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## Perspectives in Gifted Education: Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education

Institute for the Development of Gifted Education, Ricks Center for Gifted Children, University of Denver

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## **Perspectives in Gifted Education: Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education**

### **Description**

Perspectives in Gifted Education is a monograph series published through the University of Denver, first by the Institute for the Development of Gifted Education and now, through the Office of the Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education. Volume 1 was focused on Young Gifted Children, Twice-Exceptional Children was the topic of Volume 2 and Complexities of Emotional Development, Spirituality and Hope, the topic of Volume 3. Volume 4 was organized around the issues of Diverse Gifted Learners and Creativity the focus on Volume 5. Now, this monograph, Volume 6, is centered on Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education.

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# Perspectives in Gifted Education: Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education

Office of the Daniel L. Ritchie  
Endowed Chair in Gifted Education  
Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

Vol. 6

# **Perspectives in Gifted Education: Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education**

**Volume 6**

**Fall 2017**

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**Introduction**  
**Perspectives in Gifted Education:**  
**Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate**  
**on Gifted Education**

Norma L. Hafenstein, Jill Alexa Perry, Kristina A. Hesbol,  
and Stephen H. Chou

Perspectives in Gifted Education is a monograph series published through the University of Denver, first by the Institute for the Development of Gifted Education and now, through the Office of the Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education. Volume 1 was focused on Young Gifted Children, Twice-Exceptional Children was the topic of Volume 2 and Complexities of Emotional Development, Spirituality and Hope, the topic of Volume 3. Volume 4 was organized around the issues of Diverse Gifted Learners and Creativity the focus on Volume 5. Now, this monograph, Volume 6, is centered on Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education.

Recent research has suggested the need for advanced training in gifted education. Overall, there is a strong need to not only understand what giftedness can be (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Renzulli, 2012), but it is equally critical to understand what the role of teachers and school leaders play (Bangel, Moon & Capobianco, 2010). For example, educators must be trained to acknowledge giftedness outside of the normal curve of traditional academic markers (Renzulli, 2012), acknowledge giftedness across diverse students (Joseph and Ford, 2006; Swanson, 2016), and implement adequate programming for these gifted students (Bangel, Moon & Capobianco, 2010).

Supported through the generosity of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation and the Considine Family Foundation, this work features

impact projects and research conducted by Education Doctoral students in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver and advised by the Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education. These works demonstrate integration of concepts of leadership, curriculum and instruction, and gifted education, and are evidence of research conducted to impact the field of gifted education. A doctoral program that is part of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, the methodologies and approaches presented here examined impacts in partnership with community members. The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), which began in 2007, is a consortium of over 100 colleges and schools of education that have committed resources to work together to undertake a critical examination and redesign of the doctorate in education (EdD) through dialog, experimentation, critical feedback and evaluation. Through a collaborative, authentic process, members of CPED developed a Framework for EdD program design/redesign that supports creating quality, rigorous practitioner preparation while honoring the local context of each member institution. The CPED Framework consists of three components—a new definition of the EdD, a set of guiding principles for program development and a set of design-concepts that serve as program building blocks. As members engage in the Consortium, they utilize this Framework to design/redesign, evaluate and improve their programs to prepare practitioners to become Scholarly Practitioners. These practitioners blend practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice by using the following guidelines:

- Use practical research and applied theories as tools for change
- Understand the importance of equity and social justice
- Disseminate their work in multiple ways,
- Resolve problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals. (CPED, 2010)

Scholarly Practitioners seek to impact practice in their work. The students in this volume are clear demonstrations of what it means to be a Scholarly Practitioner.



Student works spanned school districts, individual buildings, state level initiatives, curricular implications, personal perspectives and other actions of change. Frequently these works highlighted issues of social justice and influence to impact children and families, educational leaders, individuals and systems. Special thanks to guest editors Jill Alexandra Perry, Executive Director of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), Kristina Hesbol and Stephen Chou, faculty in the Education Doctorate program, Rachel Taylor, Graduate Assistant Editor and to the support of Mary Albertoni, Assistant to the Chair. Articles offered here are organized around three major themes of impact, including school-based interventions, teacher or curricular influences and the role of parents or individuals in consideration of giftedness, which comprise this Volume 6, *Perspectives in Gifted Education: Influences and Impacts of the Education Doctorate on Gifted Education*.

Kristina Hesbol, University of Denver Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Assistant Professor, opens this volume with reflections on school leaders who recultured their school to become inclusive, welcoming diversity as an asset (Hamayan, 2008). Because of such leadership, appropriate and high-quality instructional experiences are provided for every student, including those who are gifted and talented, twice exceptional, racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse, or economically under-resourced. Such schools understand that every student's uniqueness adds value to the school and the community. This manuscript also examines co-constructed partnerships that study a complex, persistent problem of practice to generate improvement, guided by the Design Concepts and Working Principles of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED, 2011).

Opening the first grouping of articles regarding school-based intervention, Robin Greene offers considerations of culturally responsive gifted education. Greene examined the perceptions and practices of one school, which support or hinder access to equitable programming for gifted

culturally linguistically diverse learners. As a result of the data collected, Greene created a conceptual model based on the convergence of culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural gifted competencies. Green also suggested a new lens through which to critique gifted education as a system.

Lindsey Reinert makes a compelling argument for school districts considering Early Access legislation. Early Access legislation provides a forum for young gifted students to access the educational system “early” as long as they are defined as academically gifted, socially and emotionally mature, who are in the top three percent of their gifted peer group, motivated to learn, ready for advanced placement, and have exhausted the resources of preschool or home schooling. Reinert examined four categories of limitation including hindrances, awareness, favorability, and readiness toward adoption of an Early Access addendum.

The role of school principals in supporting learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents is explored by Colleen Urlik. Urlik’s article considered the role of principals as instructional leaders and the impact of principals on school-based leadership. Urlik suggested the need to focus on principals by providing professional development to these site-based leaders. She articulates various aspects of a comprehensive program design (CPD) for learners with high potential and identified gifted and talents, and provides a rationale for specific, distinctive programming. While assumed, Urlik builds a targeted rationale for principal professional development to impact school-based programming.

The second grouping of articles focuses on teacher or curricular influences. Sheri Collier’s study, “Uncovering the Gifts of English Language Learners” explored the impact of professional development interventions provided for preschool staff members in a school district of a large metropolitan area. Data collected and analyzed included baseline survey information, content from staff development sessions and professional learning community activities and post-survey information.

Content of the interventions were focused on understanding the characteristics of English Language Learner students, Gifted and Talented students, and English Language Learner students who may be Gifted and Talented. Results showed that there is a strong need for professional development regarding professionals' attitudes and supports. Further, that this type of focused professional development could be effective in promoting systematic thinking and long-term vision of gifted education and English Language Learners.

Kate Bachtel promotes the value of emotional intelligence in her reflections on "Emotional Intelligence for Achievement and Well-Being." Bachtel offers a specific professional development model to expand educator capacity to support student emotional development in a wide range of school contexts. She reports contributions to underperformance include misunderstandings and biases coupled with relatively few resources invested in evidence-based emotional learning in schools. Support for Bachtel's intervention is grounded in a body of research illustrating the impact emotional intelligence (EQ) has on life outcomes and data from ongoing program evaluation.

Sydney Haugland considers influences of professional development as she examined teacher referrals to a gifted program following training on the Kingore Observation Inventory. Haugland gathered baseline and post intervention data and numerous other collection points including interviews, reflective journaling and surveys. Findings indicated increased teacher participation in the referral process and change in educator beliefs around gifted learners. Haugland also offers recommendations for continuation of professional growth and instructional support for gifted learners.

Closing this section is Jess DeLallo's discussion of the question, "Should Character Education Make a Comeback in Public Education?" Through a qualitative data analysis, results indicated a number of themes derived from interviews with educators, business professionals, and community

members. These themes included a lack of demonstration of courtesy and manners, basic skills for success in the workplace and challenging work ethics. DeLallo offers recommendations for character education inclusion in public school curriculum to ultimately impact the workplace and society.

A consideration of the perspectives of individuals and the role of parents is the concluding section of this volume. Christine Winterbrook explored the lives of gifted women through a narrative collection of the lived experiences of five diverse gifted women. Through in-depth interviews, Winterbrook gathered data on internal gifted characteristics and external influences that affect gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement and overall well-being. Winterbrook found through this collection of narratives, themes of perfectionism, Imposter Syndrome, and societal pressure that lead to conformity. Implications of these themes are discussed.

Rebecca McKinney articulated a persistent problem of practice in the field of gifted education as the inequitable identification of and programming for culturally and linguistically diverse gifted learners. She suggests that one possible root cause of this problem is the lack of parent engagement from culturally and linguistically diverse parents and caregivers and calls for active inclusion of parents and caregivers in the identification process. McKinney proposes a framework to support African American parents and caregivers in having conversations with other African American parents and caregivers through a guided facilitation. This framework supports the development of relationships, establishment of trust and shared planning and actions.

Stephen Chou, Director of Research and Training at The Summit Center, psychologist in private practice and adjunct faculty at the Morgridge College of Education, closes this volume with reflections on innovations in gifted education. Chou acknowledges the complexities of gifted learners, the need for training of leaders in gifted education, and the

responsibility we all share to educate for the future. Chou charges each of us to serve and to lead.

This monograph is a collection of current research and writing related to impacting the practice of gifted education as a field. Both faculty and graduating students share their passion and influence in ultimately serving gifted children from all backgrounds. The importance of training educators working in the field, including teachers and principals as well as parents and caregivers, is clearly articulated. Voices of individuals, across the age span, are heard and recognized as the need for additional support and development is detailed. Implications for both policy and practice are presented in hopes of advancing knowledge in and around the field, in addition to enhancing the perspective of what giftedness is and can be. This work is offered to support and prompt further action in recognizing and serving gifted children, their communities, and those who work with them. We do so to advance thinking, enact positive change, and to reach the future.

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## **Developing Practitioner Scholars to Disrupt the Status Quo: A Leadership Laboratory of Practice**

Kristina A. Hesbol

Principal leadership that effectively improves teaching and learning for every student is a uniquely dynamic and complex constellation of contextually bound practices. This role requires distinctive skills – the ability to build and assess the extent to which the organization shares a common vision, to bring to the surface and challenge prevailing mental models, and to support systemic thinking (Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland, & Monpas-Huber, 2006). A paradoxical quandary faced by today's school leaders is the contrast of continuous change and the conservative system that resists change. Leadership that nurtures and supports inclusive practices encounters resistance from members of the school community who resist change. These people hold fast to a view of a reality that not only does not exist today and may not exist tomorrow, but also may never have existed. Weick's theories (1995) on organizational sensemaking explain why such resistance occurs.

Principals play a foundational role in forming school cultures that encourage change, a process that requires shared leadership. They need to actively engage all members of the internal and external school community in deep organizational learning, building trust to provide breakthrough instructional impact for every student (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Rather than focus on the individual inspection of *teaching*, they focus on the collective analysis of a body of evidence of student *learning*. Developing a school culture of inquiry supports the professional use of data as a lever for improvement. Such leaders establish cycles of formative assessment at the classroom and building levels which provide evidence that collectively established goals are/not being met – and the building leadership team takes shared responsibility and ownership for the success of every student. To leverage sustainable change, successful school

leaders need to understand how to exercise social capital (Coleman, 1988), to build trust, and to promote teachers' ownership of responsibility, authentically and intrinsically changing their instructional practice to meet the needs of every student in their classroom.

A critical role of the principal is that of an equity advocate, particularly with the evolving changes in the demographic landscape of American urban, suburban, and rural schools. The construct of a community of practice developed by Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002) focuses on improving teaching and learning for every member of the community, with the learning needs of its members addressed through proactive partnerships (Hesbol, 2013). Principals who demonstrate their effectiveness as learning leaders create a schoolwide focus on learning for students as well as for the educators. Such a change affects the way that every member of the school community works collectively to eliminate ineffective practices and to explore new strategies to reach every student in a personalized way. Such schools are described as, "characterized by a profound respect for and encouragement of diversity, where important differences among children and adults are celebrated rather than seen as problems to remedy" (Barth, 1990, p. 10). The research on schools which have been successful with broadly diverse groups of students indicates that these principals supportively help their teachers move from a posture of defensive resistance to change to a reframed sense of pride and empowerment, resulting from the teachers' success with their students (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Eliminating deficit mindsets and supporting diverse students' funds of knowledge and cultural capital (Rios-Aguilar & Marquez Kiyama, 2017; Yosso, 2006) are central leadership responsibilities to lead schools that genuinely welcome all students and their families.

In traditional principal leadership preparation, aspiring school leaders have seldom been taught expressly about atypical learners, ranging from culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse learners to students with special needs. Coursework or experiential fieldwork with gifted and

talented or twice exceptional students is rarely included in their training. Consequently, it is incumbent upon all school leaders to learn about each of their students, to meet their individual cognitive, as well as social/emotional, needs. To effectively lead inclusive learning communities, principals must develop a school culture that thrives on difference, meeting each student where she is and preparing individualized instruction to optimize her learning outcomes.

Successful principals are responsible to lead both the instructional and organizational cultures of the school. Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton (2010) examined the effect of teachers who engage in critical conversations about improving instruction, a process made possible and often facilitated by the school leader. Developing high expectations for every student, matched by high levels of support, is central to institutionalizing a culture of continuous improvement. Developing and supporting a shared vision that the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that every student learns with increasingly successful learning outcomes.

Effective principals guide faculty and staff in a process that regularly interrogates every practice, program, and procedure in the school to confirm that it aligns with their shared vision (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). In the process, a culture of collective responsibility is fostered, breaking down silos of isolation and creating new norms of collaboration with learner-focused outcomes. There is a significant need for culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016) to support the appropriate identification of gifted and talented students. Related policy implications are described in this volume by Dr. Colleen Urlik in the chapter, "Focusing on Principals to Support Learners with High Potential and Identified Gifts and Talents" (Urlik, 2017).

Principals who demonstrate their effectiveness as learning leaders create a schoolwide focus on learning for students as well as for the educators.



Such a paradigmatic shift affects the way that every member of the school community works collectively to eliminate ineffective practices and to explore new strategies to reach every student in a personalized way. These changes in school culture affect the way that adults work with each other to improve their professional practices and to create the best learning environments for every student.

Findings from the ground-breaking school leadership research, *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning* by Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson (2010), indicate that leadership is second only to the teacher in terms of impact on improving student learning. Of equal importance is their finding that the social capacity created by faculty collaborating to improve instructional practice also has a significant influence on student learning outcomes. Schools in which students consistently achieve at high levels show a shared leadership across stakeholder groups, including parents and teachers.

In 2007, the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) and its member institutions began to re-examine and re-design the educational doctorate (Ed.D.) as a distinct professional practice degree. In 2013, three doctoral programs from the Morgridge College of Education submitted a successful application to become a member of the CPED consortium. A national Gifted and Talented doctoral cohort began that year; Doctoral Research Projects (DRPs) from members of the cohort comprise the chapters of this monograph. The program was purposefully aligned with the innovative CPED Design Concepts and Working Principles (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2010). Graduates of the program have developed into *scholarly practitioners*, educators who demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to lead change and improve the problems of practice they routinely encounter (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2010). The chapters they wrote for this publication model how theory and practice reciprocally inform and enhance each other. An example of this dynamic relationship is explicated in the chapter, "Gifted Culturally Linguistically Diverse Learners: A School-

Based Exploration”, written by Dr. Robin Greene (Greene, 2017). These graduates can apply ideas learned in their doctoral program to their practice, collaborate with stakeholders, and use systematic inquiry as practice to collectively improve the challenges to their systems. Each has become a self-directed learner, leader, and applied researcher, linking theory with systematic inquiry.

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## **Gifted Culturally Linguistically Diverse Learners: A School-Based Exploration**

Robin M. Greene

### **Abstract**

This exploratory case study focused on how perceptions and practices of one school in an urban school district in Colorado supported or hindered access to equitable programming for gifted, culturally linguistically, diverse learners. As a result of data collected, the researcher created a conceptual model based on the convergence of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) and multicultural gifted competencies (Ford and Trotman, 2001). The researcher also suggests a new lens through which to critique gifted education as a system.

**Keywords:** gifted, culturally linguistically diverse, critical race theory

As demographics in the nation continually change, Black and Hispanic youth have continued to be denied access to gifted education programs at the national and state level (Ford, 2012). While there are multiple reasons for such a lack of access including identification practices, student self-perception, underachievement, lack of culturally responsive teaching (Colangelo & Davis, 2002; Ford, 2007; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Ford & Milner, 2005; Jensen, 2009; Worrell, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2007; Johnsen, 2004; Gay & Kirkland, 2005), research indicates a persistent problem of practice: Educators struggle to identify gifted culturally linguistically diverse students and do not understand the nature and needs of those students.



Ford contended that deficit thinking was the root of the problem regarding identification of culturally linguistically diverse students (Ford, 2001; Ford, 2002; Ford & Grantham, 2003). This misinterpretation is a lack of acknowledgement of cultural preferences for learning and the various expressions of knowledge and manifests itself into a lack of strong program models that capitalize on the unique cultural experiences of the students (Ford, 2001; Ford & Grantham, 2003). In addition to negative teacher perceptions based on deficit thinking (Ford & Grantham, 2003), assessments used to identify gifted children may also be linked for this persistent problem of practice because they perpetuate myths regarding who should be placed in gifted programs (Borland, 2013).

In multiple studies, alternative assessments such as portfolios, local norming, multidimensional assessments, performance assessments, dynamic assessments, and even opportunity norming have been shown to have the potential increase representation in gifted programs (Borland, 2013; Callahan, 2005; Johnsen, 2005; Lohman et al., 2008; Van Tassel Baska, Johnson & Avery, 2002). Appropriate educational programming and placement is crucial to the success of culturally linguistically diverse learners (Ford, 2003).

### **Literature Review**

This literature review explored Critical Race Theory, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Constructivism as central tenets in educating gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners. Supporting gifted education and the need to recognize gifted learners, as those who need learning experiences that are qualitatively different from their peers, have been a source of contention for over a century (NAGC, 2015). Although conceptions of giftedness have changed over time for cultural, political, or research reasons (Purcell & Eckert, 2006), one theme remains constant: In order to be successful students, gifted and high ability learners require appropriate learning experiences and challenges that meet their cognitive and emotional needs (Assouline et al., 2006; Castellano, 2016; CDE, n.d.;

Delpit, 2006; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Ford, 2010; Ford, 2012; Ford, 2014; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Matthews, 1998; NAGC, n.d.; Plucker et al., 2010; Tomlinson, 2005; Webb, 2013; Winebrenner & Brulles 2008).

Furthermore, the increase in both culturally linguistically diverse students and students of poverty has put stress on a fragile education system, and the system, itself, has been slow to change (Ford, 2012; Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010). Even with the increase in representation in programming, Black and Hispanic students are still "...less than half as likely to be in gifted students as White students" (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). In 2010, McBee found that being African American or Hispanic decreased the probability of being identified as gifted once the student was referred. The findings suggested that although the students were being referred at equal rates to their majority peers, and they were not being identified based on the identification measurements/qualifications (Worrell, 2008).

### **Critical Race Theory**

In reviewing the scholarship regarding Critical Race Theory (CRT) and gifted education, a gap has shown in which studies critically examine gifted education. Studies have shown that research participants often do not participate in gifted education programs because of some of the reasons outline by critical race theorists (Evans, 2015; Harper, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Additionally, theorists have postulated, through a CRT lens, intelligence tests have shown to support deficit thinking (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Tate, 1997; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Because intelligence tests, as well as abilities tests and standardized tests, are used to identify learners for gifted programming (Borland, 2013; Ford, 2014; NAGC, 2015; Plucker & Burroughs, 2013; Worrell, 2007), CRT theorists have argued that these processes continue to legitimize African American and culturally linguistically diverse learners' deficiencies (Ford et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McDermott et al., 2014; Warne et al., 2014).

## **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

There is limited research regarding culturally competent teachers of gifted culturally linguistically diverse students. However, some studies have shown that culturally competent teachers showed a) self-awareness and understanding; b) cultural awareness and understanding; c) social responsiveness and responsibility; and d) used culturally sensitive techniques (Cushner, 2001; Pang, 2001; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Further, while the literature and research regarding the impact of culturally responsive teaching has depth and breadth (Daniel, 2016; Gay, 2002; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lopez, 2016; Montgomery, 2001; Kim & Slapac, 2015; Vavrus, 2008; Villegas, 1991; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Ware, 2006; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995), the literature specific to the intersection culturally responsive pedagogy in gifted education is still sparse (Castellano, 2016; Ford, 2010; Ford, 2011; Ford & Trotman, 2001).

## **Methodology**

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore educators' perceptions of characteristics, needs, and practices relating to gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners in an urban elementary school in a Western state. The central research question, as identified through the literature, was the following: *What are educators' perceptions of the characteristics, needs, and practices related to gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners?*

Sub-questions included:

1. How do educators describe gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners?
2. How do educators describe their understanding of culturally responsive teaching as it relates to diverse gifted learners?
3. What are school-based practices for gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners that support or hinder learning?

## Study Setting and Participants

Research for this bounded (Creswell, 2013) case study occurred in the winter of 2017 at one elementary school in an urban school in a Western state and was chosen because it seemed to highlight the persistent problem of practice. The 17 participants of this study comprised of teachers and administrators who worked in the school and were all considered to be educators. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants in comparison to the students with whom they work.

Table 1

*Illustration of disparity between student and educator demographics*

<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
American Indian	2.2%	0%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	1.4%	0%
African American or Black	25.7%	5%
Hispanic or Latino	59.9%	20%
White	8.1%	75%
Multiple Races	2.5%	0%
English Language Acquisition Eligible	21%	N/A
Free and Reduced Lunch Eligible	93.6%	N/A

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Table 2

*Examples of various data collected*

<u>Data type</u>	<u>Structure</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>	<u>Information collected</u>
Observation	Nonparticipant	60 minutes per classroom	Extensive field notes that focus on culturally responsive pedagogy tenets and multicultural gifted teacher competencies
Interview	Semi-structured	30 minutes per participant	Ongoing Educators' perceptions, understandings, opinions, and real-life context through their experiences
Audio-Visual	N/A	Ongoing.	Photographs of regalia, classroom environment, school environment student produced work

Research has shown that culturally diverse learners are more academically successful when they have teachers who represent them culturally (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Delpit, 2006; De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Iyer & Reese, 2013). However, there has also been research supporting academic success of culturally linguistically diverse learners if their teachers seek to understand their culture (Bass, 2009; Cole, 2008; Gay, 2010; Sloan 2009).

### **Instrument and Data Collection Procedures**

In this exploratory case study, the unit of analysis was the entire school. The researcher used semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and audio-visual materials to create artifacts for future analysis. Table 2 gives an overview of the data collected in this study.

Table 3

*Demonstration of Culturally Responsive Tenets*

<u>Tenet (Gay, 2010)</u>	<u>Demonstrated</u>	<u>Observed</u>
The teacher provides space and relationships where ethnically diverse students feel recognized, respected, seen, and heard	14	15
The teacher knows culturally diverse students thoroughly personally and academically	13	15
The teacher cultivates a sense of kindredness and responsibility among culturally diverse individuals	13	15

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The teacher enables ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions as well as being receptive to new ideas and information was observed in every classroom	14	15
The teacher builds confidence among students from different aspects	11	15

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## Data Analysis

The researcher used a data analysis spiral that allowed for a systematic and organized approach to analyzing data. Interviews, photographs, and observations were reviewed independently first, with the researcher taking notes and reviewing initial reactions (Creswell, 2013). Then, the interviews, photographs, and observations were reviewed simultaneously to look for patterns and emerging themes (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

## Data Analysis

### Observation of Educators

**Culturally responsive pedagogy.** Fifteen educators were observed using the literature –based observation protocol. The first components of the educator observation focused on culturally responsive pedagogy tenets described in detail by Gay (2010). Table 3 represents the tenets and the number of classrooms in which they were demonstrated.

Table 4

*Demonstration of Gifted Multicultural Competencies*

<u>Gifted Multicultural Competencies (Ford and Trotman, 2001)</u>	<u>Demonstrated</u>	<u>Observed</u>
Knowledge of the nature and needs of students who are gifted and diverse	9	15
Ability to develop methods and materials for use with students who are gifted	7	15
Skills addressing individual cultural differences	6	15
Skills in teaching higher level thinking skills and questioning techniques using multicultural resources and materials	4	15
Ability to recognize strengths of students who are gifted and diverse	8	15
Seek to develop students' sense of self as a gifted individual	7	15
Skills in counseling students who are gifted and diverse	5	15
Skills in creating an environment in which diverse gifted students feel challenge and safe to explore and express their uniqueness	6	15

**Gifted multicultural competencies.** The second section of the observation protocol focused upon the research-based gifted multicultural competencies developed by Ford and Trotman (2001). Table 4 displays the gifted multicultural competencies and the number of observations in which the competency was demonstrated.

## **Interviews**

Educator interviews took place over the course of two months. The first three questions of the interview were educator-centric in that the questions were focused on what the educator individually understood. Questions four through six, however, were school-community centric.

### **Emerging Themes and Assertions**

Themes that emerged from data collection included the following: Inconsistency between what educators reported as perceptions and their practices as a school; Professional learning opportunities regarding characteristics of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners impacted teacher perception; Educators have shifted how they think about plan lessons by planning for “the high”; Inconsistency in implementation and support of Talent Development model; Differences noted between cultural responsive pedagogy and teachers who are skilled in gifted multicultural competencies; Lack of understanding of how existing social emotional supports can assist gifted diverse learners; and There are some culturally responsive gifted educators evident. The most prominent theme, though, was the inconsistency between what educators reported as perception and their practices as a school. This was demonstrated through reports of positive characteristics and negative manifestations of learners and lack of professional learning mentioned regarding social emotional needs of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners, for example.

### **Conceptual Model**

The Greene Culturally Responsive Gifted Model™ was created by analyzing the observation data and noted that there were teachers at the study site who were demonstrating their ability to create a culturally responsive classroom environment while exhibiting multicultural gifted competencies. Current scholarship did not offer examples of educators who were able to create culturally responsive classrooms while also demonstrating multicultural gifted competencies, however, this study did.



Greene's Culturally Responsive Gifted Model <sup>TM</sup>

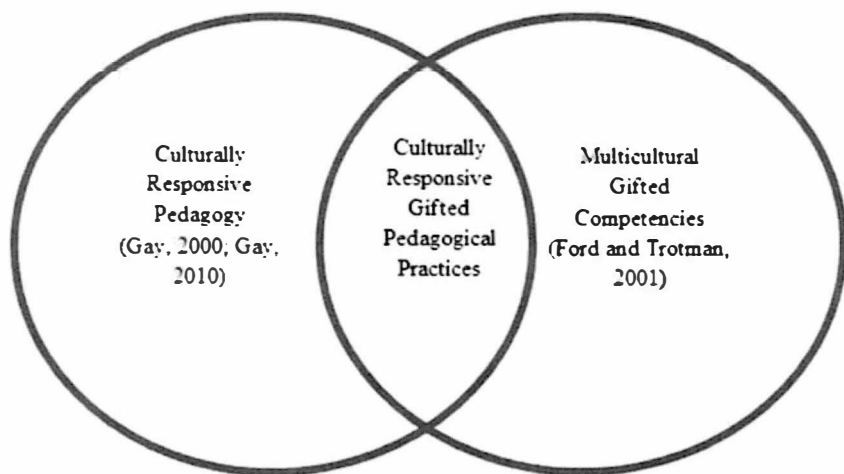


Figure 1. Greene Culturally Responsive Gifted Model

A Critical Race Theory framework was key in developing Greene's Culturally Responsive Gifted Model, which attempted to show that through the intersection of culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural gifted competencies, there were educators practicing culturally responsive gifted pedagogical practices who were dismantling the oppressive factors in schools as outlined by CRT.

