5-1-2014

How Does Your Garden Grow: How Planting Seeds of Hope Inspire a Community of Gifted African-American Learners to Flourish in an Early Childhood Setting

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HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW: HOW PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE INSPIRE A COMMUNITY OF GIFTED AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEARNERS TO FLOURISH IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTING

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Danielle Elaine MacNeal-Harris

June 2014

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, PhD.
Abstract

“Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested”

-African Proverb

Each day, African-American children are rarely given the opportunity to reach their full potential and flourish in American school systems. There continues to be a disparity in the number of African-Americans in the gifted population. When identified early, and with appropriate educational opportunities, young, culturally diverse gifted learners will be more likely to have long-term educational success. By utilizing an educational criticism methodology, this study discusses the importance of gifted education for African-American, early childhood students, by answering the question, how does The Hope Center engage in gifted education. This investigation reveals how one inner-city preschool program has planted seeds of Hope for an underrepresented group of learners. This is a reflection of how one small community is doing its part in cultivating our youngest gardens of learning.
Acknowledgements

I want to formally thank all of the people who I have crossed paths with that have inspired me to complete my research and obtain my doctorate degree. My friends, family members, sorority sisters, colleagues, professors, classmates and all those who have given a word of encouragement, asked how it was coming, helped edit a paper, watched my girls for me to go to class, etc…, I sincerely thank you.

To the teachers, students and administrators at *The Hope Center*, thank you for giving me a chance, or two, to begin by teaching experience with you, and for graciously allowing me to conduct my research at Hope, I thank you.

To my late husband who supported me in his own special way and encouraged me not to stop, I thank you.

To my beautiful daughters, who sacrificed many nights so I could go to class, listened to me when I complained, and told me I could do it, even when I wanted to give up; I hope I am an inspiration to you both, and always know you can achieve anything you put your mind to. I love you both very much, and I thank you.

And lastly, to my mother, who has supported me throughout this lengthy journey in more ways than I can mention. For never giving up on me, for being patient when I needed, for having high expectations of me, and never allowing me to settle for less, I am grateful. I love you and I truly thank you.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Imagine you are a child who is different from everyone else in your class. On a standardized test, you may score two or even three standard deviations away from the mean. No one wants to play with you, because you’re different; some even call you weird. You don’t think like the other children, and the teacher has no idea how to communicate with you, or provide appropriate instruction. Imagine this is your life, and has been ever since you began school at the age of four years old. No one has ever really acknowledged your learning differences, or your special learning needs. Then one day you are evaluated, and there is a name for your special need…you are gifted.

Gifted students are traditionally identified as late as third grade in most U.S. public school systems (Schwartz 1997). By the third grade, most students have spent four years in public schools, and for those who attend preschool, they have spent up to six years in the school system. The effects of chronic educational deprivation, when the educational needs of students with differing abilities are not being met within the school setting, and underachievement established during the kindergarten through third grade years are likely to be more deeply embedded and more difficult to reverse with every year of delay in assessment and programming for gifted students (Whitmore, 1988). This is especially an issue that has a direct impact on gifted low-income minority students, who are at the greatest risk for progressing through the school years unidentified.
Previous research indicates that early enrichment can contribute to the maintenance of potential in gifted children (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Garber & Beghab, 1988). These findings, combined with the literature on environmental effects on cognitive development (Karnes & Johnson, 1991; Lewis & Louis, 1991), illustrate the dire need for providing enrichment and educational support for gifted children, especially those from disadvantaged environments, as early as possible. Despite the adequate knowledge that early identification and services are crucial to maintain and facilitate children’s potential, the majority of school systems do not identify or provide services for gifted students in preschool or early elementary school years (Purcell, 1994). The Hope Center is an exception to that norm. At this early learning center, children are identified using multiple assessment measures, and are provided with learning opportunities designed to foster their intellectual and cognitive gifts. Undeniably children come to us with many strengths and interests and it is everyone's responsibility to attend to the potential and promise in all children. The challenge is how to best identify and serve this unique population of gifted students.

According to Donna Ford (2008), the underrepresentation of African-American students in gifted programs remains a persistent dilemma. In studying underrepresented populations, a key historical trend has been to primarily focus on African-Americans (Jenkins, 1936). The date of Jenkins’ initial research indicates the historically embedded severity of the presence of underrepresented groups in gifted education. In Jenkins’ research, he also found that despite high intelligence scores, African-American students were not being identified. According to Ford (2008), little progress has been made in regards to reversing underrepresentation. Ford (2008) states:
Compared to special education, gifted education is a small field; fewer publications are devoted to this area of study. And unlike special education, gifted education is not federally mandated, leaving much room for differences in definitions, identification, and programming across districts and states…Proponents of gifted education argue that gifted students have exceptional or special needs, as do children in special education classes; without appropriate services, gifts and talents may be lost or not fully developed. (p. 290)

Children with special learning needs are being ignored and neglected in our school systems. As educators, and as advocates for children, it is our responsibility to change the current state of gifted education in our American public school systems. All children have the right to a free and public education, and all children should have a right to have their special needs met. In order to obtain this, we need to change the way children are identified for gifted programming, and more importantly, when they are being identified. Currently, there are no federal mandates stating educational services need to be provided for gifted students. All decisions regarding gifted education, and funding for such education, comes from the state level (NAGC, 2012).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this investigation is to examine how a culturally diverse early childhood learning center attempts to meet the needs of their young, gifted, African-American learners. In this study, policies, practices, and procedures of one culturally diverse early childhood center, *The Hope Center*, will be examined. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the question, “How does *The Hope Center* engage in gifted education?” Subsidiary questions include:

1. How does *The Hope Center* recruit African American students for their gifted pre-school program?
2. How does *The Hope Center* identify African American students for their gifted pre-school program?

3. What types of learning experiences do the teachers at *The Hope Center* provide for the African American students in their gifted early childhood program?

4. What is the educational significance of the processes and conditions implemented by *The Hope Center*?

5. What are some implications for similar programs?

**Theoretical Framework**

The emergence of a formal, defined Critical Race Theory (Valdes, et al., 2002), was born in the late 1980’s in the legal arena of America. Its emergence not only had a direct impact in the world of legal academia but affected the way race had influences across different domains. Critical Race Theory, also referred to as CRT, refers to a framework, a mindset if you will, of how to view the world, during the post-civil rights era. Although the theory is set in traditional American culture, CRT and its use are taking on a more global perspective. CRT as a movement attempts to transform the relationship between race and power by exploring the role that race and racism play in modern society. Although originally examined through the lens of law making and legality issues, CRT has grown to be an invaluable doctrine which covers multiple facets of American society, including education, political science and ethnic studies.
Critical Race Theorists continue to reject at least three mainstream beliefs about race:

1. The notion of “colorblindness” to race will eliminate racism, when contrarily, “self-conscious racial identities can be and have been the source of individual fulfillment, collective strength and incisive policy-making” (Valdes, et al., 2002, p. 1).

2. Secondly, the tenet that racism is solely a matter of individuals, not overall systems. The thought that to address racism, we must make systematic changes to the current processes of which this country is currently built upon. The problem does not lie with the bigoted school-board member, or the racially influenced judge, but with the very structures of segregation, wealth and transmission.

3. The third tenet about racial injustice that CRT challenges is the thought that we can fight racism without looking at the other “isms” that exist within our culture. Other neglected forms of discrimination include sexism, ageism, heterosexism, classism, etc…

To discuss the foundations of CRT, without mentioning Derek Bell would be an injustice itself. Bell was a law professor at Harvard Law School, and was perhaps one of the “guiding lights” which led to the theoretical birth of CRT. Bell sought to understand, “How the laws contributed to the systematic disempowerment of African Americans more broadly.” Professor Bell was, “influential not just in setting the context for contesting the exclusionary practices of elite law schools, but also in helping to establish...
a scholarly agenda that placed race at the center of intellectual inquiry rather than at the margins of constitutional theory,” according to Crenshaw (1995, p. 10).

As the evolution of critical race theory continued, the theory forged a more immediate relationship with education. A new generation of CRT scholars have utilized this provocative theory (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. xii) as an influence of their scholarly pursuits. Although many scholars would have you ignore the very concept of race, the whole notion of “colorblindness,” CRT places race at the forefront of our minds and at the center of our analysis. This often challenging work reminds us that we cannot simply “get past the notion of race,” because it is indeed at the constitutive of what it means to be an American (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. xii). This is not to insinuate that racism is solely an American phenomenon, on the contrary, evidence of racial strife exist in places like the UK as well as parts of Paris. This example signifies that race remains a potent symbol of difference, inequity and oppression, according to Ladson-Billings (2011). The notion of CRT is not only critical in the United States, but because of the world-mindedness of this country, this theory has a prominent effect on countries across the globe.

Although a persistent issue of turbulence and controversy in this country, the proposition of race, and more specifically racial theory, remained one of the least developed fields of sociological inquiry. Unlike its sister issues of inequality, gender, class and feminism which have been theorized for decades, racial theory was not formally inducted until the early 1990’s. This is not to say that other scholars have not examined carefully the notion of race as a powerful tool for the elucidation of social inequity, instead, Ladson-Billings and Tate suggest,” the intellectual salience of this theorizing has
not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (2006). The cultural and social-structural significance that race has in the educational realm, continues to be explored by current critical race theorists. In 1933, Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. DuBois in 1989 (from a republished work originally written in 1903), used race as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequity, although they were “consistently marginalized by the mainstream academic community,” according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006). With multiple publications, Woodson and DuBois essentially laid the foundation for the anticipated birth of what we’ve come to know and accept as critical race theory.

Critical Race Theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this study, primary because it is an approach to scholarship that integrates lived experiences with racial realism. A potential outcome of this study is to open the eyes of early childhood educators, and recognize the potential gifts that young African-American learners possess. Another reason for selecting CRT, is it allows a variety of scholarly traditions to be utilized in order to make sense of experiences and epistemological standpoints (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). CRT also provides the framework to create narratives based out of the historical, socio-cultural, and political realities of the lives of people of color, and in this case, children. This will allow this research study to be presented through the lens of encouraging equality and access within gifted programs.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Geneva Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths
of these students. Gay further continues to illuminate culturally responsive teaching as validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive pedagogy and practice facilitates and supports the achievement of all students. In classrooms which are culturally responsive, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learner-centered context, where strengths of the students are identified, nurtured and utilized in order to promote academic success. As we progress through this educational investigation, I will use culturally responsive pedagogy as a filter to conducting observations, interviews, as well as data analysis. I will expand on the implications of creating a culturally responsive environment for students, especially African-American students, to flourish in chapters four and five.

**Definition of Terms**

**African-American**: The dictionary defines this term as an American of African descent; of or relating to Americans of African descent. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, An African-American or Black person is a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘Black, African American, or Negro’ (U.S. census, 2010).

**Culture**: refers to a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba 1991).

**Culturally diverse**: refers to the variations people possess in regards to their systems of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, etc… that people use to give meaning to their lives and the lives of others.
**Gifted:** Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

**Intellectual giftedness:** … is an intellectual ability significantly higher than average. It is different from a skill, in that skills are learned or acquired behaviors. Like a talent, intellectual giftedness is usually believed to be an innate, personal aptitude for intellectual activities that cannot be acquired through personal effort, (Wikipedia, 2010).

**Underrepresentation:** This term means “inadequately represented.” For the purposes of this project, when the term is used, the reader will know we are talking about a specific group of people who are “inadequately represented” in gifted education programs.

**Deficit Thinking:** is the notion that educators may have when they interpret differences as deficits, dysfunctions and disadvantages. Educators begin to focus on the students’ shortcomings and weaknesses, as opposed to their strengths (Ford, 2007).

**Intelligence:** an umbrella term describing a property of the mind including related abilities, such as the capacities for abstract thought, understanding, reasoning, planning, problem solving, communication, learning and learning from the experience.

**Educational experience:** As defined by John Dewey (Eisner 1998), this experience fosters the growth of human intelligence, nurtures curiosity, and yields satisfactions in the doing of those things worth doing.

**Early childhood:** for the purposes of this study, early childhood will refer to the years prior to a student entering 1st grade. This consists of the preschool experience for three
year olds, four year olds and the kindergarten classroom experience for five and six year olds.

**Preschool:** The Merriam Webster dictionary provides the following definition: of, relating to, or constituting the period in a child's life that ordinarily precedes attendance at elementary school. For the purposes of this investigation, the preschool period will refer to children ages 3-5 and have not yet entered kindergarten.

**Significance**

In order to meet the needs of young, gifted, African American children, it is imperative to first determine if such a group exists. The indubitable fact is, that since its inception, African Americans students have been educationally neglected in the realm of gifted education and advanced placement. Although it presents to be an impenetrable problem, addressing the significant underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education is in fact, a soluble issue. Parents, educators, administrators and other invested stakeholders possess the power to confront the issue head on, and begin to lessen the discrepancies in our educational system, and that power lies in being proactive in eliminating the barriers which prevent culturally diverse students from being recruited and retained in gifted education programs. How *The Hope Center* is able to find qualified, interested families with young, gifted children, can prove to be a model for other programs that do not possess the same successful recruitment endeavors.

Once prospective students are found, the next step in the process is to identify their needs, in order to determine if additional educational support is needed, in the form of gifted programming. Comparable to the recruitment of gifted African American students, the identification of these students continues to be a problem for the public
school system (Passow & Frasier, 1995). In our American history, there has been a long history of research, theories and teachings which promote the notion of deficit thinking in regards to the intelligence of culturally and linguistically diverse groups, especially African Americans. Some of the terms used to identify this diverse group of learners included “genetically inferior,” which evolved into “culturally deprived” or “culturally disadvantaged” (Gould, 1995; Valencia, 1997). More recently, the term has developed into “culturally different.” According to Ford (Ford, Grantham & Whitting, 2008), “deficit thinking refers to the negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs about culturally linguistic diverse groups that result in discriminatory policies and behaviors or actions” (p. 292). Deficit thinking contributes to the under-identification of gifted African American students because this type of thinking, leads to actions and behaviors. These negative beliefs people possess, affect identification by an over-reliance on tests with little consideration for biases, low referral rates of minority students for gifted education services, and the adoption of policies and procedures that have a disparate impact on culturally and linguistically diverse students.

This study seeks to identify successful methods of identifying young, potentially gifted children. "If you don't identify these learners, they seldom live up to their potential. When they're in an atmosphere where it's OK to be smart and show their intelligence, they'll really blossom," George Brantley, former executive director of The Hope Center (Yettick, 2001). In young children, a concern exists that advanced abilities do not necessarily result in subsequent high achievement (Khano & Kirby, 1986). According to Lewis & Louis (1991), this unfulfilled promise may be due to factors such as mis-measurement or the lack of environmental support and stimulation. Early
identification is acknowledged by many advocates for minority gifted children as an imperative strategy (Lewis & Louis, 1991). Consequently, early intervention can make a difference in an educational life course which may be headed for underachievement, especially for children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Karnes, Shwedel & Linnemeyer, 1982).

_The Hope Center_ has been operating in the Northeast Denver community for over 50 years. When the center first opened, the primary target audience was developmentally delayed adults. Since then, _The Hope Center_ has expanded, and renovated a graffiti-ridden, abandoned grocery store to provide a quality program for children in the neighborhood. In 1995, _The Hope Center_’s executive board visualized an unconceivable notion, that inner-city kids are gifted too. This vision was inspired by the 1994 publication, _The Bell Curve_, written by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, which suggested that some ethnic groups had lower overall intelligence levels than other groups. As a result of this erroneous exclusion of minority children and children from low socio-economic backgrounds, _The Hope Center_ created an early childhood learning program geared towards addressing and meeting the needs of young, gifted, African American learners. Through advertising and word-of-mouth, the program has screened over 300 children whose families, neighbors and child care providers believed they might have superior IQs. Over 30% of those screened, most with IQs of 120 and above, have since been identified and served with enrichment programs that parents pay for on a sliding scale.

