was

informed by the literature. But the most important thing she found was to give practical applications of those ideas so that teachers understood the theories in the context of what happens in the classroom. Theresa made the point that it was important to "educate" teachers in this way rather than just providing "tricks" that the teachers could use in their classroom without understanding the theories or research behind the ideas. While the teachers were not prevented from doing the wider reading themselves, the GE specialists had made the theory relevant to the teachers' context and demonstrated to them the value of the theory and research in practical ways.

So knowledge, of giftedness, gifted children and gifted methodologies, was important for each of the participants in their GE specialist roles. And keeping up with new research through attending conferences and reading widely informed their own PL. But the participants' deep knowledge of the disciplines and the Australian Curriculum was also important. This enabled them to assist teachers to design curriculum units that were concept-based, rich with deep and complex content and differentiated for diverse students, including the gifted.

All three participants valued the ability to think well as something that had been taught to them by their wonderful teachers, and that they taught to other teachers. Their aim through the PL they provided was to show teachers how to model sound thinking and questioning skills in their classrooms and how to teach their students to think well, using rich concept-based knowledge. Jane (interview 3) said that "If you can teach them how to think then they are going to do well. Because that is what my teachers did with me. They gave me that discipline of the mind. It's all very well knowing what's inside 24 encyclopaedias, but you have to be able to think well to make that knowledge work for you." In the interviews, Jane talked about how she set up a PL community focusing on teachers learning, using and sharing ideas about the *Harvard Thinking Routines*, and explicitly teaching staff about Ron Ritchhart's (2015) thinking cultures.

Thinking skills formed an important part of the provision for students at Anna's schools, supported by her principal who believed that thinking skills were important for *all* students, but essential for gifted students. Theresa focused on teaching critical, creative and caring thinking skills to teachers. One topic in the postgraduate GE course she coordinated was taught by a philosopher with the explicit aim of developing the teachers' ability to think well so that they understood what was good thinking and questioning and knew how to analyse and extend their students' thinking. Critical and creative thinking are included in the General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum and are intended to be embedded in teaching for all students through each of the curriculum areas. They are also recommended by ACARA (n.d.) in their Student Diversity curriculum advice as ways to extend gifted students:

> Teachers can provide students with opportunities to work with learning area content in more depth or breadth; encompassing specific aspects of the general capabilities learning continua (for example, the higher order cognitive skills of the Critical and creative thinking capability); and/or focusing on cross-curriculum priorities. Teachers can also accelerate student learning by drawing on content from later levels in the Australian Curriculum.

This advice assumes that teachers have a broad and deep knowledge of the discipline they are teaching. It is frustrating for me, as an educator, that there are no ITE topics nor explicit emphasis on developing pre-service teachers' understanding and expertise in any of the General Capabilities other than Literacy and Numeracy, and perhaps ICT. Pre-service teachers currently need to demonstrate their own literacy and numeracy skills prior to gaining teacher registration by passing a literacy and numeracy assessment. This is perhaps because students' literacy and numeracy are tested and compared across sites and states and so teachers need to prove their own skills. Standardised testing makes these capabilities (or lack thereof) more visible to the scrutinising public. But what about the other capabilities deemed to be essential for students to

become "confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed

members of the community" (Education Council, 2019)?

The OECD's (2019) *Learning Compass 2030* highlights what they call the

"transformative competencies" that students need to develop in order to thrive in an uncertain

future: creating new value through critical and creative thinking in collaboration with others;

reconciling tensions and dilemmas; and taking responsibility. These move way beyond simple

literacy and numeracy capabilities. How are pre-service teachers (and in-service teachers) being

provided with the necessary PL to teach these capabilities? How are teachers able to follow

ACARA's student diversity advice (e.g., teaching higher order cognitive skills) if they have had

no explicit guidance on what this might look like? Gifted students, who have the potential to

develop these capabilities to an advanced level, need teachers who can embed these skills into

rich, concept-driven curriculum. The research and literature base to support a capabilities

approach in education are there, but while accountability measures for teacher quality focus on

achieving basic skills and bringing student achievement up to basic standards, the aspirations for

gifted individuals and GE seem to be lost. Or left to chance – the serendipity of finding that

wonderful teacher who provides those rich educational experiences. For Anna, Sister Teresa was

her "saviour" and "just magical" – the exception rather than the expectation for a teacher in her

experience.