Three educators (all given pseudonyms) demonstrated that they had culturally responsive gifted pedagogical practices. Jenna seemed to be skilled at creating a culturally responsive environment while incorporating teaching techniques that were necessary for gifted students to thrive (Borland, 2013; Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan 2008; Ford, 2016; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Gay, 2010; Grantham, 2004). During her observation, Jenna demonstrated every tenet of culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as every multicultural gifted competency. Jenna had created a specific

culturally responsive curriculum that spoke to the refugee crisis, which was well received by some of the refugee students in her room. She created assignments incorporating the gifted student's need for social justice by using culturally relevant materials, and the physical space combined student and teacher voice (Gay, 2000; Gay, 2010; Pollock, 2008; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Seeley, 2004).

Kenneth also demonstrated culturally responsive gifted pedagogical practices throughout his observation. Kenneth's individualized passion projects with scaffold questioning and self-directed learning created a place where students were ascending in their intellectual demand (Tomlinson, 2010). He was seen counseling individual students and recognized the strengths of his students, who were diverse, through statements like, "You're really good at thinking visually, so why don't you try to create a diagram or use a Thinking Map to tell your story," (Kenneth, 2017).

Next, Gabrielle was the third educator in the study who consistently demonstrated culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Gabrielle's content, she said, lent "...itself to natural differentiation," (Gabrielle, 2017). However, even with content or subject matter that was easily differentiated, the educator must be skilled in the art of differentiation to engage learners (Ford, 2016; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011). She offered scaffolded work in expressing their rationale behind their art with different levels of language supported to help students write.

In reviewing the observations, as well as the interviews with these educators, all the educators seemed to have individualized relationships with the majority of their students, if not all, in which they knew something unique about each one and could speak to something specific with each one (Briggs & Renzulli, 2009; Fan, 2012; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Gay, 2010). These relationships created a classroom culture affirming and valuing the individual contribution each student made, thus

creating an open space for learning to take place and capitalizing on a culturally responsive classroom environment.

### **Discussion**

The first question addressed was What are educators' perceptions of the characteristics, needs, and practices related to gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners? Educators stated positive perceptions of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners; referencing both positive and negative manifestations of giftedness in culturally linguistically diverse learners, they were telling the "other story" of diverse learners who are gifted (Ladson-Billings, 2014). They also discussed dominant culture characteristics, commonly seen such as individualism, as well as multicultural characteristics seen like story telling (Bernal, 2003; Ford, 2014; Gay, 2010; Litowitz, 2016).

Although perceptions stated focused on strengths of learners, there were "other stories" (the opposing views as detailed in CRT) teachers espoused, including the racially oppressive theory of colorblindness (Pollock, 2008). Elizabeth stated, "With this group...I don't see it as much different with me being a White person, I'm not seeing a huge difference with these kids...I haven't seen a difference between how different cultures affect giftedness." Another educator, Kimberly (2017), indicated that she did not treat her students who were gifted culturally diverse any different than her other students because, "they all have the same need," (Kimberly, 2017). Both Elizabeth and Kimberly's statement indicated a level of colorblindness, a form of oppression, when viewing their students (Litowitz, 2016).

The second question explored in the study was the following: How do educators describe gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners? When describing gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners, educators, at times struggled with how to articulate what they were thinking. Some struggled with layering the two groups together because, as Kimberly (2017) stated, "I don't see a difference. Our kids are gifted and they are

all culturally linguistically diverse.” The researcher was unsure if Kimberly’s colorblind statement was caused by her construction of reality or through some socially embedded level of oppression (Atwater, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Litowitz, 2016; Morford, 2007).

Most educators, as in the previous question, expressed admiration for these learners and took an asset-based approach (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Pollock, 2008). They focused on the strengths of both groups of learners combined. Lara stated, “They just have a second source of power. Their brains are just flexible because they can call on two ways of thinking and two cultures because language and culture are intertwined.” Multiple educators acknowledged cognitive flexibility in code-switching as an asset. The asset-based approach taken by these educators contrasted the literature regarding gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners. In the literature, gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners are perceived as having deficits (De Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Frasier & Passow, 1995; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Whiting, 2007), which was supported by the literature in CRT (Litowitz, 2016).

The third question guiding the study was the following: How do educators describe their understanding of culturally responsive teaching as it relates to diverse gifted learners? Every single educator discussed “teaching to the high”, but it was very rare that an educator mentioned using culturally responsive teaching and embedding that with rigor (Ford & Trotman, 2001; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

In reviewing additional data related to this question, the researcher found that most educators believed that they had knowledge of how to identify characteristics of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners, but they did not feel as if they had the instructional practices in place to adequately meet the learner’s needs (Delpit, 2006; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Litowitz, 2016).

The fourth question guiding the study was the following: What are school-

based practices for gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners that supports or hinders learning? In CRT, theorists have identified that racism and oppression exist historically and currently within the entire education system; thus, hindering learning for culturally linguistically diverse groups (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Furthermore, CRT identifies that education views culturally linguistically diverse groups of learners through a deficit lens (Litowitz, 2016). The administration at Joshua Elementary, however, have taken an asset-based approach by expecting all teachers to “teach to the top” and “plan for the high,” in which all learners are viewed for their strengths (Thomas, 2017). Throughout the 2016-2017 school year, the school created and implemented a talent development model where all students are viewed as having strengths. In this approach, all educators received training at the beginning of the year regarding the characteristics of gifted learners, including diverse gifted learners.

Another school-based practice that may support gifted culturally diverse learners is the celebration of learners who are considered GT/Talent Development (GT/D). One educator in the school, Stephen, was actively reaching out to families and the neighborhood community to hold celebrations at the school to celebrate the success of the students selected as the GT/D. He has invited parents to the school to discuss the model (Stephen, 2017) and gather their input. He indicated that he wanted to shift thinking in his neighborhood around family and cultural perceptions of intelligence (Bernal, 2003; Boykin, 1994; Ford, 2010; Ford, 2011).

Although there are specific school practices that support learning, there are practices within the case that may hinder learning for gifted culturally diverse learners. For example, inconsistent implementation of the talent development model or inconsistent understandings across staff members may unwittingly cause oppression of gifted individuals (Atwater, 2008; Litowitz, 2016; Pollock, 2008). Some educators voiced frustration with the lack of professional support regarding coaching. There was the perception that some educators in the school receive more gifted support than others, as well as confusion regarding administration expectations.

Another school-based practice that may hinder learning is the inconsistency with representation of student voice and creation throughout the building. The first floor had photographs of the students and the educators in the building. The second floor and cafeteria, however, had little to no student work outside of the classrooms.

With the inconsistencies in implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, multi-cultural competencies, professional learning, and coaching and feedback, the school showed that there were opportunities that still existed to change practice (Fullan, 2006; Senge et al., 2013). The energy and excitement that was expressed about gifted learners throughout the interviews may not positively impact those learners if there is not consistency with implementation of rigorous learning environments with teachers who are culturally competent (Hebert, 2014; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Plucker & Callahan, 2008).

Finally, the central research question guiding the study was the following: What are educators' perceptions of the characteristics, needs, and practices related to gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners? The researcher found that the educators at Joshua elementary had positive espoused theories that they could share regarding the characteristics of gifted culturally diverse learners. However, the same educators who could describe characteristics of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners could not easily articulate the social emotional needs of diverse gifted learners. Few educators demonstrated gifted multicultural competencies consistently or at all throughout the study. The inconsistencies throughout the school regarding instructional practices for gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners may continue to oppress the marginalized groups (Litowitz, 2016) of students who attend Joshua Elementary.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This action research study, as with any other study, had limitations that should be noted. Limitations included the lack of generalizability of findings as well as researcher bias. Only half of the educators in the

school participated in the study, which may have impacted the outcome. The researcher was analyzing one case to inform the field, as much as the researcher tried to remain neutral to the events in the study, unintentional signals may have been sent to participants (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, to validate data, the researcher incorporated triangulation as well as member checking (Creswell, 2013).

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study suggest there are multiple implications for future practice that could positively transform gifted education at the local, state, national, and even global levels, as well as the lives of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners. These implications have the potential to break down the identified barriers to programming and can change the lives of gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners in ways that the field has been trying to do for the last 40 years (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008).

As detailed earlier, the use of critical race theory in education is not a new phenomenon (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Litowitz, 2016; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2016). What is relatively newer, however, is the refinement of CRT to analyze finite and specific marginalized sections of the population (Connor, Ferri, and Annamma, 2016; Dunbar, 2008). Gifted education has struggled to identify students of color because there is a disproportional amount of identified White students (Borland, 2013; Colangelo & Davis, 2002; Ford, 2008; Plucker & Burroughs, 2013; Worrell, 2007). Disproportionality, whether for special education or gifted education, is the result of structures put in place to subjugate culturally diverse learners (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). With shifting demographics in the nation (Bureau, n.d.), from predominantly White to predominantly Hispanic and African American, the field will need to use a GiftedCrit lens to understand how to reverse disproportionality and develop talent systemically. Furthermore, GiftedCrit should also actively critique the multicultural education practices and multicultural curriculum that may or may not exist within

classrooms (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016; Dunbar, 2008; Jay, 2003). The research in this study was analyzed through a GiftedCrit lens, developed by the researcher, with specific attention to the multicultural educational practices in the classroom (Ford & Trotman, 2001; Gay, 2010).

In this study, the researcher's emerging theory, GiftedCrit, helped guide questions and methodology and was a lens through which to analyze data. In using the lens of GiftedCrit, the researcher developed the Greene Culturally Responsive Gifted Model through which to observe the classroom. The model was created in response to the lack of scholarship regarding observed gifted culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural gifted competencies in the classroom (Ford, 2008; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Gay, 2010; Pollock, 2008) and emerged through data collection. The model's supporting data suggests there are general education classroom teachers and building level administrators who demonstrated they have a culturally responsive environment that is blended with gifted practices and multicultural gifted competencies.

Implications or next steps for practice, which derives from Greene's Culturally Responsive Gifted Model, is the creation of an observation form that could be utilized in environmental scans as well as the evaluations of teachers, administrators, and districts. The observation form would derive from the model and highlight the specific intersection of both culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural gifted competencies. Teachers could use the form to observe their own classroom and reflect upon their practices to see if they are creating equitable opportunities for gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners. Administrators could also use the form to observe classroom environments, shared areas, as well as their own practices with teachers to determine if their school's actual theories and espoused theories are congruent. Finally, the district could use the observation form as an overall view of the district and the practices that are occurring within it.



Next, the findings from the study have overall implications for the field of Gifted Education. First, there should be a review of the NAGC Pre-K through Twelve (NAGC, n.d.) standards to include culturally responsive gifted pedagogical practices for administrators. Currently, the NAGC standards focus on best practices for teachers and how teachers can create appropriate programming and environments for all gifted learners. In a review of the programming standards, however, there are no standards for administrators (NAGC, n.d.). As an organization, NAGC, does include administrators in its education series. However, there seems to be an opportunity to create standards for administrators so that they support the teachers in creating appropriate environments for gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners. As the national leaders in gifted education, NAGC should lead the way in providing specialized standards for administrators (building level or district level) specifically regarding culturally linguistically diverse learners.

There are state implications for practice as well. State systems should consider incorporating both culturally responsive pedagogical practices and multicultural gifted competencies into their website so that all stakeholders visiting the site are able to see that information as being of importance to the state (Ford, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995).. At minimum, departments of education should incorporate culturally responsive pedagogical practices into their gifted education strands for endorsement so that gifted education teachers are better equipped to respond to the needs of their diverse learners (Ford & Trotman, 2001). Finally, higher education institutions that are training teachers should include facets of culturally responsive teaching and gifted education in their preservice classes for both teachers and administrators.

### **Conclusion**

It is educational malfeasance to continue to deny gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners access to the educational programming and opportunities that they need to thrive. Actively ignoring academic potential of the fastest growing demographic groups (Bureau, n.d.) in the

United States due to endemic racism, oppression, whitewashing, and or colorblindness (Atwater, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Litzow, 1996; Pang, 2001; Pollock, 2008) is a gross injustice to those learners. Therefore, understanding that the perceptions and practices of educators regarding gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners is critical to the success or failure of bright and diverse minds (Ford, 2014; Plucker & Burroughs, 2010).

In exploring this case, Greene's Culturally Responsive Gifted Model was created to show the overlap and intersection of culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural gifted competencies. The creation of the model was a direct result of the intersection of pedagogy and suggested competencies based on theory as evidenced by actual practice. Also, through this exploratory study, the researcher discovered the lack of scholarship regarding critical race theory as a framework through which to view gifted education and the development of GiftedCrit framework emerged. In using a traditional CRT framework, it can be argued that the United States education system has been stuck in the quicksand of oppression (Jay, 2003; Pollock, 2008; Taylor & Billings, 2016).

As a field, gifted education should seek to positively transform the lives of its learners. Therefore, the deliberate adoption of a critical race theory perspective in gifted education requires that we "not only identify and analyze those aspects of education that maintain a marginal position for students of color, but that we transform them" (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Jay, 2003). When combining gifted education with critical race theory, the purpose of transformation and reformation becomes one of social justice. For gifted education to become the instrument of social change, the structures of oppression must be transformed so that gifted culturally linguistically diverse learners become "beings for themselves" (Freire, 2000). For this transformation to occur, however, there must be action; and the time to act is now.

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## **The Limitations on Colorado School District Adoption of an Early Access Addendum Process**

Lindsey Reinert

### **Abstract**

Colorado House Bill 08-1021: Early Access legislation is optional based policy for school districts in the State of Colorado to choose to implement. The basic parameters within this state legislation were identified highly gifted students defined as academically gifted, socially and emotionally mature, who are in the top 3% of the gifted peer group, motivated to learn, ready for advanced placement, and have exhausted the resources of preschool or home schooling. Early Access passed in 2008, but as of 2017 only 42% of school districts had a process registered with the state department of education. This study examined the limitations on the 103 Colorado school district's adoption of an Early Access Addendum process. This descriptive survey research design asked 19 questions addressing the four categories of limitations (hindrances, awareness, favorability, and readiness) towards adoption of an Early Access Addendum process. A total of 20 school districts completed the online survey.

**Keywords:** acceleration, Administrative Units (AU), Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), early entrance, Early Access, school readiness

Gifted children come to us with theories, notions, and motivations to make sense of their world; they are not merely empty vessels to be filled with facts. Coleman & Cross (2001) stated, "Gifted students need opportunities to be together with their intellectual peers, no matter what their age differences" (p. 12). Early intervention has a significant effect on young children's development (Barbour & Shaklee, 1998). Specifically,

preschool gifted education is one of the most neglected areas in education (Buchanan, Chamberlin, & Vercimak, 2007; Delisle, 1992). Many early childhood programs are unequipped to meet the needs of preschoolers with precocious intellectual and academic abilities and/or special talents (Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008). One view point that can be drawn from the literature is that the youngest gifted learners in our society are not being identified and served well in public education. Colorado House Bill 08-1021 passed in 2008, as of 2017 and only 42 percent of school districts' had a process registered with the state department of education. The purpose of this study was to examine the limitations on Colorado school districts' adoption of an Early Access Addendum process.

So few areas related to the young gifted child have been researched that there is still uncertainty about the nature and fostering of giftedness and talent at this age (Gross, 1999). Experts in gifted education eagerly assert that early identification and appropriate educational intervention for gifted young children increases the probability of future extraordinary achievement and reduces the risk of later emotional and educational problems (Harrison, 2004; Hodge & Kemp, 2000; Morelock & Feldman, 1992; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2004; Silverman, 1997; Stile, Kitano, Kelley, & Locrone, 1993, 1993; Whitmore, 1980). It is important to investigate the barriers that Administrative Units experience and perceive in implementing an Early Access model to serve gifted young children because every child deserves an appropriate education to develop his/her unique potential (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). The Early Childhood Division [ECD] of the National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC] stresses that creating optimal environments is vital for all children, including young gifted children, to develop their capacity for learning to the fullest potential (Shaha-Coltrane, 2006).

There are 178 school districts in the State of Colorado (CDE, 2016). Seventy-five school districts in the State of Colorado have an Early Access plan on file at Colorado Department of Education that detail the

implementation of an Early Access protocol and are evaluated through the State of Colorado-Gifted Education Review (four-year cycle) process (CDE Gifted Education: Administrative Units Program Plans for 2012-2016). Five Administrative Units have a revised Early Access plan in place for CDE review and 103 school districts do not have an Early Access plan submitted (CDE Gifted Education: Administrative Units Program Plans for 2012-2016). Administrative Units have until the 2017 Colorado-Gifted Education Review (C-GER) to propose an Early Access Addendum plan (Colorado Department of Education Gifted Education: Administrative Units Program Plans for 2012-2016).

### **A Brief History of Acceleration**

Rogers' (1991) meta-analysis is the most comprehensive review of acceleration in the field of gifted education. Early entrance to school is one of the 12 methods of acceleration delineated in this meta-analysis, which states, "Early entrance is a reasonably safe decision to make. Across a broad base of short-term and longitudinal studies based primarily on school records, academic performance was found to be significantly enhanced. Social and psychological adjustment is neither enhanced nor threatened by early entrance to school" (p.201). Through a review of the NAGC: State of the Nation in Gifted Education report (2012-2013), thirty-three states do not have early entrance policies or do not permit early entrance; only eight states have legislation and detailed policy for early entrance into school. Out of the eight states with legislation for early entrance, six states' policies are not under the umbrella of gifted education (NAGC, 2012-2013 State of the Nation). Only two states, Minnesota and Colorado, have Early Access legislation specific to identification of highly gifted learners and that is monitored through the state accountability annual reviews (NAGC, 2012-2013 State of the Nation). Ten states did not submit the data results to the national gifted education report (NAGC, 2012-2013 State of the Nation).

In the State of the Nation in Gifted Education report (2014-15) it was revealed that 13 out of 40 states reported having policy specifically

permitting acceleration strategies, 27 states left it to LEA authority, and no states prohibited it. Among individual acceleration options, 13 states had policy that specifically did not permit early entrance to Kindergarten (a form of acceleration), while seven states specifically permitted it and 19 left it to states to have decisions be made by the local school district. (NAGC, State of the Nation, 2014-2015).

### **Persistent Problem of Practice**

Colorado House Bill 08-1021 passed in 2008, and as of 2017, only 42 percent of school districts even have a process registered with the state department of education. Decisions about acceleration have traditionally been based upon personal biases, or incomplete and incorrect information (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). Amid the political wars of education, the interests of bright children have been lost (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). Schools have held back America's brightest students for all kinds of reasons (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). In 2015, the Belin-Blank Center produced *A Nation Empowered: Evidence Trumps the Excuses Holding Back America's Brightest Students*, which provided a significant update to *A Nation Deceived* (2004).

"Ten years ago, the robust and unanimous research on the effectiveness of acceleration had not translated into policy and practice. Current practice is improving, however if you don't believe in something, you demand nearly perfect evidence. If you are comfortable with an educational intervention, anecdotal evidence is plentiful and sufficient. When it comes to acceleration as an intervention, we do have consistently robust research evidence. However, that is not enough to put acceleration into common practice" (Colangelo, Assouline, Van-Tassel-Baska, & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015, p. 5).

In a Guest Forward statement in *A Nation Empowered*, Betts and Cross (2015) state, we can do more to empower our educational system of parents, educators, and policy-makers to provide interventions for gifted



learners. Siegle et al. (2013) indicated, the key to changing acceleration policies and practices may be to show administrators and others who have the power to make those changes that many parents and teachers do support acceleration.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the limitations on Colorado school districts' adoption of an Early Access Addendum process.

### **Methodology**

The descriptive survey research design examined the limitations on Colorado school districts adoption of an Early Access Addendum process. The nonexperimental descriptive survey design encompassed a quantitative approach as the strategy of inquiry utilizing data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation stages. Gliner, Morgan, and Leech (2009) stated there was no active independent variable (intervention) within the nonexperimental approach, thus the researcher did not manipulate or control the independent variable. Nonexperimental approaches focus on the attribute independent variables and will allow for no treatment or invention.

### **Participants**

The 103 participants were volunteer educators representing the State of Colorado in gifted education in roles such as gifted directors, gifted coordinators, and/or school district representatives for gifted education. These participants were recruited using a recruitment email letter sent directly to the 103 Colorado school district representatives for gifted education.

The 103 school districts were grouped in Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and are an important and vital part of the public educational system in Colorado. Colorado's BOCES (or Educational Services agencies) are unique in that they are an extension of

the local member school districts (Colorado BOCES Association, 2017). A BOCES in Colorado exists at the discretion of its members and provides only those programs and services authorized by its members (Colorado BOCES Association, 2017). At the time of this study, there were 20 BOCES regions across the State of Colorado. Nine of the 20 BOCES have school district members that do not have an Early Access Addendum on file with CDE (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). Summary statistics can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*School Districts without EA Addendum & Completed Directed Online Survey*

Name of BOCES	NR	n	%
East Central BOCES	3	20	15%
Adams BOCES	0	1	0%
Metro BOCES	1	3	33.30%
Centennial BOCES	4	30	13.30%
Ute Pass BOCES	3	8	37.50%
South Central BOCES	3	12	25%
Santa Fe Trail BOCES	0	6	0%
Southeastern BOCES	2	12	16.60%
San Juan BOCES	4	11	36.30%

Note: All data were self-reported. NR=Number of responses

## Data Collection

Online directed survey. Using guidance through the literature review and previous research (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Southern et al., 1991a), the researcher constructed a customized survey to measure the unique factors which contribute to the evaluation of the central question of this study (Azano, 2014; Plucker, 2013; Cross & Burney, 2005; Bainbridge, 2002; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001). Operational definitions for the survey can be found in the following section. A field pretest was conducted with the construct for the purpose understanding how the data collection protocol and survey instrument worked under realistic conditions (Fowler, 2014).

## **Operational Definition**

For clarity, the central question is restated as “What are the limitations on Colorado school districts’ adoption of an Early Access Addendum process?” The term “initiative” in this section refers to Colorado House Bill 08-1021 as legislation that is an optional based policy for school districts in the State of Colorado to choose to implement.

For the purpose of this study, the construct of “limitations” was operationally defined as a composition of the following factors: Awareness, Favorability, Readiness, and Hindrances. Weiss (1995) defined change theory quite simply as a theory of how and why an initiative works. A theory of change delineates the pathway of an initiative by making explicit both the outcomes of an initiative and the action strategies that will lead to the achievement of these outcomes (Connell & Klem, 2000). *A Nation Empowered* (2015) stated that a first step towards successful acceleration was becoming informed, understanding the research findings on acceleration. Utilizing “explicitness of both outcomes and actions” define “Awareness” as a school districts knowledge or perception of a statewide initiative (Colangelo, Assouline, Van-Tassel-Baska, & Lupkowski-Shoplike, 2015; Connell & Klem, 2000).

A quality of change theory is judged by four explicit criteria: how plausible, doable, testable, and meaningful the theory of change is (Connell & Klem, 2000). By applying the “four explicit criteria” “Favorability” was defined as a school districts degree of view of the statewide initiative with partiality (Connell & Klem, 2000).

A component of change theory is to examine expectations for outcomes and activities in light of available and potential resources (Connell & Klem, 2000). The ability to “examine expectations for the outcome” defined “Readiness” as a school district’s state of preparedness for the statewide initiative (Connell & Klem, 2000).

Plucker (2013) identified the factors of poverty, rural provincialism, limited resources, and negative perceptions of gifted programs, as persistent challenges for delivery of services for gifted students. Utilizing “persistent challenges” defined “Hindrances” as a school districts perception of an obstacle, barrier, or restriction to the statewide initiative (Plucker, 2013).

Therefore, the survey questions were divided into five, unlabeled subscales: Sample Demographics, Awareness, Favorability, Readiness, and Hindrances. Questions, which comprised each subscale, were arranged in no specific order and were not grouped by subscales or otherwise categorized.

This research was not intended to offer a set of knowledge claims or rules, but rather as an investigation to examine limitations towards adoption of an Early Access process (Noddings, 2002).

### **Field Check**

The purpose of a field check was to show personal understanding towards the findings from the directed survey through a variety of informal collegial conversations about Early Access within the field of gifted education for the State of Colorado (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). As the researcher of this study, I am a current practitioner in the field of gifted education for a public-school district in the State of Colorado. Through professional experiences across the State of Colorado, such as Colorado Department of Education Gifted Education state director meetings, Colorado Department of Education Gifted Education regional director meetings, and a variety of Colorado gifted associations: Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented (CAGT) conference, Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) conference, University of Denver-Institute for the Development of Gifted Education (IDGE) conference, Colorado Academy for Educators of the Gifted, Talented, and Creative (CAEGTC) board member, and Gifted Education State Advisory Committee (GE-SAC) member and presiding secretary.

By suspending our understandings in a reflective way moves one towards cultivating curiosity (LeVasseur, 2003). Creswell (2013) states “the researcher needs to decide how and in what way his or her personal understandings will be introduced into the study.” By providing a field check, the researcher shows the personal understanding of this study (Creswell, 2013).

## Results

### Major Findings

Overall, the major findings that were revealed from the data analysis clustered into the four subscale categories of limitations: hindrance, awareness, favorability, and readiness. This was grounded in the gifted literature, change theory literature, and was supported by logic (Azano, 2014; Bainbridge, 2002; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Colangelo, Assouline, Van-Tassel-Baska, & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015; Connell & Klem, 2000; Cross & Burney, 2005; and Plucker, 2013;). The researcher concluded that the findings from these four subscale categories were interconnected to one another, as evidenced by the survey results. It was quite encouraging that all participants were aware of Colorado House Bill 08-1021: Early Access. This indicated an awareness and knowledge of the state statute, which supports the reliability of the communicated hindrances. With this awareness, participants indicated that “funding” (75%) and “human resources” (75%) were the major hindrances enabling school districts from implementing an Early Access process. The researcher concurs, as evidenced by the data analysis results and from the literature on gifted rural education, which describes “numerous insufficiencies in gifted programming in those environments arising from lack of funding” (Azano, 2014; Bainbridge, 2002; Plucker, 2013;).

Out of the 20 participants, eight believed the most important aspect that needs to be addressed was providing funding (40%) for Early Access to be implemented in their school districts. Through the lens of the survey question of the *most* important thing that would have the greatest impact

towards filing were as follows: Funding (40%), Sufficient human resources (15%), Other (15%), A clear process (10%), An AU commitment (10%), Additional training needed (10%), and Sufficient age appropriate assessments (0%).

It was encouraging that 90% of the participants communicated favorability to engage in a professional learning session specific to Early Access to address the needs that are limiting the adoption, which was in alignment with the literature that... “Such untrained staff, limited resources, and fewer program options in those settings” (Cross & Burney, 2005; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001). It was disconcerting that 17 out of 20 participants communicated their school district was not at all ready to slightly ready to submit an Early Access Addendum. Without additional or further professional learning to overcome the perceived hindrances outlined above, school districts continue to select to not engage in the implementation and adoption of an Early Access process.

The cross tabulation revealed six types of impacts on filing a Colorado Department of Education Early Access Addendum by School District/AU size. As indicated above, funding (40%,  $n= 8$ ) was communicated as the most important impact on filing; 25% Rural districts, 10% Rural Multiple district, 5% Suburban district, and 0% Urban/Suburban district. Sufficient human resources was designated only by Rural districts at 15% ( $n= 13$ ) shared as the most important impact on filing. Again, the cross-tabulation results demonstrated similar findings about funding as the most important impact (Azano, 2014; Bainbridge, 2002; Plucker, 2013).

Another cross tabulation that address the four subscale categories of limitations (Hindrane, Awareness, Favorability, and Readiness) communicate Hindrances are the most important factors impacting filing a Colorado Department of Education Early Access Addendum for both Rural districts ( $n= 13$ ) and Suburban school district ( $n= 2$ ). Connecting back to the use of “persistent challenges” defined “Hindrances” as a school districts perception of an obstacle, barrier, or restriction to the

statewide initiative (Plucker, 2013). Followed by Readiness as the second most important factor impacting both Rural districts and Suburban districts. Favorability was indicated as the third important and Awareness as the least important factor respectively for both Rural districts and Suburban districts who responded to the survey.

In contrast, Readiness was indicated as the most important factor impacting filing a CDE Early Access Addendum for both Rural Multiple districts ( $n=2$ ) and Urban/Suburban ( $n=2$ ). Connecting back to the ability to “examine expectations for the outcome” defined “Readiness” as a school district’s state of preparedness for the statewide initiative (Connell & Klem, 2000). Followed by Hindrance as the second most important factor impacting both Rural Multiple districts and Urban/Suburban. Favorability and Awareness were both indicated as the third or least important factor respectively for both Rural Multiple districts and Urban/Suburban districts that responded to the survey. There was not a fourth ranking for Rural Multiple districts and Urban/Suburban districts.