Young children come to school with an innate curiosity, many strengths and a variety of interests. It is the responsibility of the caregivers and educators to attend to the
potential and promise of all children. As if that task is not challenging enough, it is also
the responsibility of educators to determine the best way to identify and serve the unique
population of gifted learners that are present in classrooms throughout American schools.
In order to fully develop the potential of gifted African-American students, programs
designed to specifically meet those needs must be established at an early age. *The Hope
Center* is a commendable early childhood program, which is designed to meet the
educational needs of young, gifted children. This center is not only dedicated to meeting
the needs of the gifted community, but realizes the importance of differentiating services
to also address the special needs of underrepresented African-Americans in the world of
gifted education. *The Hope Center* serves as an exemplar on meeting the needs of this
distinct population of learners within the gifted community.
Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

History of Gifted Identification

The origins of identifying gifted children, or children who possessed “significant intellectual differences,” can be credited to early investigations conducted by Binet (Binet, Alfred & Simon, 1916). As a result of this early research, Binet was able to show where we could search among mental functions for significant intellectual differences, and it was he who created the first successful intelligence scale and illuminated the validity of an actual age development through successive hierarchies of intelligences. Through this measure, the term “mental age” was birthed. Binet’s work was essentially the foundation needed for Stern’s later development of an intelligence ration, or quotient, more commonly referred to as I.Q. (Silverman, 1997).

During a subsequent study conducted by psychologist Lewis Terman (1915), students in three schools in San Francisco were scanned for “bright” children, children with an intelligence quotient of 125 or greater. Teachers of children who had scored exceptionally high on a mental ability test were additionally called upon to complete an information schedule and were expected to provide ratings on a variety of traits that were associated with being gifted (Terman, 1915). After this, the importance of having parents completing an information schedule became apparent.

Since its conception in the 1920’s, gifted education has endured a tumultuous reputation. “Often mirroring the pendulum swing of society’s priorities of ‘critical needs
to its elitist luxury,’ (Jolly & Kettler, 2008), gifted and talented students become a
national priority when excellence is sought and a critical need is perceived” (Jolly, 2009,
p. 37). Although the Soviet’s launching of the Sputnik satellite awakened our nation’s
need for gifted programming, the field had been established, and frankly, ignored, since
the 1930’s. After this triumph made by another country, the gifted population received
more notoriety than ever before. In an effort to afford “better provisions for our talented
youth” (Barbe, 1959), the United States Congress passed federal legislation which
presented itself as the National Defense Education Act, also referred to as NDEA.
According to Fleming (1960):

   motivating the discovery of intelligent and talented young men and women and
   stimulat[ing] them to devote themselves to the sciences, foreign languages,
   technology, and in general to those intellectual pursuits that will enrich personal
   life, strengthen resistance to totalitarianism, and enhance the quality of American
   leadership on the international scene (p. 132).

The implementation of NDEA stimulated interest in the field of gifted education, and this
was evidenced by the 1960 White House Conference on Children, which focused
primarily on “opportunities for children and youth to realize their full potential for a
creative life in freedom and dignity”( U.S. Department of Health, Education, and
Welfare, 1967). Specific recommendations were made on the behalf of gifted children,
including, the notion that all schools should be required to make special, provisions for
the education of gifted children, including talented students and creatively gifted
students. Suggestions were also made in reference to state departments of education
assuming greater responsibility for gifted education, as well as educating teachers in
areas which focused on the nature and needs of gifted learners. Finally, the report
suggested finding more sensitive ways to identify potentially gifted students from diverse and underserved populations (National Association for Gifted Children, 1960).

“Gifted children represent one of the greatest assets of any society and are an integral part of the intellectual spirit and vitality of the future” (Fetterman, 1988). Although this may be the case, gifted programs are not supported on a national level, and according to the previously stated report, more than half of the United States do not monetarily support gifted programs. In addition to the lack of funding, the charges of elitism have been strongly affiliated with gifted students. Gifted children represent at least 3-5% of the students in school, as determined by typical intelligence measures used in schools (Borland, 2009), that percentage is not including students who are gifted in areas other than those calculated by an intelligence test. Although there is a number of students affected, there lacks substantial funding mandates and teacher training programs geared towards gifted education. The development of gifted programs significantly lags behind among other comparable educational programs, for instance, vocational education, migrant education, and special education (Fetterman, 1988).

Our society began to validate the existence of gifted children, and the value of gifted education in the early sixties, with the launch of Sputnik via the Soviet Union. This remarkable success from another country forced the United States to acknowledge the importance of our gifted children. Although, as Americans, we strive to be at the “top of the food chain,” and often choose to engage in “intellectual marathons” with other countries, we are not “putting our money where our mouths are” in terms of gifted education.
As previously mentioned, one of the primary obstacles faced in the gifted education is the idea of elitism. Being a part of the gifted population has often meant being grouped with the intellectual “haves,” and that everyone else automatically falls into the intellectual “have nots,” category. This mindset has led to a devastating picture being painted of our intellectually gifted population. This way of thinking has misled people to believe that this percentage of the population might be given preferential treatment in public school systems, and that these students with these “special gifts and talents” are given enough opportunities to foster those special talents. In 1980, Roger Taylor, a gifted education consultant, provided us with an entertaining vignette of an elite group which exists in our schools, and that is the athletically advantaged group. Roger illuminates how much preferential treatment is granted to this group of students, but as citizens, we are afraid to acknowledge the gifted population for fear that we may be developing an “elitist” group of individuals. The elite groups already exist, and it didn’t begin with the gifted, but as Taylor points out, the American educational system as a whole fosters the development of an elite group (1980).

Another obstacle that advocates for gifted programming face, is the erroneous notion that “they will make it on their own.” That gifted students do not need curricular interventions in order to be successful. By definition, the intellectually gifted are capable of learning on a higher cognitive level and more rapidly than their same aged peers. This idea feeds into the myth that gifted students do not require additional educational support. The regular education classroom is designed to meet the needs of the average student (Switzer & Norse, 1979). “The child is bombarded with forces which encourage
modification of behavior, creativity, and intellectual development toward the mean of the group” (p. 323). Silverman states, when we realize gifted children are children with special needs—another branch of special education—the importance of early identification becomes clearer (1992). She goes on to emphasize the urgency we place on the identification of children with learning disabilities, and the obvious best practice for identifying such children is to do so as early as possible, because early intervention makes the most difference in a child’s life. What is not understood by Silverman, is why then don’t American schools place the same sense of urgency on children who are gifted:

We are legally bound to identify and serve [mentally disabled] children not only in the primary years, but also in the preschool years. We are morally bound to identify and serve gifted children in their early years if we want these children to be able to contribute their gifts to society (1992, p. 16).

**What Does it Mean to be Gifted?**

There are many definitions of giftedness throughout the United States, and depending on the intended audience, the interpretations of the term are limitless. Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted definition that is federally mandated, which every school must abide by, however, there are several definitions that stakeholders tend to model (NAGC website). The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) defines a gifted person as being someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression. This definition provides a general reference to the spectrum of abilities that fall under the umbrella of “gifted.” This is an example of a very broad, subjective definition.
The following definition is taken from the Javits Act of 1988 which provides grant monies for educational programs which seek to serve individuals from underrepresented populations:

The term gifted and talented student means children and youths who give evidence of higher performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools in order to develop such capabilities fully.

Some professionals define "gifted" as an intelligence test score above 130, two or more standard deviations above the norm, or the top 2.5%. Others define "gifted" based on scholastic achievement: a gifted child works 2 or more grade levels above his or her age. Still others see giftedness as prodigious accomplishment: adult-level work while chronologically a child. But these are far from the only definitions. Former U. S. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland, Jr., in his August 1972 report to Congress, stated:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society (Marland, 1972).

No Child Left Behind legislation (2001) created a new, achievement-based definition of giftedness, however it does not mandate that states use its definition:

The term “gifted and talented”, when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily
provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (Title IX, Part A, Section 9101(22), p. 544)

A group of respected professionals in the field of gifted suggest a definition based on the gifted child's differences from the norm:

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, cited by Martha Morelock, "Giftedness: The View from Within", in Understanding Our Gifted, January 1992).

Although there are many variations of definitions of giftedness, some containing similarities and very detailed descriptions, while others are quite vague in their description, there is one definition that has been profoundly influential in the field of gifted education, and that comes from The Marland Report (1972). Although this definition can too be viewed as extremely subjective, it is the definition widely used by many gifted programs across the Nation, and serves as a model for other definitions to be birthed:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (Marland, 1972, p. xi-xii).

Giftedness can occur across many domains. Being gifted in one area does not necessarily mean a child will be gifted in all areas. Children can be gifted in general intellectual ability, leadership, creativity thinking and production, specific academic areas, psychomotor ability and visual and performing arts. Giftedness should not be measured solely on one’s performance on a standardized measure, but rather, a combination of abilities, skills and characteristics should be considered. The
characteristics of giftedness can present themselves in a variety of developmental areas, including general intellectual ability, academic aptitude, creative thinking and production, leadership, psychomotor ability, and physical and performing arts. The list of characteristics is quite comprehensive, although not exhaustive. These general characteristics of giftedness were compiled from multiple checklists gathered from varied gifted organizations, and was retrieved from the Austega Information Service website (2010). Some of the characteristics include:

- provides very alert, rapid answers to questions
- has a wide range of interests
- displays a great curiosity about objects, situations or events
- has the capacity to look into things and be puzzled
- shows superior judgment in evaluating things
- learns rapidly, easily and efficiently
- uses a lot of commonsense
- retains and uses information which has been heard or read
- has a power of concentration, an intense attention that excludes all else
- shows similar characteristics to general intellectual ability but concentrated around one or a few fields
- learns rapidly, easily and with less repetition in one or a few specific areas (probably not all subject areas)
- is fluent in producing and elaborating on ideas
- makes unusual associations between remote ideas
- is able to understand the intellectual aspects of psychomotor activities
• demonstrates endurance, stamina and persistence in physical activities
• demonstrates prowess in physical activities common amongst age peers
• discriminates musical and other sounds well
• understands musical relationships
• readily shifts into role of another character, animal or object
• enjoys evoking emotional responses from listeners
• demonstrates ability to dramatize feelings and experiences
• puts depth into drawing, showing planning and good proportion

Identification Issues Regarding Race

In order to be able to identify young African-American children for gifted programs, they first need to be found. The issue of recruitment is not a novel concept when it comes to the poorly represented group (U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, 2002), but an issue that has existed since as early as the 1930’s with a study by Jenkins, which found that despite high intelligence test scores, African-American students were not formally identified as being gifted. Ford suggests that, “for more than 70 years, educators have been concerned with the paucity of African-American students being identified as gifted” (Ford, et al., 2008, p. 289). In 1998, Donna Ford reviewed trends in reports on underrepresentation and found that African-Americans have been amongst the culturally and linguistically diverse populations that have always been underrepresented, with these numbers continuing to increase over the years. Supporters of gifted education believe that gifted students have exceptional needs which without the appropriate support systems, gifts and talents may be lost or underdeveloped. The Javits Act of 1994 realized the implications of potential talent loss, specifically among
culturally and linguistically diverse students, and economically disadvantaged students.

The primary goal of the Javits Act is to support efforts to identify and serve these special populations of gifted students (Ford, 2008). Although giftedness crosses the color lines, African-American students may exhibit the characteristics listed previously, in addition to characteristics of giftedness that occur more prevalently in culturally diverse students:

- ability to express feelings and emotions;
- ability to improvise with commonplace materials and objects;
- articulateness in role-playing, socio-drama, and storytelling;
- enjoyment of, and ability in, visual arts, such as drawing, painting, and sculpture;
- enjoyment of, and ability in, creative movement, dance, dramatics, and so forth;
- enjoyment of, and ability in, music, rhythm, and so forth;
- use of expressive speech;
- fluency and flexibility in figural media;
- enjoyment of, and skills in, small-group activities, problem solving, and so forth;
- responsiveness to the concrete;
- responsiveness to the kinesthetic;
- expressiveness of gestures, body language, and so forth, and ability to interpret body language;
- humor;
- richness of imagery in informal language;
- originality of ideas in problem solving;
- problem-centeredness or persistence in problem solving;
- emotional responsiveness; and
- quickness of warm-up, (Torrance, 1969).

When we discuss the issues with identification, we must also address how teacher referral effects the identification of African-American students. Although there have been few studies conducted regarding this issue as it relates to culturally and linguistically diverse students, there does exist a body of scholarship that shows some teachers have negative stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions about the intellectual abilities of these diverse learners (Terman 1915). It can be arguably stated that White teachers are more competent in identifying giftedness among White students, but less...
effective with students who differ from their background. In line with this, Beady and Hansell (1981) found that African-American teachers held higher expectations of African American students that did White teachers. This was also revealed in more recent research by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1992 and later by Irvine in 2002, which found similar results as the previous study, that Africa-American teachers held African-American students to a higher academic expectation.

These issues can be linked to the inadequate teacher preparation in gifted education and multicultural education in teacher preparedness courses. How can we expect teachers to be able to adequately identify students for gifted programs, when only about 3% of colleges and universities offer courses in gifted education (Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006). With such a minimal amount of opportunity for formal instruction in gifted education, how can teachers be expected to identify, refer and instruct gifted students? In addition to the lack of formal gifted instruction teachers receive, too few educators receive formal and meaningful exposure to multicultural educational experiences, multicultural curriculum and instruction, and practicum experiences in urban settings. Often times, one course in diversity is all that is provided in preparation for working with culturally diverse students (Banks, 2006).

**The Need for Early Identification.**

Often times when engaged in educational conversations with laypersons about the need for gifted identification in the early childhood years, they get this peculiar look on their face, and ask the question “Isn’t too early to see if a child is gifted?” or “How can you tell if a three year old is gifted?” I usually dismiss the misguided questions, and try
to give an elevator pitch about identifying potentially gifted children early, so that they may begin to receive services early. The differences between gifted children and non-gifted children can be assessed as early as one and half years of age, using standard assessment measures (Damiani, 1997). However, after children have been identified as gifted, parents often recall noticeable differences between their child and others, as early as infancy. Some of the differences include showing significantly greater goal directness, more responsiveness to the tester and test materials, as well as longer attention spans (Damiani, 1997).

There have been several research studies which support the feasibility and advisability of identifying and serving young gifted children and their families. There is also extensive documentation on the need for programming for young gifted children (Burns & Tunnard, 1991; Sandel, McCallister & Nash, 1993). The early identification process is not said to be an “end all” to identifying gifted children. If young children are evaluated at an early age, and do not qualify to receive gifted services, that it not to say they are definitely not gifted. A number of factors could be a reason for anxiety or other test taking issues. If parents and teachers continue to notice characteristics of giftedness, a re-assessment is the best follow-up for that young learner.

The Relevance of Gifted Education.

“Genius without education is like silver in the mine.”-Benjamin Franklin

In 1988, David Fetterman proclaimed the importance of reevaluating the role of gifted and talented education not only nationally, but on a global perspective as well (Fetterman, 1988):
Gifted programs prepare future leaders, scientists, and artists. In addition, these programs help meet the individual needs of gifted children. The loss in unrealized potential of underserved gifted children is incalculable—in lost inventions, cures, discoveries, and dreams. Gifted programs help gifted students maximize their potential and increase the probability that they will make a productive contribution to society (1).

The author realized the urgency of gifted education over two decades ago, and today, gifted education is not a federal, and in some cases, not a state priority. According to The State of the Nation Report in Gifted Education, released in 2009, the federal government only provides 2 cents out of every $100 invested in K-12 education. This figure is determined, according to the report, by comparing U.S. Department of Education funding for students in K-12 which equals about $37.6 billion, to the funding for the Javits Gifted and Talented students Education Act, which was approximately $7.46 million in 2009. With the gross lack of federal support, the burden falls on the states to ensure the needs of gifted and talented students are being met. At the state level, only six states have fully funded mandates for gifted education, and there are 15 states which have no mandates on gifted education. Perhaps there are only gifted and talented children in certain parts of the country? Certainly this is sarcastically stated, however, the implication is as serious as the data. Of the remaining states with mandates, the majority consist of partially-funded mandates, and some have an unspecified funding source altogether. Thirteen of the states provide $0, in state funds to support gifted education, and another 5 states provide less than $1 million per year. Eleven states elect to make gifted education a priority, and invest over $10 million in state allocations.
Because of the limited state support for such mandates, it is often up to the local school
districts to allocate funds for gifted and talented programming, which leaves many gifted
students either never identified, or not receiving an appropriate K-12 public education.