Change takes time. One of the encouraging findings from Frankling et al.'s (2017) study

was that change is possible. Their study examined the effectiveness of PL about differentiation in

changing teachers' practices. Differentiating the curriculum to provide appropriate challenge for

gifted students is something that teachers in general find difficult. Frankling et al. (2017, p. 75)

confirmed that:

It is possible to lead educational networks by trialling and exploring new ideas, acting as a guide, coach and mentor to colleagues. For school leaders contemplating a similar journey of leading professional learning related to differentiation, we would recommend two things; first, that all professional learning be thoughtfully and explicitly linked to deliberate practice that aligns students, teachers and the curriculum and, second, that leaders are able to ensure the environment remains safe for change. If these conditions exist, meaningful pedagogical change is possible.

While there are many PL models that schools and sites might apply, they found that effective

elements of PL relating to curriculum differentiation included:

improving teacher knowledge, providing job-embedded opportunities to collaborate around issues that are highly proximate to classroom practice, and investing enough time to develop meaningful learning (Frankling et al., 2017, p. 75).

Each of these factors was raised by the participants in this study also when talking about what

they found to be effective in changing teachers' practices relating to making provision for gifted

students in the classroom. Anna raised the importance of including time for collaborative

practical activity and discussion in staff PL workshops so that teachers could see how an applied

theory might work in the classroom and share ideas and questions with their colleagues. She also

worked one on one with teachers to ensure they were confident and capable of embedding

thinking skills and differentiation into curriculum units with assistance, practice and feedback.

Jane worked with PL teams over time, as well as with individuals, to coach them in designing

differentiated curriculum and instruction. Theresa talked about the benefits of the extended PL

provided through the SHIP teacher training and postgraduate courses that she provided.

Sustained PL learning over time, contextualised to provide relevance and meaning for teachers,

are recommendations from all three participants. Added to their knowledge and understanding of

GE and the Australian Curriculum, and also essential to their role in delivering effective PL in

GE, were their knowledge and skills relating to thinking and learning well. It is clear that the

content of GE PL programs/workshops needs to be steeped in theories and research evidence, but

translated for the teachers into contextualised practices that are immediately recognisable as relevant, meaningful and directly applicable to their own classroom.

The necessity for the principal to provide time and resources to facilitate this is obvious. Anna and Jane both observed that teachers working collaboratively in PL communities over the course of the year with their guidance was an effective model that gave the teachers time to learn, trial and discuss new ideas. They acknowledged the support of their principals in providing that time. Anna explained the importance of the principal using teachers' performance management meetings as a form of checking on their progress. But also, as a way to monitor whether the GE specialist was providing the kind of assistance that the teachers needed and appreciated. In addition to working with groups of teachers, Anna and Jane also emphasised the need to work closely with individual teachers to ensure that the units of work applied principles of effective teaching and learning but were also differentiated to challenge and extend the gifted students.

Changing teachers' negativity and resistance in relation to GE was raised by both of the participants who worked within a number of school settings. Jane's advice was to focus on the 80 percent who were open-minded and if not ignore the 20 percent, at least wait until time permitted to approach them. Anna warned that some teachers are incorrigible and advised that the GE specialist shouldn't take their rebuffs personally but should develop a thick skin. This echoes Delisle and Lewis's (2003) inclusion of thick skin as one of the characteristics teachers of the gifted should cultivate. Anna went into great detail about the different types of resistance she encountered from teachers, but it would seem that the essential qualities that she demonstrated in working with staff were positivity, good humour and patience. What is apparent from both Jane and Anna's stories is that there are no silver bullets or quick fixes when it comes to changing teachers' practices. Both were in their schools or cluster of schools for many years, both worked

hard to provide teachers with both collaborative workshops and individualised learning support, and both held staff accountable for making changes to their teaching to extend and challenge the gifted learners. This is the dual role of both shining the light and applying the heat that Brighton, et al. (2006) mentioned. And both Anna and Jane helped to change the teaching and learning culture of their schools, with GE PL becoming an accepted expectation of the teachers. Jarvis and Henderson (2012) advocated that GE should be part of a coordinated and shared approach within schools, an idea echoed by Ronksley-Pavia and Neumann (2022) who talked about how GE leadership might help to create a shared purpose.

Life themes: What enduring qualities and factors sustained them throughout their careers?