### **Field Check Findings**

Through professional experiences with colleagues in the field of gifted education, the researcher provided a variety of informal collegial conversations that addressed Early Access implementation through the State of Colorado. Four collegial conversations have focused on individual school districts seeking advice and consultation to improve/modify the individual school districts current Early Access process due to the May 2016 released updated Colorado Department of Education: Early Access for Highly Advanced Gifted Children under Age Six guidelines (2016). Additional conversation focused on individual school districts looking for support in revising the Early Access Addendum prior to the required Colorado Department of Education submission in October 2016.

A colleague communicated that their school district leadership had interest, support, and buy in that made moving forward with adoption of

Early Access easy. This same colleague shared that without the funds from the Jacob K. Javits Grant Program (2015), Right 4 Rural Grant (R4R), this school district could not have purchased age-appropriate aptitude and achievement assessments but could provide professional learning/training for district personal on proper administration of the assessments and step by step support in creating the Early Access Addendum (Jacob K. Javits Grant Program, 2015; Colorado Department of Education, 2016). See Appendix A for more details about Right 4 Rural.

Another perspective shared was a colleague's philosophical belief supporting the concept of Early Access. The school district that employs this colleague, however, already had a process of advanced kindergarten programming, which was inherited upon employment into the gifted department of the school district. The colleague shared that new initiatives within the school district system are prioritized, and due to the current advanced kindergarten program serving young children, it is not a district priority to adopt a new process such as Early Access.

A different concern revealed that a small rural district had interest in implementing an Early Access process, but plans to watch and learn from a neighboring rural district that had moved forward with Early Access implementation this school year.

The perception from another rural school district was also shared and revealed that the district had become completely strained financially. Further, human resources were forced to serve third through 12th grade students, in addition to the other young learners in the community that they typically serve. Additional conversation shared that the school district administration voiced the question of what program would have to be cut to allow for funding the implementation of Early Access programming. The colleague communicated that this was a demonstration of the lack of knowledge of gifted identification and programming options.



A different concern revealed was of a suburban school district who had chosen not to engage in adopting an Early Access process due to the affluent population the school district serves. The colleague's perception was that parents would be lining up out the district office door to sign up for Early Access. The current district led administrator was noted as being unwilling and uninterested in implementing this optional legislation now.

Yet, another concern that arose was having school districts/BOCES (that do not have an Early Access Addendum on file with Colorado Department of Education) regions engage in a directed survey regarding Early Access. The concern was a lack of collegial engagement with the directed survey. The perception of the Colorado Department of Education – Gifted Education Regional Consultants indicated they would need to contact each school district/BOCES to explain what Early Access is prior to completing the directed survey, which would negatively impact the individual's workload. Additional conversation with this colleague shared a resistance to confirm email addresses or forward the directed survey link to appropriate stakeholders within the school districts/BOCES region this individual served.

A regional concern revealed that a few school districts within a particular BOCES region were very interested in implementing an Early Access process. However, due to the BOCES by-laws stating "A BOCES cannot conduct independent programs" and "Any programs or activities operated by a BOCES must be approved and authorized by all its Board of Directors" (Colorado BOCES Association, 2017), the by-laws have made implementation difficult.

Through multiple conversations with colleagues and the community partner supporting this research, individuals shared that school districts might not want to engage in the directed survey due to individual school districts exposing possible deficiencies within their school system, which would demonstrate vulnerability. By completing the survey, a potential threat of revealing limitations within the school district arose. In turn,

employees could feel uncomfortable being put in this position with their employers. Low response rate effected by participants selecting to not participate bring about a non-response rate (Fowler, 2014).

This field check presented multiple limitations that exist for practitioners in the field who look to adopt and/or implement an Early Access process. This information indicated the continuous issues and barriers practitioners are facing.

### **Implications of Results**

Budget concern and lack of state unfunded mandates for early identification often leave young, gifted children unidentified and underserved (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). Although in recent years the number of measures for identifying young children has increased, much work remains to address effective programming and services for this population (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, & Van-Tassel-Baska, 2015). Evaluating students' abilities and performances using tests or rating scales provides educators with data that help them effectively plan appropriately challenging curriculum and instruction to ensure on going cognitive development and learning (Assouline, 2006).

The results of this directed survey indicated that there is a need for increased engagement from more of the 103 school districts who do not have an Early Access Addendum on file. For teaching and learning to change across a district, which will affect all students, districts will have to be organized differently, district policies and practices will need to change, and new supports will need to be provided for both students and adults (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Beall, Howley, Rhodes, 2009; Howley, 1989; Croninger Lee, Smith, &, 1995).

When students do not have choice in expressing their mastery and understanding, they usually do not make the real connections to their learning (Tomlinson, 2005). Robinson (2004) states, "Boredom,

underachievement, perfectionism, and succumbing to the effects of peer pressure are predictable when needs for academic advancement and compatible peers are unmet" (p. 62).

### **Response to Limitations**

The researcher developed four responses to the limitations. The first response was to encourage school districts to utilize two Colorado Department of Education Gifted Education Grant programs to address the two predominant limitations. With this Awareness, participants indicated that "funding" (75%) and "human resources" (75%) are the major Hindrances enabling school districts from implementing an Early Access process. This Hindrance can be potentially addressed using the Colorado Gifted Education Universal Screening and Qualified Personnel Grant (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The Colorado General Assembly passed legislation in 2014 that established an appropriation for an Administrative Units gifted education grant program (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The program supports the foundational programming elements of universal screening and qualified personnel. It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

"Universal screening provides a means of access to gifted identification assessment and programming to every student" (Colorado Department of Education, 2014).

Through this opportunity, Administrative Units can apply for funds to offset the cost incurred when:

- 1) Conducting universal screening no later than second grade; and
- 2) Employing a qualified person to administer the gifted program, implement the program plan, and provide professional learning to increase capacity of educators to identify and program for gifted students and family partnerships.

(Colorado Department of Education Gifted Education, 2014).

The second researcher response to the limitations was to encourage BOCES and Colorado Department of Education to start a discussion with the Colorado BOCES Association concerning the BOCES by-laws. This collegial discourse could allow individual school districts that are BOCES members the option to conduct independent program such as Early Access without a BOCES Board of Directors placing a unanimous vote for any program to be approved for implementation by a BOCES region. This would allow for individual BOCES school districts the flexibility for serving their unique community's needs through appropriate programs.

The third researcher response to limitations would be to advocate for Colorado Department of Education Gifted to look at modifying how the BOCES distributes the received Colorado Gifted Education Universal Screening and Qualified Personnel Grant funds (CDE, 2016). A different distribution strategy could allow for Colorado Department of Education to allocate specific grant funds towards BOCES school districts that have an Early Access Addendum on file with Colorado Department of Education.

The final response to limitations would be to change House Bill 08-1021 legislation. Specifically, changing the policy from an optional-based policy for school districts to a mandated state statute required by all school districts/ BOCES to implement Early Access. The research seems to indicate that individual beliefs and perspectives continue to determine educational access for young gifted learners.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although there is still much research to be done, the purpose of the current work was to generate baseline data from an online directed survey that addressed school districts limitations towards adoption of an Early Access Addendum and provide important findings to the field of gifted education. Having acknowledged the importance of the findings, the researcher confirms that there were some flaws and limitations to this study.

A main limitation that was revealed during this study was the low response rate. Although the survey was administered to 103 participants, only 20 responded, which was under-whelmingly small. There is no agreed-upon standard for a minimum acceptable response rate (Fowler, 2014). A limitation of this low response rate led to difficulties to find significant relationships from the data, as statistical tests normally require a larger sample size to ensure a representative distribution of the population and to be considered representative of groups of people to whom results will be generalized or transferred (Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2011; Gliner, Leech, & Morgan, 2009). Therefore, due to the low response rate, this study could not provide a complete picture or conclude accurate trends regarding the hindrances affecting all 103 schools across the State of Colorado. One possible reason for the low response rate could be the potential in employees feeling discomfort from exposing deficiencies within the school system they work for. By responding, they may have run the risk of demonstrating vulnerability (Fowler, 2014).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Further studies could be conducted to overcome the limitation of this study regarding research response rate. This study may be limited because of the low response rate at 19%, as calculated based on the 103 survey recipients. Future research could include one-on-one interviews with participants to increase the response rate addressing the limitations on Colorado school districts adoption of an Early Access Addendum.

An additional future research study could examine the only two states, Minnesota and Colorado, who have Early Access legislation specific to identification of highly gifted learners and that is monitored through the state accountability annual reviews (NAGC, 2012-2013 State of the Nation). Future research would encourage disseminating the same directed survey to Minnesota school districts that have not adopted Early Access. These results could potentially allow for a larger sample size, the possibility of and generalization two states engaging in Early Access legislation.

Next, it would be interesting to investigate the current school districts in Colorado that are implementing Early Access and address the stages of change theory each school district is presently engaged in. By utilizing Connell and Kubisch's theory of change (1998), researchers could evaluate comprehensive communities of initiatives. This study would allow for a direct observation on the impact of change theory on statewide initiatives.

Additional research could explore other Colorado Department of Education state policies, such as the Colorado General Assembly Senate Bill 08-212, known as the Preschool through Postsecondary Alignment Act or Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). This legislation requires every child in state funded kindergarten programs to have an individual school readiness plan to support the school readiness and success for each child. This study would examine the state policies shared above by evaluating potential connections to Early Access policy for possible addendums to the Preschool through Postsecondary Alignment Act or Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids and the Colorado Department of Education School Readiness to include components of Early Access legislation (Colorado Department of Education, 2016).

Lastly, it would be interesting to engage in some action research with Colorado school districts that have an interest in adopting the Early Access Addendum. Denscombe (2010) wrote that an action research strategy's purpose was to solve a problem and to produce guidelines for best practice. This study would address the persistent problem of practice within a specific school district and address the limitations towards adoption of an Early Access Addendum utilizing the McREL model to address the issues and solve problems.

### Conclusion

In a position paper on acceleration, NAGC (2010) states, "Academically gifted students often feel bored or out of place with their age peers and naturally gravitate towards older students who are more similar as "intellectual peers." Studies have shown that many students are happier with older students who share their interest than they are with children the same age. Therefore, acceleration placement options such as early entrance to kindergarten, grade skipping, or early exit should be considered for these students."

*A Nation Deceived* (2004) and *A Nation Empowered* (2015) contained many references in which young gifted learners were helped when they could enter school ahead of age peers. Assouline, Colangelo, Lupinski-Shoplik of the University of Iowa Belin-Blank Center state, "Like the research on grade-skipping, the research conducted on early entrance to kindergarten and first grade portrays a positive picture for these young students." Finally, Karnes and Johnson (1991) found that,

The earlier gifted children are identified and provided appropriate programs, the better their chances of fully actualizing their potential. On the contrary, when young gifted children fail to be challenged during their early years in school and in family situations, they tend to develop negative feelings towards school and develop poor work habits, and then become underachievers (p. 133).

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## Appendix A

### Right 4 Rural: Colorado Department of Education

This document outlines the Colorado Department of Education Right 4 Rural is a project with great promise to increase the identification of gifted students from underrepresented populations (Jacob K. Javits Grant Program, 2015).

As partners, the Colorado Department of Education and the University of Denver co-constructed a design to impact program and instructional supports for identification. Right 4 Rural provides services to selected Administrative Units (AUs) so that the proportionality of diverse student groups in their respective gifted populations becomes more like that of their total school community and to the state total gifted population average of 7%. To this end, leaders and teachers within the Administrative Units receive professional development tailored to reframing their gifted program and instructional practices to address unique local needs and resources.

The project outcome is demonstration sites where leadership in rural AUs apply design thinking about and practices of community to build a sustainable gifted program with their member districts. Building in the consideration of sustainability factors such as policy, systems thinking,

and staff, family and community regard, the Administrative Units will generate a strong gifted program to continue the program plan design and identification of gifted students.

Teachers will be coached in the use of three selected instructional strategies in their classrooms, one each grant year. The principal investigators will conduct action research regarding the formative results of using these strategies in the classroom, determined using performance rubrics. This attention to student performance reinforces the notion that identification requires opportunities to demonstrate exceptional potential; and once recognizing the exceptional potential, rubrics with advanced or distinguished levels set high expectations for students and teachers. Simultaneously, over the course of year 2 and year 3, Colorado's revised Right 4 Rural Colorado Department of Education Application for the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program Gifted Education Identification Guidelines will be applied to determine the effectiveness and perceptions about its guidance for identification outcomes.

These major components – leadership in program design and support, evidence-based instructional strategies, and the culture/climate of identification – set the scene for strong identification results. Right 4 Rural defines four goal areas to impact identification:

- All Administrative Units will implement a local gifted program plan that addresses needs of students and teachers, including identification, programming, family partnerships, evaluation and expectations as seen by plan analysis and survey results.
- All Administrative Units will increase the number of gifted students to 7% identified in one or more categories of giftedness, especially from underrepresented groups of low incomes, English language learner, Hispanic students, and Native American students.
- Teacher survey and observation results will provide evidence of change in teacher practice to implement instructional strategies (inquiry/exploratory learning, depth and complexity, and learning clusters) proven to have a positive effect on identification and student learning.

- The Administrative Units will increase student performance as measured by tests and/or performance rubrics in literacy, math, or science using selected instructional methods.

The combination of grant management and research is proposed to accomplish goals by leveraging existing state structures for professional development and improving identification while using high level content, personnel and research from the University's resources.

Right 4 Rural is supported by Administrative Units with high rates of traditionally underrepresented students in the gifted population. Right 4 Rural will build a vision and a practical model for all rural districts in and out of Colorado that wish to impact identification.

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## **Focusing on Principals to Support Learners with High Potential and Identified Gifts and Talents**

Colleen Urlik

### **Abstract**

For professionals within the field of advanced academics and gifted education, it is critical to explore and understand the principal's impact on a school-based gifted program. This article contains a literature review around the aspects of a comprehensive program design for learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents and the need behind these programs. Furthermore, current research around principals as instructional leaders and their impact on school-based was explored necessitating the need to focus on this population for professional development and future research.

**Keywords:** principals, gifted and talented, gifted programming, instructional leaders

The purpose of this article was to build understanding around the principal's impact on a school-based gifted program. The first section presents the different aspects of a comprehensive program design (CPD) for learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents. The next piece provides a foundational understanding on why specific, distinctive programming is needed for this unique group of learners. The final section of this article explains the impact of principals on school-based programming and highlights principals as a focal point for future research. Principals have historically not been a population focused on in terms of gifted education or research, yet they are the top instructional leaders within their schools and therefore are critical to the success of any school-based programming, including programming for learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents.



### **Comprehensive Program Design (CPD): A Continuum of Services**

In 2010, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), in conjunction with the Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted (CEC), revised the national Gifted Program Standards. This was done to support and assist school and district leaders in the implementation and evaluation of a continuum of research-based services to meet the needs of learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents (NAGC, n.d.). The standards:

Provide a basis for policies, rules, and procedures that are essential for providing systematic programs and services to any special population of students. While standards may be addressed and implemented in a variety of ways, they provide important direction and focus to designing and developing options for gifted learners at the local level. (NAGC, n.d.)

Beyond supporting consistency in best practices, the standards also support advocacy, provide guidance for professional development and teacher preparation programs, support policy creation at all levels, and define the field of gifted and talented (Johnsen, 2014).

To guide the revision of the Gifted Program Standards, a comprehensive review of the research was completed and foundational values were created based on both a historical and current body of research (Johnsen, 2014). The established principles were:

- giftedness is dynamic and is constantly developing;
- giftedness is found among students from a variety of backgrounds;
- standards should focus on student outcomes rather than practices;
- all educators [including teachers, counselors, instructional support staff, and administrators] are responsible for the education of students with gifts and talents;
- students with gifts and talents should receive services through the day and in all environments that are based on their abilities, needs, and interests. (Johnsen, 2014, p. 283-284)

These foundational principles served as the underpinnings for the six programming standards, which are (1) learning and development, (2) assessment, (3) curriculum planning and instruction, (4) learning environments, (5) programming, and (6) professional development (NAGC, 2010). Included within each standard are a brief description and numerous student outcomes to offer guidance when creating and evaluating a defensible CPD (NAGC, 2010). As these standards represent the evidence-based, best practices within the field, they are essential for instructional leaders and principals (who are the schools' top instructional leaders) to understand in order to ensure effective implementation, evaluation, and refinement of a school-based CPD (Johnsen, 2014).

For the purposes of this article, a CPD was defined as "a thoughtful, unified service delivery plan that has a singular purpose: to identify the many, varied ways that will be used to meet the needs of high-potential students" (Reis, 2006, p.74). Reis (2006) explained the seven traits of high-quality CPD, which included derivation of the services, comprehensiveness, practicality, consistency, clarity, availability, and continuation, extension, and evaluation. Much like the NAGC-CEC standards, these traits can be used as lenses for the creation and evaluation of GT programs. Furthermore, Reis (2006) shared the CPD:

- Must demonstrate linkages between what is being provided in district and school classrooms with local and state curriculum standards and gifted program guidelines and regulations.
- Must describe current program services as applied to the regular curriculum as well as to the gifted and talented curriculum.
- Is a foundational, administrative design plan on which program goals and objectives are built.
- Must provide opportunities for expansion of current services across all content areas and grade levels.
- Should take into account a broad range of talents (e.g., academic, artistic, creative, and leadership) and the spectrum of talent development (e.g., latent, emerging, manifest, actualized).

- Must consider affective (e.g., social and emotional) needs as well as academic needs.
- Should describe curriculum philosophy and address grouping issues.
- Must reflect a wide range of broad-based choices that will enable talents or potential talents of a diverse group of students to be developed. These multifaceted educational opportunities can be provided during the school day, but also after school and in the summer, through the active participation of professional faculty and parents. (p. 75)

The aforementioned standards, traits, and guiding principles work together to form a CPD involving multiple pathways, a continuum of services for students PreK through Twelfth grade, and opportunities for a diverse group of learners who have high potential and identified gifts and talents. To accomplish this, a CPD must be developed in response to the student population so there is not one single, correct model (Reis, 2006), which is why school leaders, especially principals, need to understand the various elements of a successful CPD (Reis, 2006). Two of the elements include delivery options and curriculum and instruction.

Numerous delivery option programs are utilized within a CPD, including, but not limited to, advanced content, cluster grouping, content or grade level acceleration, curriculum compacting, curriculum telescoping, project based learning, mentorships, pull-out programs, and tiered instruction. Each delivery option has its' purposes, but the critical idea is the delivery options selected for a CPD must be chosen in response to the needs of the student population (Reis, 2006) and the reality of the school's current resources. As the top instructional leader, principals are aware of their students' needs, as well as current resources of the building, including strength-areas within the staff, which can be leveraged to better meet the needs of learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents.

Along with a variety of delivery models, curriculum and instruction are additionally critical pieces to any CPD. As in all elements of a CPD, the selected curriculum and instruction must likewise be responsive and flexible to meet the needs of the learners within a given population (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2013). Curriculum and instruction signifies yet another piece principals and school leaders must understand in order to meet the needs of gifted and high potential learners (Sak & Maker, 2006). Curriculum and instruction have been defined as a “design plan that fosters the purposeful, proactive organization, sequencing, and management of the interactions among the teacher, the learners, and the content knowledge, understandings, and skills we want students to acquire” (Burns, Purcell, & Hertberg, 2006, p. 88).

One essential piece to recognize is that high-quality curriculum for gifted learners is generated from a high-quality curriculum for *all* students (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2013; Reis, 2006; Tomlinson, 2005), and a guaranteed and viable curriculum is critical to impact all student achievement (Marzano, 2003). According to Tomlinson (2005), effective curriculum and instruction for all students:

1. Focuses squarely on the essential facts, concepts, principles, skills, and attitudes that professionals and experts in the discipline value most. It directs student attention to rich and profound ideas, and ensures grounding in what matters most in each topic and discipline.
2. Provides opportunity for students to understand clearly and in depth how the essential information, concepts, principles, and skills work to make meaning and to be useful. It guides students in understanding where, how, and why to use what they learn.
3. Engages the students affectively and cognitively. Students find pleasure, or at least satisfaction, in what and how they learn.
4. Places the student at the center of learning and addresses the reality that different students will learn in different ways, at

different paces, and will manifest different interests.

5. Has a product focus. That is, it calls on students to transfer, apply, and extend what they have learned to solve problems, address issues, and create products that are meaningful and purposeful to the student.
6. Guides students in developing their capacities as thinkers and their awareness of their capacities as thinkers.
7. Is relevant to students' varied experiences and lives, including gender, culture, economic status, and exceptionality.
8. Coaches and supports students in developing the skills, tools, attitudes, and processes to become increasingly independent as learners. (p. 161-162)

Van Tassal-Baska (2003) discussed five key assumptions about curriculum and instruction for students with identified gifts and talents, which included:

1. All learners should be provided curriculum opportunities that allow them to attain optimum levels of learning.
2. Gifted learners have different learning needs compared with typical learners. Therefore, curriculum must be adapted or designed to accommodate these needs.
3. The needs of gifted learners cut across cognitive, affective, social, and aesthetic areas of curriculum experiences.
4. Gifted learners are best served by a confluent approach that allows for both accelerated and enriched learning.
5. Curriculum experiences for gifted learners need to be carefully planned, written down, implemented, and evaluated in order to maximize potential effect. (p. 174)

Stambaugh and Chandler (2012) expanded on the evidenced-based features of curriculum for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents. Effective curriculum and instruction for this group of learners must:

1. Scaffold instruction through the use of graphic organizers and the teaching of thinking skills,
  2. Emphasize the development of potential rather than remediation of skills,
  3. Focus on teacher modeling of both oral and written communication of the discipline,
  4. Provide targeted professional development to teachers,
  5. Create opportunities for engagement including real-world problem solving and student choice,
  6. Incorporate student goal setting and self-monitoring,
  7. Use curriculum-based performance measures to modify instruction and measure progress,
  8. Place effective curriculum in the hands of trained teachers.
- (Stambaugh & Chandler, 2012, p. 37-42)

A defensible CPD meets the various needs of learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents on a daily basis. Now understanding better what a CPD entails, the next section in this article explores the research behind the need for such programming.

### **The Need for Gifted and Talented Programming**

Evidence continues to suggest learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents are not provided with an effective comprehensive program design (CPD) (Finn, 2014; Plucker, 2015; NAGC, 2016). One explanation for this lack of programming has been that learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents are continually misunderstood due to deep-rooted societal myths about their abilities and the daily instruction they require (Fetterman, 1999; NAGC, n.d.). This article will focus on two myths, which continue to impact advanced and gifted programming in countless schools across America, and will provide a brief overview of the research contradicting each myth.

The first myth is all students are challenged by their general education classroom teachers, explaining learners with high potential and identified

gifts and talents will consistently be differentiated for by their general education classroom teacher therefore do not need specialized programming (NAGC, n.d.). The second myth is once students are identified with gifts and talents, they will continue academic growth on their own without major assistance or help from teachers or administrators therefore do not need specialized programming (NAGC, n.d.). First, the two myths are in direct opposition of one another as the first myth states students in this population have their academic needs met through differentiated instruction and the second myth says they don't need anything different. The research in response to each of these myths is clear.

The first myth delves into the research behind differentiation. Tomlinson (2002) defined differentiation as a series of processes:

Ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning. A readiness match maximizes the chance of appropriate challenge and growth. An interest match heightens motivation. A learning profile match increases efficiency of learning. Effective differentiation most likely emanates from ongoing assessment of student needs. (p. 188)

However, differentiated instruction is not what the majority of learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents experience on a daily basis. Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Zhang, and Emmons (1993) explained that teachers made "only minor modifications in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students" (p. 110). Based on observations across five content-areas over 92 observational days, Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, and Salvin (1993) concluded, "no instructional or curricular differentiation was found in 84% of the activities experienced by the target gifted and talented or high ability

students” (p. 131). These studies highlighted the idea that few teachers implement differentiated instruction to meet the needs of this group of learners.

Various root causes have been explored to account for this lack of differentiation, including a “lack of sustained teacher training in the specific philosophy and methods of differentiation, underlying beliefs prevalent in our school culture that gifted students do fine without any adaptations to curriculum, lack of general education teacher training in the needs and nature of gifted students, and the difficulty of differentiating instruction without a great depth of content knowledge” (Hertberg-Davis, 2009, p. 253). Hertberg-Davis (2009) added, “Many teachers also seem resistant to differentiation because they perceive it as highly time consuming” (p. 252). Gallagher (2003) agreed and discussed how time is often prioritized as he stated, “A regular classroom teacher has a primary responsibility to average students and then to students who have fallen behind. Time often runs out before a well-meaning teacher can organize special experiences for gifted students” (p. 18). Lastly, the sustained legacy of No Child Left Behind continues to prompt teachers and administrators to teach to the middle, focusing on those students not reaching proficiency (Hardesty, McWilliams, & Plucker, 2014; Rutkowski, Rutkowski, & Plucker, 2012). A root cause absent from this list is the impact of principals’ knowledge base and support on teachers’ ability to differentiate for learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents.

This leads to the second myth, which is the belief that identified gifted students are able to attain high levels academically and continue to perform at those high levels without specialized, differentiated programming. Based on a review of 33 studies, Reis and Renzulli (2009) determined the need for specialized, differentiated gifted education and programming is necessary as “our nation’s talented students are offered a less rigorous curriculum, read fewer demanding books, and are less prepared for work or post-secondary education than top students from



other countries” (p. 309). Gallagher (2003) summarized findings from a 1993 report on national excellence by stating:

- Only a small percentage of students are prepared for challenging college-level work, as measured by tests that are not very exacting or difficult.
- The highest achieving U.S. students fare poorly when compared with similar students in other nations.
- Students going on to a university education in other countries are expected to know more than U.S. students and to be able to think and write analytically about that knowledge on challenging exams. (p. 11)

Plucker (2015) agreed, pointing out, “Multiple international comparisons reveal disparities in how our most talented students achieve relative to their peers in other countries” (p. 3) providing quantitative support that many of our students are identified as possessing the aptitude to achieve higher than their same-age peers are failing to be competitive at an international level.

This concern has continued to grow from a disaggregation of data collected from the National Assessment of Educational Program (NAEP), state-wide achievement assessments, and the International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) for global analysis (Hardesty, McWilliams, & Plucker, 2014). Based on the collected data, Hardesty, McWilliams, and Plucker (2014) developed the term “excellence gap”, which represents the disparities of scores at the highest levels, which is different than the “achievement gap”, which represents the differences between scores to attain minimum proficiency (Hardesty, McWilliams, & Plucker, 2014). Students not adequately challenged on a daily basis leads to students not staying at or ever reaching high levels academically (Hardesty, McWilliams, & Plucker, 2014).

This excellence gap is most prominent when disaggregating specific

groups of students in public education across America, specifically CLD learners and learners from low-income households (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010), further revealing disproportionality and inequities in gifted education (Esquierdo & Arrequin-Anderson, 2012; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007).

The demographics of the United States are changing at a rapid pace as the population is becoming increasingly diverse and Hispanic (Harris & Sanchez Lizardi, 2012; Kurtzleben, 2011) and the number of students living in low income households is also increasing (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; Torres, 2014). However, Hispanic, Black, and Native American students, and students from low-income households, continue to be underrepresented in gifted programs (Esquierdo & Arrequin-Anderson, 2012; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007; Worrell, 2014).

Due to weak or nonexistent programming, a focus on proficiency, and several other factors, CLD students and students from low-income households are underrepresented in gifted programming in part because these students are not ever scoring at an academic level high enough to qualify them for entrance into gifted programs (McBee, 2006; Worrell, 2014), thus perpetuating the excellence gap (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010).

From school to school, it is common to see inconsistencies in gifted programs, even within the same district (Young & Balli, 2014). However, these inconsistencies become issues of equity as schools with large populations of CLD students and students qualifying for free or reduced lunch have inconsistent programs when compared to affluent schools (Young & Balli, 2014). Just as Sonia Sotomayor stated, "Until we get equality in education, we won't have an equal society." As a nation, we cannot afford to continue these inequities.