Administrators and even educators will claim there are no reliable measures to
assess young children. Stakeholders may even protest that it costs too much money to
measure intellectual ability at such a young age. In fact, the negative effects of not
addressing the needs of young gifted children in kindergarten or earlier, will have a
greater impact on schools, teachers and students. The cycle of under-identification
perpetuates the deepening of underachievement of our gifted youth, and will be more
difficult to reverse with every year of delay in intervention and identification (Whitmore,
1988).

Underrepresented Populations in Gifted Programs.

One of the most persistent patterns which exist in gifted education programs is the
grossly underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse populations. African-
Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native American students have historically been
inadequately underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Ford, 2007). Of these
three diverse groups, African-American students are the only minority group to become
“more underrepresented” between the 1998 and 2000 (Ford, 2007), instead of the groups
numbers rising in gifted programs, the opposite has been seen. African-American
learners are the focus of this research due to that primary reason, and secondly, African-
American students persist to be the primary focus of litigation related to inequities in
gifted education (Office for Civil Rights, 2000). By focusing on the needs of African-

American gifted learners, it is not my intent to minimize the importance of serving all
culturally and linguistically groups of gifted children, the discussion is designed to
narrow the focus of this research.

According to Ford (2007), the majority of past and present endeavors to redress
the underrepresentation problem have been, “inadequate and misdirected, resulting in
what may be the most segregated programs in our public schools” (p. 402). Because
giftedness is a social construct that exists in “every cultural group and across all
economic strata” (USDE, 1993), there should be little or no underrepresentation of racial
and ethnic minority students in gifted education. Consequently, there should be virtually
no overrepresentation of Anglo students in gifted programs.

**Issues pertaining to the underrepresentation of African-American gifted students.**

A vast majority of scholarly works tends to illustrate recruitment as a primary
reason for the underrepresentation of cultural minorities in gifted programs. Recruitment
refers to the screening, identification, and placement of potentially gifted students. Lack
of recruitment of culturally diverse minorities is linked to the overreliance of
standardized tests for screening and identification purposes. These tests used primarily
for these purposes are biased, and are certain to yield unfavorable results for racial and
ethnic minority groups who are unfamiliar with U.S. customs, traditions, values, norms
and language (Ford, 2004). Often due to immigration, American school districts faced an
increasing amount of ethnic and racial diversity in schools, these led to an increased
reliance on these skewed standardized measures (Gould, 1981/1995; Menchaca, 1997).
According to Gould (1981/1995), intelligence tests provide limited information about racial and ethnic minority populations, yet this is the preferred identification measure used in American public schools. Educational opportunities were often limited for diverse students, who tended not to score favorably on them. According to Menchaca (1997):

Racial differences in intelligence, it was contended, are most validly explained by racial differences in innate, genetically determined abilities. What emerged from these findings regarding schooling were curricular modifications ensuring that the “intellectually inferior” and the social order would be best served by providing these students concrete, low-level, segregated instruction commensurate with their alleged diminished intellectual abilities. (p. 38)

Ford (2007) has identified another barrier to the recruitment of minority students for gifted programs as a “cultural deficit.” This refers to a perspective which pervades decisions made about and on behalf of African-American, Hispanic-American, and Native-American students (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Frazier Trotment, 2002). This reoccurring trend is described by Storti (1989):

The more we retreat from the culture and the people, the less we learn about them. The less we know about them, the more uncomfortable we feel among them. The more uncomfortable we feel among them, the more inclined we are to withdraw. The more we withdraw from the people, the more faults we find with them. The less we know about their culture, the more we seem to dislike it. And the worst of it is that, in the end, we begin to believe the very lies we’ve invented to console ourselves. (p. 32-34)

“Deficit thinking is negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse groups that result in discriminatory policies and behaviors or actions” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 291). When educators possess a deficit orientation, it hinders access to gifted programs for diverse students. This type of thinking prevents the ability and willingness of educators to recognize the strengths and potential gifts of
students from diverse groups. “Deficit thinking exists when educators interpret
differences as deficits, dysfunctions, and disadvantages” (Ford, 2007). As a direct result
of this type of thinking, minority students are often stamped with the “at-risk” label, and
consequently, their weaknesses and shortcomings are given the most attention, instead of
their strengths. With the publication of The Bell Curve (Hernstein & Murray, 1994),
arose a revival of deficit thinking about diverse groups of learners. With the goal of
influencing public and social policy in mind, Hernstein and Murray misinterpreted and
 misrepresented their data to confirm institutionalized prejudices. This grossly
 misrepresented data fueled the continuance of deficit thinking, and led the country to
believe that certain groups of people were intellectually inferior to other groups.

Summary

Gifted education, is an important topic that receives a lot of attention in the field
of education. The literature clearly suggests that early identification is the most
appropriate for all learners. The literature has also highlighted significant disparities in
the amount of African American children in gifted education programs. African
American children who are potentially gifted are no exception. The American school
system needs to reevaluate the need for early identification in gifted students, so that their
gifts can be nourished.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter 1 described the purpose and significance of examining African-American students’ experiences in gifted education programs. Chapter 2 reviewed the relevant literature on the history of gifted education, issues of early identification and access, and issues pertaining to underrepresented populations in gifted education. This chapter begins with an overview of the research design and explains why this methodology was selected. A depiction of the research site is followed by a description of the data collection process and a narrative about the researcher.

Research Questions

This study focused on one inner-city, early learning facility’s attempt to equip the youngest African-American gifted learners with the necessary tools for academic success. Specifically, this research addressed the following questions:

How does The Hope Center engage in gifted education?

How does The Hope Center recruit African American students for their gifted pre-school program?

How does The Hope Center identify African American students for their gifted pre-school program?

What types of learning experiences do the teachers at The Hope Center provide for the African American students in their gifted early childhood program?
What is the educational significance of the processes and conditions implemented by The Hope Center?

What are some implications for similar programs?

**Research Design and Rationale**

*The Hope Center* currently serves approximately 24 students in their gifted program, 16 of those are enrolled in the gifted preschool program, and the other eight receive specialized instruction in the gifted kindergarten program. The preschool program is divided into two separate sessions, with the younger children attending in the morning, and the older preschoolers attending in the afternoon. The first research question in this investigation sought to address how *The Hope Center* recruits potentially gifted students for their early childhood learning programs. According to Hope Center’s President and CEO, Gerie Grimes, the recruitment process occurs throughout the summer months and school year and there is currently a waiting list for admittance into the preschool program. The recruitment of children for this program is the first step in acknowledging the need for gifted programming exists within the African American community, as well as, the crucial first step in addressing these community needs.

The concept of recruitment as it relates to this topic is simply stated as finding and placing students in gifted education. One crucial question must be addressed in the quest to desegregate gifted education, and this question must be considered by all potential stakeholders; How can we improve access to gifted education for culturally diverse students, and once they have been successfully recruited, how can these students be successfully retained? Retention is another under-investigated topic in the field of gifted
education, specifically as it relates to African American students, but it is a topic which requires significant consideration and investigation. While I would certainly agree with Donna Ford (1994) and the imperative need for addressing the retention of culturally diverse gifted students, for now, we will focus on how students are recruited for *The Hope Center’s* program, and perhaps how these students are retained will constitute a potential discussion for future investigation. In order to answer the first and second research questions, How does *The Hope Center* recruit and identify African American students for their preschool program, I interviewed key administrators that play a role in the recruitment process. In addition to conducting qualitative interviews, I reviewed all relevant recruitment materials including, marketing materials, *The Hope Center’s* website, e-mails, e-blasts, and parent and community newsletters.

In order for the third research question in this study to be addressed: what conditions do the teachers at *The Hope Center* provide for the educational experiences of African American students in their gifted early childhood program, I utilized multiple data collection methods. These methods included classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis, including reviewing teacher lesson plans, student journals and environmental displays. Dewey defines educational experiences as ones that, “fosters the growth of human intelligence, nurtures curiosity, and yields satisfactions in the doing of those things worth doing” (Eisner, 1998, p. 98).

**Research Method**

An educational experience is what we hope all students receive in our American school, but school itself does not guarantee that. The conditions refer to the state of
something, especially with regard to its appearance, quality, or working order. When I speak of the conditions for educational experiences that the teachers provide, I am specifically referring to how the classroom, teacher interactions and curriculum are established for student’s educational growth. The most efficient method of documenting teacher and student interactions is to watch them. I conducted classroom observations over a span of two weeks. The weeks were intentionally non-consecutive, in order to truly see what happens inside the classrooms at The Hope Center, at different intervals of the year. The first five days of observations occurred in the beginning of the summer, two days during the fall, and the final three days of observations took place in the winter. As much as possible, I conducted the observations as a nonparticipating observer, however, at multiple times, the students were very eager to talk to me and show me things about their classroom environment. During the naturalistic observations, I attempted not to alter the situation being observed, but rather, just recorded what was seen and heard. I recorded detailed notes with the intent of highlighting the contextual features of the environment and descriptions of the key individuals. According to Eisner (1998), in educational criticism, especially in the descriptive dimension, the writer, “always tells an incomplete story.” The researcher should not expect to see and tell everything that occurs in the classroom. Eisner (1998) continues to express, “that in this sense, a narrative, like perception, is inherently selective. But selectivity, although partial and framework dependent, is a way of giving point to observations and thereby helping others learn to see” (p. 90). There is no definitive amount of time required to spend in the classroom observing in educational criticism. The method supports the notion of
spending a sufficient amount of time in the actual classroom, to be able to depict a clear and accurate portrait of the environment that will allow the reader to be able to envision the setting, as seen by the researcher. With these considerations in mind, it was important to me to observe during different points throughout the school year, in order to create an actual picture of regular classroom practices to the reader.

**Educational criticism and connoisseurship**

The first dimension in the educational criticism methodology is the description. A vivid description of an environment allows the reader to “see” the classroom. According to Eisner (1998) the text should allow the reader to participate vicariously in the events described. In an effort to let the consumer know what it is like in the classroom setting, the author must provide enough information during the descriptive phase to allow the reader to visualize the setting. The other crucial aspect of description is the emotion involved. Not just what is obvious to the writer, but what the situation feels like is as equally important as what the setting looks like. The descriptive dimension of educational criticism allows both the visualization and the emotional impressions be portrayed to the reader.

Although he renders himself a quantitative, educational researcher, Robert Slavin (1992), illustrates the unique characteristics of qualitative research, and supports the compulsory notion that this research is conducted in the natural setting and used as the direct source of data, and the researcher is the key instrument. In order to fully understand the context of the early childhood gifted classroom, one must immerse oneself in the setting of the classroom. It must be understood that human behavior is
significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Therefore, simply conducting interviews, would not deliver an adequate description of the conditions for learning the teachers provide. I was able to conduct several classroom observations which spanned over a total of two weeks. During the investigation, I held three formal teacher interviews; because of the amount of time I was able to spend at The Hope Center, I was afforded the opportunity to have follow-up conversations about what I had seen during the observations.

The description, possibly the most crucial element of the qualitative design, is possibly the most time consuming aspect of the data collection process. Slavin (1992) goes on to summarize some of the demands of qualitative data collection, specifically as it relates to providing an adequate description:

The qualitative research approach demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied. The researcher constantly asks such questions as: Why are these desks arranged the way they are? Why are some rooms decorated with pictures and the others not? Why do certain teachers dress differently from others? Is there a reason for certain activities being carried out the way they are?...nothing is taken as given, and no statement escapes scrutiny. Description succeeds as a method of data gathering when details face accounting. (p. 67)

The intent of the observations, document analyses, and teacher interviews, is to paint an accurate portrayal of the gifted classrooms at The Hope Center. With an in-depth view of the gifted classroom, I hope to present and understand the conditions for learning and growth are provided to these young learners. The document analysis allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the conditions provided for learning.
Reviewing the lesson plans provided an opportunity to see the intended curriculum, whereas reviewing students work provided the chance to review the received curriculum.

The final research questions, “What is the educational significance of the processes and conditions provided for educational experiences of the students in The Hope Center’s gifted early childhood program?”, and “What are the educational implications for similar programs?”, will help disseminate information to similar early educational programs. The final questions are answered via the analysis of the qualitative data collected, the development of themes, researcher interpretation of observations and interviews.

As previously stated, with every year of delay in assessment and programming for gifted students, the effects of underachievement and lack of programming are more likely to be deeply entrenched and more difficult to reverse (Whitmore, 1988). Lower socio-economic gifted minority children will be directly impacted, and are at the greatest risk of progressing through the school years unidentified. Although school systems are aware that early identification and services are crucial to maintaining and facilitating children’s potential, for the most part, children are not identified, nor services provided for gifted students in the preschool or early elementary school years (Purcell, 1994; Shaklee, 1992).

According to Creswell (2009), “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding individuals or groups ascribe to a human or social problem” (Creswell 2009). Creswell goes on to elaborate on qualitative research, “the process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making
interpretations of the meaning of the data,” (2009, p. 127). Qualitative inquiry paints a portrait with words, similar to how Picasso used paints. This method allows the researcher to deliver a truly unique piece of narrative artwork that can only be told by individuals. This is a naturalistic approach where “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

I utilized educational criticism and connoisseurship as the methodological framework which this study will be built upon, in order to truly capture the essence of The Hope Center, as it relates to the aforementioned research questions.

Connoisseur is defined as a person who is especially competent to pass critical judgments in an art, particularly one of the fine arts, or in matters of taste; a discerning judge of the best in any field. Elliot Eisner expands on this definition:

Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation. It can be displayed in any realm in which the character, import, or value of objects, situations, and performances is distributed and variable, including educational practice (1998, p. 63).

However, educators need to become something more than connoisseurs, they need to become critics.

If connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure. Criticism, as Dewey pointed out in Art as Experience, has at is end the re-education of perception... The task of the critic is to help us to see. Thus... connoisseurship provides criticism with its subject matter. Connoisseurship is private, but criticism is public. Connoisseurs simply need to appreciate what they encounter. Critics, however, must
render these qualities vivid by the artful use of critical disclosure (Eisner 1998, p. 87). Educational criticism is used as a tool for school and classroom improvement, (Eisner 1998). This method provides a framework for collecting and organizing data.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship utilizes description, interpretation, evaluation and thematics, to create a detailed work of art which can be used to improve a school environment. According to Eisner (1998), the description is the tool which allows the reader to be able to visualize or “see” what a place or process looks like. The description is an attempt to help the reader understand the school or classroom setting being observed “the text should also enable readers to participate vicariously in the events described” (Eisner 1998). This portion of this particular qualitative design allows the researcher to provide visualization, not only what is directly observed, but to describe how the environment felt, what were the emotions at the time of the observation. Although the details illustrated in the description will hopefully paint a vivid picture for the reader, it is impossible for the researcher to record every detail of the environment. The researcher must select what to include in the description, and what to leave out. Similar to the preparation of a fine meal, a chef would not include all of the spices in the spice rack, but would only select a few. According to Berlinger (1988), “only the less competent try to attend to everything.” The full “burden of proof” does not lie solely on the writer to provide a meaningful descriptive text; part of the proof depends upon the reader who must construe what they are reading to make it meaningful. There is an argument in literary theory which argues that texts are made by readers, not by writers (Fish, 1980). Hence, the descriptive dimension provides the necessary foundation which
will allow the reader to make meaningful connections to the text, and provides the first layer of this literary artwork.