Savickas et al. (2009) focus on five key factors that can be understood and managed throughout the career development process: concern, control, curiosity, confidence and commitment. *Concern* is demonstrated by the participants in this study in their ability to care deeply about others, about their career choices and their impact on others. Being able to exert some *control* over their career and workplace through influence and self-management skills was something that they each experienced, even though some factors were beyond their sphere of influence. They each developed coping mechanisms, such as critical friends and work-life balance, which enabled them to retain a sense of control. Continuing to read and learn demonstrates their *curiosity* to actively consider and pursue possibilities and opportunities throughout their careers. Their *confidence* to be assertive, particularly when working with nay-sayers, is evident in their career stories, while their *commitment* to their career as a purposeful vision (rather than just a job) shines through clearly. These five factors in combination explain to some extent their effectiveness in their roles as leaders of GE PL and their ability to adapt to change while maintaining their vision over the span of their careers. For the participants in this

study, though, I would also add *community* as a factor in their career development. Lives are lived in society with others, not (as a rule) in isolation. It is through relationships with others that the participants' lives and careers have created connections to both personal meaning and professional fulfilment. These life themes are, in effect, the glue that provides a more holistic understanding of their career stories. The themes intertwine – *concern*, *commitment, curiosity, confidence, control* and *community* are all strongly interconnected in the participants' stories.

Theresa talked about the "fire in the belly" that can inspire gifted people to work passionately to achieve their goals. Passion or enthusiasm is an important career theme emerging from their stories. This aligns with research literature, such as Margolis et al.'s (2018, p. 3) study that found that "teachers spend greater effort and resolution on teaching if they perceive their actions as valuable and important. Thus, enthusiasm is one cause of effective teaching (and)…seems to be a crucial factor for student achievement and motivation." But, as Henderson and Jarvis (2021) found, passion is necessary but not enough. Passion and belief might help GE specialists to persist when faced with challenges in their role, and to sustain their effort over time. However, the GE specialist must have, in addition, which combined and interconnected rich and deep knowledge triumvirate of gifted education, discipline content and effective teaching and learning methods. Their love of reading and lifelong personal professional learning have been driven by their curiosity to know more, to understand their work at a deeper level and to keep up with contemporary research. Drawing on this, they can then apply their creativity and organisational skills to design effective learning programs for diverse students in specific contexts. For the participants, this would seem to be just as relevant for teaching gifted students as it is for teaching teachers about GE.

The participants all believed that they were good teachers themselves, and that they were acting as change agents on behalf of gifted students. This clearly articulated mission and self-belief that they could be successful gave them a confident professional identity. It is no secret that self-efficacy is a strong intrinsic factor in motivation (Bandura, 1977). It is also a strong factor in being able to adapt to pressures and career challenges. Wei (2021, ¶ 3) asserted that:

> It is well established in research and academia that the teaching profession requires inner commitment and a strong identity to face the arduous dilemmas often present at work.

In recognition of the necessity to prepare teachers for rapidly changing contexts, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has undertaken extensive international studies on teacher agency and the development of teacher professional identity (TPI). In a working paper commissioned by the OECD, Suarez and McGrath (2022, p. 7) asserted that:

> Teachers' commitment to teaching and their self-efficacy, or their confidence about their own abilities to carry out their work, are an important part of their professional identity and have considerable influence on students' performance and attitudes.

This raises the question whether enough attention is paid to how teachers develop agency in their careers, or is it left to chance? Beginning with ITE courses and continuing through the multiple PL hours teachers undertake during their careers, are teachers provided with the opportunities to articulate their mission as a teacher? Are they explicitly taught how they might develop their TPI and why it matters?

While each of the GE specialists in this study demonstrated agency and positive TPI, were self-disciplined and worked hard independently, they also all valued being part of a professional community. Jane's staff, in the main, took pride in her status and external recognition almost as if her strong TPI positively influenced the collective professional identity of the school. It must be acknowledged that each participant worked at the same site or cluster of

sites for many years – long enough to introduce change and innovation through leading GE PL that significantly influenced the culture of their school or site. From the change management literature, we know that change takes time and sustained effort (Rousseau & ten Have, 2022). Anna took a long view of change and worked to understand what each teacher needed and how she might help to overcome the obstacles to change they presented. Jane's advice to start small and initially focus on the teachers who are open to change seems a sound approach. Gathering together colleagues within PL communities and finding critical friends who could support them both personally and professionally were common and valued experiences for all participants. Building a supportive community around the gifted students and attending to their social and emotional development were seen by the participants as being vital for not just the achievement and wellbeing of the gifted students but also their survival. The same can be said for the value of building a supportive professional network for the GE specialist. Having the support of the principal and being in a position of power within the school leadership team to hold teachers accountable for change are also important contextual factors in changing teachers' practices through PL. But without professional friends, the role of GE specialist can be exhausting and disheartening (Henderson & Jarvis, 2021). The importance of building relationships with colleagues, critical friends, the principal, and the students has been shown in this study to be a major driver of success and satisfaction for the participants.