This body of research highlights the fact that for some students to

continually grow, gifted programming must be made available (Gallagher, 2003; Hardesty, McWilliams, & Plucker, 2014; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Additionally, the programming must be appropriate for the student population, rigorous, purposeful, and include multiple delivery methods (Tomlinson, 2005; Reis, 2006). Such programs are created over time, by leaders who know and understand the elements of effective gifted programs and make them a priority. Such specialized programs exist and are maintained over time because of support of principals, which are discussed further in this article.

### **Principal Impact on Programming**

Numerous decisions once determined at a central administration office within a school district have now been turned over to each individual school's principal (Lynch, 2012). "[Only] certain important functions, such as administrative computing, auditing of schools, bus transportation, food preparation, payroll and pension, and new school construction, are carried out by central office" (Ouchi, 2006, p. 299). Through this site-based decision-making model, principals have greater control over their schools' budget and are empowered to make decisions to respond to the individualized needs of the stakeholders they serve, including students, parents, and the community (Ouchi, 2006; Mette & Bengtson, 2015). With site-based leadership, principals have increasingly more responsibilities within a school (Lynch, 2012; Ouchi, 2006), increased accountability, and an immense requirement to understand the myriad of diverse populations within the school as well as the unique needs of each group of learners. This model further creates "varying climates and cultures depending on the type of leadership provided by the administrative teams, the support given to teachers, and the varying demographics of students supported in each building" (Mette & Bengtson, 2015). This means schools within the same district can be exceedingly dissimilar in aspects even beyond culture and climate. Schools can develop distinctive programs and utilized diverse curriculum and instruction based on the principals' decisions.

In the move to decentralize school districts, site-based decisions can include, but are not limited to, community outreach, curriculum, instruction, assessment, evaluation, systems, hiring practices, professional development, and specialized programs (Lynch, 2012), including special education and gifted and talented (GT) programs. Some systems and programs may be informed by, and even regulated by, state and federal mandates and laws to various degrees, whereas others rely on principals being knowledgeable about best practice because “every principal’s most important job is getting good teaching in every classroom” (Marshall, 2013, p. 3). Two examples in the state of Colorado include a specific evaluation system enacted by law to evaluate staff to which all administrators within public school organizations must adhere (CDE, 2016) and, like many other states, Colorado public schools are mandated to participate in formalized state-wide assessments (CDE, 2017). Another example is the federal requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which necessitates programming guidelines for and communication around students who qualify for an Individualized Education Plan (CDE, 2017).

Other programming options are not tied to legal mandates. Some examples of these include curricular decisions, instructional models, hiring practices, and non-mandated programs, such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), formally known as Response to Intervention (CDE, 2017) and GT programs.

### **Principal Leadership Impact on Instruction and Programming**

A principal’s impact on a school has been well documented and one form of impact is how principals affect change within the school is through professional development (Youngs and King, 2002; Marshall, 2013; Zepeda, 2013; Rigby, 2014). According to Youngs and King (2002), “School leaders can connect their schools to sources of professional development that concentrate on instruction and student outcomes, that provide opportunities for feedback and assistance in teachers’ classrooms, and that are sustained and continuous” (p. 644). Marshall (2013) stated,

“The quality of instruction is the single most important factor in student achievement” (p. 1) emphasizing the need for principals to be knowledgeable instructional leaders to support their staff in the implementation of best practices (Rigby, 2014; Zepeda, 2013).

Additionally, after completing a research study including 99 high schools, Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) suggested, “The degree to which principals are successful at creating a strong learning climate in the school seems to be the most important way in which they influence the average quality of instruction in the school” (p. 642-3). Based on a middle school case study, Jacquith (2015) concluded, “A principal’s actions have the potential to create site-based conditions that can grow a staff’s capacity to improve instruction, depending on how the principal conceives of, organizes, and structures learning opportunities for teachers” (p. 19).

The importance of principal knowledge and support on programming options is beginning to be realized in specialized programs (Printy & Williams, 2015; Seedorf, 2014). Seedorf (2014) explained the importance of principal knowledge and support in regards to building and maintaining a strong Response to Intervention (RtI) program for both interventions and identification of special education as well as gifted and talented (GT) students. Seedorf (2014) stated:

Teachers and administrators alike need to become familiar with a more holistic view of RtI and how students with advanced needs also fit into this framework. Once teachers and administrators are aware of the comprehensive nature of RtI, *support* from both district- and building-level administration is the next key component. (p. 255)

Likewise, Printy and Williams (2015), who also conducted research on the principal’s role in the implementation of an RtI system, stated, “Principals in all the schools had decision discretion for implementing RtI” (p. 196) and similarly cited strong site-based leadership as an imperative for the implementation of such reform.

### **Principal Impact on Gifted and Talented Programming**

Given the research on GT programs, the need for such programs, the changing populations across America, the impact of those changing populations, and the importance of principals as instructional leaders and supporters of programs, it seems evident principals must directly impact gifted and talented programming. However, empirical research on principals' impact on gifted and talented programming is limited (Grantham, Collins, & Dickenson, 2014). A few qualitative studies have delved into the topic, and these studies all focused on what is known throughout the field of education; principal support and buy-in is imperative for school-based change, including gifted programming success and sustainability (Lewis, Cruzeiro, & Hall, 2007; Long, Barnett, & Rogers, 2015; Weber, Colarulli-Daniels, & Leinhauser, 2003).

Support from leadership within gifted and talented programming has been cited a critical component in several studies. Johnsen, Haensly, Ryser, & Ford (2002) cited strong leadership as a factor to facilitate change when working with cohort groups to increase differentiation for GT and high-achieving students within the general classroom. Horn (2015) added onto this body of research and explained, "From the very beginning, principal leadership has been a key component" as schools within Fairfax County Public Schools worked to create the Young Scholars program to realize and nurture giftedness within traditionally underserved populations. Additionally, as a subset of a larger study, Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006) conducted an ethnographic case study "to examine the influence of a key external factor, the building administrator, in middle school teachers' willingness and ability to address systematically the needs of all learners, including the gifted, in diverse middle school classrooms" (p. 91). In this study, three middle schools participated in a three-year study to focus in part on meeting the needs of gifted students in general education classrooms through differentiation (Hertberg-Davis and Brighton, 2006). Four themes emerged from this study, which were:

1. Teachers' responses to being asked to differentiate mirrored those of their principal.

2. Teachers needed administrator support – both in terms of resources and emotional support – to feel comfortable with differentiating curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
3. Effective implementation of differentiation required an administrator with both the desire to see change occur and the belief that change was possible.
4. Encouraging teachers to differentiate instruction in any systematic way required administrators to have focus and long-term vision. (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006, p. 99-100)

This study highlighted not only the power of principals' attitudes and supports, but it also emphasized the need for system thinking and long-term vision. These themes were expanded on by VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005), as they stated:

Leaders need to provide ongoing support within the school district or building that encourages teachers to utilize differentiated strategies for gifted learners. A system must be in place to assist with that support, including administrative visits to classrooms, questions about how teachers are meeting the needs of gifted learners, provision of needed resources, staff development provisions and common planning times, as well as an accountability measure for meeting the needs of gifted learners. Teachers must see that administrators care about the growth and development of gifted learners as much as they care about other learners. The need for a supportive school climate that fosters high expectations for teachers and holds them accountable for differentiation is essential to the process being successful. (p. 215)

Several other qualitative studies have provided similar conclusions. Lewis, Cruzeiro, and Hall (2007) completed case studies on two principals who had current successful GT programs within their public general education schools. From this study, researchers stated, "Principals are in

the best position to enact coherent, developmentally appropriate educational experiences for all of their students, and *all* should include gifted learners” (p. 61).

Weber, Colarulli-Daniels, and Leinhauser (2003) completed interviews with two principals, one in a public GT magnet school and one in a private GT school, to determine the similarities and differences between the “role of the principal as it relates to the education of gifted and talented children in programs and schools”. They noted, “Research [on the role of the principal on GT programming] is neither extensive nor recent”, but through their research, it was also suggested that, “Their [the principals] insights provide us with a glimpse of their passion, dedication, love for, and belief in what they do” (p. 62). As we know from other previously explored studies, what the principals value, the staff values, so when a principal has the passion and knowledge around gifted programming, the staff and school are more likely to as well, thus building a strong site-based program (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005).

Another qualitative case study of ten Australian secondary schools the following themes emerged:

1. Schools with a documented gifted policy were more likely to provide more substantially for their gifted students.
2. Selective (all gifted) schools and schools with selected classes were more likely to provide distinctive gifted programs in line with state policy.
3. Principals with a policy to follow were more likely to provide adequate resource support and professional development for teachers in the school.
4. The desire of principals to meet policy mandate does not always equate to having the means to do so. (Long, Barnett, & Rogers, 2015, p. 118)



### **Conclusion**

Current realities of GT programming included inconsistent programming (Young & Balli, 2014), underrepresentation (Callahan, 2005; Esquierdo & Arrequin-Anderson, 2012; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007; Worrell, 2014), and the excellence gap (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010). Due to this, researchers have focused much time and attention on a variety of issues to determine root causes and possible solutions for different contexts and environments (Esquierdo & Arrequin-Anderson, 2012; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007).

Current research reveals the impact of principals' regarding programming within their schools (Lynch, 2012; Mette & Bengtson, 2015). Impact has been seen as a result of professional development and the conduction of principals' attitudes and supports (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006; Marshall, 2013; Rigby, 2014; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005; Youngs & King, 2002; Zepeda, 2013).

Taken together, these two bodies of research demonstrated the need for future research and professional development with principals as the primary focus. In their unique positions, principals are in the situation to create, evaluate, and refine programming for learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents. To do so, they need to understand the needs of this group of learners, the elements of a CPD, the purposes behind a CPD, and how to replicate best practices. As a field, it is imperative to support and uplift principals and their knowledge-base so they in turn can do the same for learners with high potential and identified gifts and talents.

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# **Uncovering the Gifts of English Language Learners**

Sheri J. Collier

## **Abstract**

This article is a review of an intervention doctoral research project that researched the lack of English language learners (ELL) being identified or referred for gifted and talented (GT) services. The interventions provided were aimed toward preschool staff members in one district of around 17,000 students in the Denver Metropolitan area. The interventions included baseline data from a pre-survey, an all-staff professional development, three subsequent professional learning communities and post survey. The purpose of the interventions was to understand the characteristics of ELL students, GT students, and ELL students that may be GT. The data were organized through a convergent mixed methods approach over a three-month period of time.

**Keywords:** English language learners, ELL, gifted and talented, underidentification, underrepresented populations

## **Problem of Practice**

The language you speak does not determine your intelligence (Anguiano, 2003). However, students from different nationalities and language backgrounds are less likely to be identified as gifted and talented (GT) students (Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martínez, 2009). The underrepresentation of minorities has been a discussion in gifted education for some time now (Anguiano, 2003). There has been a concern around the identification of our bilingual and multilingual students into gifted education (Barkan & Bernal, 1991; Esquiedo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Harris, Rapp, Martínez, & Plucker, 2007). "While the number and relative proportion of English language learners (ELL) in public school systems is rapidly increasing, ELL students are often overlooked for gifted



programs, and for this reason are grossly underrepresented in gifted and talented education programs” (Harris et al., 2007, p. 26).

On a national level, the Colorado Department of Education (2015) reported that in 2014, there were 4,472,563 English language learners in the United States. This number comprised 9% of all students, pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, nationwide. The Office of English Language Acquisition (2016) identified eight states with 10% or more of the population as English learners: Hawaii, Alaska, Oregon, California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

On a state level, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), the state of Colorado identified 86,118 students who participated in programs for ELL in the school year 2002–2003. Ten years later, in 2012, 101,262 students participated in these programs (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). This number does not take into account the students who speak another language and who are not in a program, or those who have received a fluent ranking according to the state test. This was an increase of 15,144 students in ten years (NCES, 2013).

The district researched had a population of 17,115 at the time of the research study (CDE, 2016). The population included 2,169 English language learners that were identified as non-English or limited English proficient (CDE, 2015). The district has recorded over 40 languages spoken within this population (CDE, 2015).

From a comparison of the percentages of ELL students identified as gifted in the state of Colorado, with the ELL percentage in the corresponding districts, no district is close to having an equitable representation (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2015). For example, in 2015, two districts from the metropolitan area were reviewed (CDE, 2015). The first district had 19% ELL population, and 3.8% of the identified GT students were ELL. The second district had 43% ELL population, and

14% of the ELL students were identified as GT (CDE, 2015). These two districts demonstrated the discrepancy and provided evidence for the claim from Harris, Rapp, Martínez, and Plucker (2007) that the number of ELL is increasing and not being considered for GT programming.

Several causes were found in the literature for this problem of practice. Barkan and Bernal (1991) stated that a major reason was the dominant culture relying on standardized tests for entry into gifted programs. Further, Anguiano (2003) wrote that the assessments were culturally inappropriate and other research has indicated that teachers have been a major reason for identification (Ford and Grantham, 2003; Harris et al., 2007). Esquiedo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012) also noted that giftedness in students manifests differently, and therefore teachers do not know what to look for to refer for GT programming. Finally, other research has pointed to the trend that parents are often unfamiliar with services and processes within schools regarding gifted identification (Anguiano, 2003). Research has indicated that students who are ELL are less likely to be identified as GT due to lack of teacher understanding and/or teacher referrals (Barkan & Bernal, 1991; Esquiedo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Harris et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2009). Teachers have been viewed as the gatekeepers to identification for GT programming in public schools (Ford & Grantham, 2003). On the frontline of the classroom, teachers see the characteristics of each student and are less likely to refer minority students to gifted programs (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Without the understanding of the characteristics of gifted ELL students, these students can be missed (Esquiedo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012). Teachers need to understand the characteristics of ELL students and language acquisition, so they can learn how to program for these students and uncover the talents that are masked by language and/or culture barriers (Anguiano, 2003).

Second language acquisition is complex and time consuming (Anguiano, 2003). There are several aspects to learning a language, yet teachers tend to notice the vocabulary of their students first. There is a difference

between social and academic language that teachers may not be able to understand in full (Lewis, Rivera, & Roby, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education, through the Office of Bilingual Education and Language Minority Affairs, wrote a report called Project Galaxies of Thinking and Creative Heights of Achievements (GOTCHA) in 1998. Results from this report stated that, "students in different phases of English language acquisition have inherently different educational needs; therefore, knowing a child's English proficiency level is vital in deciding on their placement in a gifted/talented program," (p. 20).

The training of the teachers was also researched to work toward supporting the need for teachers to learn about ELL students and their possible gifted characteristics. Professional development and professional learning communities (PLC) were researched as a possible solution to the concern of teachers being a reason for underidentification (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Harris et al., 2007). Dooner (2008) stated that, "many educators argue that professional learning communities offer an important and distinct form of professional development because they are situated between the educational policies of school districts and the realities of schools and practicing teachers," (p. 564). Further, Vescio (2008) stated, "At its core, the concept of a Professional Learning Community rests in the premise of improving student learning by improving teaching practice," (p. 82).

The goal for this action research project was to investigate teachers' knowledge and understanding of GT ELL students. The next step, after investigation, was to increase the knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of an ELL student who may be gifted to the district preschool staff. Preschool in the school district was reserved for students that qualified through Child Find (special education program) or the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP). This meant that the students who were qualified for special education, spoke another language, or had a different at-risk factor as determined by the state of Colorado, were able to attend this preschool (CDE, 2017).

The overarching concept of this study was in regards to change in the knowledge in staff members. This change included knowledge and referrals of ELL preschool students for gifted identification. The process of change included the four stages of change as identified by Michael Fullan (1994). These stages included: initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome (Fullan, 2007). This research project initiated change through a preschool, provided a professional development to implement the change, continued the learning through professional learning communities, and analyzed the outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of professional development on referrals of ELL students for GT identification by preschool staff.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Currently, many teachers are monolingual and do not understand the process of language acquisition (Esquiedo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). This lack of understanding of the language acquisition process coupled with the lack of understanding of the student adds complexity to the identification process of GT ELL students (Esquiedo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). "As the Hispanic population of the United States continues to dramatically increase, education professionals repeatedly face the challenge of how best to provide services for those whose primary language is Spanish," (Brice & Brice, 2004, p. 8).

The rationale of this study was to look deeper into the role of teachers in the lower identification of ELL students into gifted programming. The problem of practice being studied was clearly expressed by Harris, Plucker, Rapp, and Martínez (2009), who wrote, "While the number and relative proportion of English Language Learners (ELL) in public school systems is rapidly increasing, ELL students are often overlooked for gifted programs, and for this reason are grossly underrepresented in gifted and talented education programs," (p. 26).

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are preschool staff members' understandings of the characteristics of ELL identified as GT?
2. Are PLCs effective in increasing preschool staff members' understanding of the characteristics of gifted ELL students?
3. Does a change in staff members' understanding lead to an increase in ELL students being referred for identification as GT?

These questions were researched to understand the complexity of the topic. A literature review provided background knowledge for research on ELL gifted students. This review also fostered understanding about language acquisition and the impact it has on identification. Further, it provided a framework for the professional development so that previous lessons were intertwined with the characteristics and needs of ELL students. In this review, the topic of PLCs and the best practices of changing staffs' behavior were also considered. Procedures to help educate and change the behavior and practices of the preschool staff members could be drawn from this study.

## Methodology and Data Analysis

Throughout this research project, the term *staff* was used to represent all members of the preschool team who directly worked with students. This included the licensed teachers, qualified group leaders, and one-on-one paraprofessionals. Staff members were invited to attend the training.

Data was gathered through a volunteer opportunity to complete a pre-survey, to participate in a professional development day in August prior to school starting, through three subsequent PLC meetings, and a post-survey. The preschool staff was represented by 45 members. All members were invited to participate in all parts of the intervention.

Baseline data from staff members was gathered via an electronic survey. This data provided information regarding pre-intervention knowledge of ELL students who may be gifted according to the entire staff. It provided the demographic information of each participant in the survey, as well as the quantitative data for numbers of referred students, self-perception on the knowledge of GT ELL characteristics, and qualitative data on the characteristics.

Staff members voluntarily participated in a 4-hour professional development. The goal of this professional development was to provide information on gifted characteristics and the needs of the ELL learner who may be gifted. The characteristics reviewed in the professional development helped to identify gifted characteristics in the ELL students for the preschool staff. Exit tickets, which included three questions, were filled out to collect data on learning from the professional development and future needs. All staff members were offered the opportunity to further their learning on ELL gifted characteristics and needs through three PLCs.

Staff members who took part in the PLCs met once a month for 3 months to continue developing their understanding of gifted ELL students. The materials presented through the facilitated professional opportunity were developed around the characteristics and needs of the gifted ELL learner. Each PLC meeting had its own exit ticket.

A post-survey was also sent via an Internet link in order to measure the growth of the staff members. The data was compared to the baseline survey data, collected before the implementation of the professional development intervention. The surveys helped to show if the professional development intervention provided the systematic change needed to modify behavior and better educate teachers regarding understanding populations at risk.

### **Research Findings**

The purpose of this mixed-methods research study was to determine the impact of professional development on referrals of ELL students for GT identification by preschool staff in the 2016–2017 school year. The research design was completed using the learning theory of constructivism and Fullan’s change theory. Constructivism has three components of learning: endogenous, exogenous, and dialectical (Armstrong, 2015). The intervention was planned for 3 months and data was collected through each stage. A quantitative approach was used to analyze the survey results from the pre-intervention survey and the post-intervention survey. A qualitative approach was implemented for the data from the surveys and intervention exit tickets. The primary focus of the intervention sessions was to review the characteristics of ELL students, GT students, and ELL students that may be gifted. The intervention was formatted as professional development and three subsequent PLC sessions.

The data was coded, analyzed, and themes were brought forth for each research question. The first research question addressed the staff members’ level of knowledge of characteristics in ELL students that may be gifted. Results showed that prior to intervention, the level of understanding was minimal, however it increased and was maintained at a high level over the 3-month research period. The second research question addressed the effectiveness of PLCs in increasing the staff members’ understanding. The data revealed that there no significant difference regarding knowledge of the characteristics after the 3-month intervention compared to those staff members who only attended the 1-day intervention. The third research question was set in place to determine if the rate of referrals would increase with a change in the staff members’ understanding. The data revealed that there were no differences in the amount of ELL students referred for GT identification post-intervention.

The overarching theme derived from qualitative data analysis was the importance of understanding the characteristics to aid in observation and intentionality of practice through changed thinking. Without the

understanding of the characteristics of gifted ELL students, these students can be missed (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). Teachers need to understand the characteristics of ELL students and language acquisition so they can learn how to program for these students and uncover the gifts that are masked by language and/or culture barriers (Anguiano, 2003). An increase in understanding of the characteristics was seen through a professional development opportunity to have teams discuss the characteristics and work together to gain a better understanding, as seen through the exit tickets from the event.

This pattern was further demonstrated through the PLC study as teachers engaged in conversation, learning, and the frustration of being comfortable actualizing on the learning information. Furthermore, this pattern supported the theoretical framework of constructivism and that learning could be constructed from previous knowledge, and enhanced through social interaction (Hoover, 1996). Through the analysis of the PLCs, the continuum of education was seen through excitement, eagerness, and, then, hesitancy. The teachers were not provided with the ability to transfer or actualize on their knowledge, therefore slowing down their ability to learn (Hoover, 1996).

The first finding was through the pre-survey, the professional development exit ticket, and the post-survey in regards to the understanding of the characteristics of an ELL student who may be gifted. The staff members who participated in the pre-survey gave a letter grade for their knowledge of the characteristics that did not match the open-ended question citing the knowledge of the characteristics; 62% of the staff members who took the survey were unable to provide evidence of that knowledge. After the professional development and also in the post-survey, the self-reported grades and evidence of knowledge from the open-ended questions were evident and better aligned. The information learned and measured from the pre-survey to the post-survey showed an 80% increase in understanding the characteristics of an ELL student who may be gifted.



The second finding was that PLC rooted in the literature provided preschool teachers with an outlet to learn the importance of observation and change their thinking about student behaviors. The PLC allowed for the five teachers to brainstorm together and discuss options for transfer activities to elicit the characteristics learned from the professional development. The teachers had the opportunity to reflect on past students and discuss current student behaviors or lessons that would be possible in the classroom.

The third finding concerned, quantitatively, the amount of ELL preschool students referred for gifted identification. The pre-survey reported that two staff members referred students during the 2015–2016 school year. One staff member reported the referral of one ELL student and the second staff member reported the referral of four or more ELL students for gifted identification. The post-survey showed that two staff members reported the referral of one ELL student each for gifted testing between the August 2016–November 2016 research window. This number implies a decrease of referrals in quantity; however, the variable of time should be noted.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The purpose of this research study was to determine if a change in understanding of the characteristics of ELL and gifted learners impacted the referrals of ELL students for gifted identification. Through this process, a few implications of the research study became apparent. The overarching implication was that staff members could change their level of understanding and maintain that knowledge to begin the cycle of change with a few considerations. Change is a multi-step, multi-tiered tool that needs all points facing the same direction to be successful. Ford and Grantham (2003) wrote that teachers were the gatekeepers for underserved student referrals for gifted education. Fullan (2007) wrote, “Meanwhile, at the school level, the principal has become increasingly important. The principal has always been the “gate-keeper” of change, often determining the fate of innovations coming from the outside or from teacher initiatives on the inside” (p.74). If change is truly going to happen, every level of

educational support needs to be a part of the process, or the change trajectory will flat line. The tiers of change for staff include peer support, levels of support, and time for support.

This research study demonstrated that teachers and staff members were willing to volunteer their time to learn about aspects that would enhance their teaching and help their students. Staff members wanted to be learners too, especially if the material impacts their classroom and they are provided with the choice (Bayar, 2014). Over 40 staff members voluntarily came to learn how to better understand their classroom population and actively learned with each other to better themselves. The characteristics learned were retained and provided further evidence that the constructivism learning theory of calling on past experiences and discussion with coworkers could build on existing knowledge (Armstrong, 2015). Through the literature review, it was stated that the professional development and professional learning community events needed to have teacher voice (Bayar, 2014). The literature also stated that a professional development session, without discussion or movement, was less successful and teachers needed a long-term investment in the change (Bayar, 2014). While the main professional development was only four hours, the entirety of each of the sessions was focused on movement, collaboration, and discussion. The difference was that the teachers were all staff of the same grade. These staff members could benefit from the dialectical piece of knowledge while pushing their own thinking because everyone in the room had the same lens: preschool.

Knowledge gained through the learning developed through constructivism and was measured within the staff members. The power of the knowledge gained was shown through the fact that all staff members present were invested in the same grade level, all the content was directed completely toward the grade level they were working, in and all the teaching was focused directly on preschool. This level of training allowed for peer support since all the peers involved were all part of the same district and all were involved with preschool.

One implication of the research was that more students were not referred for gifted identification, which countered one of the main purposes of this study. While the knowledge of gifted characteristics was increased, the follow through on a transfer activity was lacking for the staff to take that knowledge to an applicable stage. The principals were not included in the training, which made the staff have a different set of criteria of training and change expected of them based off the school. Principal involvement would have helped with the transfer of knowledge and reinforcing the expectations of referring ELL students for GT identification. The principal could have been another set of eyes on the students and pushed the learning to the next step, resulting in further referrals. Partnership and cohesion could also lead to change.

Another prominent implication was the fact that time is a major component to change. In this study, referrals did not increase, and one reason could be due to the ability to implement more training and study the long-term effects. The increase in the knowledge of the characteristics and the referral process was a powerful start to change in the school district, but the true implication of the study will not be observable for some time. The measurement for this study only compared a year of referrals to the first three months of school for referrals.

Overall, the knowledge gained will benefit the students far more than a referral will. The knowledge gained was not a program or a script; it was a skill to better educate their students. While the lens that was taught with was gifted, all staff members left with a better understanding of their population. This was far more impactful. DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) wrote about professional learning communities and stated, "Do not fall in love with a tree – embrace the forest" (p. 257).

In reviewing all the implications, this study demonstrated that knowledge is maintained when the education is shared with those that have the same end goal. Knowledge is transferred when everyone involved shares the

knowledge and the process. Therefore, all school professional developments can only be as impactful as a small team; the power was in providing the outlet for all the preschool teachers. If the district shares the goal and the learning is facilitated not only by school, but also grade levels, then the change can truly start happening.

The focus of professional development and professional learning communities is to see a change. Typically these initiatives are taken on school by school. This hinders the staff in truly delving into the dialectical practice of constructivism due to the small number of teachers sharing the same grade level experience. For change to occur, the staff needs the opportunity to focus on learning with others that are immersed with the same grade level of students to allow the focus to be on the whole child. The power from this training was that everyone was focused on the lens of preschool, no matter the school they worked at, everyone taught preschool and was able to connect to the material about the three to four year old students.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose and rationale for this study was to change the staffs' understandings and behaviors in a way that the staff could start to work on a strength-based model and to understand second language learners who may be gifted. By understanding second language learners and their gifted characteristics, the district can start to identify more students at an early age for GT services. This will allow for the staff to begin uncovering the gifts of ELL students at an early age. The overall implication for the study was that teachers needed to have the ability to learn with other teachers that are teaching the same grade. Once the original learning occurs with the grade level peers, it can be taken back to the school and be supported through the school-based leadership and district leadership. Fullan (2007) stated that a top down and bottom up approach were important, but that principals were middle management and were truly the gatekeepers for change. A stratified and unified approach for teachers would be the most effective for change, as well as time for the knowledge to transfer with support.

The research demonstrated that change is a slow process, but the knowledge is needed in education. The overall impact for this school district was that the preschool staff members for the 2016-2017 school year took the first step in uncovering the gifts in ELL students.

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## **Emotional Intelligence for Achievement and Well-being: SoulSpark's *The Heart of EQ***

Kate Bachtel

### **Abstract**

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is significantly predictive of a wide variety of life outcomes. Gifted children experience the world with greater sensitivity and intensity; therefore, supporting the development of specific emotional skills in the gifted is hypothesized to have an even greater impact on achievement, relationship quality and well-being. Yet in schools, relatively few resources are invested in supporting student emotional development. Furthermore, educators often confound extraversion, charisma and likeability with emotional development. This on-going exploration examines the potential of a specific professional development model to expand educator capacity to support student emotional development in a wide range of school contexts.