Educational critics are determined to not only provide an in-depth account of what they experienced, but also to explain what it all means. “If description can be thought of as giving an account of, interpretation can be regarded as accounting for” (Eisner, 1998, p. 95). The writer’s obligation is not to provide a step by step explanation of what the experiences mean, but to provide enough interpretative description to allow the reader to raise fresh questions, to deepen the conversation and allow the reader to come to develop their own interpretation as well.

Eisner emphasizes that the awareness of qualities is a fundamental achievement. This holds true because what the writer can interpret depends first on awareness. Without awareness, interpretation is rendered impossible (1998). The description of a particular person, thing or environment is all one hopes to achieve, but without interpretation, the description alone is almost always inadequate. Eisner continues to state, “to interpret is to place in context, to explain, to unwrap, to explicate. It is, as some might say, a hermeneutic activity of ‘decoding’ the messages within the system” (1998). More easily stated, the description provides the what, the interpretation provides the how and why.

Because of the enterprising nature of education, schools are responsible for not only changing their students, but also enhancing the lives of their students. “Because schools are social institutions whose primary mission is educational, the significance of what transpires in schools [and classrooms] is subject to a standard that allows its
educational value to be appraised” (Eisner 1998). The evaluation of what is described and interpreted is crucial to the foundational merit of educational criticism. Different from the ostensible observer, who is “detached” and can simply describe what has been seen, the educational critic is responsible for assessing what was seen as well.

Although it may seem that with description, interpretation, and evaluation, that the researcher has provided a complete literary picture for the reader, there is one more facet of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Every classroom, teacher and school, possesses unique and distinguishing characteristics, but they also share commonalties, or themes, with other educational settings. This theme is applied to other situations through a process known as naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1975). Eisner (1998) illustrates the fact that the process of generalizing is a pervasive feature of life and that it takes many forms. Themes are formulated as an outcome of educational criticism. These themes are reflective of what the researcher observes as reoccurring messages during the observations. During qualitative research, multiple themes may arise, and it is essential to note that these themes are not to be formulated prior to the investigation, but after it’s completed.

**About the Researcher**

One of the unique aspects of qualitative research is the role of the principal investigator. The researcher serves as more than just an on-looker collecting data; because of the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the researcher typically has a sustained connection with the participants involved. According to Mehra (2002), “The researcher cannot separate himself or herself from the topic or people that he or she is
studying. It is the interaction between the researcher and the researched that the knowledge is created.” The researcher needs to “explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture and socioeconomic status, that may shape their interpretations formed during a study” (Creswell 2009).

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher. When I was about eight years old, I remember my mother standing at the top of the staircase looking at me with a puzzled look on her face, “Who are you talking to?,” would be her first question and I would simply reply, “my class,” “Where are you going?” she would ask, “I’m taking them to the bathroom!” As I got older, I was able to secure summer jobs at a local childcare facility where I was able to work with children of all ages. In preparation for college, I participated in a high school course that provided us with training and experience working with early childhood students. I have always wanted to be a teacher! After graduating with my undergraduate degree from the University of Northern Colorado in 1996, I was offered a position as a paraprofessional in the same elementary school I attended when I was in the sixth grade. At that time, I decided to return to graduate school, where I would pursue a degree in Early Childhood Special Education. While working on that degree, I was given the opportunity to teach in a special education preschool classroom at The Hope Center.

The Hope Center is where I got my first start. As a first year teacher, I was excited about the challenge that lied ahead. I had students in my classroom from different cultural backgrounds, different linguistic backgrounds, some were in foster care,
some of the students were born to teenage parents, and they all had a diagnosed disability. After receiving my Master’s Degree in 1998 from the University of Colorado at Denver, I was confident that I could take the knowledge about working with children I had gained at *The Hope Center*, and apply to a classroom in the Denver Public School system. I worked for DPS for one year in the emotionally disturbed preschool classroom. Although, this was indeed one of the toughest experiences I had in the classroom, it was also very rewarding.

This was also a challenging time in my personal life. I was expecting my first child. This was a changing point for some different reasons in my life. Obviously, I was becoming a mother, but secondarily, I decided to try a different role in the world of education. I became a center director for a large chain of child care facilities. This opportunity provided me another view of the world of education and the administrative responsibilities of it all. I learned about working with families, as well as working with a variety of different ages of children. I was able to look at curriculum implementation through a different lens. My responsibilities as a center director prepared me with not only a broader skill set, but also the confidence to pursue other leadership ventures.

The pursuit of other leadership ventures led me back to *The Hope Center*, where I served as the Program Coordinator. As the coordinator, I was responsible for the oversight of the center’s five programs including the child care center, the special education classrooms, the gifted preschool and kindergarten classrooms, the Colorado Preschool Program classrooms and the infant program. Assuming a leadership role at *The Hope Center* included participating in collaborative planning with other non-profit
organizations, as well decision making and ensuring the success of daily operations at the center level.

With more personal changes, the birth of my second child, I decided to return to the classroom, initially only part-time, so that I could spend more time with my infant and preschooler that I had at home. I sought an opportunity that would afford me the luxury of working with an age group I love, but also the flexibility of part-time employment. I found that opportunity at the Ricks Center for Gifted Children at the University of Denver. I had heard of this school before, but I had not had the opportunity to visit the school before now. This small, but influential school was unique in its design: there were approximately 280 students, ages 3 years old through 8\textsuperscript{th} grade, all were identified as being gifted and talented, where all of the students benefited from self-contained gifted classrooms. All of the faculty of the Ricks Center were teachers, and a model of team teaching was employed. All of the teachers were experienced with working with gifted students, or were participating in classes geared towards meeting the unique needs of the gifted learner, all offered at the University of Denver. This was a unique opportunity for me, because I hadn’t had the occasion to work with gifted students, in a teaching role. I had some experience from \textit{The Hope Center}, and some personal experience, as my daughter was identified as gifted and attend the gifted preschool program at \textit{The Hope Center}, but I was never the main facilitator in a gifted classroom.

This experience prepared me for another challenge, as well as a grand opportunity for me to participate in gifted education classes, and eventually decide to pursue a
Doctorate Degree in Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership with an emphasis in Gifted and Multicultural Education. While pursuing an advanced degree from the University of Denver, I began teaching full-time at the Ricks Center. I began to witness the evolution of a gifted child, and it inspired me to continue with my post-graduate studies. I was fortunate enough to work at the Ricks Center for six years before leaving to pursue other opportunities with the Denver Public Schools.

My passion had developed into a love for gifted education, gifted children and their families. But I still had a neglected passion, and that was working with students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. The Ricks Center offered wonderful classes and educational opportunities for all of the children it served. However, through no fault of their own, a vast majority of the students and teaching staff were from one dominant culture group. I had gained so much knowledge from my experience at the Ricks Center, but I determined it was time to move on, time to follow my other passion pursuit, so when I received the opportunity to be an early childhood teacher at an inner-city school, whose student population was predominantly African-American and Hispanic, I took it.

Now, I’m nearing the end my fifth year of teaching in an urban Denver Public School, I am noticing that the gifted identification process for young students is not considered a priority. I began to wonder what happens to these young, bright, potentially gifted learners if they are not appropriately identified until the third grade or later. I began to consider how it would look to identify our youngest DPS students in the preschool years, I began to investigate some of the early education possibilities that exist for students, primarily students of color, and I begin to realize that there are not many
opportunities for this special group of learners. All of these thoughts and uncertainties have brought me back full circle, so-to-speak, and brought me back to the educational principles and practices at the Hope Center, where this investigative inquiry begins.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

**Participants.** A discussion about participants and site include four aspects identified by Miles and Huberman (1994): the setting, the actors, the events and the process. The Hope Center has been purposefully selected for their unique design and services they provide for young, African-American, gifted learners. Although The Hope Center has multiple early childhood programs, my study solely takes place in the preschool and kindergarten gifted classrooms. The preschool program is designed to meet the needs of children ages three to five years old. The younger of the children have instructional time during the morning, while the older of the preschool groups receives instruction during the afternoon. I spent equal amounts of time observing the morning session of instruction, the afternoon session and in the all-day kindergarten classroom. My role as an observer was primarily that of a complete observer, where I observed without participating, except for during the times when the students insisted on conversing with me. One of the advantages of this type of observer role, according to Creswell (2009) is it may be useful in exploring topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss. This observation method also provided the most authentic portrayal of typical occurrences of the daily operations of the gifted classroom. The apparent actors for this research study are the gifted early childhood teachers, as well as the children enrolled in the program. In addition to the teachers, I was able to engage in
conversations with the administrative staff as well, which consists of the social worker and dean of students, the assistant director and the President and CEO. To maintain the anonymity of the children being observed, I audiotaped the classroom observations, I did not utilize video recording equipment in the classroom. Although there were multiple types of data collected, the majority of the time was spent observing the students and teachers in the natural setting, and having meaningful follow-up conversations with the classroom teachers.

For the structured interview process, teachers participated in three separate formal interviews, and several informal conversations between me and the teachers. The teachers were given an interview protocol prior to the interviews to serve as a guide for our conversations. The initial interview was held prior to the first classroom observation, this interview was brief, around 30 minutes long. This interview provided the researcher with the necessary background knowledge of the classroom, teacher and students, needed to begin observations. The primary outcome of the subsequent interviews were to address clarifying questions, and to gain a deeper understanding of what was observed in the classroom, documents, etc… The final two interviews allowed the teachers to reflect on their current practice, and elaborate on aspects of their classroom and experiences they wanted to highlight. With the exception of the president and CEO, the administrators participated in one interview also at an agreed upon location. For the Ms. Grimes, there were two interviews conducted, used for clarification purposes. For the teacher and administrative interviews, I used a small flip camera in order to accurately record the tone, inflections, facial expressions and other nuances that may have been missed if
solely relying on observational notes and audio recordings. The events that were observed took place in the most natural setting possible, in the classroom, on the playground, etc… The process that Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to is the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting.

Conducting classroom observations provide access to the behavior of the teacher and students. Interviewing allows the researcher to put into context and provides access to understanding their actions (Seidman, 2006). The initial interview provided the context for the observation periods, so that I would have some basic background knowledge of what happens on a daily basis in the classroom. The follow-up interviews provided both the researcher and participants with an opportunity to ask questions and elaborate on things that were observed in the classroom. As mentioned previously, there were additional interviews conversations that were composed of less structured questions, which provided the opportunity for the participant and researcher to engage in more of a conversation about what happens in the classroom.

The initial interview protocol consisted of four primary questions. The protocol also consisted of probing questions for each of the primary questions. According to Creswell (2009), the probing questions are intended to provide follow-up and allow the persons being interviewed to explain their ideas in more detail, and to elaborate on something they said previously during the interview. Creswell goes on to explain the purpose for using open-ended and somewhat unstructured interview questions that are few in number and intended to elicit the views and opinions of the participants (2009). The participants received a copy of the interview guide so they were able to review and
reflect upon the primary interview questions. See Appendix A for a copy of the interview protocol.

Observation Schedule. There is no specified amount of time that a researcher must spend in the classroom in order to paint an accurate portrait of what is being observed. A researcher can spend a year in the classroom and still not capture the essence of that environment if they are not perceptually acute. The length of time is not the important question, rather the quality of the evidence the researcher has to support descriptions, interpretations and appraisals, according to Elliot Eisner. In general, Eisner (1998) suggests, “for beginning researchers two weeks in a classroom and four weeks in a school, full time or nearly so, is not unreasonable.” With that being said, I was fortunate enough to spend ten days in the two classrooms, spread out over an extended period of time, which permitted me to observe the teachers and children at different phases of the school year. As previously outlined earlier in this chapter, I observed for five days at the beginning of the summer, two days during the fall and three days in the winter. This extended period of time provided an opportunity to directly observe how the teacher deals with transitions, establishes rituals and routines and how well the students adjusted to the classroom environment. At the conclusion of the weeks of observation, I was able to ensure I have enough evidence to support the multiple dimensions of educational criticism and connoisseurship.

Interview Process. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people are engaged in the storytelling process, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. It is the process of selecting constitutive
details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience (Seidman, 2006). The ability of people to symbolize their experience through language is at the very core of what it means to be human. According to Heron (1981), to understand behavior means to understand the use of language. He goes on to point out that the original and conventional paradigm of human inquiry is two people talking and asking questions of each other:

The use of language, itself,…contains within it the paradigm of cooperative inquiry; and since language is the primary tool whose use enables human construing and intending to occur, it is difficult to see how there can be any more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings into the human condition. (p.26)

Interviewing, then, is considered a basic mode of inquiry. The ultimate purpose on qualitative, in-depth interviews is not to gain answers or test hypotheses, or to evaluate a particular situation. Interviewing seeks to engage in an interest in understanding the lived experience of a group of people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). For these reasons, I’ve chosen interviews as a primary source of gathering information about The Hope Center’s identification process.

Although similarities exist between qualitative interviews and standardized survey interviewing, the epistemology of the qualitative interview tends to be more developing and open-ended, verses providing definitive answers that may result from survey like questioning. Moreover the qualitative interview was selected because it observes the participants more as meaning makers and not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers (Holstein & Gubrium) 1995. For this reason, conducting multiple personal interviews were in fact the most appropriate forms of
gathering information for the purpose of this research project. Although the questions established served as a guide for the participants’ responses, it allowed the teachers to keep focused. It also allowed me the equally important notion that I remain flexible and attentive to the variety of meanings that may emerge as the interview progresses (Warren 2002).

Prior to obtaining consent for the interviews, I was able to explain the purpose of the study, to teachers and administrators, I presented the general outline of the interview protocol, and protective steps for them to pause or terminate the interview, should the need arise. Possible reasons for suspending the interview include reluctance to answer questions, anxiety, or any other discomfort with the interview process. After the participants reviewed all of the materials, I answered any questions, and then obtained signed consent. Seidman (2006) suggests conducting a series of three interviews with a maximum of 90 minutes each. I scheduled two interviews, and informed the participants that if the need for a third interview arises, I would seek permission from the participants to conduct the final interview. Because of the flexibility of the teachers and the details they provided, additional formal interviews were not needed. An interview protocol was used to guide each of the interview sessions. After the interviews had been conducted and audio recorded, the teachers received a copy of the transcript, so “they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell 1998). This is a significant strategy used for establishing credibility, such as a system of checks and balances. Reviewing the transcripts allowed the teachers to ensure their words were recorded accurately, and also
allowed them the opportunity to expand on a specific topic, as needed. No errors were identified from the participants.

**Teachers.** Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation (Kvale 1996), with the emphasis on researchers asking the questions and listening, and respondents answering (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Prior to the initial classroom observation, I conducted an interview with the teachers directly involved with the gifted program. Currently, there are two teachers who teach in the gifted program at The Hope Center. “Interviews with teachers can be a very rich source of information,” Eisner (1998). This initial interview served as a way for me to fully explain the purpose of the research study, as well as a chance for the teachers to share their philosophical viewpoints in regards to gifted education. Additionally, the teachers were encouraged to highlight some of their pedagogical practices. The initial conversation, which took place between the researcher and the respondents, served as a foundation to the relationship that was formed during the subsequent weeks of observation. The questions that were asked in this primary interview consisted of 4-5 structured questions, and time was allowed for the participants to add other information they deemed important to the study. As a follow-up to the multiple classroom observations, I conducted another interview. The secondary interview, according to Creswell (2009), “is intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants.” The role of the educational connoisseur is not solely to observe the setting and report what they see, but also to listen to what the participants have to say, “the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in which they work,” Eisner (1998). The questions in the follow-up interview were unstructured
and generally open-ended and allowed the teachers to discuss what I’d seen in the classroom, as well as fill in any gaps, or nuances that I may not have been able to directly observe.

**Administrators.** In order to obtain an insight to the identification processes utilized at The Hope Center, administrators that are directly involved with the gifted programs were interviewed. In addition to qualitative interviews, I reviewed internal identification measures, and parent and/or teacher checklists, and other documents in reference to recruitment efforts. Each of the administrators received the interview protocol prior to the first interview. Each administrator participated in one interview, with the exception of the agency’s representative, Ms. Grimes, who allowed me several opportunities to speak with her about clarifications and additional information sought.