A final note concerns the theme of *context*. Anna talked about the different schools she worked in and the different school cultures she experienced. When one principal, for example, told her that all the students at the school were gifted and they didn't need her there, Anna knew she would struggle against such a block. So it would be wise to read school policies and determine the priorities and values advocated to identify how GE might fit into the context.

Jarvis and Henderson (2014) advocated for a way to align GE with mainstream education as a whole school improvement strategy. This might help to locate the need for GE PL within a whole school approach as a priority. Jane suggested that GE specialists take some time to understand the context, to understand the people and the way things happen at that school/site in order to set realistic and achievable career goals. Jane's advice was also to start small and build gradually. Her approach was to work firstly with the teachers who are appreciative and keen to learn (80 percent) so that the more difficult teachers (20 percent) are less likely to have a negative impact on the GE specialist's wellbeing. Anna and Jane both found that when other teachers started to see the results, they became more inclined to want to work with them to adopt GE methods. In terms of managing the frustrating aspects of the role, Anna's advice was to find a critical friend as a necessary support. This was the person with whom to vent, and then to discuss possible ways to move forward. Theresa finished her story with a warning to take care. The participants each faced multiple challenges in their careers, such as negativity and opposition from colleagues, time limitations and high expectations. The literature on teacher burnout conveys evidence that challenges in a teaching career that are not managed (or not able to be managed) can lead to stress, anxiety, exhaustion and retirement (Carroll, et al., 2022). So it would seem essential when considering a career in Education and providing PL to teachers, that GE specialists examine their own coping mechanisms and the extent to which they have the 5 Cs (Savickas, et al., 2005) as well as a supportive community to avoid burning out. But also, to consider the *context* within which they are working to identify the potential risks and affordances and how to navigate one's career within each particular setting.

Limitations of this study

Narrative research typically involves only a few participants, so having three participants was more of a *de*limitation rather than a limitation, consistent with this method. The intention in working with a small sample group is to gather rich data in the form of in-depth stories. It may be seen as a limitation of this study that only three participants were selected on the basis that it is difficult to make generalisations based on data from a small sample. However, making generalisations was not the intended nor stated goal of this study. The intention was to focus on establishing trustworthiness of the research through writing and interpreting a co-constructed narrative that is internally consistent and provides depth of insight into a particular life experience. Life and career stories are contextual, so another limitation might be that these stories take place only in one specific place. However, a distinction must be made between the *de*limiting factors, such as the small sample size and single location and the potentially limiting factors. One limiting factor may be that the participants are all female, which raises the possibility for future research to identify male participants who have undertaken GE PL responsibilities. Another limitation may be that all participants came from a Humanities teaching background. Perhaps teachers with Mathematics or Science backgrounds who provide GE PL in their schools might provide different insights? The participants in this study believed that GE PL applied through the specific learning areas in the Australian Curriculum helps to bridge the GE theory/practice gap. Further research is required to explore whether the insights raised in this research might be consistent for GE specialists from different teaching area backgrounds across all subject areas.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry was inspired by the research puzzle wondering what happens in the PL space between theory and practice; wondering what the participants' stories might reveal about significant factors in the provision of GE PL. While this current research may have ended, I haven't ceased to wonder and continue to think about the space between GE theories and GE practices in schools, and how to design and deliver PL for teachers that will change minds and outcomes in constructive ways. Effective PL can be transformative for teachers who benefit from increased confidence and capability. Everyone can be empowered as a result – not only the teachers themselves, but also the schools, through more inclusive cultures. And ultimately, effective PL in GE will empower the gifted and talented students, who can experience improved wellbeing and learning outcomes. Each school and site is different, and PL needs to be tailored to fit those different spaces. The pervasive and enduring puzzle for those who provide PL in this field is the complexity of how to design and deliver learning that knits together theory and practice for teachers within specific contexts. One way might be to consider different models of provision, such as Design Thinking which Henderson et al. (2021) used as a PL framework to ensure that the teachers' diverse contexts were foregrounded.

Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997, p. 8) wrote that "the hand of the writer and the eyes of the reader shape all written works." It may be, having read the stories presented in this narrative study and considered my analysis and interpretation, that the reader may yet identify other insights and points of resonance connecting to their own experience. There is the story that is told and the story that is heard, for the narrative involves both the writer and the reader. It is within the power of story to provoke the teller and the listener or reader to understand, imagine and reimagine their world and their place in the world. Using narrative to understand and reflect

on the key themes and factors influencing our careers can assist educators to reflect on the

specific knowledge and skills that might progress their own careers.

This thesis has captured the career stories of three influential GE specialists in SA.

Telling their stories has helped them to reflect back on their legacy. Their stories provide hope

that it is possible to bridge the theory-practice gap and bring about change through leading PL

about GE. What a wonderful vision it is to hope that exceptional teachers for gifted learners

come to be not the exception, but rather the rule. It is hoped that this thesis will also provoke

current practitioners to consider what their legacy might be and to identify their own "key

goods" that help them to be effective agents of change for gifted students. Completing this

research study has given clarity to my own career story and encouraged me to consider my own

future directions reframed by the identified themes. According to Clandinin (2013, p. 44), "of

course, for narrative inquirers, exit is never a final exit." The challenge of the puzzle, and the

stories, continue.

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Appendix A: Letters of introduction, information and consent to participants

Dr Jane Jarvis
School of Education
Flinders University
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 08 8201 3798
Fax: 08 82013184
Jane.jarvis@flinders.edu.au
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

Date

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir/Madam/Name

This letter is to introduce Lesley Henderson who is a doctoral student in the School of Education at Flinders University. I hold the position of Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Flinders University, and am writing to you in my capacity as one of Lesley's Research Higher Degree supervisors.

Lesley is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis and other publications on the subject "The space between: A narrative inquiry into three practitioners' experiences of leading professional learning in gifted education". Lesley has identified you as a gifted education practitioner who has considerable experience in professional learning about gifted education. She would like to invite you to assist with the project by agreeing to be involved in a series of three interviews of between 60 to 90 minutes in length per interview on three separate occasions, in addition to a group interview of 90 minutes' duration with the other research participants.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. Participation is voluntary and you are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since Lesley intends to make a tape recording of the interview, she will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed, and that the recording will not be made available to any other person. Lesley will share with you the transcriptions of the interviews to check for accuracy, faithful representation of your ideas and to ensure that your confidentiality is preserved.

If you are willing to participate in this important and valuable research please complete and return the attached consent form to Lesley at lesley.henderson@flinders.edu.au. Lesley will contact you to discuss her research and arrange a mutually convenient date, time and location for the interviews.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project may be directed to Lesley's supervisors: myself, jane.jarvis@flinders.edu.au or kerry.bissaker@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jane Jarvis, Senior Lecturer, School of Education

> *This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 7367). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

inspiring achievement

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INFORMATION SHEET
(for participating in 3 individual interviews)

Title: The Space Between: A Narrative Inquiry into three practitioners' experiences of leading professional learning in gifted education

Researcher:
Ms Lesley Henderson
School of Education
Flinders University
Telephone: (08) 8201 3331
Email: lesley.henderson@flinders.edu.au
Supervisors:
Dr Jane Jarvis
School of Education
Flinders University
Telephone: (08) 8201 3798
Email: jane.jarvis@flinders.edu.au
and
Dr. Kerry Bissaker
School of Education
Flinders University
Telephone: (08) 8201 5376
Email: kerry.bissaker@flinders.edu.au

Description of the study:
This is a qualitative narrative inquiry. Three practitioners will be asked to relate stories of their personal and professional experiences concerning their lives and careers in gifted education. Analysis of their stories will generate a narrative that seeks insights into leading professional learning for teachers about gifted education in the context of South Australia.