**Keywords:** gifted, emotional development, affective development, well-being, EQ

### **Emotional Intelligence for Achievement and Well-being**

Sam finds joy reading, tinkering in the garage and playing with his dog. He is both wise beyond his years and naïve. About a year ago, Sam was enrolled in sixth grade at an independent school that prides itself on the high academic achievement of its students. Sam's family had recently relocated. When he was struggling to integrate with peers, the school leadership recommended the family seek the support of an outside expert. This is when we met. After reviewing his records in depth, I discovered a speech language pathologist at Sam's prior public school had administered a cognitive evaluation. Sam's full-scale intelligence quotient was in the 99.9% on the Wechsler's Intelligence Test (or WISC-IV), indicating



ability in the highly to profoundly gifted range. By all measures, Sam should have been the school's perfect student, yet his teachers did not identify Sam as gifted. Surprisingly, little attention was paid to Sam's academic strengths.

After administering an emotional development psychometric assessment, the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Assessment Youth Version (or SEI-YV), it became clear Sam's emotional development (also referred to as EQ) was out of synch with his cognitive development. Sam's EQ lagged significantly relative to his same age peers. In part because Sam's emotional competencies were not as strong, he experienced more conflict and even aggression at school. His middle school peers sensed his uniqueness and often excluded him, sometimes even engaging in bullying behaviors. So much so, a director at the school recognized the relational aggression and reported it to the family. To make matters worse, one of the students bullying Sam was the son of one of the school's biggest donors. Despite conversations with the head of school explaining how Sam and his family were working to support his emotional development, Sam was not offered an enrollment contract for the following year. Sadly, the voice of the donor was given more weight than Sam's. Being ejected from the new school community inflicted emotional pain. I found myself wondering if the family and teachers had his EQ data earlier if they would have been able to better partner to support Sam and his classmates.

Now in his neighborhood public middle school, with focused attention on improving his emotional competencies, Sam has started to grow a few solid friendships. He has reported feeling more at ease and connected. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is inextricably tied to achievement, relationship quality and health (Freedman, 2016). Unfortunately, schools invest little instructional time to support the development of these critical skills. Furthermore, informal investigations reveal educators often confuse emotional development with charisma, extraversion and likeability to the detriment of students and the community as a whole.

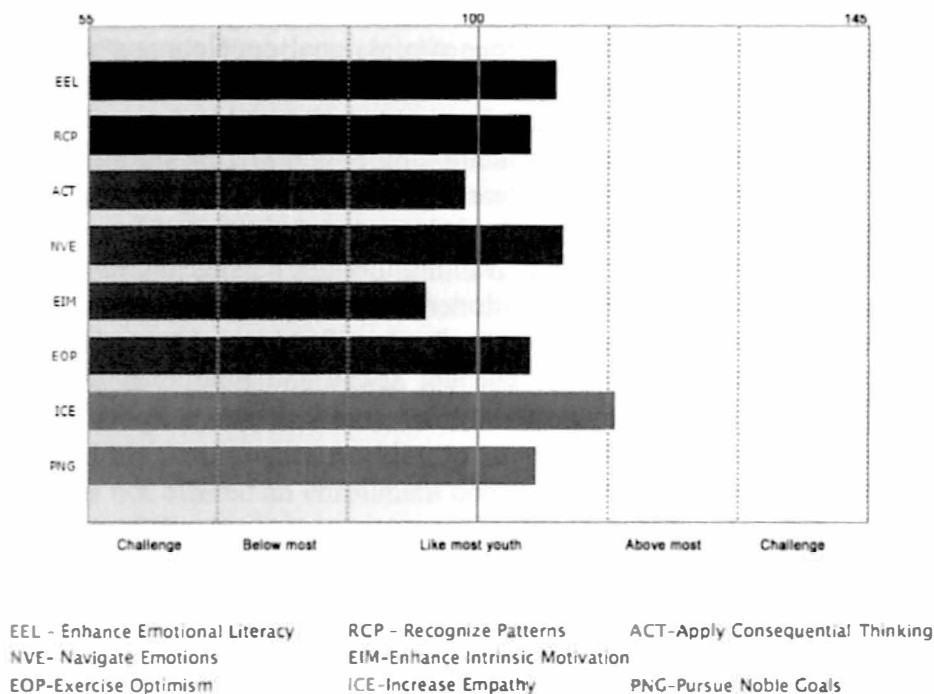
## Context

Over the course of the last decade, I have supported student and educator affective development in a variety of roles and contexts. Working closely with clinicians, educators and parents, I have examined different social and emotional learning curricula and programs. Relatively few have proven effective in supporting the unique emotional development of gifted learners. Beyond attending numerous professional development sessions on gifted student emotional development over the course of the last decade, I have received formal training on several social and emotional, or SEL, programs. In 2008, I began facilitating Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) Model Parent Groups; these experiences with parents of diverse gifted learners have been a rich source of learning. In addition, I have completed formal training through PassageWorks and am a certified Six Seconds EQ Practitioner. Other related professional SEL learning includes: *In Focus* through the Teaching Heart Institute, HeartMath, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Devereux and a variety of mindfulness and well-being initiatives.

Perhaps, my most valuable learning came from my parents who were both educators. My mother taught kindergarten and believed in a holistic, play-based approach. My father studied confluent education (holistic learning involving the mind, body, emotions and spirit) and attended workshops with Frederick “Fritz” Perls during his 47-year tenure as a world history and psychology teacher at a Milwaukee high school. I learned a lot from his and my mother’s parenting practices. In addition, I grew up across the street from a Waldorfesque summer program that emphasized social and emotional development. I attended the program from ages three through twelve and subsequently taught at the program in high school and directed it in college. Cumulatively, these experiences prepared me with a keen eye for discerning effective emotional development programming.

Furthermore, experiences administering and interpreting Six Seconds emotional intelligence assessments illustrated educators are often poor at

predicting EQ score ranges. Take the recent assessment results below as an example. In this case, the Six Seconds SEI-YV was administered to a cohort of gifted students. The excerpt below in Figure 1 is from the student the team of exceptional educators perceived to have the highest EQ.



**Figure 1.** Sample Six Seconds Report Excerpt from Student Perceived to have Highest EQ.

The midline labeled “like most youth” represents mean scores for each of the eight emotional competencies. The report informs that this student’s overall emotional development was fairly typical as related to same age peers. As a result, she was able to form social connections with other students her age with relative ease. In this case, her teachers interpreted the student’s large social network as an indicator of high emotional development. Given this student’s emotional development was average for

her age, there were still significant growth opportunities. Moreover, social development encourages assimilation and self-distancing, which can cause harm (Dabrowski, 2016). In the absence of in-depth understanding of the skills comprised within the construct of emotional intelligence, and tools and strategies to support the development of these competencies, students may be underserved by competent, well-intentioned teachers.

Seeing the short comings in available programs, educator misconceptions and the lack of resources invested in supporting student emotional development in most schools inspired me to create my own approach and accompanying professional development module. The title of the session is *The Heart of EQ*. Evaluation of the pilot program is on-going with an emphasis on quality improvement. This article explores the potential of this professional development module to empower educators to better support student emotional development in their classrooms. The question driving the inquiry was as follows: *How do pilot program participants perceive the professional development module?*

### **Literature Summary**

For the purpose of this article, emotional intelligence, or EQ, is defined as “the capacity to blend thinking and feeling to make optimal decisions – which is the key to having a successful relationship with yourself and others” (Six Seconds, 2016, n.p.). Referencing more than 20 years of data from more than 100,000 individuals across more than 125 countries, Six Seconds outlines specific emotional skills that account for 55% of the variance in effectiveness / achievement, well-being, relationship quality and life satisfaction (Freedman, 2016). Given the increased depth, range and complexity of gifted students’ emotions (Gatto-Walden, 2016; Fonesca, 2011; Piechowski, 2014), future research may reveal that emotional development has an even greater impact on the overall well-being of gifted youth than their neuro-typical peers.

Recognizing there is inexcusable under-identification of Black, Latino, Native American and low-income students in gifted programming

(Dynarski, 2016; Ford, 2013), even formally identified gifted students experience significant challenges in school. Chu and Myers reported gifted youth may be vulnerable to: underachievement, social isolation and rejection, dropping out of high school and suicidal ideation (2015). Each of these challenges have affective roots. Furthermore, research showed gifted children experienced bullying behavior at approximately twice the rate of typically developing students (Peterson & Ray, 2006). According to Peterson and Ray, about two-thirds of gifted students have experienced bullying by eighth grade (2006) in contrast with about 25 to 30 percent of the general population (StopBullying, 2016). Supporting gifted student emotional development may increase youth's capacity to weather the social storm of being a cognitive outlier.

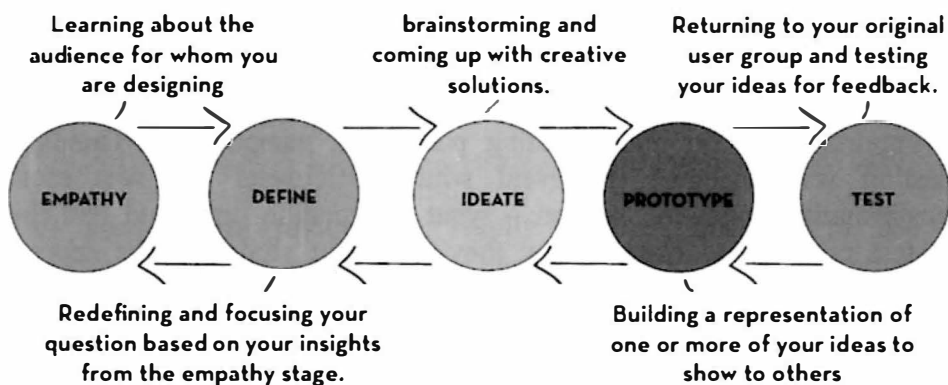
Furthermore, the Six Seconds model holds potential to improve the emotional development of educators (Rojas, Carlson, Heck & Stafford, 2012). This is important as it correlated to teacher effectiveness and well-being, which ultimately impacts students. Students often experienced unintended learning as a result of educators' actions and their learning environment (Eisner, 2017; Roeper, 2004). The Six Seconds model, developed by Jensen, was a direct result of her experiences serving gifted youth, educators, and families (Jensen, 2017). Given its roots in exemplary gifted instruction, and my experiences administering and interpreting Six Seconds emotional development data, the research from Six Seconds had a significant impact on the progress of the professional development module.

### **Inquiry Approach**

The project was designed to deepen educator understanding of the emotional skills predictive of achievement and well-being and introduce ways to support the growth of these EQ competencies in practice. The intervention is the pilot professional development module, *The Heart of EQ*. After a decade in practice supporting student emotional development and two years' experience administering emotional development assessments and interpreting the data for parents and educators, I designed

this professional learning experience to address frequent gaps in understanding encountered in the field.

A survey was designed to elucidate participants' feedback on the value of the overall session, what information was most helpful, what they were curious to learn about in future sessions and what they would change about the program. As this project is still in process and the goal is to improve outcomes for students, the program design, implementation and evaluation process have been iterative congruent with design thinking. Design thinking is a problem solving framework which begins by engaging empathy and defining an unmet need in the community (Barry, 2017). Please see Figure 2 for details. As new research emerges, I intend to continue refining the program. After each session, I reviewed feedback and took comments into consideration when planning subsequent presentations.



*Figure 2. Overview of the Design Thinking Process (Barry, 2017, n.p.).*

Sessions took place from January 2016 to 2017. The professional development module was delivered at three different gifted conferences where it was peer-reviewed and promoted to educators, administrators, and school counselors. Two additional sessions were designed for a similar audience at two different kindergarten through eighth grade schools for gifted youth. At one campus, parents were also invited to

attend. The second school-based session was exclusively for staff. Prior to participants arriving at the start of each session, a copy of the voluntary and anonymous paper survey was placed on each chair (please see Appendix B for a copy of the survey). At the end of each session, attendees who chose to complete the survey placed them in an envelope in the back of the room as they left.

### **Instrument Design**

The brief survey was designed with a focus on acquiring information to facilitate continued program improvement. While on occasion I did know some of the participants, no attendance data was collected. I chose a single mode for survey distribution given Dillman, Smith and Melani's research indicating multiple choices of modes to complete a survey tends to negatively influence response rates (2014). The survey was purposefully anonymous to encourage honest, unfiltered responses and prevent distortion to increase positive self-impression (Fowler, 2014). The survey was purposefully concise to increase response rates. There were four questions in total. The first was a Likert scale overall session experience rating. The next three questions were qualitative; qualitative data played an important role in understanding participant perspectives. The first question was designed to reveal what participants felt was most transformative about the session – what information presented had the greatest potential to change how they cared for students. The second question was crafted to identify potential future topics and/or areas attendees might like to explore in greater depth. The final question was created to invite ideas on how the session could be improved moving forward.

### **Demographic Information**

While attendance was not taken, there were approximately 20 to 40 attendees in each session. As the purpose of this survey was to better understand participant perspectives on the session's efficacy, demographic information was not collected. However, participants were invited to share if they were a student, parent, teacher, administrator, clinician, other or

some combination thereof. Attendees primarily self-identified as educators 79 of the 119 participants, or two-thirds, indicated they were in some type of teaching role to gifted youth. Thirty-four of these educators also identified as parents. Twenty-nine, or 24%, of the participants identified as parents not in any type of professional teaching or counseling role. Nine participants identified as clinicians or counselors and two did not provide any information on their role caring for gifted children.

### Evaluation Results

As previously detailed, *The Heart of EQ* professional learning experience has been delivered at five different events where the audiences were comprised primarily of educators serving gifted students. Parents of kindergarten through eighth grade gifted children were also present at one of the sessions. While formal attendance was not recorded, the approximate head count in each presentation ranged from 20 to 40 participants. In total, 119 surveys were collected over the calendar year. Additional sessions have been conducted at specific schools in the evening, which included both parent and educator participants. Feedback from these sessions was excluded, as was data collected from a webinar delivery of the program.

This section will review the results of each question to deepen understanding of the perspectives of participants. Please see a summary of the overall session rating in Figure 3 below.

	Mean	Mode	Range
Question 1 (n=119): Please rate this session on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest.	4.52	5	3 to 5

Figure 3. Summary of Overall Session Rating.

1. Please rate this session on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest.



Overall, participants scored the session positively. The most frequent response was a five, the highest score on the Likert scale. The average, or mean, score of a little over four and a half reinforces that participants found the session informative. While the positive session ratings are promising, it was the qualitative feedback that was most instrumental to program improvement. Please see Figure 4 below which provides details of feedback collected from the five sessions. If each of the five sessions had a full 40 attendees (most had fewer), the response rate would still be a strong 60%.

*Figure 4. Highlights of Qualitative Feedback from January 2016 to January 2017.*

<p><b>Question 2:</b> Please list the 3 biggest takeaways:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Strategies to teach emotional literacy</li> <li>* Tools to engage intrinsic motivation</li> <li>* Little changes in practice can have big impact on student outcomes</li> <li>* Importance of using a strengths-based lens to view children</li> <li>* Empathy conceptualized as superpower</li> <li>* Importance of teaching optimism</li> <li>* Breathing strategies</li> <li>* Toolbox activity</li> <li>* Relationship between emotional development &amp; being a change maker</li> <li>* Bracelet strategy</li> <li>* Gamification ideas</li> <li>* Trauma signs</li> <li>* There are resources for teaching EQ</li> <li>* Teachers' perceptions of students behavior</li> <li>* There is a difference between conflict &amp; bullying</li> <li>* Biases which can negatively influence students</li> <li>* EQ is measurable</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 3:</b> Please list 2 concepts you are curious to learn more about:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Examples of EQ assessment questions</li> <li>* Strategies to enhance student confidence</li> <li>* How to change teacher culture</li> <li>* Discipline strategies</li> <li>* Strategies to better communicate with parents</li> <li>* More information on instructors' work in the field</li> <li>* How emotions provide data</li> <li>* Does this improve the mental health of staff?</li> <li>* How trauma affects behavior</li> <li>* The impact EQ coaching has on students with autism</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 4:</b> If you could change 1 thing about the session, what would it be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Make the session longer</li> <li>* Speak more loudly</li> <li>* More tools and practice examples</li> <li>* More interactive participant activities</li> <li>* Provide an outline or handout</li> </ul>

2. Please list the three biggest takeaways.

Of the 119 participants, 78 named three specific items from the session that they perceived as most valuable. Twenty-nine identified two, ten only one and two none. Table 2 above illustrates the range in responses. The most frequent responses related to tools to support the development of discrete emotional skills.

3. Please list two concepts you are curious to learn more about.

Sixty-two participants shared two concepts they were interested in learning more about, 36 listed one and 21 left the question blank. The most frequently identified areas for future learning related to specific individual student cases and how to reference the framework to grow relationships among various stakeholders and transform culture.

4. If you could change one thing about the session, what would it be?

Finally, 68 of the 119 participants listed something they would change about the session and 51 either left the last question blank or wrote “not applicable” or “nothing.” The themes in improvement responses were rather evenly distributed. Many noted wanting to extend the session’s length. The sessions conducted at the gifted conferences were all approximately one hour in length. The sessions hosted at the gifted schools were closer to an hour and a half in response to this feedback. In addition, participants mentioned the need to increase the volume or use a microphone. There were also some who asked for more examples and interactive activities which were integrated into subsequent sections. Finally, many requested a handout to take notes on. Initially slides were shared via email, but print copies were not provided in an attempt to be eco-conscious. For the last two sessions, a one-page summary handout was created for participants.

## Discussion

The emotional intensity and high energy level of the gifted child cannot be ignored because they disturb the routine and the order of the things set before the arrival of the little Energizer. Gifted children take in information from the world around them; they react and respond more quickly and intensely than other children. They are stimulated both by what's going on around them and by what moves from within (Daniels and Piechowski, 2009, p.4).

This quote from Daniels and Piechowski re-emphasizes why emotional intelligence plays such an integral role in the overall development and well-being of gifted youth. EQ is likely more predictive of outcomes for gifted youth than their neuro-typical peers due to this intensity in the way they experience the world. SoulSpark's *The Heart of EQ* session provides educators and parents with evidence-based practices to increase student emotional intelligence. Following is a discussion of the limitations and potential implications of this project.

## Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this investigation was the variance among sessions. Given the emphasis on continued improvement, no two sessions were exactly the same. In addition, the survey did not record the date of each session. As all surveys were compiled, it was not possible to determine if session ratings improved over time. In addition, it was assumed educators and parents at gifted schools have relatively greater expertise in gifted development than in other learning communities. Similarly, gifted conference attendees were presumed to have a greater familiarity with the characteristics and needs of gifted children than other educators. As this project did not collect any information on gifted expertise, there was no way to discern the prior depth of participant understanding. Variances in audience composition may influence recommendations.

## Potential Implications

Feedback received to date indicates *The Heart of EQ* professional learning experience has the potential to increase educator and parent capacity to support gifted student emotional development. In the interim, following are some researcher perceived potential positive outcomes for further investigation:

- Enhanced ability to discern among executive functioning skill deficits, overexcitabilities or OEs, potential mental health issues and gaps in student emotional skills, which may be contributing to behavioral and academic challenges.
- Increased awareness of personal biases.
- Improved communication around student affective growth opportunities.
- Integration of mini EQ lessons into flexible instructional periods.
- More EQ tools and strategies to grow stronger teacher, student and parent relationships.
- Greater capacity to navigate conflict and reduced relational aggression.

Next, I will be working with a bilingual colleague to translate of *The Heart of EQ* into Spanish. Shortly after, we will pilot the session with bilingual parents at a school where the session was previously delivered in English. Prior participants will be present to support with interpretation as may be helpful.

## Conclusion

I was truly riveted by the information you presented to us on Friday. I have been pondering many of the insights and research you provided so that I can better inform my own practice as well as that of my teaching staff. Thank you, thank you! You were a breath of fresh air. I hope that we can continue our partnership towards greater understanding of life as a gifted individual.

(professional development coordinator at a gifted school, January 10, 2017)

This unsolicited letter of gratitude came from an educator who had attended *The Heart of EQ* training the week prior. This gifted expert has also worked in the field for about a decade and has attended many gifted conferences and workshops, which lends credibility. Below are some similar handwritten notes on the bottom of surveys that provide insight into the potential of this professional development module:

- “A very good talk and I am thankful I came. It has helped fill my parenting toolbox and enhanced understanding of giftedness.”
- “Love your energy and your speaking so naturally.”
- “I found your presentation enjoyable and encouraging.”
- “Fantastic presentation, well done.”
- “You are an amazing source of knowledge and practical experience! Thank you!”
- “This was wonderful!”
- “Loved it! You are so passionate about what you do and such an incredible resource!”

In sum, participants perceive *The Heart of EQ* professional development module positively as demonstrated by the overall session ratings. In addition, all but two participants listed helpful takeaways from the session. The two who left the first question blank did score the session at a 5, the highest rating on the Likert scale. Sadly, EQ continues to decline globally with marked drops in the skills of navigating emotions, empathy and intrinsic motivation (Freedman, 2016). Given the impact emotional intelligence has on health and performance (Freedman, 2016), supporting student emotional development through evidence-based practices is a moral imperative.

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## Appendix A

### Definitions of Emotional Skills Comprised within the Construct of Emotional Intelligence

- **Emotional Literacy** - Identifying and appropriately expressing feelings
- **Recognize Patterns** - Awareness of habitual reactions
- **Navigate Emotions** - Accessing the data and wisdom feelings provide to inform decision making
- **Intrinsic Motivation** - Gaining energy from personal values and commitments versus being driven by others
- **Optimism** - Taking a perspective of choice and opportunity
- **Consequential Thinking** - Assessing short and long-term costs and benefits of choices

- **Empathy** - Recognizing and appropriately responding to others' emotions
- **Pursue Noble Goals** - connecting daily choices with your deep sense of purpose
- (Six Seconds, 2016)

### Appendix B

Please circle all that apply. I am a:

Student   Parent   Teacher   Administrator   Counselor   Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate this session on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest:

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Please list the 3 biggest takeaways:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What 2 ideas / concepts are you curious to learn more about?

- 1.
- 2.

If you could change 1 thing about the session, what would it be?

- 1.

### Author

Kate Bachtel graduated with an Education Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction with a Specialization in Gifted Education from the Department of Teaching and Learning Sciences, Paul Michalec, Advisor, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver. Currently, Dr. Bachtel serves as Board President of Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) and Founder and Lead Learner at SoulSpark Learning, Boulder, Colorado.



## **Discovering the Impact of the Kingore Observation Inventory on the Referral of Gifted Students to an Enrichment Program**

Sydney S. Haugland

### **Abstract**

As a change agent, my hope is to bring awareness and research-based approaches to meeting the needs of gifted learners in schools. The purpose of this action research was to discover how the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI) influenced teacher referrals for an after-school Gifted and Talented Education Program (GATE; Kingore, 2001). Teachers took part in professional development of the KOI and learned about descriptors for gifted learners. The KOI tool provided indicators for classroom teachers to utilize when observing learners in the classroom and ultimately, making referrals of gifted learners for a GATE program. This research aimed to discover how teachers' instructional practices were impacted after the use of the KOI tool. Data collection consisted of interviews, reflective journaling, and surveys. The mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014) aimed to gather qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the study. The data collected was analyzed and several findings emerged. Two noteworthy findings from the use of the KOI tool were an increase in teacher participation in the referral process and educator reflection about beliefs of gifted learners. Additional conclusions and recommendations were identified to continue awareness and instructional support for gifted learners.

**Keywords:** professional development, KOI, qualitative data, GATE

The study presented was a synopsis of a long-term doctoral research project. This article included a background overview of the study, a statement of problem, introduction to the Kingore Observation tool, data

collection, and review of findings. For purposes of this study, and to preserve the privacy of participants, administration, families, and students of the school, the school will be referred to as Willow Elementary.

## **Overview**

Identification of gifted and talented students presents a conceptual and practical challenge for educators. On the one hand, giftedness can be represented by potential, a difficult trait to measure reliably given the multifaceted approach to identification supported by many gifted programs, which may or may not accurately measure potential (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 2004). On the other hand, some behaviors indicative of potential, especially in academic areas, may only develop if students are provided with adequate experiences and advanced instruction (Renzulli, 1990; Sulak, 2014).

With diverse learners in the classroom, educators are charged with the task of meeting all these needs often in the same classroom or building. Gifted and talented programming is a way gifted students, and those demonstrating gifted potential, can receive challenge, enrichment, and acceleration in order to make continuous progress (NAGC, 2016). Unfortunately, South Dakota school districts do not receive state funding for gifted education (Davidson Institute, 2016). South Dakota does not require gifted education or a gifted education program for learners throughout the school year (Davidson Institute, 2016). Gifted education funding and programming is left up to the individual school districts (NAGC, 2016). Therefore, South Dakota school districts are left to determine what programs they value and are willing to fund. Without a required gifted and talented program for schools, many students may be unable to have their needs properly met in the regular classroom (Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2015). This is a concern for students who are gifted and those who have potential as their ability to make continuous progress is at risk. Anderson (2015) revealed, "Since the state eliminated a funding match in 1995, more than 100 school districts have eliminated their program. Just 21 programs remain in South Dakota

for gifted and talented” (*Argus Leader*, 2015). In addition, the state of South Dakota does not have a definition for gifted learners or a set process to identify learners for those who have a gifted program (Davidson Institute, 2016). Even if individual schools in South Dakota are able to fund a gifted and talented program, the identification process is still uncertain due to the fact that there is not a state-wide gifted identification procedure (Davidson Institute, 2016).

At the beginning of the study, I took an in-depth look into the identification process for one elementary school in South Dakota. At Willow Elementary, there were only three grade levels, third through fifth. Learners who were gifted or students with potential were not identified for a specific learning plan, such as an *advanced learning plan* (ALP) or a gifted program (Medina, 2016). The school did not have a gifted and talented program for students to receive services during the day. According to Mr. Cooper at Willow Elementary, teachers did their best in the classroom to differentiate the curriculum for all learners. In 2013, teachers expressed a desire for students who were gifted and showed gifted potential to receive enrichment and extensions at Willow Elementary. After conversations with the principal, they discussed funding possibilities and ideas on how to introduce a GATE program into the community. Willow Elementary reached out to a local public education foundation seeking funding through grants to support an afterschool GATE program for learners who exhibited gifted characteristics and traits. The public foundation agreed and funding started in 2014.

The goal for the program was to provide students who were gifted with learning opportunities beyond the classroom curriculum in collaboration with peers and adults in the school and community. However, teachers and the previous GATE director wondered if their original goal and program reached all students who were gifted learners. According to the principal, the GATE program, which was in its fourth year, had a relatively successful start. In the past four years, the principal and the GATE director utilized Willow’s state assessment data as the primary measure for

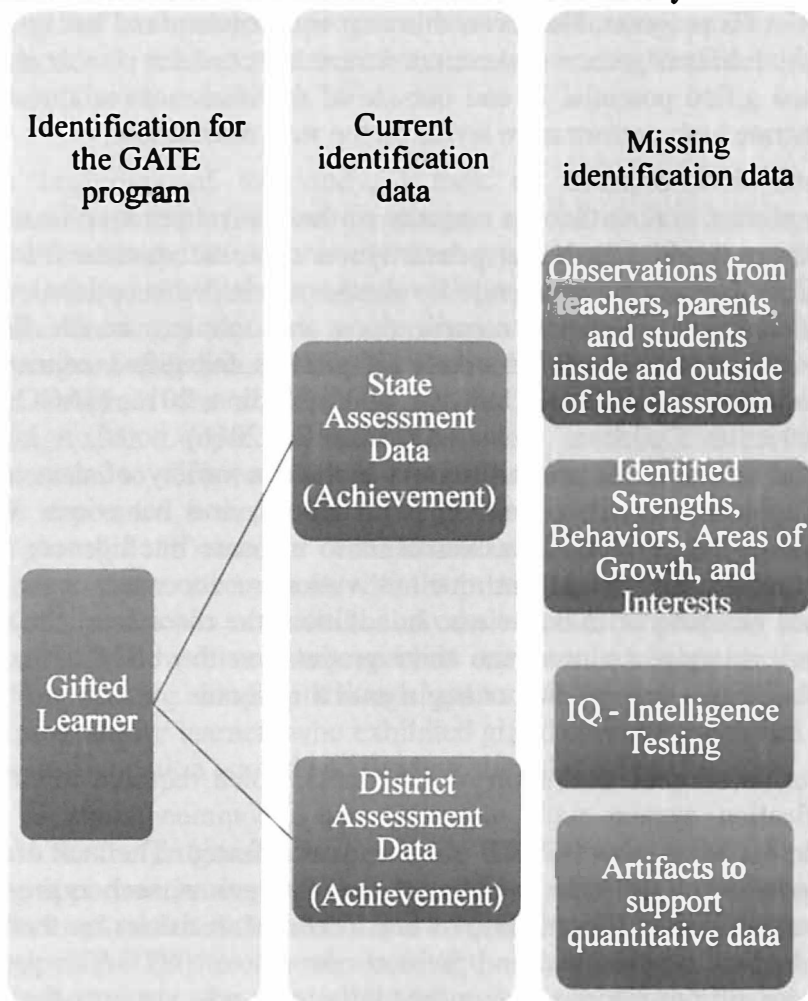
referring students to the GATE program. Together they created the referral list and confirmed with the teachers their proposed selections. Initially, teachers were asked to review their baseline classroom assessments in conjunction with the proposed selection list to confirm student placements in the GATE program. However, this step was not required nor enforced. Additional referral measures were not utilized to consider if other students exhibited gifted potential in and outside of the classroom whom did not demonstrate high performance levels on the state assessment.