**Data Analysis.** The process of data analysis involves making sense out of the text and image data, according to Creswell (2009), it involves preparing the data for analysis, and moving deeper into understanding the data, similar to peeling back the layers of an onion, representing the data and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process which demands the researcher practices continual reflection about the data collected, asking analytical questions, and recording helpful notes all throughout the process. In fact, Creswell (2007) states that data analysis should be conducted concurrently with the gathering of the data, interpretation of the data, as well as writing reports based on the data.

Creswell (2009) suggests following an outline of data interpretation, from very specific steps to more general steps. The first step Creswell presents is to organize and
prepare the data. All transcripts should be typed; field notes and observation details should be recorded as well. The next step is to read through the data and obtain a general sense of the information, and to reflect on its meaning. While conducting classroom observations and interviews, I continuously reviewed the information in order to become familiar with the data. This repetitive process allowed for the natural emergence of themes to occur, what Eisner would call an *emergent focus*, as I did not have predetermined ideas to look for during observations. The themes that are introduced in chapter four and formally discussed in chapter five, developed from the review of notes recorded during the observations. As Eisner states,

> …that note taking and at times audio recording, are important tools in conducting qualitative research… they are not simply important, they are crucial. They provide the reminders, the quotations, the details that make for credible description and convincing interpretation” (1998, p. 188).

This process of note taking, and making meaning from those notes leads to the most detailed of the analytical process, the coding process. “Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (Rossman & Rallis, 1991, p. 171).

After the transcripts had been reviewed by the interviewees, I continued with the analysis of the narratives. I was able to chunk the information, and formulate codes that allowed me to create a deeper meaning and allowed for themes to emerge. The codes that I used to describe the data were determined by identifying teacher behaviors, student behaviors, environmental factors, gifted specific practices, and culturally responsive practices. The teacher quotes, student quotes, stories, etc… were given one of the aforementioned codes. This process allowed me to become more familiar with the data,
while allowing me to create meaning. While observations and interviews were being conducted, I used the information gathered to begin identifying emerging themes. Similar to the belief of Creswell, Rubin and Rubin (2005) state, “data analysis should occur throughout the interview process; should seek to discover variation, portray nuances in meaning, and examine complexity; and it should rely on transcriptions versus memory or intuition.” Educational criticism will serve as the lens to interpret the gathered information. The specific descriptions, interpretations, evaluations and thematics that emerged from this study will be presented in depth in chapters four and five.

The dimensions of educational criticism and connoisseurship create a virtual framework for data analysis. The interpretation can be thought of as explaining the meaning of participant’s experiences, according to Eisner (1998). Eisner also goes on to suggest, “…the formulation of themes within an educational criticism means identifying the reoccurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writers” (1998). In The Educational Imagination (1985), Eisner identifies the three sources of evidence that are utilized in educational criticism as structural corroboration, consensual validation and referential adequacy. I will highlight how structural corroboration was attained in this investigation. Structural corroboration is similar to the process of triangulation utilized in quantitative research. “It is a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs” (Eisner, 1995, p. 110). This data emerges from multiple sources including direct classroom observations, teacher interviews, administrator interviews, and analyses of materials used. In seeking structural corroboration, the
researcher looks for recurring behaviors or actions to develop themes, as opposed to isolated incidents that may be considered exceptional rather than the norm. In this investigation, I utilized information gained from the observations, teacher interviews and materials analysis to identify reoccurrences and provide structural corroboration.

As I reviewed and reflected upon the participants’ responses during interviews and observations, I was able to identify thematic categories which will provide a structure for the interpretation of the educational experiences. As a result of this study, there were three major themes that developed: the notion that all of the children are a part of a community and are encouraged and expected to be contributing members of that community. The second theme was the importance of language and vocabulary development in young African-American children. Both teachers illuminated the need for their students to possess a rich vocabulary, and to be able to access it when needed in order to be competitive in school. The final theme that permeated both classrooms was the idea of teachable moments, and taking advantage of those moments. Each day there were a multitude of small opportunities for children to wonder, for them to ask questions and make observations; instead of letting those moments go unnoticed, both teachers took the time to indulge the children in those moments and provide spontaneous learning opportunities for their students. These themes will be explored in depth in the upcoming chapter.

**Data Presentation.** “A display can be defined as an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles & Huberman 1994). We use displays in everyday situations, these displays help us to
understand information and use it in some way, whether it be to analyze it further, and use the information for another purpose. The understanding we gleam from the display, will inform the decisions we make in regards to using it. For example, when you enter a restaurant, you look to the menu, or the data display, to figure out what to order, how much it will cost, etc… Depending on the depth of the display, the reader may be able to gain additional important information, like nutritional information and ingredients. I hope to create a literary presentation that is rich in information, and provides all the pieces of data the reader needs to process the information and make an informed decision, like the menu which contains more than just the item name and price. The information gained from the researcher observations as well as the interviews are equally important and consist of rich, valuable data. Again, this information will be presented in more detail in the forthcoming chapters.

Validity and Reliability

Eisner has identified three sources of evidence that supports the research validity of a qualitative educational criticism design. These sources are identified as structural collaboration, consensual validation and referential adequacy (Eisner, 1998). Structural collaboration is similar to triangulation and Eisner defines it as “the process which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation or evaluation of a state of affairs” (p. 110). Data which is collected in educational criticism typically is comprised of direct observations, interviews, and the examination and analysis of artifacts. Qualitative researchers seek a merging of evidence that enables the researcher to feel confident in their observations, interpretations and evaluation.
Consensual validation refers to, “the agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation and the thematics of an educational situation are right” (Eisner, 1998, p. 112). Agreement may be found in one dimension or in any combination of dimensions. Typically speaking, consensus is not generated by multiple critics, but rather “won from readers who are persuaded by what the critic has to say” (Eisner, 1998, p. 113). The goal of educational criticism is to radiate and “bring about a more complex and sensitive human perception and understanding” of an educational setting or experience (Eisner, 1998, p. 113). This inspires the paradigm of the third basis of evidence used to achieve research validity, referential adequacy. Eisner states referential adequacy is attained “when readers are able to see what they would have missed without the critic’s observation” (p. 114).

**Limitations**

Limitations exist in all research studies. The primary limitation of this study includes the data collection of one community site. *The Hope Center* was selected because of its unique programs being offered to young gifted students, in addition to being a site that would grant access for doctoral research. Because there are only a maximum of 24 students being serviced by this program, another inherent limitation of this study is the small sample size. Due to these primary factors, the generalizability of the results may be limited as well.

**Potential Benefits of the Study**

Since educational criticism is a method of research which seeks to improve the quality of education, by examining and appraising complex settings and experiences
(Eisner, 1988), it is my hope that the information presented in the later chapters will contribute to the field of gifted education. Hopefully, this study will serve as a first step to recognizing the importance of early identification of young gifted learners.

Additionally, this study hopes to inspire other programs to implement similar programs for educating gifted learners by identifying the characteristics of African-American children at an early age. Another potential benefit of this research study is to recognize the efforts and contributions *The Hope Center* has made to the African-American children in our community, and to highlight this program for members of the community that may not be aware of the gifted programs available to their children.
Chapter Four: Descriptions of The Hope Center

Introduction

As discussed in previously in chapter one, I employed critical race theory as the theoretical framework for this investigation. I also previously noted I would be using culturally responsive pedagogy as a lens that would guide my observations, evaluations and data analysis. In Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, research & practice, Geneva Gay (2000) identifies culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other’s cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 29).

Utilizing these aforementioned characteristics to improve culturally responsive teaching, would also require several classroom environmental considerations to be made. For example, the literature in the classroom would not only represent multiple ethnic perspectives, but would also reflect a variety of literary genres. Mathematical concepts would incorporate everyday-life concepts of various ethnic groups, including economics,
how math is learned in different cultures and consumer habits. In order for the different learning styles of diverse students to be adequately addressed, activities would reflect a variety of sensory opportunities—visual, auditory, tactile (Gay, 2000). In order to highlight the elements of the two culturally responsive classrooms I visited, I will highlight the sensorial aspects of the observations.

My experiences and time spent at The Hope Center will take the shape of a sensory walk. This chapter will offer a detailed description of what can be seen, heard, touched, and felt in the gifted classrooms of The Hope Center. These sensorial descriptors will allow the reader to envision the environment vicariously through the researcher. These four areas emerged during the data analysis, as previously mentioned in chapter three. As I became familiar with the data, the interviews and observations, I noticed that each of the different events had a different sensory feel to them. An overarching refrain of the senses emerged, and I placed the data into the appropriate sensory category: what was seen, what was heard, what was touched and what was felt. Each of the classroom descriptions will be divided into four sections. The first section, What did I see, will include a description of the physical environment. The materials on the shelves, wall displays and how the students interacted with the environment as a third teacher. The next section, What did I hear, will examine the voices of the teachers, their experiences and their contributions into the lives of the children they serve. This section will also highlight the “teachable moments” that were observed in the classroom. What did I touch, will give a vivid description of the materials available for the children to explore. This section will also explore how the children interacted with the
manipulatives in the classroom. The final section, and perhaps the most significant, is 
*What did I feel.* This section will portray what was felt as I became a member of the 
classroom community, if even for a brief time. How being in the rooms made me feel, 
listening to the voices of the teachers and seeing the children’s reactions to classroom 
instruction will be presented in this final section.

Eisner’s (1988) intentional, structural and pedagogical dimensions were used as a 
 lens that helped develop these themes that were revealed through interviews and 
 observations. Interpretation and evaluation will be interwoven throughout the detailed 
 descriptions, marrying the first three dimensions of the educational criticism and 
 connoisseurship methodology. According to Eisner (1988), the description should enable 
 the reader to “see” the environment the critic is attempting to help them understand; 
 additionally, “the text should also enable readers to participate vicariously in the events 
 described.” Descriptions in this chapter will focus on providing the reader the 
 opportunity for a vivid experience that will evoke prior experiences within the reader, 
 allowing them to establish a connection which truly allows for the understanding and 
 visualizing of each setting.

Interpretation, which is Eisner’s second identified dimension, will allow the 
 reader to understand the meaning and the context of the description, instead of just 
 providing a description in isolation. Interpretation lends itself to asking the question, 
 “What does this situation mean?” in addition to illuminating potential consequences of 
 the observed practices. Possibly, this process of contextualizing may raise additional
questions, which will contribute to later discussions of thematics, suggestions for future research, and next steps which will be explored in depth in Chapter Five.

Eisner’s final dimension of educational criticism, evaluation, is essential. In order to completely understand the connections between what was observed the classroom settings and the impact on educational experiences provided to the children at *The Hope Center*, the researcher must evaluate what has been seen. This final piece helps the reader truly appreciate the ultimate purpose of this study, and other similar studies, which is understanding the issues related to education and educational settings.

**The Gifted Kindergarten**

**What Did I See?**

As I entered *The Hope Center* for the first time in years, the familiarity of the building immediately felt welcoming. I was greeted by a smiling receptionist who eagerly greeted me. She was seated below a high ceiling and a half-wall connected to that ceiling. The halfway contained several large faded, sepia colored photographs of children that once played and laughed in the classrooms of *The Hope Center*. And although the paper on which the photographs were printed were being faded by the sun, nothing could fade the smiles and the feelings of joy that were captured in those pictures. Images that are indeed indicative of what I would be a witness to in the weeks I would be spending at *The Hope Center*.

Although I began this observation journey during the summer, the heat of the season remained outside the two sets of double doors as I entered a cool, air-conditioned environment. Just inside the double doors are several soft couches, coffee tables and a
large metal book stand. This area seemed inviting for visitors, families and prospective families, and the books and magazines ranged from cultural magazines to books regarding gifted children; there was indeed something for everyone on that metal bookcase. To my right there are the offices of the administrators of The Hope Center which include a social worker, the executive director, the secretary, the deputy director, the business manager and the fundraising coordinator. Although they differ from the varied backgrounds of the teachers, and the educational path they may have followed is quite different, they were all in that building for one purpose; the love and education of young children.

I was pleasantly greeted by a second person as I affixed my signature the guest book and stated my purpose. The soft and subtle smile of a woman in her seventies, but still committed to the work at the Center. This smile has greeted guests and families for over 20 years, and she still has a very soft-spoken, almost timid demeanor, one that is surely well received by the children. Ms. Janice gets up from behind her desk to greet me, pulling her silver oxygen tank slowly behind her. This image instills one thing in my mind about The Hope Center, prior to me ever setting foot into the classroom, dedication.

As I begin walk down the hallway, I am reminded of all of the children that have had experiences at The Hope Center, including my own. This memory is awakened by the multitude of pictures, murals and collages displayed down the long corridor. The pictures show different events, family nights, kindergarten graduations, carnivals and other festivals that have taken place over the years at the Center. These pictures of children from the past and present, teachers who have come, gone and remained,
illuminate the value of community that is embedded in the walls of The Hope Center.

The idea that we are all a part of a community, and even when our time is done, when we have grown and moved to other adventures, we still remain an integral piece of the memories that have been made inside of this particular school community.

About halfway down the hallway, to my right is the kindergarten classroom. Adorned with drawings, schedules, lesson plans, and notes to parents, I can peek through the open blinds on the window to see the first classroom in the gifted early childhood program at The Hope Center. Peering through the window, I see culture, happiness, joy of learning, rich experiences, language and community; I am excited to enter the classroom and be able to interact with the environment and the children. I enter the classroom of the, “Little Angels,” the term fittingly given to them by their teacher, and all around me I see elements of the current children, as well as of the children who have graduated from the kindergarten program before them. Upon entering, I hear clickety-clack, clickety-clack of my shoes as they land softly on the linoleum floor. This part of the room houses the kidney table, large enough for Ms. Ginger and her 8 “little angels” to gather around for whole group welcome activities. Adjacent to the kidney tables are open lockers and hooks for the children to hang their coats, backpacks and store other materials they may need to bring from home. On this tiled portion of the classroom the art area is housed. There is a double-sided easel, currently decorated with children’s dried artwork from the day before. There is an art shelf which contains 12 colorful buckets of artistic materials the children can use when creating their one-of-a-kind masterpieces. This area also allows the children to explore freely with play-doh, without
worrying about destroying the carpet. The linoleum floor extends into the bathroom, complete with two child-sized toilets, one with a door for privacy and the other one open, two sinks and a bathtub, currently used to store sand table materials. The bathroom serves as a connecting bridge to the other gifted classroom, the preschool room.

Although the walls are painted in a light cream hue, they are covered in all the colors in the rainbow through pictures, child made cards and drawings, paintings and posters which provide a colorful artistic display. This tiled area also houses a large teacher storage cabinet, I’m sure filled with surprise goodies that Ms. Ginger will present and exchange items for, as the year progresses. As my eye begins to wander, I notice not only are the walls covered in artwork and letters from children, but the ceiling is as well. Paper mobiles with colored brown and beige smiling faces are connected with red yarn and swaying gently every time someone passes that area. There are wind chimes, pipe cleaner creations and dream catchers dangling throughout the room, and crystals. The dangling crystals, when swaying just right, will catch the sun’s warming rays and rainbows will begin to dance on the walls and flooring. And of course there are angels, angels made of many different materials, yarn, wood, stained glass, just to name a few, are floating. While the materials in the classroom and displayed on the walls and ceiling may seem overwhelming, there seems to be a balance, a certain fung shui if you will, throughout the classroom, and it appears to keep the gifted child engaged with the environment.

