CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to analyse the factors relating to academic underachievement among four intellectually gifted students in Malaysia. It was also intended to determine whether the factors of underachievement that have been reported in literature also affect Malaysian students in the same way.

What is heartening about this research, is the identification of a few factors that are affecting academic underachievement in the four intellectually gifted Malaysian students. They are family and parental factors, peer and social factors, school factors and locus of control. Self-concept that was thought to be a factor however, did not seem to be a contributing factor to academic underachievement among the four intellectually gifted Malaysian students. Once these factors are identified, intervention strategies can be formulated to reverse underachievement among these students.

5.2. Summary of Results

Family and Parental Factors

All four underachieving intellectually gifted students say that their parents' opinion toward their school achievement is one of little or no satisfaction. Parents of all four students are said to have put a great deal of pressure on them in regard to homework by having high expectations. Two out of four underachieving gifted students are highly supervised by their parents.

The finding on family and parental factor as a contributing factor to academic underachievement among the four intellectually gifted students is similar to what had been found by other researchers (Baum, Renzulli & Herbert, 1995; Rimm, 1984, 1989; Whitmore, 1986). For example, Baum, Renzulli and Hebert (1995) when examining the factors that contribute to underachievement, found that a fifth grader felt the pressure of parental high expectations. The results of this study prove that high parental pressure and supervision could adversely contribute to academic underachievement among the four intellectually gifted Malaysian students.

Peer and Social Factors

Except for Liu Bin, peer and social factors contribute to the underachievement of all three intellectually gifted students. Two out of these three fear social rejections by peers and may be consciously underachieving in order to be accepted by their peer group. Another faces maladjustment and is socially withdrawn. Social withdrawal may indefinitely affect achievement in these intellectually gifted students.

This finding is consistent with what had been found by other researchers (Karnes & Brown,1980; Rimm, 1984, 1989). Karnes & Brown (1980) had warned that intellectually gifted students may not want to risk rejection by their peers who place little importance on intellectual ability. Thus, they could become ashamed of their talents and always give excuses for failings and consciously underachieving

School Factors

This is yet another big contributing factor, as all four seemed to agree that school is boring, useless, unchallenging and uninteresting. Although not said

explicitly, it is implied in three of the subjects that courses were too content-based. Three wanted more opportunities for independent projects rather than assigned work. It is indicated that school or college proves to be unsatisfying as far as academic work is concerned.

The finding on school factors that affect the academic achievement of the four intellectually gifted students is similar to what had been found by Frankel (1960), Morrow and Wilson (1961), Newell (1989), Haesbroek (1988), Baum, Renzulli and Herbert (1995). Rimm (1989) also revealed that for the gifted underachievers, school was boring, dull, irrelevant, useless and a place where too much work was given. The results of this study proves that laborious drill classes, boring presentations, unchallenging work and too content-based subjects were among the factors attributed to academic underachievement among all four intellectually gifted Malaysian students.

Self-concept

All four students in this study scored relatively high in Section C of Hauick-2, which means that they have a high self-concept. On the other hand, Gallagher (1985) had found in his study that gifted students' actual capabilities are masked by low self-concept and this leads to underachievement. The finding from this study is in contrast with many researchers like Gallagher (1985); Marsh (1983); Marsh (1987) and Wong, (1992).

The results of this study suggests that self-concept is not closely related to academic underachievement among the four intellectually gifted Malaysian students. The contrasting result is not due to instrumentation as Wong (1992) used the same

instrument. However, his study involved a larger sample size. Thus, the difference in sample size may be a possible explanation for the contrasting result.

Locus of Control

Except for Jackie, all three are externally controlled as they scored relatively high in Section B of Hauick-2. The result of this study suggest that external locus of control are factors contributing to academic underachievement in three of the intellectually gifted students. This is similar to what had been found by many other researchers (Whitmore, 1986; Tannenbaum, 1983; Rimm, 1986; Rimm, 1987; Fine & Pitts, 1980; Willings & Greenwood, 1990, Kanoy, Johnson & Kanoy, 1980 and Laffoon, Jenkins-Friedman & Tollefson, 1989). Laffoon, Jenkins-Friedman and Tollefson (1989) for example, found that gifted underachievers and non-gifted students are significantly more external in control than gifted achievers.

5.3 Recommendations

It is well established by now that our system of education seems to lack a systematic educational provision for the underachieving intellectually gifted. Therefore, the researcher would like to suggest some recommendation based on her observation.

All four students in this study complained that the courses and their lessons in class were too content-based. The curriculum for the underachieving gifted must be reviewed to provide more exploratory and discovery oriented lessons and activities. Textbooks and examination-based projects should be minimized. In cases where possible, an enrichment programme should be designed to meet the needs of the underachieving intellectually gifted Malaysian students.

The school in general should plan and organise relevant programmes to enhance the learning of all students, more so for those with special needs like the four students in this study. Any evaluations or assessment that are to be carried out must not take the form of examinations and tests alone. The evaluations can be in other forms desired by students and all assessments should include other skills.

Also, the college should perhaps allow these students to take certain subjects at a higher level. This is to avoid boredom, as claimed by all four students. Melissa for example, should be allowed to take Art and Design as an elective subject. Liu Bin should also be allowed to take extra subjects in the first year's module since he has demonstrated mastery of the computer at this level. He may even be considered to graduate in a shorter period of time.

The parents should be given a talk, a workshop, a seminar or a course in order to help them understand the nature of underachievement among high intellectually gifted students. This is to ensure that they understand their intellectually gifted children and set appropriate goals and expectations for them. Both Melissa and Jacky are highly supervised at home and this supervision should be minimized so that they can be more independent in the school environment.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study is not without its limitations. At the same time, the findings have opened up some possibilities.

Studies on educational interventions in order to reverse academic underachievement among the intellectually gifted Malaysian students should be carried out. Some foreign studies that had been conducted (Emerick, 1992; Baum 1988; Baum, Renzulli & Herbert, 1995) can serve as the basis for conducting similar

studies on our Malaysian students in the local scene. Emerick (1992) for example, studied the factors that had influenced the reversal of underachievement in 10 gifted students. Baum, Renzulli and Herbert (1995) then examined the effect of using creative productivity enrichment as an intervention in reversing underachievement.

The four students in this study reported that they dislike the courses they take. Teaching strategies and styles that do not suit the learning styles of these four students' may have been the cause of their academic underachievement. Further studies could also be undertaken to see if there are any possible relationships between teaching strategies and the learning strategies of our underachieving gifted Malaysian students. Redding (1990) has carried out one such study where he looked into the learning preferences of underachieving gifted adolescents. He found that the underachieving gifted students perform at a high level on tasks which require synthesizing but do not perform as well on detailed, computational or convergent problem solving tasks which require precise and analytic processing.

A quantitative study with a bigger sample size in the same area would be helpful to examine if the same factors cause underachievement in intellectually gifted Malaysian students. Baum, Renzulli & Herbert (1995) for example, engaged a bigger sample of 17 students in their study while Redding (1990) had a sample size of 50 subjects.