It is important to note that the majority of the referral process for students into this program was based primarily on quantitative data from state mandated assessments and grade-level assessments with optional teacher recommendations. National organizations and scholars in the field of gifted education recommend a referral process for gifted education to include a body of evidence (Johnsen, 2005; Medina, 2016; NAGC, 2016; & Plucker & Callahan, 2014). As Medina (2016) noted, a body of evidence in a referral process should include a variety of data sources including achievement, cognitive, observations, and behaviors. Willow Elementary did not conduct assessments to measure intelligence, require parent and teacher input, determine motivation, or document observations of gifted characteristics/behaviors. In addition, the director of the GATE program struggled to nominate third graders, as the body of evidence (especially state testing) did not begin until third grade.

Without an adopted definition of giftedness, nor a required referral and identification system with research-based recommendations in South Dakota, the after-school GATE program was affected. The lack of policy and agreement at the state level forced many programs, such as the GATE program at Willow Elementary, to make referral decisions on their own. According to the principal and previous director of the GATE program, educators did not use qualitative data because it was not introduced as a necessary step in the referral process. However, after speaking with the principal and former director of the GATE program, there were problems in the identification process due to the lack of qualitative data collected.

The following chart illustrates the current referral measures and the elements that were missing in the referral process.

### Overview of the Referral Process at Willow Elementary



Without the qualitative data, the third grade referrals were limited, learner strengths and needs were not identified, and student interests were not matched to GATE sessions for the purpose of engagement and motivation

(Medina, 2016). With a limited body of evidence to understand each learner's strengths and needs, lesson planning and developing instructional strategies to meet the needs of learners could be difficult (Medina, 2016). In addition to a comprehensive identification process, appropriately matching the learners with appropriate programming needs was a problem.

### **Statement of Problem**

At Willow Elementary, the referral process for a GATE program was limited, weak in research-based approaches, and lacked necessary information to make programming decisions. Teachers wanted to support learners who were gifted and those who showed potential in gifted characteristics through an afterschool GATE program. However, the referral system was inadequate to do so. In order to determine who needs gifted programming, a comprehensive body of evidence is necessary (Medina, 2016). As Medina (2016) noted, "A body of evidence should consist of quantitative and qualitative measures to determine if a student meets the criteria for gifted identification and to build a student profile of strengths and interests" (p. 6). Students should be identified using multiple pathways and qualitative and quantitative data must be considered in order to create a learner profile to support gifted identification. There are limitations to only using one measure for the referral process (Johnsen, 2005). Medina (2016) pointed out, "Although the criteria for identification may be met by cognitive assessment data, a comprehensive body of evidence is still collected and examined to determine a student's strength area, affective needs and appropriate programming options" (p. 6).

Classroom teachers, parents, and students should be involved in collecting a body of evidence (Medina, 2016). The body of evidence would ideally showcase how students are interacting with classroom material, people, and the outside world building a portfolio of evidence (NAGC, 2016). The qualitative data in the portfolio would capture their personal characteristics, interests, strengths, and areas of growth and provide in-depth insights that can enhance and build upon the state assessment numbers (Medina, 2016). The classroom teacher has the ability to observe

students for gifted characteristics. In order for a teacher to make observations about whether a child is gifted, showing high-abilities, or potential giftedness, it would be essential for teachers to use specified, consistent criteria throughout the school, a school district, and state (Purcell and Eckert, 2006). Teacher observations can provide a narrative to include in a learner's portfolio to explain the learner's characteristics in conjunction with quantitative data from classroom and state mandated assessments. These portfolios would help confirm and validate the referral lists and support the need for students to be part of an afterschool GATE program. When qualitative data is not included as part of the referral and selection process for the GATE program, educators may miss the evidence needed to identify a student and his or her strength area(s) (Medina, 2016). When this occurs there is a missed opportunity to inform decisions about appropriate programming services.

### Research Questions

After speaking with the previous director of the GATE program and the principal of the elementary school, Willow, I identified problems in the referral process and recommended making adjustments and changes, specifically regarding the addition of a qualitative measure. The purpose of this study was to discover how the use of an observational tool could influence teacher referrals for the GATE program. The teachers in Willow Elementary in South Dakota participated in a study aimed to answer the following research question and sub-question:

- 1) *How does use of the KOI influence teacher referrals for a GATE program?*
  - a) *How does use of the KOI influence teacher instructional practices for gifted learners?*

In partnership with my principal at Willow Elementary, I introduced a qualitative measure, an observation tool for teachers to collect data in the classroom and to provide a common language in the building for educators to describe gifted characteristics. The qualitative measure this action

research utilized was the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI), a tool designed by and named for Dr. Bertie Kingore (2001). This tool equips teachers with a common language to identify gifted characteristics and behaviors in learners. The KOI categories are as follows: advanced language, analytical thinking, meaning motivation, perspective, sense of humor, sensitivity, and accelerated learning. The categories Kingore identified align with the common characteristics of gifted learners from the NAGC (2016) and those of the National Society of Gifted and Talented, NSGT, (2016). These categories can help teachers identify gifted potential in the classroom and can support appropriate programming for a gifted learner.

### **Kingore Observation Inventory**

The Kingore Observation Inventory, KOI, (Kingore, 2001) was designed to observe learners over a period of time. “The administration of the Kingore Observation Inventory is not dependent upon the use of trained testing specialists or school psychologists; rather, it is a practitioner’s instrument designed for the classroom teacher” (Vaughn-Neely, 1994, p. 18). The KOI is a screener, which allows teachers to observe students over a period of time and notice patterns in specified categories that help describe a gifted learner (Kingore, 2001). The purpose and objectives of the KOI are:

1. To enrich classroom learning environments in order to uplift the level of thinking, production, and challenge for all students;
2. To assess all students’ learning needs and responses so that the most appropriate levels and types of differentiation are immediately implemented;
3. To serve as one component in the identification of students for whom the regular curriculum is not sufficiently challenging and unlikely to promote high levels of learning, e.g. advanced and/or potentially gifted students; and
4. To provide a standard for teachers’ analytical observations to document insights about their students to other educators.



Kingore (2001) noted that the KOI tool is a guide for educators to observe the strengths, talents, and interests of all children in order to recognize student-learning needs. The KOI instrument fosters common language and an economical process for teachers to recognize specific, observable characteristics of giftedness and high aptitude in the classroom and throughout the building (Kingore, 2001). As noted by Kingore, "It supplies a structure to guide educators' deeper understanding of giftedness, high-ability, advanced potential, and what emerging talents actually look and sounds like in learning environments" (Kingore, 2001, p. 2).

The KOI is not a norm-referenced observation tool and cannot be used to compare students to other students to determine gifted identification, as it is not standardized (Eickhoff, 2015). The KOI can provide valuable information in conjunction with other data sources to support programming for a gifted learner, but it should be clearly noted that the KOI is not "qualifying data for identification," in many states, such as the state of Colorado" (Medina, 2016, p. 11). For purposes of this study, the KOI was used as a qualitative data source, locally normed, in conjunction with other data sources to determine a talent pool during the referral process for an after-school GATE program. Students in this study were not formally identified as a gifted learner, but referred as a learner with gifted potential to an after-school GATE program.

### **Data Collection**

The research study began in the Fall of 2016 with an elementary staff comprising of third through fifth grade certified classroom teachers. During the workweek at the start of the new school year, all teachers learned about the voluntary study and were provided with consent forms. Teachers were instructed to complete the consent forms, if they were interested in the study, and turn them into the mailroom in a sealed envelope.

Thirty-five certified staff members were asked to participate in a voluntary study to gather data around gifted learners. Twenty-two out of the 35 staff

members agreed to participate. All 22 participants in the study were female. When compared to the demographics of the staff, 1 out of 35 certified staff members were male. The demographic response rate percentages collected were extremely close to the actual population demographic percentage breakdowns, and therefore, the demographic response rate accurately represented the population and making adjustments for sample nonresponse and sample frame deficiencies was not necessary nor justified.

After the signed consent forms were collected, teachers were emailed a link to a digital survey through the online survey system, Qualtrics. The pre-survey period lasted two weeks. Once the survey was completed, the professional development training on the KOI began. Per the principal's request, all teachers, whether part of the study or not, were asked to participate in the professional development and implement the KOI survey in their classrooms. Attendance was taken during the professional development, and any teacher not present received the professional development presentation and materials. I was available if any teacher had questions or concerns. All participants in the study were in attendance at the training. Each teacher received a copy of the KOI form and the power point slideshow handouts. As discussed in the professional development section of this paper, once school began, educators were asked to make observations in their classroom using the KOI tool in order to support the referral process for the after-school GATE program.

In order to monitor the professional development implementation, grade-level meetings were scheduled and journal entries were collected every two weeks during the six-week implementation. The grade-level meetings and journal entries provided documentation and conversations to support teacher understanding and use of the KOI. These qualitative measures also monitored change in teachers' beliefs and understanding of gifted traits. Therefore, in September and October, two grade-level meetings were scheduled and two anonymous journal entries were provided in school-mailboxes and electronically via email. The researcher facilitated

the grade-level meetings. The journal entries were self-administered and turned in at a central location, the mailroom. The entries asked participants to reflect on three ideas: please describe a successful experience with the KOI; please describe a challenging experience with the KOI; and available to space to ask questions and make comments. Towards the end of the study, in early November, the post-survey was emailed to participants with a digital link, and participants were asked to make GATE referrals. Teachers were asked to utilize the state assessment and classroom assessment data, achievement tests, and the observations made with the KOI.

After the post-surveys were completed, three, randomly selected interviews were conducted. The interviews gathered teacher perspective and experiences with the KOI. The purpose of each interview was to understand change in the referral process as well as any changes in teachers' beliefs and practices. The pre- and post-surveys, along with the journal entries and interviews, were analyzed together in order to determine how the use of the KOI influenced teachers in the referral process for the GATE program, and the instructional work in the classroom.

### **Data Interpretations and Findings**

After all data was collected, triangulation of survey results, journal entries, and interviews began. Using the software, NVivo (2017), to import transcribed journal entries, interviews, and the open-ended response statements, I ran the word frequency query and nodes process using all three sources of data. The survey analysis was used to support or contradict any of the themes generated from the themes developed in NVivo. The goal of triangulation was to identify any consistencies or trends, as well as any inconsistencies, amongst all three data sources (Creswell, 2014). In response to research question one (*How does the use of the KOI influence teacher referrals for a GATE program?*) it was determined that the use of the KOI influenced teacher referrals in three ways.

**Influence One:** In the post-survey, journal entries, and interviews, an increase in teachers' knowledge and understanding of gifted characteristics cut across all three data sources. For example, post-survey question ten showed participant responses increased from 67% (combined somewhat agree and strongly agree) to 100% of participants somewhat agreeing and strongly agreeing that they could describe observed-work in the classroom using KOI descriptors. Journal responses and interviews confirmed teachers' could use gifted descriptors to describe artifacts and make observations of students. The journal entries and interviews revealed classroom teachers began to observe students with analytical thinking in math, meaning motivation around leaves and ecology, and accelerated learning in reading. In addition, one participant mentioned the KOI and professional development training provided her with gifted descriptors she was not aware of. This increase in knowledge around gifted descriptors could be attributed to the use of the KOI and the professional development training. Further research is recommended.

**Influence Two:** The triangulation of the post-survey, journal entries, and interviews confirmed that the use of the KOI influenced teacher referrals because educators were able to use consistent, identified criteria when making observations. This was most evident in the post-survey open-ended response question where participants were asked to describe the characteristics of a gifted learner. Teachers responded with phrases and words that aligned with other teachers and with the KOI. The participants described that a gifted learner may have the following traits: extended vocabulary, advanced writing (advanced language indicator); think "outside the box," curious, engaged in learning, sensitive to the world around them (perspective and meaning motivation indicators); ability to problem solve, see and solve problems in a unique way (analytical thinking indicator); advanced or adult humor, and sensitivity to peers (humor and sensitivity indicators) (KOI, 2001). In addition, these same descriptions were documented in journal entries and in interviews. The interviews provided similar findings. All three interviewees mentioned the KOI was a consistent way to gather information and record names of

students who demonstrated a gifted characteristic like humor, sensitivity, advanced language, and accelerated learning. One of the interviewees was a newly hired educator and two of the interviewees were more experienced and seasoned teachers. The newly hired educator commented that the KOI provided her with a clear and easy-tool to help make observations as a new teacher. The experienced teachers mentioned that although they had been in education for a while, the KOI provided a helpful reminder, guide, and consistent tool for all educators in the building to get on the same page. All three data sources for this study identified the threads of consistency, alignment, and the usefulness of the KOI for making observations. It would be beneficial for educators to continue the implementation of the KOI and locally-norm the KOI to develop consistent scoring and observations for yearly referrals.

Influence Three: The post-survey, journal entries, and the interviews confirmed that there was active participation by educators for the purposes of referring learners to the GATE program. The pre- and post-survey question one asked participants if they participated in recommending learners for the GATE program. There was an increase in participation responses from 56%, who strongly agreed, to 72% strongly agreeing, and 16% somewhat agreeing that they participated in the referral process. Interview question two asked participants to compare their data collection process from previous years to this year. Educators described that the KOI allowed them to look at students in a different way with a specific set of criteria. The educators explained how they used observations to confirm the state testing results. Continued implementation of the KOI is warranted to engage teachers in the referral process.

There were consistent findings when analyzing all three data sources in response to the first research sub-question (*How does the use of the KOI influence teachers' instructional practices?*) The use of the KOI did not influence teachers' instructional practices. The eighteenth question on the post-survey asked participants to determine if the KOI supported their instructional strategies. The post-survey identified 35% of participants

strongly agree, 35% of participants somewhat agree, and 29% of participants were undecided. In addition, question 13 on the post-survey asked participants to reflect on the statement: *I am comfortable meeting the needs of my gifted learners*. The post-survey identified 11% strongly agree, 59% somewhat agree, 11% were undecided, and 18% somewhat disagree. The post-survey results indicated little influence on teacher's instructional practices.

In addition, the interviewees were all asked to describe the impact of the KOI on their instructional practices in the classroom. All three interviewees expressed that little changed in their classrooms after the KOI training. One interviewee noted the KOI confirmed her beliefs about her gifted students with high analytical thinking and accelerated learning in math, but the level or pace of instruction in math did not change (Assouline et. al., 2015). She was unable to provide time and appropriate resources during her day to specifically meet the needs of those learners. Another teacher noted she did not know the resources or ways to extend lessons for her gifted students, but she knew that more worksheets were not adequate to meet their needs. The journal entries confirmed that meeting the needs of gifted learners was a challenge for teachers with all the required curriculum, progress monitoring, and district mandates on their plates. Teachers expressed the need to support their gifted learners but that they were unsure how to do so. Further support and questioning is needed at Willow Elementary to understand how teachers can be supported and provided with the appropriate resources to instructionally meet the needs of their gifted learners.

### **Summary and Interpretation of Research Question One**

The main goal of this study was to discover how the use of the KOI might influence teacher referrals to the GATE program, as well as their instructional practices in the classroom. Using change theories from Hooks (2010), Fullan (2006), and Shields (2013), as a lens to review the data, it was clear that the KOI initiated change in the GATE program referral process. In response to research question one (How did the use of

the KOI influence teachers in the referral process?), two major findings were identified: educators' participation in the referral process increased and educators spent time in reflection about beliefs of a gifted learner.

**Participation Increase.** To begin with, surveys, journal entries, and interviews revealed an increase in teacher participation. The use of the KOI led to 100% teacher participation in referring learners to the GATE program in the fall of 2016. This year, teachers generated the list of GATE participants from their observations and state and classroom assessments. In the past, the GATE director and the principal generated the list. In interviews and journal entries, teachers expressed an awareness of the process and criteria to refer learners to the GATE program, including the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The journal entries showed that awareness of required criteria was new information for teachers and helped in the process of making observations and referrals. The data gathered from the surveys, interviews, and journal entries described teachers' use of multiple measures to confirm students they were referring to the GATE program. Best practice in the identification of gifted learners recommends a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures to support screening and identification (Purcell & Eckert, 2006). "Non-test assessments are often criticized for lack of objectivity, but careful training of raters can mitigate bias and, when used with other instruments, they can provide valuable insights into student performance and potential in areas not assessed by standardized tests" (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2013, p. 86). After professional development on the KOI, the addition of the KOI qualitative data was added to the referral process. Teacher interviews indicated that referrals in previous years did not include multiple measures consisting of qualitative and quantitative data. In contrast, the findings from this study showed that teachers were actively using the KOI to make observations in the classroom. The addition of teacher observations made it possible for educators to become involved in the referral process.

Developing quality referral systems can help meet the needs of gifted learners (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2013). The addition of teacher

observations to the referral process ignited many conversations among teachers and opened the door for students who may not have been identified in the past based on quantitative data alone. For example, one teacher mentioned recommending a learner who was previously misdiagnosed and misunderstood due to his behaviors in class. As she reviewed his assessment data, made observations in the classroom, and collected artifacts in and outside of the classroom, she analyzed the multiple sources to determine her student had gifted potential and would benefit from the after-school GATE program. She shared her observations and data collection process in grade-level meetings during the study. Her stories were powerful and provided real life examples of identifying a gifted learner for her teammates. As teachers shared their stories about how they made observations and collected artifacts to aid in the referral process, teachers had the opportunity to listen and gain insights. In order for change to continue, these conversations, observations, and participation of teacher in the referral process must continue.

**Educator Beliefs.** The use of the KOI influenced teacher beliefs and understandings of gifted learners. This critical finding identified change in mindsets around criteria describing gifted learners and ultimately a change in recommending learners during the referral process. As noted in journal entries and interviews, the elements of the KOI introduced gifted characteristics to teachers that were not previously valued or utilized when defining a gifted learner (KOI, 2001). After the professional development training, teachers could articulate a new understanding of gifted learner profiles. The journal entries and interviews uncovered the previous beliefs of teachers that gifted learners had only one learner profile, an accelerated learner with strong academic performance and little behavior disruption. At the end of the study, teachers were able to articulate a broader understanding of gifted learners by describing them as learners who may be twice-exceptional, sensitive, humorous, having advanced language, meaning motivation, and may have disruptive behaviors. During grade-level meetings, teachers shared their experiences making observations of gifted learners in the classroom. These conversations, in addition to the



professional development information, provided an opportunity for educators to learn from one another and gain new understanding.

### **Summary and Interpretation of the Research Sub-Question**

In response to the research sub-question (*How did the use of the KOI influence instructional practices for gifted learners?*), no influences were identified. When teachers were interviewed and asked to describe how the use of the KOI influenced their instruction, teachers were unable to identify any changes to their practices. Although the use of the KOI helped teachers select appropriate gifted characteristics to describe their learners, the teachers were unable to use these characteristics to articulate how their instruction would change for gifted learners. The participants in the interviews expressed their need to differentiate but were also unsure how to do so and with what resources. In conclusion, the interviews revealed a need for awareness of appropriate instructional practices in the classroom for gifted learners.

As the results of this study indicated, teachers gained knowledge around a common tool to gather observational data. Teachers were able to identify gifted characteristics in their learners using seven criteria from the KOI. However, the use of the KOI tool did not influence instructional practices, which may ultimately result in little to no impact for gifted and talented learners in the classroom. As a researcher who is passionate about this population, I want to make a difference in how educators are meeting the needs of gifted learners. The next steps will be to meet with the principal to share the surveys, journal entries, and interview findings with the purpose of identifying opportunities for professional development and potential cooperative learning groups within the school for instructional supporting gifted and talented learners. At Willow Elementary, there is room to grow in support of our gifted learners.

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## **Should Character Education Make a Comeback in Public Education?**

Jess DeLallo

### **Abstract**

During the mid-1990s, a push to remove character education from public education was made, which seemed to have led to a dearth in the manners and work ethics that many young people under the age of 30 have today. After interviewing people in both the education and business fields, it has become apparent that the younger generation may be lacking in the basic social niceties, such as common courtesy and manners, work ethics, and basic skills to be successful in the workplace. With this newfound knowledge, is it time for public education to bring character education back into the classroom?

**Keywords:** character education, entitlement, basic skills, work ethic

There is no doubt that each generation comes with its own set of values, morals, and defining traits, while the previous generations pass judgement (good/bad/indifferent) upon them for their decisions—from the “Greatest Generation” (WWII), the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Next and Generation Y, and the Millennials. It would be difficult to say that any one generation was patently better than another (indeed, each generation has its pros and cons); however, there seems to be an alarming trend among our Millennials and Generation Ys—the trend toward entitlement and a lack of work ethic. Indeed, many from the business and educational sectors complain that our youth want to be rewarded for “doing their jobs”, while the bare minimum is all that can be expected of some people; the lack of pride in a job well-done seems to be a thing of the past. While there have been many articles and books written about this “crisis,” educators must ask, “how can we try to overcome this?”

In the mid-1990s there was a big push from parents to get “character education” out of public schools. Many parents felt that it was the right and responsibility of the family to provide character education, which may or may not have any religious overtones attached. It was suddenly seen as inappropriate for schools to help teach students to be “decent”, “hard-working”, and “socially competent” because of the question that kept arising—“*who* is determining what it *means* to be a ‘decent, hardworking, and socially competent’ person?” Is it possible that, due to this lack of consistent “training” for students of what is expected of a respectful, hard-working American, that the public school system has somehow created the “entitled generation”? According to Ventriglio and Bhugra (2015), “Each generation carries with it its own values, norms and expectations. These are formed by a number of factors, including social and cultural factors. These factors influence patterns of child rearing and also how an individual’s world view is shaped,” (p. 1). Therefore, if society has “backed off” what traditional childrearing should and should not include (since it is a family’s right to choose which values they instill in their children), where does the role of public education fit in? It is all fine and well to say that a family has the right to instill whichever values they want to on their children, but, when those children enter the workplace without manners, a strong work ethic and the feeling of entitlement that makes many employers furious, whose fault is it then? How is America supposed to compete internationally when employers cannot even rely upon the current/next work force to behave properly in their business world? Sure, American children are learning a plethora of skills (especially technology) that the last generation (just 10 years before) only scratched the surface of, but, if they are unable to work with their peers (who may range in age from 18-65+), how useful is this to employers?

According to Miller and Konopaske (2013), “managers need to understand how certain dispositional factors influence the degree to which employees perceive that they are entitled to rewards that at times are inconsistent with their contribution to the organization,” (p. 808). Is this to suggest that the marketplace needs to adapt to provide employees with unwarranted

rewards because they *want* them? How will this affect the bottom line over time? The United States has become more and more inefficient at business as outsourcing has become the norm in society (cf. any of the literature on Globalization in the last 15 years)—how will the US be able to compete if corporations are investing more money for less work because their workforce feels that they deserve “something for nothing”? Indeed, Brummel and Parker (2015) made a convincing argument delineating between obligation and entitlement in terms of what is “owed” and what is “deserved”, and the *perception* that something is owed (i.e. praise, bonuses, special recognition) for providing the basic services of a job can lead to resentment on both sides (that is, those who want to receive it, but do not, as well as those who feel that they must provide it when it has not been earned). Of course, the implications of entitlement and a lack of work ethic reach beyond the workplace—what happens when these students reach college, where students (who are often used to being coddled) are now paying for their educational services (see Boswell, 2012)? How will the legal system handle young adults who have never been held accountable for anything before? Is it fair to hold someone to the same standards of others when they genuinely do not feel that they have done something “wrong”?

It is obvious that there is a problem if/when a large population (i.e. the *perception* of an entire generation) has little work ethic, sense of accountability, and feels entitled to anything and everything that they want. What, then, is the solution? Just as with any large-scale societal issue, there is no one, easy answer. First, is there *really* a problem with entitlement and a lack of work ethic today? Or, has the bad behavior of a few tainted the perceptions of all? Is a shift in what constitutes “an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay” really a crisis, or is it just a shift in values? If the youth of today do not hold the same work ethic of those who came before them, does this really mean that the work cannot be done (albeit differently)? If the evidence shows that there truly is a phenomenological crisis of entitlement, what can be done? Perhaps the answer to assuaging the problem could be solved by bringing back a

program that seemed to have positive results in the past—character education. Yes, the original objections still stand—who decides what morals and/or ethics a child should be taught? Should this not be a family decision? How about a modified program? Is it still objectionable if the character education being taught in schools focus on a set curriculum, which included: perseverance, manners, the meaning of hard work, conflict management, etc.? Are these characteristics so questionable? Would this type of a curriculum be less objectionable if it were to be called something other than “character education”? How could reintroducing these (and other) basics into character education lessen the perception of entitlement in the current generation? Is it even worth talking about?

### **Methodology**

In order to investigate the issue of entitlement and the role of character education, this study took a phenomenological viewpoint and interviewed a range of candidates from K-12 educators, business professionals, community members, etc. Interviewees included representatives from public schools, community colleges, trade school instructors, members from the healthcare industry, hospitality and consumer services industries, journalism, etc. All those interviewed had either a leadership or management role in their respective fields for 10-30 years. In this 16 question structured interview (see Appendix A for the full interview protocol), the first question this study addressed was whether “Is there an actual phenomenon that people are experiencing?” Next, interview candidates explained, from their own points of view, what used to take place versus what is happening now (in terms of manners, work ethic, etc.), what their views on character education are, and what they think that it should include, etc.

In order to facilitate this study, candidates were chosen based on their role (i.e. educator, businessperson, etc.) and their willingness to support educational research. All interviewees provided informed consent, and their interviews were audio recorded. After the interviews were

conducted, the researcher transcribed the interviews, and analyzed the data using open, axial and selective coding, and the data were analyzed as to whether this small sample population thought that character education should be reintroduced into education in order to reduce the entitlement seen in the Millennial generation or not?

## Findings

According to the data collected during the interviews, it was clear that there *was* evidence that young people today (i.e. under the age of 30) lack basic skills, manners, work ethic, and who seem to have an “entitled” mentality. According to Ross (interview, January 1, 2016), “I don’t think that it is intentional. I think that it can be attributed to the way that they were raised, or the lack of how they were raised.” Although the sample for this study was small, several themes and codes presented themselves, which formed the basis of the findings for this study. The overarching themes that came out in the interviews were that: (a) people under the age of 30, for the most part, do not have the same work ethic as their colleagues over the age of 30; (b) people under the age of 30 lack basic manners, common courtesy and basic skills needed in the work place (specifically reading, writing and arithmetic skills); (c) people under the age of 30 often feel that they are “owed” something whether they have “earned” it or not; (d) there was a sense from those interviewed that people under the age of 30, who seem to be lacking in basic manners and work ethic, are not necessarily to blame—there has clearly been a shift in expectations that parents have placed upon their children, and, in turn, that society has placed on parents for instilling certain characteristics in their children; (e) the shift in attitudes and skills around manners, work ethic and basic skills is not a shift that has benefited society as a whole; (f) although the newest generation to enter the workforce is dreadfully unprepared for what employers need (and want), all hope is not lost for this generation—they still have the ability to effect great change on society; and, (g) if public schools were to bring back character education in order to bridge the gap that the current generation has in terms of manners, work ethic, and basic skills, it would greatly benefit the students



and the community at large (in terms of a future work force).