Being an outside observer, I began to wonder if the dream catchers, and the crystals were all placed in the classroom by happenstance, or if there was a deeper
significance behind the materials. Initially, this was just a passing thought I held, a minor
detail that I didn’t see a reason to pursue with the teacher. As my days in the classroom
passed, my question, my wondering that I held would be answered, without me having to
utter a word. During a morning meeting, Ms. Ginger asked the students to reflect on a
time when they visited the Denver gem and minerals show. The eyes of the children lit
up, as they remembered embarking on a field trip, previously that year. The children
spoke openly with their teacher, and with each other, about their experiences that day.
How the weather was bad, so there weren’t many people attending the show. As they
passed from booth to booth, the children stopped at a table and were impressed with the
beautiful amethysts and other crystals the man had in his possession. The Native
American man began to share stories with them about the healing power of the stone, and
how the amethyst conducts peaceful energy. As the children were amazed at the sheer
beauty of the gemstones, Ms. Ginger undoubtedly was creating other connections that she
would share with her students later. Because of the low attendance, and I’m sure because
the children were so entranced with his display, the vendor gifted each of the students
with their very own piece of amethyst. This became a prized possession for many of the
five year olds, and a lesson began to develop for Ms. Ginger to provide to her students.

The students now held their very own piece of culture, even if the culture was not
personally their own, they had something tangible they could connect to the kindness of
the vendor at the Denver gem show. Because of her innate ability to create culturally
responsive experiences for her students, Mr. Ginger found other ways to learn about the
culture of the Native Americans. Later that year, they were able to visit the annual pow-
wow held in Denver. Because of their previous experience, the children were very excited to visit, and of course look for other treasures, similar to their amethysts; there were also other subtle connections made with the creating of dream catchers and certain Native American traditions honored in the classroom. As suggested by Gay (2002) and Villegas & Lucas (2002), a specific activity for becoming a culturally responsive teacher is to learn about the history and the experience of diverse groups. Not only has Ms. Ginger seamlessly accomplished this, she has created a bridge for her students to begin to understand an unfamiliar culture as well.

During a later observation, I noticed the children were beginning to get antsy during an instructional period, apparently Ms. Ginger noticed this as well, and although she was not completely finished with her plan, she led the students to participate in another activity altogether. According to educational theorists, the structures, assumptions, substance, and operations of conventional educational enterprises are European American cultural icons (Pai et al., 2006). A prime example of this is the protocols of attentiveness and the emphasis placed on them in the classroom. Geneva Gay highlights that:

students are expected to pay close attention to teachers for prolonged, largely uninterrupted periods of time. Specific signs and signals have evolved that are associated with appropriate attending behavior. These include nonverbal communication cues, such as gaze, eye contact and body posture. When they are not exhibited by the learners at times, intervals, and durations designated by teachers, the students are judged to be uninvolved, distracted, having short attention spans, and/or engaging in off-task behaviors. All these are “read” as obstructive to effective teaching and learning” (Gay, 2010, p. 24).
Instead of using the fact that the children had become distracted and were no longer engaged in the lesson as an indicator of misbehavior, Ms. Ginger demonstrated culturally responsive teaching skills and led the students in a different direction. The teacher instead used an approach she felt would be relevant to the population she served, she had them get up and do a literacy and movement activity. Ginger directed her students to the alphabet chart, when she pointed to or said a specific letter, the children all did a gross motor movement which allowed them to simulate the shape of the letter with their bodies. This simple exercise not only reinforced that each of the letter represents a different shape, but it also allowed the children to incorporate kinesthetic movement into their day, and prevented anyone from being singled out for distracting behaviors. This is yet another example of the cultural responsive teaching practices observed in Ms. Ginger’s classroom.

**What Did I Touch?**

As previously mentioned, the classroom was full of materials allowing for students to explore and interact with their environment. The primary materials noticed in almost every area of the room were books. Hundreds of books. Fiction, non-fiction, leveled readers, chapter books, picture books, books with and without words, books appropriate for kindergarten and books intended for middle schoolers. Every open shelf was full of books! The classroom also housed a large variety of games and puzzles. In this identified area of the classroom, the space is dedicated to puzzles and games, simple called “table toys.” In this “manipulatives” area, there was a blonde wooden shelf containing a states puzzles, several hundred piece jigsaw puzzles, puzzle cubes and bags
with other puzzle cards. On top of the wooden shelf were several Matryoshka dolls, or Russian nesting dolls. Some were painted in the traditional Russian technique, while others were natural wood with no paintings, some were painting depicted different people and one set depicted several of the Avalanche players. The artifacts represented in the classroom placed a certain importance on the appreciation of other cultures. The cultural relics represented not only the children in the classroom, but a variety of other cultures as well. Additionally, there were a variety of math games, some traditional games that were purchased from school supply companies, and some unique games such as Countdown and Mancala, a math game which originated in African countries.

The typical interest areas filled the room including science, dramatic play, table toys, art, blocks, library, cozy corner, music and computers. The science area was at the back of the room, conveniently situated underneath a large window facing the playground. This was especially notable because of the study of gems, rocks and crystals the class had participated in earlier. In addition to the multiple crystals dangling in front of the window, there were many other crystals and prisms on the table that the children used to play with light and color. The children often asked to go to this area to see how many rainbows they could make in the room, and also led to some interesting conversations about what time of day has the most sunlight in the room and the various locations of the rainbows.

In addition to a large variety of stones, amethysts, some of which were gifts from the kind Native American man previously described, and prisms, the science table contained microscopes, sand timers, oil timers, pine cones, flowers, leaves antlers,
magnifying glasses, seashells, thermometers, plants, logs, tree branches, animal furs, tree cookies, stained glass pictures, three dimensional prisms, encased insects, animal card games, kaleidoscopes, mirrors, bug catchers, insect information cards, rotating prisms, animal feathers, a crystal bird cage, nature pictures, and of course, scientific books and magazines. All of these materials allow the students to be natural investigators, to bring pieces of their home and community into their classroom. Leaves and feathers were collected and preserved by students, some added pine cones to the collection, while Ms. Ginger contributed a set of deer antlers, complete with a mini-study of the animals near her home in the mountains. This science center provides these natural investigators a place where scientific inquiry meet the opportunity to examine real world artifacts, and children can imagine and create. Books and information cards, along with pictures demonstrate there are many ways to explore the world around them, and their teacher provides many opportunities for them to do so. This was evident when Ms. Ginger provided the children with Frisbees, and they were allowed to exit to the playground to practice throwing the Frisbees to each other, after making predictions about where they would land, and developed theories about how to hold your hand when throwing, how fast to throw to a friends, etc… Not only were they encouraged to make these predictions, and carry-out these lengthy discussions, they were given the opportunity to carry out an experiment, and see if there theories were indeed correct! Ms. Ginger allows her students to not only learn about science, but to be scientists.

Although the block area was not a clearly defined space like the other centers, children were allowed to take block materials and build in the middle of the room. There
were two children working diligently on a wooden marble tower. The children concentrated on where to place the ramps, then dropped the marble to see if that layout gave them the effect they wanted. When that wasn’t pleasing to them, they would talk about how to change it up. They would add some ramps, take some away and try again.

After several tries, these two persistent five year olds finally accomplished what they had been working towards; a free-standing marble ramp which provided twists, turns and drops for this little round glass ball to travel, and when it reached its destination… a standing ovation from its kindergarten architects.

In addition to the very popular marble maze, there were other building materials available to the children throughout the day. A large basket of Lincoln logs was inviting to one child in particular. There were also buckets of assorted building blocks, mega blocks and large cardboard blocks that were painted like bricks. These colorful, larger than life-size bricks lined the wall underneath the dry erase board, and were big enough for a child to build a wall around them, preventing their classmates from seeing them.

A large world map hung in the dramatic play area, perhaps a subtle message to the students that others exist in this world. There were cultural artifacts from different countries at their level, which allows the students to try things on, and interact with materials from cultures other than their own. Hanging near this center was a letter written to the teacher, the 5 year old author of this letter wrote it in English and Chinese. This was displayed for students to see and read. Dolls of different colors, sombreros, dress up clothes for boys and girls, cowboy boots, ruby red slippers, play food, a chest full of creative accessories, are just a few of the things available for creative play area.
What Did I Hear?

How an individual evolves into a teacher, the journey they choose to take or the path that has been chosen for them, is integral to truly understanding how they view their small piece of the world, their classroom, how they influence their students and ultimately how they create educational experiences for the young people they work with. Having the opportunity to sit down and have a meaningful conversation with Ms. Ginger, and hearing how she ended up on this path called gifted education, gave me a deeper appreciation of the passion she has for her students.

Ms. Ginger started her journey towards education after completing what begin as a three month opportunity, turned into one year studying abroad in England. Upon her return home, she began to look for an “easy” job, not as an educator, but her mother had a different idea. She encouraged Ginger to pursue a teaching job, because after all, her parents had invested quite a bit of money into her Kent State education. She returned to Kent State, for what Ginger referred to as “political reasons,” and went on her very first interview, which happened to be for a gifted school in Youngstown. Kennedy school, which Ginger reported to be the first school for the gifted in the United States, was indeed where this extraordinary teacher had her initial experience with gifted students. Ms. Ginger spent two years at the Kennedy School, and worked with preschoolers and third graders. She contributes her introduction to impromptu sign language to that experience, because all but two of her preschool children were from other countries and spoke different languages. She was forced to communicate in signs so that everyone understood the instructions. This early experience has led to her continued use of “sign
language” in her classes today, and explains the sign language alphabet posters and interest area signs that are displayed in her classroom.

Ms. Ginger’s journey then led her to Colorado, where she wasn’t sure if she wanted to search for a teaching job. She was led to meet Eve McIntosh, the founder of McIntosh Academy, and worked with her for ten years. She attributes much of what she knows to Ms. McIntosh, stating she was,“ brilliant, thorough, very spiritual and taught me many, many things that I use every day. She taught me a lot about a whole lot of things.” During her time at McIntosh Academy, Ginger was exposed to weekly seminars on giftedness and further preparing her to work with gifted students. Her time at McIntosh Academy gave her and two other teachers the inspiration to develop their own school, Community School for the Gifted. Ginger spent another ten years developing her craft in gifted education, before transitioning into the next part of her journey.

Ginger shared that as she was sitting in the hot tub at her mountainside home, she was beginning to wonder where her career path would lead next. Her husband and a dear friend of theirs were discussing “hope,” on a Sunday morning. At that moment, while she was perusing the newspaper, she saw an opening at The Hope Center, in gifted education. What started off as a joke, become Ginger’s destiny.

As she begins to recall her first time at The Hope Center, Ginger’s eyes light up as she remembers the first time she met Mr. George Brantley, the executive director of Hope Center for over 30 years. Ginger spoke very highly of Mr. Brantley and his dreams of the gifted program at The Hope Center. Often times referred to as Hope Academy, Mr. Brantley shared “his baby” with Ms. Ginger. Ms. Ginger continues daily to help
keep Mr. Brantley’s dream alive; the dream of provided quality gifted programs to young, minority children. As quickly as her eyes lit up, Ms. Ginger’s face saddened as she talked about the day she was hired to begin a new journey in her life. The day before 9/11. Ginger expressed that when she went to bed on September 10, 2001, she was elated to begin her new job, which Brantley had told her would begin in one week after all the necessary paperwork was complete; Ginger knew she had one more week of “vacation” to enjoy before she began going to work every day. When she woke up the next morning, she was shocked and devastated to hear, “that someone had hit New York,” were Ginger’s exact words. Still excited about her new job, but also heavy-heartened about what was happening in our world, Ginger embraced that she began at The Hope Center during that “strange and unique” time in America, where people were hanging flags in their windows, and uniting in grief.

Since that fateful time, Ms. Ginger has been at The Hope Center, and pleased with the intimate interactions she has with her students. At any given time, there will not be more than eight students in her class, which is unheard of in an educational setting. This intimate environment allows Ms. Ginger to work with each child at his or her level, and build on their existing background knowledge.

They’re brilliant, they’ll always be smart and be able to learn, my main priority is to teach them how to act, how to be a community. It’s real hard for them to understand about being gifted, because they’ve never been anything else…I’m a gardener, I have this little bouquet, some of them need the sun and some of them need the shade. Some of them need to get their bodies working, while some of
them need to get their fingers working. But they all need the same basic things, which is for me to be consistent every day, for them to know that when they come here every day, it’s safe; for them to be able to express themselves, that they can trust each other and me, and that when they’re wrong, it’s ok (Ms. Ginger).

Ms. Ginger is very zealous when she speaks about her students, and what she expects from them. She speaks of her students, past and present, as if they are her own. It is evident that Ms. Ginger is equally passionate about gifted education, and making sure children receive the correct placement, ensuring not only their academic success, but also their success as a human being:

The placement of children, for whatever reason, in gifted programs, if they are not truly gifted, is the worst thing you can do for that child and the class. Because the child is always struggling, and no matter what you do, that child knows [they are not the same as the other children], …people will say, ‘oh, well all children are gifted,’ no, all children do not have superior intellectual ability, and these children need to have specialized services. They go crazy, they become problems, they do what they do….like the child who gets up and leaves the group while I’m talking about seashells and wanders off, If I say, ‘sit down,’ that’s one thing, if I say, ‘what are you doing?’ and the child replies, ‘well, there’s some seashells over here on the table,’ ‘oh yea?’ Ms. Ginger replies, ‘well bring some over, bring one for everybody,’ instead of, ‘rah rah rah, sit down.’ You can build them up, build their self-esteem and make them feel valued. (Personal Interview with Ms. Ginger, 2013).
Not often do you find teachers who are so in tuned with their students, and able to make personal connections with them, that will eventually help the students reach their full potential. Being a Caucasian teacher, I was initially uncertain how well she would be able to connect with her students and build those personal relationships; it was immediately evident that Ms. Ginger didn’t let cultural differences prohibit her from connecting with her multicultural students. In fact, this seasoned teacher uses her and her students cultural differences as inspiration for implementing culturally responsive practices. The amount of time she devotes to getting to know her students and their families is an essential component of creating culturally responsive classrooms. Ginger fondly reflects on a student in her class who speaks in a very boisterous voice. She relates with this student telling him that there are times when people have told her she is too loud. They discuss together how sometimes if you’re too loud, no one will hear you. An apparent underlying tone of the “voice” in the classroom is the idea that in certain situations, a loud voice can be misinterpreted and often intimidating to others. This fact may reign especially true for African-American males. Although right now, they are small children, Ms. Ginger’s goal is to equip the African-American boys in her class with the tools necessary to be successful in life. An overly boisterous voice, coming from an older African-American male can seem to be a challenge of authority or perhaps an intimidation tactic. One of the misconceptions of education as reported by Geneva Gay (2010) is the notion that education has nothing to do with cultures and heritages. Gay goes on to identify one of the aspects of culturally responsive teaching is ensuring students need to learn knowledge and skills that they can apply in life. By taking the time
now to demonstrate why it is important to have control over the things you can control, such as voice, Ms. Ginger is instilling in him the necessary skill he will need later on in life to be successful, in this often color driven world. She iterates that the quirks she has wrong within herself, she wants to help her students overcome, to make them better individuals. Ms. Ginger’s bottom line is, “you either honor children or you don’t.”

Ms. Ginger gives the children about one week after school begins to truly sees who she has in class. That first week is filled with establishing routines, classroom rules and everyone being on their best behavior trying to impress the teacher. But after that first week is finished, you begin to see a truer picture of the individuals in the classroom. Ms. Ginger discloses the subtle complexities that arise when discovering the distinctive personalities of each of the “little angels”:

I very basically assess who they are in that first week…then you start to figure out who you really have, you need to figure out who is where, and that is very different, you see with the different levels that I have. So what they need is individualization, they need someone who can figure out where they are in math, where they are in reading, where they are in spelling, and how to raise the bar. Deb Leon, Tools of the Mind, I believe that. I could pass out papers and everyone gets an A+ and does a good job, and no one learned anything. I take them up to here, gently. Then we can move, they can learn and they can grow. That’s what teaching is supposed to be. Any time I introduce a new concept, I throw it out to anybody, because the child who may not be writing his letters yet, may be the one who gets it. The other balance I try to find that’s really important to them, that is
children are supposed to go from concrete to semi-concrete to semi-abstract to abstract. They live in abstract a lot of the time with a lot of the concepts. For instance, Kevin, who is only five, lives in the abstract world, but he loves to pour the sand. So, they need to have all of those levels, because most five year olds are at this level; just because my kids [the gifted students] are at his level and this higher level, they still need balance. I teach them there needs to be balance in all things, who they are, where they live, in Colorado, so now we’re studying the Utes, because they’re here. I teach them that I live on a mountain, I wake up each morning to the glory, I watch the sky change from my hot tub. I teach them this is who we are now. Who knows what their jobs will be, who knows what their phones will do, you know? So I can teach them people skills, I can teach them the interactions that they need, I can teach them how to think, I can teach them how to communicate, but I can’t prepare them for the unknown, so I can only do, get that math in there, that science, get that reasoning in there, but the bottom line is, none of that is as important as who are you going to be and how are you going interact with the world (Personal interview with Ms. Ginger, 2013).