Purpose of the study:
This project aims to:
1. document the life stories of experienced gifted education practitioners in South Australia.
2. determine the critical factors that influence the effectiveness of professional learning for teachers about gifted education to enhance the outcomes for gifted students.
3. develop a vision for the future of professional learning about gifted education in South Australia.
4. contribute to the literature in the field.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to attend a one-on-one interview with the researcher on 3 separate occasions within the space of a month. Each interview will last about 60-90 minutes. The times and location

of all interviews will be mutually agreed upon. All interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with looking at the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed and stored as a computer file and will only be destroyed if the transcript is checked by the participant. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time, or choose not to answer a question in the interview.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

You will be asked to attend a one-on-one interview with the researcher on 3 separate occasions within the space of a month. Each interview will last about 60-90 minutes. The times and location of all interviews will be mutually agreed upon. All interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with looking at the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed and stored as a computer file and will only be destroyed if the transcript is checked by the participant.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We do not need your name and you will be anonymous. The names of specific schools also will not be used. Once the interview has been transcribed and saved as a file, the voice file will then be destroyed. Any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher (Lesley Henderson) will have access to. Your comments will not be linked directly to you.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

This project has been assessed by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee as a low risk project. The researcher does not anticipate any risk to you from your involvement in this focus group interview; however given the nature of the interview context and personal narrative, some participants could experience emotional discomfort. If any emotional discomfort is experienced please contact the Flinders University Counselling Service on (08) 82012118 for support / counselling that may be accessed free of charge by all participants.
There is a burden of time expected from participation – each interview is expected to last for approximately 60-90 minutes, which may mean up to a 6 hour commitment of time.
If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at Lesley.henderson@flinders.edu.au (or to the postal address above).

How will I receive feedback?

On project completion outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via email.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 7367). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Flinders
UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

(by interview)

The Space Between: A narrative inquiry into three practitioners' experiences of leading professional learning in gifted education

I ....

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Letter of invitation and the Information sheet for the research project on Professional learning about Gifted Education in South Australia to be completed as part of Lesley Henderson's Doctor of Education program.

1. I have read the information provided.

2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.

3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.

4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.

5. I understand that:

    •   I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.

    •   I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.

    •   While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.

    •   I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

6. I have had the opportunity to discuss taking part in this research with a family member or friend.

Participant's signature……………………………………Date…………………...

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name…………………………………………………………................

Researcher's signature…………………………………..Date……………………

Appendix B: Final Ethics Approval Notice

FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:   7367

Project Title: Professional learning about Gifted Education in South Australia:
                   Practitioners' perspectives

Principal Researcher: Ms Lesley Henderson

Email: lesley.henderson@flinders.edu.au

Approval Date: 7 September   Ethics Approval Expiry Date: **31 March 2020**
                   2016

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in
the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. **Participant Documentation**
   Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of
   student projects, to ensure that:

   - all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and
     formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above
     mentioned errors.

   - the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters
     of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and
     questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current
     Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction.
     The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and
     documentation should contain international dialling codes for all telephone and fax
     numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.

   - the SBREC contact details, listed below, are included in the footer of all letters of
     introduction and information sheets.

     *This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research
     Ethics Committee (Project Number 'INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval'). For more
     information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be
     contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email
     human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.*

2. **Annual Progress / Final Reports**
   In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical
   Conduct in Human Research (March 2007)* an annual progress report must be
   submitted each year on the **7 September** (approval anniversary date) for the duration of
   the ethics approval using the report template available from the *Managing Your Ethics*

Approval SBREC web page. *Please retain this notice for reference when completing annual progress or final reports.*

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please submit either (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request and an annual report.

Student Projects
The SBREC recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, reviewed and approved. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend some changes that may include the collection of additional participant data.

Your first report is due on **7 September 2017** or on completion of the project, whichever is the earliest.

3. **Modifications to Project**
   Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

   - change of project title;
   - change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, principal researcher or supervisor change);
   - changes to research objectives;
   - changes to research protocol;
   - changes to participant recruitment methods;
   - changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
   - changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
   - changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
   - changes / additions to information and/or documentation to be provided to potential participants;
   - changes to research tools (e.g., questionnaire, interview questions, focus group questions);
   - extensions of time.

   To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please complete and submit the *Modification Request Form* which is available from the Managing Your Ethics Approval SBREC web page. Download the form from the website every time a new modification request is submitted to ensure that the most recent form is used. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

   Change of Contact Details
   Please ensure that you notify the Committee if either your mailing or email address changes to ensure that correspondence relating to this project can be sent to you. A modification request is not required to change your contact details.

4. **Adverse Events and/or Complaints**
   Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 08 8201-3116 or human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

   - any complaints regarding the research are received;
   - a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
   - an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.