### **Discussion and Reflections**

First, it is important to note that the data for this study was based on a small sample and more research will need to be done before school districts, and possibly state legislatures, can begin the discussion of reinstituting character education back into the public school curriculum. The larger the follow up study's sample population, the greater the chances of the study could actually affect change. That being said, it was clear from the data collected that there was a very real problem that needed to be addressed—a large population of the generation under the age of 30 lack the skills, manners and work ethic that would allow them to be successful after high school in college and/or career. Therefore, it is important that this evidence be used by policy makers in order to address the cause and effects of this unfortunate trend. According to White, these shifts in expectations of our youth...

“... have harmed our society as a whole. The work force has been very much reduced. As a fact, we are not as productive as we used to be. [...] If something doesn't change, it is going to have a bigger impact on society than it already has had right now. [...] Young people are the backbone, the strength and the energy of America. If they are not in the position to pick up the ball and lead the charge, then there is no hope.” (Interview, January 1, 2016)

What with America's next steps be if a consistent workforce cannot be produced?

It was pretty horrifying to think that an entire generation has the possibility of “having no hope” at effecting positive change on society unless something was done to ameliorate a bad situation that, according to participants, came about from poor, inconsistent, and ineffective parenting. Of course, any time an entity comes out and says that there is a national crisis due to poor parenting, there is going to be an immediate and strong backlash from parents who would argue that they are “doing the

best that they can” and “how dare [said entity] make an evaluation of individual parenting?!” Which, on the one hand, is a very valid point. When does the right of the parent to instill (or not instill) certain characteristics, ethics and/or morals need to be usurped by governmental agencies (such as public education) in order to ensure that the future of this country will be up to the task of running the country in a few short years? Of course, these ponderings are a little outside the scope of this study, but, they raise some important questions—however, are *these* questions *the* questions that are raised at the possibility of reintroducing character education into public schools? Perhaps they are the questions that need to be asked when arguing *against* the reintroduction of character education? That is, can we really afford *not* to have this discussion?

According to participants, if character education were to be reintroduced into public schools, the focus should be on common courtesy, manners, work ethic, basic skills (i.e. reading, writing, arithmetic), problem solving skills, reading and writing in cursive, polite conversation/communication with others, etc. Are *these* skills really so objectionable? If these skills were taught in public schools, would this really be usurping the rights of parents to instill ethics and morals into their children? What *valid* argument can be posed that could legitimately contend that these skills (no matter what educators call them) should *not* be taught in public schools? It is important to note that, while all participants agreed that these skills need to be taught to students, they did not all agree on character education as a whole. Indeed, White argued (interview, January 1, 2016), “I think that it is a sad day in our society when we are expecting other people in society to educate our children on how to have basic common courtesy”. That being said, it may be a sad day, but it also may also be imperative. Therefore, while educators may need to find a scientifically researched program that would allow them to teach these skills to all students (regardless of what the curriculum is called), this *is* a conversation that needs to take place. This is not the first time that teachers are being expected to “fix” a problem in society that could have been avoided by “better” parenting (i.e. look at the vicious notions of hatred that had to be

overcome by teachers who taught about cultural diversity in schools over the past 50 years). It is also not the first time that teachers will have to teach children how to behave more appropriately in society, but that is not to say that all children will come out of the school system as “the same” cookie-cutter children. Indeed, as DeManning so eloquently explained (interview, January 1, 2016), “the focus of any type of [character education] would be to develop the character of the individual so that they are a well-functioning member of society. Just recall that not everyone is going to be able to be put into a mold, and then become the same person—everyone has a different character, and different parts of their character need to be emphasized in order to be a well-functioning member of society.”

Therefore, it would be possible for teachers to introduce a curriculum into schools (regardless of the name), which focused on teaching students how to work hard, persevere, have manners and common courtesy, etc. without completely negating the impact of parents on their children. If teachers could work on teaching these students from a young age, and reinforcing these skills throughout their academic careers, perhaps students would be more ready to enter the workplace when it was time; a student’s ability to be deemed “college and career ready” should be based on more than just a grade point average, but also on tangible, work-related skills and social functions. As Wright explained (interview, January 1, 2016), “everyone wants to do the right thing, but how can they when they have no idea what the ‘right thing’ is?”

### **Conclusion**

According to the results of this small study, there is definitely a “crisis” in the current young generation—a large number of people under the age of 30 do not have manners, lack a strong work ethic, do not know common courtesy, and feel entitled to benefits and services that colleagues, employers, and teachers feel that they have not earned. Aside from these issues being very frustrating to employers and colleagues in the workplace, this is a potentially disastrous trait that the United States is

setting up for its future. People have to be taught how to behave properly within society—if parents are not providing the necessary training, then someone else needs to step in in order to ensure that America's youth is ready to perform the duties, tasks and jobs that are needed. If parents cannot provide the education that our youth need to be taught in order to be successful in school, career and life, then the schools need to pick up the slack, and teach the children the skills they need—this is what the educational system has always done. Whether the school system calls this curriculum “character education” or “basic life skills,” it is imperative that the youth of America be taught these skills so that America can remain competitive in the world economy going forward. America has already felt the pains of outsourcing due to cheaper labor in other countries with Globalization—the US cannot afford another outsourcing trend due to a lack of basic skills and social courtesies by the modern workforce. More research is needed in order to definitively conclude that the reintroduction of a character education curriculum could help to combat these alarming trends found by those interviewed for this study; there is, however, enough data to warrant a larger study that could really tease out the further implications of the lack of common courtesy, work ethic, and manners in our ever-growing global economy.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Protocol**

1. In your current position, what shifts in attitudes and skills (other than technology) have you seen in young people over the years?
2. To which factors do you think that these shifts can be attributed?
3. Do you think that these shifts have benefited our young people? How and why?
4. How important is it for employees (of any age) to have manners? Why?
5. What is a rough estimate of the number of students/employees over the age of 30 that you work with have manners? Why do you think that this is the case?
6. What is a rough estimate of the number of students/employees under the age of 30 that you work with have manners? Why do you think that this is the case?
7. How important is it for employees (of any age) to have a strong work ethic? Why?
8. What is a rough estimate of the number of students/employees over the age of 30 that you work with have a strong work ethic? Why do you think that this is the case?
9. What is a rough estimate of the number of students/employees under the age of 30 that you work with have a strong work ethic? Why do you think that this is the case?

10. What do you think should be done in order to improve the manners and work ethic of today's youth?
11. Some people have dubbed the youth of today as living in the "age of entitlement"—what are your thoughts on this?
12. What is your opinion of character education in public schools?
13. If character education were to be reintroduced in public schools, what should the purpose of the programs be, and what should be the primary focus?
14. If you were able to instill one skill or characteristic in all of today's youth (other than technology), what would it be and why?
15. Are you hopeful for this generation and their potential to effect change in the world? Why or why not?
16. What one thing do you think that K-12 educators could focus on that would help the current generation to be more successful in school, their careers, and life in general?

### **Author**

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## Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women

Christine A. Winterbrook

### Abstract

Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women is a narrative collection that shares the lived experience of five diverse, gifted women. These women were identified as gifted and talented through a formal psychological evaluation. They were served in gifted programming in elementary and secondary school. This qualitative narrative study revealed the lived personal experiences of the five gifted females throughout their lifespans. The internal gifted characteristics and external influences that affect gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing were analyzed. The results of this study also examined the internal and external influences that effected self-efficacy in gifted women. The collection of narratives allowed prominent themes to emerge, such as perfectionism, Imposter Syndrome, and societal pressures that lead to conformity.

**Keywords:** gifted females, internal barriers, external barriers, self-efficacy, lifespan

The narrative stories of gifted women provided insight into the lived gifted experiences in the research study, *Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women*. The stories uncovered the unique challenges of growing up as a gifted female. The purpose of the study was to collect narrative accounts of a diverse group of gifted women. A purposive sample population that represented various ages, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socio-economic backgrounds was selected. All the participants were identified as gifted and talented through a formal assessment; they also participated in gifted programs.

The investigation explored the lives of five diverse gifted women,

allowing patterns and themes to emerge, divulging the participants' lifespan from childhood to their present age. Gifted females were chosen for research because they are an underrepresented population in gifted education, specifically in mathematics and science programs (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). Females are underrepresented in gifted education programs; especially low socio-economic, African-American, and Hispanic populations (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013).

### **Background of the Problem**

Historically, females have been underrepresented in gifted education (Pierson, 2014). Currently, specific populations of gifted females are underrepresented, especially African-American, Hispanic, and females from lower socio-economic classes (Rothenbusch, Zettler, Voss, Lösch, & Trautwein, 2016). A persistent problem of practice that gifted women face includes, "In most professional fields and occupations, men surpass women in both professional and creative accomplishments" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 132). Another concern has been that numerous gifted women around the world look back upon their achievements in life with feelings of regret (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Nationally, females are achieving in science, mathematics, and technology (STEM) at lower rates than their male counterparts (Pusey, Gondree & Peterson, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Gifted females have distinct internal and external barriers that cause unique challenges, such as deciding in middle school if they want to be known as the "pretty" girl or the "smart" girl (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). "In today's American society; however, there is increasing pressure on girls to be pretty and popular and to have boyfriends as early as possible" (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 38). Davis, Rimm, and Siegle (2011) stated that "over compliance, fear of being assertive, and fear of failure" may cause gifted females to underachieve and "set life goals below their abilities" (p. 428). Women have the unique challenge of choosing to get married and start a family over pursuing higher degrees of education or personal pursuits of passions and interests (Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm,



2014). These are challenges their male counterparts rarely face (Reis, Callahan, & Goldsmith, 1994). Some of these internal and external barriers have been shown to relate to why females are achieving at lower rates than men (Kerr & McKay, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of conducting a qualitative study on gifted women was to reveal the narratives of gifted women. These narratives shared the lived gifted experiences and exposed what being a gifted female reflects throughout the lifespan. It reveals internal, gifted characteristics, external influences, and the influences that impact self-efficacy in gifted women. Discovering common traits that have allowed gifted women to be successful and achieve at optimal levels can provide necessary information for guiding the next generation of gifted females (Young, Rudman, Buettner, & McLean, 2013). Identifying mentors that gifted females can relate to has shown to help with important choices and decisions in the future (Muratori & Smith, 2015). It is beneficial to share the stories of gifted women to allow them to have a *voice* (Stoeger, 2009). It builds their confidence and reveals common traits and characteristics that gifted women possess.

### **Research Questions**

The research question that was the driving force of the research project was: *What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience?* The sub-questions that supported the research question were: (1) What was the personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? (2) What gifted characteristics influence gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (3) What external influences have contributed to gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (4) What were the internal and external influences that effected self-efficacy in gifted women?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Narrative knowing was the conceptual theory used for a broad explanation of behaviors and attitudes in the qualitative, narrative inquiry study. Using a theoretical framework or perspective had an overall orienting lens or transformative perspective that shaped the type of research questions asked. Theory guided the researcher as to what issues were important to examine and the people who needed to be studied. Narrative knowing also indicated how the researcher was positioned in the study and how the final accounts were written. Utilizing narrative knowing allowed “complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact a person’s knowledge creation from specific cultural standpoints” (Etherington, 2013, p. 6).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection involved developing the setting, gaining permissions, identifying the participants, developing the means for recording the data collected, and storing the collected data (Creswell, 2013). For the study, it was vital to select women who were identified as gifted through a formal evaluation and served in gifted programming in elementary and/or secondary school. It was also imperative to find a diverse population of women who had various ages, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and came from various geographic regions. A selective sample was chosen for the narrative research project, more specifically a purposive sample. Participants were selected because they met the criteria of being identified as “gifted” through a formal measure and participated in a gifted program during elementary and/or secondary school. “A hallmark of all good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 151). The five women chosen to participate in the project had vastly different stories to tell about growing up gifted and are at various stages of their lives.

## Participants

Kasey was a single, twenty-four-year-old graduate student from Beijing, China. She was identified and placed in gifted programming in middle school. Kasey was purposefully selected to represent the Asian perspective and the young adult perspective of being a gifted woman. She chose to be interviewed at her residence.

Isabel was a thirty-seven-year old, married, Latina who grew up in a transient, impoverished household who is now an alternative education advocate for gifted and twice exceptional students. Isabel was selected to participate to represent the Latina perspective, as well as the thirty-something perspective. She also represented the transitional and impoverished perspectives. Isabel's interview occurred via SKYPE.

Dominique was a single, black, forty-seven-year old woman who's currently a teacher of middle school gifted students, she was born in Fresno, California. Dominique was identified and served in gifted programming beginning in elementary school. Dominique was purposefully selected to provide the black perspective and the forty-something perspective. Her interview occurred while driving in a car.

Elizabeth was a married, white, upper middle class, profoundly gifted woman who was raised in the Midwest. She is a mother of three profoundly gifted children. Elizabeth was purposely selected to represent the fifty-something age-range and for her profoundly gifted perspective. She was also the only mother who still had children living at home. Her interview occurred at a hotel.

Mary was a white, sixty-six-year-old married woman with three grandchildren, who is currently a superintendent for a city school district in the southern United States. She was born on a one-hundred-fifty-acre cattle farm and was raised in a rural area. Mary represented the sixty-five and beyond perspective. She also represented the rural, married, and grandmother perspective. Mary's interview occurred in her office.

## **Procedure**

The interview procedures followed a narrative inquiry protocol. The Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) seven stages of conducting qualitative inquiry were utilized (Creswell, 2013). Participants were provided with a recruitment letter asking if they would like to participate in the research project. Once a response was received, a purposive sample population of five women was identified. Each chosen participant was given an informed consent to sign, which included an interview guide. The research was transparent to the participants and the informed consent stated the purpose of the study and asked participants' permission to interview, as well as record, the interview process. Once informed consent was received, one-on-one interviews were scheduled with the participant at a location and time of their choosing.

The interview protocol allowed the interviews to stay focused on the topic but remain conversational in nature. During the interview, the participants were asked about their life growing up as a gifted female. Broad and general questions were used so the participants could make meaning of their experience of growing up as a gifted woman. Open-ended questions were utilized to allow them to share their experiences of being a gifted woman in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to answer the research questions.

## **Data Analysis**

"The data collected in a narrative study needs to be analyzed for the story they [participants] have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies" (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). The Three-Dimensional Space Approach Clanadinin & Connelly (2002) developed is a broader, more holistic sketch "to understand people that examines their personal experiences as well as their interactions with other people" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339). This narrative approach incorporated "common elements of narrative analysis: collecting stories of personal experiences in the form of interviews, retelling the stories based on narrative elements, rewriting the stories into chronological sequence,

and incorporating the setting or place of the participants' experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). Based on the interactions that occur in a place or context, these elements of experience conceptualize "a primary means for analyzing data gathered and transcribed in a research study" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339).

In addition to the three-dimensional approach, Ollerenshaw & Creswell suggest a "complex analysis process as reading and rereading through the field texts (transcripts), considering interaction, continuity or temporality, and situation through personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of the individual," (2002, p. 342). Personal, practical knowledge is described as "personally individualized and pointing inward, in terms of aesthetic, moral, and affective elements and language that are constructed as part of the experience" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). Professional knowledge refers to "outward and existential conditions in the environment, in terms of other individuals' actions, reactions, intentions, purposes, and assumptions" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342).

### **Transcription of interviews.**

Once the interviews were completed, the recorded interviews were transcribed and placed into a narrative. A sequential date order was implemented that shared the narrative from beginning to current day, told in the voice of the participant, using the Three-Dimensional Space Approach. The recorded data was placed into transcription software. The researcher listened to the audio recording of the interviews multiple times and compared it to the transcription software to ensure the software transcribed the interview accurately. Once accuracy of the transcriptions was finalized, the transcriptions were then placed into narratives. "Moving away from the actual transcript, the researcher asks 'what it means' and what its 'social significance' is. Furthermore, themes, tensions, and patterns were also identified" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). The researcher then began the re-storying process, or retelling, and collaborating and negotiating "information with participants and returning again and again to the field data" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342).

“The researcher organizes larger patterns and meaning from the narrative segments and categories. Finally, the individual’s biography is reconstructed, and the researcher identifies factors that have shaped the life” (Creswell, 2013, p. 192).

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Summary of Findings**

The interviews provided the data necessary to analyze the themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews, comparing them to the existing literature on gifted females. The age ranges were highly diverse, ranging from twenty-four to sixty-six years of age, with a broad spectrum of lifespan experiences. The socio-economic status was also highly diverse from impoverished and transient to upper-middle class. The women ranged in ethnicities: African-American, Asian, Latina, and Caucasian.

The five women graciously and candidly shared their personal lifespan experiences of being a gifted woman, providing a rich opportunity for extensive analysis. The data collected was the lived experience of the five participants, which were real-world measures that were “complex, multi-layered and nuanced” (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). The summary of findings reflected patterns and themes that emerged from the narratives. The data revealed that each participant had a unique story to share; however, there were common threads that were evident when analyzing the data from the research project. The narratives revealed information about the lived experience throughout the lifespan (i.e., early childhood, middle childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, young adult, adulthood, and sixty-five and beyond).

### **Summary of Findings for the Individual Narratives**

Kasey. The main themes and patterns that emerged in Kasey’s narrative included societal pressures, especially from her parents and peers, including conformity and stereotypes. A societal pressure or external influence, which resulted due to Kasey’s parents’ unrealistic expectations, was underachievement. Kasey loved literature and worked hard to get

accepted into the literature program in middle school; however, her parents expected her to attend the mathematics program that was offered because a science and mathematical ability was highly favored in her Chinese culture. This unrealistic expectation resulted in Kasey coping with social and emotional issues (i.e., depression and underachievement). She quit doing her school work and fell into an imaginational world to escape her parents' expectations. This behavior of underachievement supported the qualitative and quantitative multiple case study that Baum, Renzulli, and Hebert (1995) performed to examine the phenomenon of underachievement. One of their findings underscored the emotional turmoil that might be experienced in dysfunctional families as a contributor to underachievement (Baum et al., 1995).

Kasey experienced numerous social and emotional factors (i.e., emotional and imaginational overexcitabilities), which ultimately influenced her abilities and talents. Conflicts and barriers that were primary components of her narrative included both internal and external barriers. She experienced many internal barriers (i.e., perfectionism, loss of belief in abilities, and self-confidence). She also experienced a great deal of external barriers (i.e., competition and external pressure from her parents to succeed in mathematics and science although she did not like mathematics and science).

**Isabel.** A theme or pattern that emerged from Isabel's narrative included social and emotional factors, such as overexcitabilities (OE's). The OE's identified were all five of the OE's: emotional, psychomotor, imaginational, intellectual, and sensory. In regard to psychomotor OE's, she always had an excess of physical energy; she was always a fidgety person. She loved to dance and was able to connect with dance early on in her life. She had sensual OE's in terms of her appreciation of art. She has sensitive skin and did not like to wear sweaters or anything too tight on her arms. She felt pain in a way that she thought other people did not. Her intellectual OE's identified were always wanting to know everything that she could know; being highly

curious and inquisitive. She experienced imaginal OE's in the form of night terrors, especially when she was a child, because of her active imagination. She would think of worst-case scenarios and worry what could potentially happen to her.

Although, she never really dealt with Imposter Syndrome in her mind, she acknowledged that it was hard for her to wrap her mind around being profoundly gifted. Isabel wished she would have known how smart she was and what she was capable of accomplishing earlier on in her life. She thinks it would have saved her from a lot of anxiousness and self-doubt. She spoke with Annemarie Roeper's protégé once and was told she was probably profoundly gifted. Isabel recognized that being profoundly gifted would match the work and experience that she had working with gifted children. She had come to terms with being a gifted woman, but not necessarily being a profoundly gifted woman. She said, "The higher level of giftedness I have not quite overcome in terms of self-acceptance."

Another theme that emerged in Isabel's story was perfectionism; however, Isabel dealt with what she referred to as a strange sort of perfectionism. Her perfectionism was in regard to her behavior. She would become frustrated with herself, stressed out, and anxious when she did not present the self that she wanted to present. It caused her to want to shut down and hide. She had very high standards, but her high standards did not cause her to become crippled or unable to make choices and decisions as some forms of perfectionism manifest.

**Dominique.** One theme that emerged from Dominique's portrait was early reading, which has been noted as a common trait of gifted females in early childhood. "Academically gifted girls are usually precocious readers and most of the gifted eminent adult women were precocious readers whose talent was nourished at an early age" (Kerr, Vuyk, & Rea, 2012, p. 648). Growing up in a predominately-white area of California, and being a black female, Dominique felt many societal pressures (i.e., stereotypes and racism). Her kindergarten teacher referred her for special education



services because she believed her behavior was more consistent of special education than giftedness. Consequently, the referral for special education revealed that Dominique was gifted. She was clustered with the same group of gifted children from elementary through high school. Many of her peers' parents commented she should not be in the gifted classes because she was black. She faced racism in college with white, Neo-Nazis, and with minorities, who worked at the university, (i.e., groundskeepers). She also faced racism through accusations of trying to act white because she enjoyed things like big hair bands in the nineteen-eighties.

Dominique had many relationship factors including parental, teacher, and peer that influenced her story. Most of the relationships were positive, such as her mother being a strong advocate in her life, which ultimately affected Dominique's ability for self-efficacy. Social and emotional issues that Dominique identified were a strong sense of social justice; she recalled arguing with her teachers and professors due to her strong-willed personality. She had high intellectual OE's, such as her curiosity as a child and how she would take anything and everything apart to see how it worked. She stated that her mother would send her to stay with her grandmother when she had enough of her constant inquiry. Conflicts and barriers that Dominique's narrative identified were perfectionism, as evidenced in her devotion as a teacher and working herself to an impossible standard to meet students' needs because she knew what she was providing as a teacher was so important. She dealt with Imposter Syndrome and really did not see herself as "smart" as others claimed she was. She had a tremendous amount of multipotentiality, but her mother's guidance helped her to choose a career that she felt called to. Additionally, she had a highly competitive spirit.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth's narrative reflected many of the common traits of gifted females explored in the literature review. One of these common traits was an issue with relationships, more specifically her relationship with her parents. As revealed in the literature review, childhood family experiences and parental attitudes have a strong impact on gifted females.

“Pre-eminent among the influences on talented females are parents’ attitudes and beliefs about their children’s academic self-perceptions and achievement” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 127). These obstacles with her parents helped her develop resiliency to overcome and care for herself. Ford (1994) stated that an internal locus of control and positive sense of self are common characteristics of resiliency which are reflected in Elizabeth’s story. She was able to succeed and rise above the chaos in her childhood to become a nurturing and loving mother who placed her children’s needs as a priority.

Elizabeth’s narrative identified that she had some challenges relating to peers and building lasting peer relationships. The intellectual differences and asynchronous development are found as even more exaggerated for profoundly gifted people than for those in the gifted range. One choice that Elizabeth made was to attend college and forgo a high school education because of her intellectual potential due to her being profoundly gifted. Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross (2004) stated, “For profoundly gifted students, AP coursework may need to be combined with grade skipping, taking college courses early, and even going to college early” (p. 32). Elizabeth’s early college experience provided her with a necessary opportunity for self-efficacy that ultimately led to her growth and development. It supported her understanding as a mother; she became acutely aware of her profoundly gifted children’s needs and is now able to advocate on behalf of her children’s needs.

Themes of societal pressures that emerged in Elizabeth’s narrative were stereotypes (i.e., feminism, sexism, and choices and decisions about marriage and career). Gifted women often feel guilty for choosing a career over starting a family (Randall, 1997). Sometimes gifted women feel their husband, or soon-to-be husband’s, career is more important than their own. Randall (1997) stated, “Women’s careers have a lower status attached to them, even though the amount of schooling required for the career may be equal” (p. 43). Many times gifted women will choose to allow their husband to get started first because they believe or are

convinced that his career is more important for providing for the family (Randall, 1997). This was evident when Elizabeth graduated from higher-level education with the same degree her husband received. Collectively, they chose to pursue her husband's career because they felt he would be more prosperous and she chose to focus on her duties and responsibilities for care and nurture. Arnold (1993) discussed that, "Although gifted women equaled or excelled men in school achievement from first grade through college, after school days were over the great majority ceased to compete with men in the world's work. [This is not due] to lack of ability" (p. 2).

One could argue that underachievement was a factor in her life because Elizabeth could have pursued a high-level corporate career; however, another perspective to consider is that she knew the importance of a family. Reis (2003) stated, "There is no clear path for any of us, as our lives and creativity are both more connected with our love for our family and our friends and are more diffused than the lives and creativity of our male counterparts. Because relationships are central to the lives of most gifted and talented women, they often run at parallel levels of importance to their work" (p. 155). Today, Elizabeth continues to actively pursue very important and meaningful work and has made significant contributions to society. One of her greatest contributions is being a mother, and coming from a dysfunctional family in her childhood, caring for her children was meaningful work for her. "There is talent development for women in nurturing children, building strong primary relationships and making a home – particularly for women worldwide whose pasts are marked by dysfunction" (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 344).

Elizabeth saw many future opportunities to consider, and in her early fifties, she was only getting started in defining herself. Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, "There comes a point in a smart woman's life when she wonders, 'Is this all there is?' This is the time that women begin thinking about what they always dreamed of being or what they imagined themselves being before life happened" (p. 211). Elizabeth has always had

many options, as multipotentiality is one of her dominant traits, and she has the ability to be successful in any endeavor that she chooses to pursue in the future. Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, "Despite all manner of setback and struggles, these women used their adaptability to transform their lives and create a new narrative" (p. 217). Elizabeth contained the potential and intellectual ability to accomplish anything she sets her mind to.

**Mary.** Mary's story reflected numerous traits and characteristics of gifted females reported in the literature review. One of the most prominent traits I discovered in Mary was her strong parental relationship, who were also exceptional role models. "Pre-eminent among the influences on talented females are parents' attitudes and beliefs about their children's academic self-perceptions and achievements which often supersede children's self-perceptions about their own performance" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 127). Mary shared that her parents never told her what to do or placed their own expectations on her but supported her in whatever endeavors she chose. One of her fondest memories was practicing the piccolo endlessly in the kitchen. She realized it must have been annoying and irritating to her parents, but they never yelled or screamed at her to stop playing, even at midnight in the kitchen. She was able to model that behavior to her own children. She shared how her parenting style was to support her children, that they continue to have an honest relationship with each other, but she does not project her ambitions onto them. Possibly due to her parents' supportive measures, Mary never felt pressure to rebel or challenge authority. She was not sure if it was due to being in a gifted program and having access to intellectual peers or other factors, but she never tried to "dumb it down" or consider that being pretty was more desirable than being smart. Callahan & Cunningham (1994) found that middle school gifted females avoided "displays of outstanding intellectual ability and searched for better ways to conform to the norm of the peer group" (p. 4), but this was not the case for Mary. She was secure in her parent, teacher, and peer relationships.

Being challenged in high school through taking higher-level math and science courses when other females were taking home economics courses

could have also supported Mary's confidence in her abilities. Although, she was an extreme perfectionist and hid her work from her teachers, due to fear of failure, her motivation for excellence compelled her to complete higher-level coursework. Rimm (2007) stated, "While the pressures of perfectionism may lead to high achievement motivation, it may also lead to underachievement. In important ways, perfectionism is very different from the motivation for excellence" (p. 247). Mary's low self-concept, unrealistically high expectations, and perfectionistic tendencies could have been why she left her teaching job after her first year of teaching. She stated that when she later ran into her former principal, and he told her what a good teacher she was, she realized she would have stayed if she had known that. However, she turned that obstacle into a positive in her life by tutoring over sixty music students and starting a family. She found value in being "home" during such a crucial time of development for her children.