Ms. Ginger speaks candidly about the families that she works with, stating that they are amazingly supportive parents, but sometimes, although it’s rare, she gets a parent that doesn’t like what she does in the class, or doesn’t think she’s doing enough with the students. Ms. Ginger contributes success with those families to getting to know each other and building relationships with the families. She is allowed creative freedoms with her curriculum, and is extremely grateful that she has the trust of the Mrs. Grimes, the
executive director, to be allowed such freedoms. Just like with the Frisbee experiments that came from the children, they were interested in that topic, so being a skilled teacher, she ran with it. Providing them additional opportunities to develop and test theories, she created targets, and Ginger practiced her Frisbee throwing technique with them.

Ms. Ginger speaks very highly of partner teacher, Ms. Brenda, as well as the other members of The Hope Center staff. There are other preschool programs at The Hope Center, designed to meet the needs of the typically developing child and the working parent. The other classrooms contain a lead teacher and assistants, and work collaboratively together. The gifted program at Hope Center is unique, in that there are two gifted classrooms, preschool and kindergarten, each with only one primary teacher. They keep the numbers low, so there is no requirement for a teacher’s assistant. This gives both Ms. Ginger and Ms. Brenda the autonomy they both desire to work with the individual strengths of their students, while still allowing them to co-plan and develop strategies with one another. According to Ms. Ginger, Brenda is not only her partner, but also helps her things she doesn’t understand. In additional to helping her spiritually, Brenda helps supports Ginger when she needs help with behaviors, with families and with discipline issues. Ms. Ginger understands that it can be challenging to gain the trust of all of her families, being a white teacher and working with predominantly African-American students. When speaking about her long-time teaching partner Ms. Brenda, Ginger sits back and smiles and reveals, “It’s kind of like with my husband, he already knows what I’m going to do, before I do it, because I’ve been doing it that way for so long, it’s the same with working with Brenda.”
What Did I Feel?

Since the last time I entered the classrooms at The Hope Center, one of the only things that had changed were the happy faces of the children. The warmth of the classroom was inviting, to children and their parents. The children were so excited to come in and share what they did the night before with their teacher and their classmates, it made me miss the days of when my own children were that age. The children were not intimidated by my presence at all, in fact, they approached me and talked with me like they had known me for months. One child in particular, Kevin, carried out a conversation with me about his authentic cultural food and he recommended a couple of restaurants to me. Since Kevin had a certain fervor for creating maps, Ms. Ginger allowed Kevin to illustrate the locations of these restaurants on a map he created. passion

There were numerous materials available to the students, they were bright and colorful, and many of them were realia items from the children’s homes as well as the teacher’s home.

The teacher took full advantage of those “teachable moments” that were natural and authentic, and really seemed to have the children wondering. Each moment that passed while I was visiting, was a teachable moment. When a child would be jumping, or playfully falling to the ground, Ms. Ginger would ask, “how’s gravity holding up over there?” When she wanted the students to look out of the window, she said, “everyone please cast their eyes out of that window, everyone should be looking through that thin pane of glass,” then she would ask what direction she was looking towards. What Ms. Ginger presented to the students was not at all scripted, which made the learning real and
meaningful. From the hand-made drum that sat in the morning circle, that was created from a deer Ms. Ginger’s husband hunted and used the hide to create a drum for the students, to the drum sticks that were covered with a cloth material used to protect the drum while drumming; that she had a scientific discussion about what adhesive would work best and why. During one morning circle, Ms. Ginger used the word “bellow” to describe an animal in a story, perplexed expressions came across the children’s faces, and one brave soul raised his hand and proclaimed, “Bellowed…what’s bellowed mean?” Ms. Ginger paused, and then asked if anyone knew what the word meant. The children looked around at each other with uncertainty regarding if they had ever heard the word or not. The teacher quickly writes the word on the white board, and the children begin to annunciate each of the syllables in the word. Ms. Ginger then goes on to explain the multiple definitions of the word “bellow.” Towards the end of her explanation she demonstrates how a person would bellow, while beating against their handmade drum. Ms. Ginger seamlessly tells the children a quick story about the significance of the drum to the Native American culture, and they began to “bellow” chants together. Ms. Ginger concludes this spontaneous vocabulary lesson with challenging the students to use the word at home that evening and see if their parents know what the word means. She intentionally leaves the word written on the board, and indeed follows up with the students during the next morning circle to inquire if they had the chance to use the word at home, and to remind them of the new word they’d added to their repertoire. As Geneva Gay points out in her book, Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice, the implementation of “cultural blindness” is prevalent in our schools, and
supports the notion that education has nothing to do with cultures and heritages, which inevitably encourages students being taught using Eurocentric frameworks, rather than embracing the multitude of cultures we have in our classrooms, and building learning experiences grounded in cultural relevance (Gay, 2010). Gay also highlights the fact that teachers do not necessarily need to be from the same cultural or ethnic backgrounds as their students for their students to succeed. This is where the notion of caring comes into building culturally responsive classrooms, Ms. Ginger takes the time to form a relationship with and care for her students. In accordance with this same idea, Gay reports,

A necessary feature of effective teaching for students of color is caring... In addition to respecting the cultural backgrounds, ethnic identity and humanity of students, teachers who care hold them accountable for high-quality academic, social, and personal performance, and ensure that this happens” (2010, p. 56).

Ms. Ginger is that ideal caring teacher, personified.

On several occasions throughout our interviews and informal discussions, Ginger made many references to spirituality and spiritual connections. Her spiritually is expressed in everything she does and says in the classroom. The crystals that were displayed around the room, the amethysts that all of the children interacted with and the way the students engaged with each other and the classroom led me to witness Ms. Ginger’s spiritual connection to the little people in her care. The excited demeanor Ms. Ginger exhibits in the classroom, and when talking about her students, was absolutely exultant. There was a genuine connection between Ms. Ginger and the students in her classroom. At all times, children were respected, their opinions were expressed, they were valued as human beings. The time I spent in the “little angels” classroom was an
inspiration that when seeds of hope are indeed planted at a young age, that the children will flourish and there are no limits as to what they grow into and what they will become.

The Gifted Preschool

What Did I See?

Prior to entering the classroom of Ms. Brenda and the “knowledge builders,” I noticed the life-size, child created rock wall built out of a refrigerator box, painted brown and covered with paper mache stepping stones. Next to the climbing wall is a blue waterfall, also created by the children, with tissue paper and crepe paper streams of water. The structures are labeled, indicated what the purpose of the creations are. Near the structures are pictures drawn and painted by the children representing other geological elements. Posted on the windows facing the hallway, are covered with the schedule and lesson plans, and a welcome sign. Hanging adjacent to the door is a large, colorful vinyl poster with their classroom name and logo on it.

Contrary to the kindergarten classroom, the preschool class was filled with younger children, with bright baby faces. As the children were gathered around the animal print rug, the building with tree blocks and rainbow blocks came to a halt, as they were curious as to who the visitor in the classroom was. They began to introduce themselves, and I immediately noticed their not quite developed speech patterns. It was difficult to translate, but Ms. Brenda was right there to help them verbalize their names to me. The classroom was colorful, with multiple hues of blues and reds mixed with natural, blonde wooden furniture. I immediately noticed the large open space, which is where the morning meeting would be held, block towers would be built and stories would
be read aloud. The walls were filled with pre-made posters indicated the name of the interest area, and a picture of what you could do in that area, all centers were labeled in English and Spanish. The areas included music, writing, library, computer, the listening center, table toys, blocks, dramatic play, art, sensory table and science. Each center posted an explanation of what the children were doing and learning at each center; clearly intended for the parents and adults visitors to the classroom because of the amount of words on each poster.

The walls were filled with children’s art work, paintings, half-colored drawings, paper dolls, finger paintings, mosaics, stick puppets, valentines, and painted coloring sheets from home. Throughout the room were three-dimensional art projects made of recycled painted egg cartons, paper towel rolls, insects made of recycled materials swayed gently from the ceiling, and child-made wind socks dangled over the cozy corner. One wall in the classroom was decorated with self-portraits made with felt, sequins, buttons and googly eyes. Underneath each of the skin colored portraits, the children wrote about what they want to be when they grow up. Alongside the self-portraits, are family photos of all of the children attached to the walls, emphasizing the importance of family, and acknowledging all the different types of families to which we belong. All of the art, inside and outside of the classroom, made the environment feel welcoming, child friendly, encouraging and supportive. Art was displayed at the children’s level, they could see their names on them, discuss their projects with friends, and remind the teacher of when they painted it. Children feel valued; children are valued. Diversity is valued in the classroom, in addition to the pictures of the families, people of color are represented
in the signs and posters hanging in the room. Pictures of the children engaged in previous units are displayed on the cubbies, again accessible for the children to see.

Although the preschool classroom is composed of younger children, the academic expectations are still high. Ms. Brenda is very adamant about preparing children for pre-reading and reading skills, and being well prepared for entrance into kindergarten. As a part of the literacy component in the gifted preschool, there is an emphasis placed on oral language, comprehension of text, phonics, phonemic awareness and vocabulary building specifically. Vocabulary is extremely important to Ms. Brenda because of the research that exists around the vocabulary deficit that exists in preschool children of color, in comparison to their white counterparts. During the beginning of my observations in this classroom, I witnessed Ms. Brenda describing to the children how to make some of the letters. This is a pretty typical activity in a preschool classroom, we often here teachers saying things like, “straight line down, then come back up, humpty hump,” when describing how to write a lowercase h. But the descriptions I heard were higher level, using advanced descriptors of the lines the letters were made up of. Ms. Brenda used the terms horizontal lines, vertical lines, diagonal lines and curved lines. The children knew exactly what she meant when she used these descriptors, and were able to form the letters based off of these descriptions. Ms. Brenda had spent time teaching the children the different lines, instead of saying, ‘make a line across, and a line up and down,’ Ms. Brenda instructed the children using the academic language she expected them to use. Ms. Brenda’s philosophy is, “If you teach children the correct terminology, they will understand it and use it correctly. If you speak to them like babies, like they’re incapable
of understanding, then that’s how they will respond.” Consequently, the oral language in the classroom is comprised of the use of academic language, sentence structure, letter recognition, story description and retell, using props and puppets, nonsense words for auditory discrimination and rhyming, connections and background knowledge in regards to stories. Graphic organizers are used to help support visual learners, mirrors are used to practice tongue placement and articulation. The gifted language in the classroom is significantly different from a traditional preschool setting. Ms. Brenda uses the history of language to help explain nuances in the English language for children that are interested and able to understand. The class studies phonemes, blends, beginning and ending sounds, rhyming and using word families. After these themes have been covered extensively, the next step for the children is beginning reading. Ms. Brenda is very passionate about making sure the children are competitive, and ready to be successful in other gifted programs. Similar to other relevant research that exists, the achievement gap is real, it exists even in preschool. Ms. Brenda is committed to help close that gap amongst African-American students and their white classmates. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the culturally relevant classroom consists of a teacher who cares, and one that will hold the students accountable for high-quality academic, social and personal performance; unmistakably, Ms. Brenda is a teacher that holds even the youngest learner, to the highest standard.

For the literacy instruction, it varies from week to week, depending where the students are in the unit. At the later point in the year, students are broken into small groups and partners, based on their reading ability. The children are so excited to show
off their reading abilities, the emerging readers are just as eager to read at the student who is five years old, but reads at a seventh grade level. The teacher models for the students, and during the beginning of the year, students are following along in individual reading books, while Ms. Brenda is reading from the big books. Children are thrilled by the pictures in the books and excited that they can recognize some of the words on the page. Watching them read the words on the page, I could see their minds wondering, trying to identify the unfamiliar words on the page. Ms. Brenda provides reading cues to help them identify the words they may not know. She explains that she doesn’t give the students the answers to the questions, but rather she provides multiple clues to help them to be successful in identifying the letter sounds and words.

The circle time meeting that is held at the beginning of their school day, is conducted by the children. The children pick a helper so that everyone gets a chance to have a job, including the identification of colors, reading of the calendar, counting to 100, days of the weeks and months of the years, weather, all in English and Spanish. The children are engaged in the conversation and enjoy taking turns leading the circle time.

**What Did I Touch?**

The classroom was set-up to facilitate play and learning, with materials ranging from recyclables to items found in nature. The overarching theme in the classroom, similar to the theme in the kindergarten room was books. Each center contained books of all differing reading and interest levels. The books are organized neatly and inviting to the children, low enough to be easily accessible to them as well. Upon entering the classroom, you immediately see the dual sided writing center equipped with a variety of
different types of paper, pencils, crayons, colored pencils, rulers, word games and stencils. The desk is large enough for two students to work on either side of comfortably. Next to that area is the science center, with shelves filled with dinosaurs, zoo animals, sea animals, magnifiers, specimen viewers, puzzles, wooden pulley and gear structure, magnet bricks, eyedroppers, color paddles, individual mirrors, writing materials, kaleidoscopes, color-mixing shakers, scales and natural materials collected from outside.

In that same tiled area lives the art center. Full of colorful materials, the children are encouraged to think outside of the box and create freely. The supply buckets consists of the usual supplies, glue, scissors, paper and markers. But there were also giant fuzzy pipe cleaners, crinkly shredded paper, tubes, egg cartons, buttons, silly googly eyes, three dimensional foam shapes, skin-colored face templates for collages, paper doilies, wooden shapes and wooden popsicle sticks. Also available to the children was a double-sided art easel, complete with finger paints, different shapes of paper, skin-colored paints, sponge painting and mittens used for texture paintings.

The most appealing area in the room was the cozy corner. Complete with a red gymnast mat for a soft surface, and large beanbags, this area was nestled in the back corner of the room. The many stuffed animals included in this area for the children to read to, to talk to or maybe just to cuddle up with, made the area a favorite with the students. Of course, this area would not be complete without its own set of books; what child doesn’t love curling up with a good book, especially if your best friend goes over there with you.
In addition to the science center, there was another table just beneath the window that housed a couple of plants, and theme related materials. In correspondence to their study of rocks, minerals and gems, was a complete collection of children’s books that were associated with the theme. There was a large collection of different rocks that the children had collected, and some they had painted to make pet rocks. Also in this area were different colored photos of different types of rocks, areas in the country where these types of rocks could be found, and paper and colored pencils for students to examine the rocks and draw what they saw.

The dramatic play area was complete with the traditional materials including dress up clothes, a small two-seater blue couch, the perfect size for four year old bodies. All of the materials were labeled with a picture, and pictures of things you can do in that center. The center would not be complete without a child-sized kitchen, doll bed and a high chair for the dolls; and I don’t want to forget the dolls, comprised of all different skin tones, those of which represented the children in the classroom.

What Did I Hear?