Her parent's example of showing care and compassion for other's needs provided a foundation for Mary and her high social justice advocacy. She works diligently to ensure students and families' basic needs were met in her school district. At sixty-six years old, she still has no plans to retire from being the director of schools anytime soon. Although her husband took an early retirement, she decided that she would not skip a beat. Her work has brought tremendous value to her community. Recently, when her district had to close for a snow day, she ensured schools were open for any student who needed a safe place during the regular school day. She made sure the school cafeterias were open to feed anyone in the community less than eighteen years of age. She also sprang into action to ensure all students had coats and gloves. Her actions have demonstrated that serving and supporting people has become so ingrained into her fabric that she will work in some capacity until the day of her last breath. Her legacy will last for generations, and although she has dealt with some forms of feminism and sexism over her lifespan, she has never let it stop her, or even offend her; she has not allowed it to be a part of her life story.

### **Limitations of the Research Study**

One of the limitations of the study is that it was restricted to the five women who were selected as the purposive sample. Care was given to select participants with various ages, ethnicities, socio-economic populations, and from various geographic locations. A suggestion for future research would be to research homogenous groups of gifted women instead of a diverse population of gifted women. Being able to compare the lifespan of a homogenous group of gifted women could provide information on additional themes and patterns that may exist.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this qualitative narrative study revealed the lived gifted experiences for five diversely, gifted women across their lifespans. The purpose of the study was to collect the narrative accounts of gifted women. The research question was: *What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience?* The data revealed that each gifted female's lived experience was unique and different. Shkedi (2005) described how in narratives, [we] "tell stories about ourselves that are historical, explanatory, and in some way foretelling of the future" (p. 11). The narratives shared the lived gifted experiences and exposed what being a gifted female reflects throughout the lifespan. It revealed what gifted characteristics influenced gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, overall wellbeing, and achievement. Finally, it revealed what the internal and external influences are that effect self-efficacy in gifted women.

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## **Parents and Caregivers of Black Gifted Students: A Piece in Eliminating Disproportionality in Gifted Education**

Rebecca McKinney

### **Abstract**

A persistent problem of practice in the field of gifted education is inequitable identification and programming for culturally and linguistically diverse gifted learners. One of the possible root causes of this persistent problem has been shown to be the lack of parent engagement from culturally and linguistically diverse parents and caregivers (Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, & Bridges, 2005; Jolly & Matthews, 2012). As the demographics of the United States become increasingly more diverse, the importance of addressing this problem of practice is especially critical. Particularly troublesome is the disproportionality of Black learners served in gifted programs. Gaps in literature focusing on culturally, linguistically diverse and low income gifted learners are large. These gaps grow when looking at research specific to gifted Black learners, and the research is extremely limited when addressing the role of parents or caregivers of Black gifted learners.

**Keywords:** culturally, linguistically diverse, African American, Black, giftedness, parent education

Gifted education has long struggled to equitably serve culturally, linguistically diverse gifted learners. This persistent problem of practice within the field of gifted education must be addressed if we hope to fulfill the mission of gifted education. "No longer is there room for the purely symbolic victory in educational reform" (Moran, 2013, p.1229).

One possible root cause of this persistent problem of practice may be the lack of understanding of gifted education by families of culturally,

linguistically diverse and low-income students (Grantham, Frasier, Roberts & Bridges, 2005; Jolly & Matthews, 2012;). The nation's excellence gaps demonstrate a critical demand for re-examination of current educational practices including parent engagement.

Ample research exists on gifted education; specifically in the areas of identification practices and programming yet gaps continue to exist in research focusing on culturally, linguistically diverse gifted learners. "Ford (1994) found that only 2% of articles and scholarly publications focused attention on gifted minority learners in general, and even fewer focused on African American students..." (Bonner, 2000, p.643). The research on parent education for families of Black gifted learners is nearly non-existent.

### **Persistent Problem of Practice: National Context**

While *Brown vs. Board of Education* took major steps toward "providing equal educational opportunities for minority students... surprisingly... little has been done under federal or state laws to ensure the educational rights of the 6.7% of American students, regardless of race, who are identified as gifted..." (Ford & Russo, 2014, p. 214). Furthermore, the field of gifted education itself has been accused of largely serving students with means and opportunity while ignoring the needs of low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ford & King, 2014; Ford & Russo, 2014). Michael-Chadwell (2010) stated, "The under-representation of historically underserved student groups continues to be a phenomenon in gifted and talented (GT) programs" (p. 99). Further, "Black and Hispanic students are less than half as likely to be in gifted programs as White students... [furthermore, this] also includes the underrepresentation of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds" (Callahan, 2005, p. 98). Elitism has long been a challenge in the field of gifted education as a result of this underrepresentation in gifted education (Myths about Gifted Students, n.d.). According to Ford & Russo (2014),

Most of the past and current efforts to redress the status of gifted students generally and the underrepresentation of

minority children specifically have been inadequate, resulting in what may be the most segregated and elitist programs in American public schools (p. 233).

Gifted and talented students from low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse families, receive inequitable programming options when compared to programming options available for their white, affluent counterparts. Specifically, “Hispanic and Black students are being denied school-based opportunities to develop their gifts and talents or to reach their full potentials” (Ford & Russo, 2014, p. 233). Ford & Russo (2014) addressed the need for “comprehensive, proactive, aggressive, and systematic efforts to recruit and retain Black and Hispanic students in gifted education...” (p. 234).

Inequitable identification and programming for low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students may be tied to the lack of parent educational opportunities specifically targeted toward this population. Parents of low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students have long been disenfranchised by the American educational system (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). White privilege is the “attempt to name a social system that works to the benefits of whites” (Pulido, 2000, p.13). “The intensified, and/or additional, barriers CLD parents face are not unlike the speed bumps, roadblocks and tollbooths, drivers encounter on a highway or byway” (Cobb, 2012, p. 12). Many CLD parents have no personal experience in the American educational system, while others may have long since turned away from the school system based on their own personal experiences as students within the educational system. Often parents from CLD backgrounds see educators as authority figures whose guidance is more directive as opposed to collaborative (Cobb, 2012). “If success at school and in life begins at home, then all parents need knowledge about what they can do to fulfill their critical roles in the home, in academics, and in providing talent development opportunities and support” (Schader, 2008, p. 481). In order to effectively engage parents from culturally, linguistically diverse backgrounds, gifted educators must

take a collaborative approach in working with parents and be aware of intra- and intergroup differences. Schader (2008) stated, "Recent work has brought attention to ethnic group differences among parents and how their underlying beliefs and values affect children's education achievement" (p. 483).

### **Contextual Framing of Persistent Problem of Practice**

As the demographics in the United States change, gifted education must address this long-standing issue of underrepresentation. "Black and Hispanic students are less than half as likely to be in gifted programs as White students..." (Callahan, 2005, p. 98). Ford et al (2014) stated, "There is no denying that gifted education classes and services are disproportionately represented by and serving White, higher-income, and privileged students: and gifted education gives them a boost up the social and fiscal hierarchy, a function of White privilege" (p.306). Payne (2010) stated, "all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, or race should have access to, and be provided with the best educational opportunities" (p. 18). The best educational opportunities should include equal access to gifted programming and talent development.

Particularly alarming is the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education. Ford & King (2014) stated, "Black students should represent a minimal 15.2% of students in gifted education. Nationally, the percentage in 2011 is 10%" (p. 306). This is significant and beyond statistical chance (Ford et al, 2014). At least 250,000 Black students annually are missed by current identification practices for gifted education (Ford et al, 2014).

There have been numerous attempts and systems developed to address underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students and low-income families in gifted programs. Borland, Schnur, & Wright (2000) stated:

In order to address the problem of disproportionate

educational failure among economically disadvantaged students more effectively, we need to identify the sociological and psychological processes that shape the attitudes and behaviors underlying educational disadvantage and to understand how these develop and operate within specific sociocultural contexts. (p. 14)

One contributing factor to the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education can be linked to the expectations held for students. Teacher perceptions of their student's abilities impact student/ teacher interactions and expectations. Culturally and linguistically diverse students and students from low-income families are often held to lower expectations. Ford (2007) stated:

Deficit thinking exists when differences are interpreted as deficits, disadvantages, or deviance. The deficit-thinking paradigm places the blame for poor outcomes within the students, as if they are somehow inherently inferior or substandard... [thinking this way] about children in poverty blinds educators from seeing [these students'] strengths (p. 38).

Callahan (2005) stated many teachers hold "inherent beliefs about the low capabilities of poor and minority children" (p. 99). Since teachers do not see the possible gifts and talents of culturally and linguistically diverse students and/or students from low-income households, teachers do not often hold high expectations for these students or refer them for gifted and talented programming.

According to Bonner (2000), "Without proper training, teachers make judgments based on their own preconceived ideas of what characteristics a gifted student should exhibit," (p. 647). This has "exacerbated the problem of under identification of African American students" (Bonner, 2000, p. 647). Bonner (2000) further discussed the issue of teacher training by

stating, "Without proper training, teachers will continue to refer only those students who fit their preconceived ideas of how a gifted student behaves; this misconception immediately rules out many students who, by current definition, show gifted potential" (p. 655). Ford et al. (2014) stated, "Culturally incompetent educators- educators who are ill-prepared for or uncommitted to working with Black students- risk compromising or sabotaging the educational experiences of Black students, and thereby contribute to the segregated gifted education programs" (p. 308). Sadly, "students who are out of "cultural sync" with their teachers will go unidentified, regardless of their intellectual abilities" (Bonner, 2000, p. 647).

The cultural mismatch between teachers and students creates barriers for Black students' abilities to be recognized. Communication style differences can also impact how teachers view students. Delpit (1995) highlighted the difference in communication styles between White and Black cultures. Delpit noted white children's narratives during story time were more "topic-centered", focusing on one event, whereas Black children shared longer, more "episodic" narratives in which scenes shifted (p.55). "The thinking of these speakers appears to be circular, and their communication sounds like storytelling. To one who is unfamiliar with it, this communication style 'sounds rambling, disjointed, and as if the speaker never ends a thought before going on to something else'" (Gay, 2000, p. 96 as cited in Gay, 2002, p.112).

Delpit (1995) also noted that adult reactions to the narratives depended on the race of the adult. White adults responded negatively to Black children's narratives, noting concern for the child's academic abilities. They also expressed concern about possible language problems, reading difficulties, family problems or emotional problems based on the perceived incoherent nature of the narrative (Delpit, 1995). The reactions of Black adults were surprisingly different. Delpit (1995) stated, "They found this child's story 'well informed, easy to understand, and interesting with lots of detail and description.' Even though all ...mentioned the



'shifts' and 'associations' or 'nonlinear' quality of the story, they did not find these features distracting (p. 55). Gay (2002) stated, "the communicative styles of most ethnic groups of color in the United States are more active, participatory, dialectic, and multi-modal.

Speakers expect listeners to engage with them as they speak by providing prompts, feedback, and commentary" (p.111). Gay continued, "the roles of speaker and listener are fluid and interchangeable. Among African Americans, this interactive communicative style is referred to as 'call-response' (Baber, 1987; Smitherman, 1977)" (p. 111). These communication mismatches impact teacher expectations and therefore opportunities for Black students' abilities to be recognized and supported within the school system.

### **Parents and Caregivers**

Parent perceptions of education, in general, have shown to vary among demographic groups. According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), African-Americans sense of identity is in direct opposition to that of Whites due to having been shunned and oppressed in American society. Crozier (1996) stated:

Moreover, with regard to black parents, one might argue that there is a particular urgency in getting them more involved in the light of the research demonstrating the disadvantage and discrimination experienced by black children, particularly in terms of academic achievement and school exclusions (Policy Studies Institute, 1994).

More attention needs to be paid to the role of Black parents in supporting the needs of their gifted children and advocating for strong gifted programming. Grantham, Frasier, Roberts & Bridges (2005) stated "to reverse underrepresentation among culturally diverse students in gifted education, the role of parents as advocates is critical" (p. 138). The myth

that “all parents are the same...mask[ing] the complexity of needs, the roles that ethnic minority parents are playing, or the constraints that impede their involvement, and at the heart of this is structural racism” (Crozier, 2001, p. 330). Wright, Weekes, & McGlaughlin (2000) found that when Black parents tried to intervene on behalf of their children, they were often ignored which resulted in feelings of frustration, despondency and anger.

Crozier (2001) shared the limited research into ethnic minority parent and school relationships shows that school personnel often viewed these parents in stereotypical ways as negative and not interested in their child’s education. Crozier (2001) states, “The blanket assumption that all parents are the same, with the same needs, and that their children can be treated in the same way is disturbing for all parents and particularly those who are already disadvantaged” (p.330). Pearl (1997) stated, “parent knowledge is one of the most important contributions to the optimum development of all children including gifted children” (p. 41). “To fully advocate for their children, parents need information about giftedness, programming options, and the policies and practices involved in gifted education” (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Bass, R. 2009, p. 53).

Gaps in literature regarding effective gifted parent education for Black families continue to marginalize typically underserved families and students. This lack of research targeting effective parent education programs for Black families is startling.

Jolly et al. (2012) stated,

African American parents clearly exert a positive impact on their children’s achievement, but we know less about the specific practices through which this influence occurs. More work clearly needs to be done to learn about parents of gifted and high-achieving learners from non-majority backgrounds... (p. 273).

## **Parent Educator**

According to Pearl (1997), “the parent educator’s rapport with the parents is critical to his or her effectiveness as an educator” (p. 45). Given the literature on African American parents, which has highlighted the effects of cultural differences among parents and caregivers, parent educators would be well served by approaching parent education in a collaborative approach with parents and caregivers (Schader, 2008). This approach would help to address the need for “comprehensive, proactive, aggressive, and systematic efforts to recruit and retain Black and Hispanic students in gifted education...” (Ford & Russo, 2014). The long-standing disenfranchisement of African American families by the educational system has created barriers for families and their children (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

## **Methods**

### **Describing the Action/Innovation**

This research study was grounded on the phenomenon of parents participating in a training series in which they collaboratively developed training to be able to facilitate parent education within their community. The questions used to guide this process were as follows:

- What do you want to know about gifted education?
- What would help you advocate for your child’s educational needs at school as it relates to gifted education?
- What experiences have you had with your child’s school, which had a positive impact on your child’s education?

### **Participants**

Five Black parents or caregivers participated in the research study. Four participants were female and one participant was male. Participants in this study had students in a variety of school districts and school types near the metro Denver area. Two participants had experience with their children being served in both private and public school settings.

### **Role of the Facilitators**

An intentional racial mix between participants and facilitators allowed participants to give voice to how Black's learn, which may not have occurred had the facilitators also been Black. The researcher's choice to use White facilitators was driven by the racial mismatch, which plagues the United States educational system today. According to Mahatya, Lohman & Brown (2016) eighty-five percent of teachers in the United States are white.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Procedures**

This research study gathered data through a variety of methods: observation, interview, focus group and product analysis. The observation provided data about the overall phenomenon, which consisted of the four conversations in which Black parents and facilitators came together to develop a relevant parent education approach for Black families and caregivers. The term, conversation, was chosen to describe this process as it was a term used by participants when defining what parent engagement should look like for Black parents.

### **Findings**

Over the course of the four conversations, a framework was developed to support African American parents and caregivers in having conversations with other African American parents and caregivers. The overarching topic of the conversation was identified as, "How do I get the most for my kids and help them succeed?" While the goal was to increase awareness about gifted education benefits and opportunities, the term gifted was intentionally not included because participants felt the topic should be general enough to attract all parents.

The identified talking points defined guiding principles for parents and caregivers when having conversations about how to get the most for their children and help them succeed. Three key guiding principles of the conversation(s) as identified by the participants were:

African American or Black parents and caregivers should:

- Stand in their truth
- Know you don't have to accept what is being told to you
- Question everything

Participants identified the need for other parents to know they can stand in their truth. Participants' defined standing in your truth as African American parents and caregivers knowing it is acceptable for them to share their experiences, speak their truth, and expect to be heard. African American parents and caregivers should not let their experiences be negated because these experiences impact how they interact with the school system.

The second guiding principle is that parents and caregivers should understand that they could question what they are told and that they could push against the system in order to advocate for their children. Participants mentioned many African American parents or caregivers, especially mothers, do not question the system because they do not want to appear to be "an angry Black woman" (Sally, 2016). Yet, participants identified this as a key principle, noting parents and caregivers must not let possible perceptions impact their advocacy for their children.

The third principle is related to the second in that it pushes parents to seek clarification and not be afraid to ask questions. Participants shared that many parents feel concern with questioning educators feeling they are not as educated and might not have anything to add (Sally, 2016). Participants who have questioned the school system shared the positive outcomes of this questioning which included adjustments to school practices related to their children, more positive interaction with the school and increased communication between parents and the school.

The foundation of an effective parent education opportunity targeted to Black parents and caregivers develops out of relationships. Relationships

must be established as a foundation on which trust can be built in order for parent engagement efforts to effectively value the culture of African American parents. Once trust is established, it is critical to create ongoing opportunities for parents and caregivers to share experiences in which they feel heard and valued for what they bring to the table.

Study findings indicated that African American parents and caregivers prefer a conversational approach to parent education. The conversations should be developed organically with parents or caregivers sharing their experiences and then offering support. These conversations should be grounded in individual parent or caregiver and therefore "one-size fits all" approach should not be used. In order to develop opportunities for these conversations to evolve, relationships must be established between the parties having the conversation. Relationships develop when a level of understanding exists between participants. By sharing experiences, participants are able to identify similarities in experiences. It is these similarities that allow for a level of trust to develop.

### **Limitations of Outcome**

Unlike quantitative studies where small numbers limits the ability of the study to be generalizable, if robust qualitative methods are used and data collected across multiple methods, then results may be generalizable to "other people, settings, and times to the degree that they are similar to the people, settings, and times in this study" (Stake, 1990 as cited in Johnson, 1997, p. 290). This naturalistic generalization allows for study results of even small qualitative studies to be generalized to other like groups. Given the small size of this study and the population targeted by this study, the ability to generalize from the data collected from this study will be limited to other similar groups.

The nature and variability of personal experiences will present a challenge with replicating this study. The limitations of the data collected for this study should be considered when using the findings of this study to inform practice.

## Implications

**Development and Implementation.** As gifted educators attempt to address underrepresentation of culturally, linguistically diverse gifted learners, it is critical to consider the role parents and caregivers play (Schader, 2008). The findings of this study provide a lens into the learning needs of African American parents and caregivers, which can be applied when gifted educators attempt to engage families in conversation about giftedness and gifted education. Gifted educators should consider how culture might impact how other diverse groups also engage with parent education efforts. By approaching parent education as a collaborative process in which the educator and the parents and caregivers are working together to identify and develop a plan, more effective parent engagement and education can be created. This parent engagement effort can lead to more CLD and low income families understanding giftedness and being able to advocate for the needs of their gifted children. With increased voice from parents and caregivers, inequities in existing identification and programming options will need to be addressed.

**Experiences and School Connection.** When working with African American parents or caregivers, gifted educators must understand the history many of these parents and caregivers have with the school system. Negative assumptions by educators, such as a belief that African American parents or caregivers lack of interest in their child's schooling because they are not at school often, can cloud opportunities to gain valuable insights about the needs of the student. Gifted educators must be willing to tackle their own biases and reflect on their instructional practices to ensure they are providing rigorous, culturally relevant programming with high expectations for all gifted students.

**Topics for Parent or Caregiver Education.** Gifted educators should be aware of the needs of the parents and caregivers in the community in which they work. Understanding the varying needs based on identification status, age of children, familiarity with the U.S. educational

system is critical when working with families to develop conversations about giftedness and gifted education. By targeting specific topics which are relevant to parents and caregivers, gifted educators will be able to increase the impact of their work with parents and caregivers. When working with groups of parents who have been disenfranchised, gifted educators should also include conversations, which address how to advocate for your child's needs (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

**Characteristics of African American Gifted Learners.** Many barriers exist for African American students to be identified for gifted services (Ford & Russo, 2014). If gifted educators are to begin to tackle this persistent problem of practice, the findings of this study shed light on one approach, which parents see as a way to look for talent among African American gifted children. In this study, participants intentionally selected a small number of positive traits. Participants felt these characteristics were broad enough for parents and caregivers to see them manifested in their children rather than beginning with a long list which might be overwhelming. As gifted educators, it is important to consider intentionality in how you are communicating about giftedness and gifted education with parents. Gifted educators should ask themselves if they are sharing characteristics that are broad enough to capture gifted characteristics across cultures, socioeconomic status and language level. Carefully embedding in characteristics which meet this expectation will increase opportunities for typically underserved gifted youth to be recognized for the talents and gifted they possess. Facilitators must be prepared to both lead and follow during such conversations to allow for the organic conversations to occur while still helping all participants dig deeper into issues.

The passing along of information should be done through a conversation with someone with whom you have a connection or relationship. These connections are formed out of trust. According to Pearl (1997), "the parent educator's rapport with the parents is critical to his or her effectiveness as an educator" (p. 45). Given the literature on African



American parents which highlight the effects of cultural differences among parents and caregivers, parent educators would be well served by approaching parent education in a collaborative approach with parents and caregivers (Schader, 2008). This approach would help to address the need for “comprehensive, proactive, aggressive, and systematic efforts to recruit and retain Black and Hispanic students in gifted education...”, a long standing persistent problem of practice in the field of gifted education (Ford & Russo, 2014).

It is important to consider cyclical conversation styles when working with African American parents and caregivers. Cyclical conversation styles involve multiple entry points to conversations with opportunities to revisit and go deeper with topics.

**Delivery Method for Parent Education.** The findings of this study highlight the importance of gifted educators understanding communication styles among different cultures both for parent education efforts as well as classroom practices. Lack of understanding can lead to frustration and mistrust. Gay (2002) states “the communicative styles of most ethnic groups of color in the United States are more active, participatory, dialectic, and multi- modal. Speakers expect listeners to engage with them as they speak by providing prompts, feedback, and commentary” (p.111).

**Implications for Practice.** While this study had a small sample size, findings can be used to inform practice for educators looking to develop parent education opportunities for Black parents and caregivers. The first step for educators would be to find ways to leverage existing individual relationships. Educators should look to build relationships with community organizations which Black parents and caregivers already have trust. Other possible resources to leverage are parent school home visit programs, which may already exist in the school system.

Critical to the replication and future implementation of the findings of this research study is the need for skilled facilitators. Gifted educators must

consider the methods they are using to reach culturally, linguistically diverse parents within the communities they support. These efforts to engage families in a way, which honors their culture, can support the work to identify and serve more students from typically underserved populations.

**Application of Study Findings in the Field of Gifted Education.** The need for a systematic approach to parent education with a specific focus on low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse families is essential if a district is to begin to address the current inequities in gifted programming that exist. This systematic approach must allow for enough flexibility to address individual parent or caregiver needs. This model must address “the complexity of needs, the roles that ethnic minority parents are playing, [and] the constraints that impede their involvement...” (Crozier, 2001, p. 330).

Individual experiences of participants highlight the need for educators to listen to and build relationships with parents to understand their personal experiences with the school system. By creating intentional parent education guiding principles, which build around the idea of having a conversation, educators can work more collaboratively with parents to support the needs of gifted learners, especially those from diverse backgrounds.

Another step identified by the researcher is the need for educators to be trained in supporting culturally diverse learners. Ford et al. (2014) state, “Culturally incompetent educators- educators who are ill-prepared for or uncommitted to working with Black students- risk compromising or sabotaging the educational experiences of Black students, and thereby contribute to the segregated gifted education programs” (p. 308). Sadly, “students who are out of “cultural sync” with their teachers will go unidentified, regardless of their intellectual abilities” (Bonner, 2000, p. 647). Bonner (2010) highlights the importance of teacher training by stating, “Without proper training, teachers will continue to refer only those

students who fit their preconceived ideas of how a gifted student behaves; this misconception immediately rules out many students who, by current definition, show gifted potential” (p. 655).

By engaging parents and caregivers of diverse gifted learners, districts can begin to address the need for “comprehensive, proactive, aggressive, and systematic efforts to recruit and retain Black and Hispanic students in gifted education...” which is a long standing persistent problem of practice in the field of gifted education (Ford & Russo, 2014).

Implications of this research reach beyond the field of gifted education. The challenges, which exist in the field of gifted education, are also facing the larger field of education. Achievement gaps and opportunity gaps plague the United States as the country struggles to educate an increasingly diverse population. Opportunities for educators to work collaboratively and build relationships with parents and caregivers, is a critical step in moving the educational system toward equity.

**Re-examination of Current Education Practices and Parent Engagement.** The nation's excellence gaps demonstrate a critical demand for re-examination of current education practices including parent engagement. Research demonstrates the importance of parent engagement in tackling these gaps. “If success at school and in life begins at home, then all parents need knowledge about what they can do to fulfill their critical roles in the home, in academics, and in providing talent development opportunities and support” (Schader, 2008, p. 481). Further research into the area of parent engagement and typically underserved populations could have positive impacts on the challenges facing the nation's schools.

### **Conclusion**

Parents are a critical, yet often neglected, component of effective educational systems (Crozier, 2011). This is particularly true for CLD and

low-income parents and caregivers. Grantham, Frasier, Roberts & Bridges (2005) state "to reverse underrepresentation among culturally diverse students in gifted education, the role of parents as advocates is critical" (p. 138).

In school districts, educators and Black parents and caregivers must work to build relationships in order to create the trust needed to allow collaboration to support all children to reach their potential. Black parents and caregivers deserve to be heard and their experiences valued, and they want to know how to get what their children need on a daily basis within schools. However, the educational system has a long history of neglecting their needs, which many of these parents have experienced, and these parents and caregivers want to protect their children from suffering the same fate.

The key to "our nation's success depends on our ability to develop the talents of high-ability students in every community" (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012, p. 8). Only when we come together, listen, learn, and value one another will all students regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status be able to reach their potential and impact society in positive ways.

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## **Innovations: Pioneers in Gifted Education**

Stephen H. Chou

Accounts of giftedness have been noted and celebrated throughout history in every culture and every stratum. Within the United States, during the 1920's and 1930's, gifted and talented education were passionately forged through the works of Lewis Terman with his "Study of the Gifted" and Leta S. Hollingworth, the foremother of gifted education, and her focus on exceptional children. Since, the field of gifted education has grown and evolved and has been supported through funds provided by the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act that continues to provide grant monies for gifted education research and policy. These projects have included *A Nation at Risk* (1983), *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993), and *A Nation Deceived* (2004) illustrating the advantages of accelerating gifted children, as well as the United States' struggle in meeting the needs of these gifted children. In the 1970's, gifted education began to recognize, more prominently, individuals who were twice-exceptional (2e), which was defined as students with intellectually giftedness as well as formally identified or diagnosed with one or more disabilities. These 2e individuals require a unique understanding and approach. Gifted education, however, continues to be challenged to support our gifted and twice exceptional (2e) youth through policy and funding on systematic and legislative levels, even when the need is great and even though it is for our brightest and most promising.

Within the field of giftedness and 2e, though there are a variety of definitions of giftedness (and controversy between definitions as well as even the use of the term), further operationalization of giftedness was provided by the Columbus Group (1991). This definition, more greatly embraced within the field of gifted/2e, not only captures the individual for their intellectual abilities but also illuminates their socioemotional experiences:

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

These inner aspects of an individual that recognize their intellect and cognitive, emotional, and sensory intensities, as well as the holistic, and dynamic varied correlation between them, have transformed the field of gifted education.

Further insight and understanding of these gifted/2e individuals is beneficial on an individual, parental, teacher, and administrative levels. Recognizing these individuals not only for their learning and intellectual potential, but also their socioemotional sensitivities, is paramount to them being seen and feeling known and held. Moreover, giftedness is not confined to a particular ethnicity, socioeconomic status, developmental level, sexual identity, religion, or any other culture facet of humanity. In fact, diversity within giftedness often adds and multiplies logarithmically, rather than takes away at any time.

The impact projects and research conducted by Education Doctoral students in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, pioneers in their present, embody a spirit of innovation; while honoring the past, they trail-blaze their future for those within gifted education. Their fire is captured and emblazoned for posterity here.

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Norma L. Hafenstein, PhD, Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education and  
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The Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education was established in October 2016 through the generous support of the Considine Family Foundation. The Chair reflects the University of Denver's and the Morgridge College of Education's long history of commitment to gifted education through service to gifted children, training of teachers to serve children's needs, and support of doctoral research regarding giftedness. The vision for the work embodied by the Endowed Chair includes a future in which giftedness will be understood, embraced, and systematically nurtured throughout the nation and the world.



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