Ms. Brenda’s start to gifted education was somewhat non-traditional, she was more “thrown into it” rather than pursuing her passion. She expressed an interest working with gifted children, which led into her current passion that she has today. Brenda’s undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree is in speech and hearing therapy, and she holds an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education, and a Master’s Degree in Education with an emphasis in reading and writing. She began her journey in gifted education by volunteering at her son’s school for several years, her son being twice
exceptional, Aurora School for the Gifted Child, which was ran by Dr. Debbie Harmon, who also spent time at *The Hope Center*. After the closing of the school, and her son moved on, Ms. Brenda began substituting at the Ricks Center for the Gifted Child and the University of Denver. For the past 19 years, Brenda has been employed at *The Hope Center*. Although she did not begin in the gifted classroom upon hiring, she has spent the last 13 years working in the gifted classroom. Ms. Brenda also brings with her over 27 years of experience with raising her own African-American children. She is the mother of four, one of her own children being identified as twice exceptional during his primary school years. The identification of her son motivated her to learn more about being gifted, and she made it her personal mission to ensure the academic success of her own children. Successful in this venture, all four of Ms. Brenda’s children have gone on to be successful in securing undergraduate degrees and beyond. Ms. Brenda has a major concern with the students that leave the program at Hope, because they go through another series of testing to be accepted into the gifted and talented program in a public school system. Ms. Brenda feels very strongly that this is when African-American learners fall through the cracks because the assessments are not culturally responsive, and often, more students of color are not as exposed to vocabulary, as white students of the same age. Because of her love and dedication to the gifted African-American child, she has remained in the classroom so she can ensure the children she teaches, are successful in gifted and/or accelerated classrooms later in their schooling career.

Ms. Brenda speaks about the children she has in the classroom, including the characteristics she notices in the children. Their sensitivity to the world around them and
“While involved in play, in dramatic play area, for example, gifted children who have been identified as gifted have more higher level use of vocabulary, even when engaged in play…. The verbal skills and higher order of thinking and emotional needs are all unique characteristics of gifted children,” Ms. Brenda shared. When speaking about how the typical developing preschool classroom is different from the gifted classroom, Ms. Brenda illuminated the fact that a primary difference lies within the stimulation of the gifted child:

There are some things that because of the district you work in or your particular school, or specific accreditations dictate the classroom environment, some things are mandated, for example, the learning centers you have in the classroom. However it is not solely the physical environment itself, but rather, how stimulated the children are in that environment. For example, if a child is in a typical preschool setting, and they visit the literacy center, they may just pick up the book, flip through the pages and be finished with it. Whereas, the gifted student is more astute, and may be more engaged with the book, they look at the pictures with longevity, they may even be reading some of the words, or trying to figure out what the words say on the page. These gifted students are drawn to the intellectual components of a book, what kind of bird is in the book, he may be curious about the different habitats of birds, why does one eat worms, while another bird prefers plants. The questions regarding why things exist, and the way they exist are more in depth than the questions you may see within a typically developing group, and may require more embellishment of the part of
the teacher, the vocabulary component needs to be established early, even if it’s the use of vernacular English, students should be allowed to speak freely, so they can have more practice with the language (Personal Interview with Ms. Brenda, 2013).

After having several conversations with Ms. Brenda, it quickly became apparent that her passion is language, coinciding with her background in speech and language. In tandem with her love of language, there is her equal love for literacy. Ms. Brenda reiterated the need for African-American children to receive structured and advanced vocabulary instruction, if they are going to be able to compete with their peers of other nationalities. Ms. Brenda frequently referenced the disparities in vocabulary that exist within the homes of affluent white families and those in the homes of African-American families who may or may not have a low socio-economic status. Ms. Brenda is an African-American teacher, who rejects the notion of a colorblind society, and admittedly sees color when looking into the faces of her small students. Because of her inherent candid nature, Ms. Brenda speaks openly about the inequalities amongst white children and their African-American playmates. Her lived experiences have guided her beliefs about education, and about students of color. Because of these experiences, the lens with which she views the world, and more specifically the classroom, is not “rose-colored” at all; but rather a very realistic view that statistically speaking, her population of students are less likely to finish high school and move on to pursue advanced degrees (Bridgeland, Dillio & Morison, 2006).
Spending time in the gifted preschool classroom I began to see what Brenda spoke so passionately about, come to life. Ms. Brenda routinely practices the using of ‘beautiful words’ when interacting with her students, and they in turn practice utilizing equally beautiful language when working with their classmates.

When exploring this topic in more depth with her, this veteran teacher began to illustrate just what she meant by exposing children to a more comprehensive lexicon:

Instead of speaking to children about ‘how are particular objects alike and how are they different,’ ask them how are they ‘similar’, what are their ‘similarities.’

When the children are in centers, and they’re dressing up in the feather boas and sequined dresses, I let them know how ‘extravagant’ they look. When they talk about what they want to be when they grow up, I encourage them to discuss ‘what career path they will choose.’ Instead of simply saying, ‘it’s hot outside,’ I teach them words like, ‘blistering, scorching and sweltering.’ Caucasian children are surrounded by beautiful words on a daily basis, at home and at school. It is my responsibility to ensure that our children [African-American children] are surrounded by beautiful words also…don’t they deserve that? (Personal interview with Ms. Brenda, 2014)

During an initial interview, Ms. Brenda looked at me sternly and expressed, “Children in here will have a Yale or Harvard preschool education.” Each day she has to spend in the classroom with her students, and each teachable moment that she is given, she is extending to her students a superior Harvard or Yale education, all before they enter kindergarten.
What Did I Feel?

Immediately, I felt welcomed by both the preschoolers and the teacher of the preschool gifted program, Ms. Brenda. Although these children were very young, some just turning three, their energy and enthusiasm in the classroom was indeed contagious. They knew the routine, and the expectations for behavior were very clear. Although she allowed the children to speak freely, and about things that matters to them, the students knew when Ms. Brenda was ready to begin the business for the day and when it was time for play and when it was time for learn. High expectations were abound in the atmosphere, not only behaviorally, but also academically. Ms. Brenda allowed multiple opportunities for the students to engage and allows the children to be stimulated by the materials and areas in the classroom. Children were expected to do, and they did.

While having conversations with Ms. Brenda, it quickly became evident that she has an innate gift for working with children who have advanced cognitive skills. While in her presence, I could feel the sense of urgency to educate our young children. Some may say they are still babies, they are too young to have such formal instruction, but in Ms. Brenda’s class, you knew they were in the correct setting. Being challenged, not only by the teacher, but by each other. Naturally being forced to problem-solve and work together. Witnessing these young minds formulate thoughts and predictions and give reasons to why things are happening, was almost magical. I could feel the passion from the teacher, knowing that she is preparing these children for a world of education where just because of their skin color, they may face disparities. I witnessed one person, working diligently with eight little people to help force the achievement gap to close,
before it really even opened for them. Preparing these young people for a competitive world, where they may start in the game with one strike against them, just because of who they are. Ms. Brenda is truly living her words, and providing a Harvard or Yale preschool education for all of the students she has the pleasure of teaching.
Chapter 5: Thematics, Evaluation and Implications

Chapter Summary

In the previous chapter, I provided detailed descriptions of the two classes of gifted students at The Hope Center, while naturally intertwining description, interpretation and evaluation. There is one overarching research question in the study, “How does the Hope Center engage in gifted education?” In this chapter, I will answer the four research sub-questions that guided this research study and provide further interpretation, while presenting and evaluating the themes that emerged from analyzing the data. Finally, I will provide a summary of implications for future research, while tendering recommendations for educators and other stakeholders in gifted education.

Discussion of Themes and Responses to Research Questions

“The formulation of themes within an educational criticism means identifying the recurring messages that pervade the situation…” (Eisner, p. 104). After the data had been collected and analyzed for both classrooms, certain recurring messages evolved, producing several themes. The first theme that evolved from the study is the sense of community; that everyone is a valued member of the classroom, and their contributions are significant and important. This idea of community is an essential component of culturally responsive teaching, according to Gay, “Cooperation, community and connectedness are also central features of culturally responsive teaching. Students are expected to work together and are held accountable for one another’s success” (Gay,
The second theme that emerged was language and the use of beautiful words. Throughout both classrooms, the use of oral language was emphasized greatly. Primarily oral language in the preschool program, then in kindergarten, written language began to play a larger part of the classroom. The third theme which surfaced is a bit more intricate than the two aforementioned themes; teachable moments. Both teachers uniquely and naturally took full advantage of those teachable moments, that many novice or unskilled teachers may let slip by, either because they don’t possess enough information regarding the subject, or because it doesn’t “fit” into the curriculum. Life is full of teachable moments; stopping to take advantage of those moments is what makes the difference between a good teacher and a great teacher. These two teachers beautifully explored the teachable moments that developed all throughout the day. These themes will be explored more in depth in the discussion of the research questions.

Research Question One

How does The Hope Center recruit African-American children for their gifted program?

Because of the other numerous early childhood programs that exist at Hope Center, in addition to the gifted program, there is large potential pool for recruiting and identifying students. As with several other gifted programs, the first recommendation for gifted programming is often made by the child’s teacher. After speaking with The Hope Center’s social worker/Dean of Students, she identified this as their most effective recruitment tool. Because of the structure of the program, once a child is identified for the 3 year old preschool program, those children will progress to the pre-k program, then
proceed to the kindergarten program. Since a lot of the students are “homegrown,” the primary recruitment efforts are aimed towards the three year olds. The teachers, in addition to the administrators, are always searching for potential candidates for their gifted program.

According to the President and CEO of Hope Center, a primary source of recruitment is through word of mouth. Hope Center has such a reputation in the community, and has been an integral part of the community for so many years, most prospective families have had a family member attend, or at least knows someone who has spent time at *The Hope Center*.

The Dean of Students and social worker, Ms. Jackie, also suggested that many prospective parents refer to the website in order to gain more information. The website contains valuable information regarding gifted children, including what parents can look for if they think their child is gifted. Current Hope Center parents can also refer friends and family members to the website to gather more information about the program.

Another method utilized to locate potentially gifted students is by hosting several community events, which enrolled families attend, as well as members of the community. Some of these events include a carnival for children held at Hope Center each year during the summer. This provides a wonderful opportunity for neighboring families, friends of families, and other families with small children attend a family friendly event, while gathering information about the programs at Hope. At these and other similar events where *The Hope Center* is sharing program information, they provide a colorful, tri-fold brochure with some things to look for in a gifted child, the same information is easily
obtained from their website as well (see Appendix C). While this pamphlet is somewhat antiquated, the information it contains is germane. The tri-fold highlights what it means to be gifted, what programs are offered within the gifted program at Hope Center and how the Center can help with the identifying and educating of their gifted child. At this particular event, there are also other community resources that are available for families to come and get information from.

Interviews with administrators revealed additional recruitment measures including each year The Hope Center hosts a fundraiser and silent auction entitled, “Million Lights of Hope,” with proceeds used to benefit the programs at the Center. “The million lights of HOPE reflects the hope that resides in each and every one of the children we have served for over 51 years and counting,” this assertion is what is shared with the family as well as the community in regards to this event. Additionally, in a concerted effort to raise awareness for the programs offered at The Hope Center, and to actively solicit community support, they host an annual 5k walk-a-thon, which also helps gets The Hope Center’s name into the community.

The fee associated with the initial assessment that parents must have administered to their child, if they are pursuing registering for the gifted program, may be intimidating to families with a limited amount of expendable funds, information revealed during interviews with administrators. Particularly because there is no guarantee that their child will be accepted, after completing the assessment. Additionally, because the gifted program is a tuition based program, families may have a difficult time affording to send their child to the private programs at Hope Center, a concern that Ms. Jackie shared.
Although they have a number of scholarships available, due to the lingering effects of the current economy, private, tuition based education may just not be an option for some parents. This fact often leaves several of the 24 spots for the gifted program vacant.

**Research Question Two**

*How does The Hope Center identify African-American students for their gifted program?*

Parents or teachers first must see characteristics in their child or their student and reach out to *The Hope Center* for potential enrollment. The family is then given three questionnaires (see Appendix D), which they are encouraged to have completed by persons who know the child best, parent, other family member, teacher, etc... The information sought on the questionnaires are indicators for giftedness, and used to assess if the potential for giftedness exists in the child. The three surveys are then submitted to *The Hope Center*, and the executive director reviews them and looks patterns within the characteristics that would suggest if a child should be further tested. Then, the director makes a recommendation to the family for testing. If the director makes this suggestion, and the family chooses to follow up, they are referred to an independent agency for testing by a licensed educational psychologist. The fee for this assessment is incurred by the family. The Gifted Identification Center administers the WISC-R and communicates with the family and *The Hope Center* for recommendations on next steps. In addition to using a standardized assessment tool, there is an emphasis on oral language and verbal ability.
As an educational connoisseur and critic, I am tasked with “transforming the qualities of ... a classroom or school, or the act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced” (Eisner, 1998, p. 86). As difficult as it may be to offer a critique of the gifted programs at The Hope Center, it is my duty to paint the whole picture to the reader. There is no such thing as a “perfect school.” Each school has its own unique deficiencies, or areas in which they can improve. In an effort to build a partnership and improve early childhood gifted programs as a whole, and more specifically the programs at The Hope Center, I offer the following suggestions. The first suggestion is the measure used to currently identify students at The Hope Center. Emphasizing the home school connections by honoring the parent as the child’s first teacher is a crucial step to expose potentially gifted children to gifted programs. As previously mentioned, The Hope Center does this by providing the parent with a checklist of behaviors they should look for in their child that may be gifted. The next step in Hope Center’s identification process is the one that could use revamping. The literature strongly supports the use of culturally sensitive identification protocols (Baldwin, 2004). One of these identification protocols is the use of multiple measures to identify culturally diverse populations. Recommendations from the National Association for the Gifted Child supports capturing a holistic profile of all students, by making the use of multiple criteria the norm. Additionally, Donna Ford, influential researcher and an expert in issues relating to gifted children of color, also exclaims that both qualitative and quantitative information be gathered from multiple sources and be included in the evaluative process (ford, 2010). In addition to using
culturately sensitive identification measures, research supports the effective use of both formal and informal measures as a means to identifying culturally diverse students, including the use of checklists for families and teachers, valid and reliable assessment instruments, student interviews and the evaluation of work samples (Briggs, et al., 2008), and perhaps more appropriate for young learners, the use of play based assessments and observations conducted by trained, gifted educators. With the addition of multiple identification measures, Hope Center and other programs like it, would be able to better meet the needs of the young gifted African-American learners, by first taking the appropriate path to identifying that those needs indeed exist.

**Research Question Three**

*What types of learning experiences do the teachers at The Hope Center provide for the African American students in their gifted early childhood program?*

A welcoming, colorful classroom awaits students that enroll at *The Hope Center*, from walking in the glass double-doors and being greeted by the friendly receptionist, to walking down the long hallways and browsing the pictures of the children that came before. Prior to entering the classrooms, you see the colorful, child-created welcome sign and all of the information posted on the checkered glass windows for parents to peruse while eagerly waiting for their child to enter the classroom for the first time. When the wooden door swings open, there is a smiling teacher on the other side, genuinely excited to meet you and welcome you into the classroom. When the child first crosses the threshold, and leaves the carpeted hallway and steps onto the tiled floor of the gifted classrooms, they instantly become a part of the learning community. They are greeted by
dancing children, water slides, houses and colorful families, all represented in the child-created artwork that they will undoubtedly add to in the coming days. The homemade artwork places an emphasis on the child, and shows that each one of their drawings and creations are important, and even when the child goes to another class, or even another school, they know a part of them will always remain on the walls and in the heart of The Hope Center.

Beginning immediately, the teachers begin to build community amongst the students. As previously mentioned in earlier chapters, community is a key component to building culturally responsive classroom communities. Children are an integral part of that community, and this becomes evident at the beginning of the class when the classroom rules are established. Children offer their opinions on what the rules should and shouldn’t be, and their contributions are noted on the dry erase board. Students are encouraged to add to the discussion regarding what will become the customary norms in their classroom. The teachers listen to the student’s input, and encourage push back from other students in the classroom. After everyone has agreed on the classroom expectations, so begins the learning journey of the students in the gifted program.

The concept of community exists in all aspects of the classroom. Each day there is a community meeting, where issues from the previous day can be safely addressed, life’s moments are celebrated and children and teacher alike begin to build a relationship, that will be necessary in the months to come to ensure student success. This community is a safe and welcoming environment where children can share their thoughts, concerns, and opinions, and actually be heard. Issues brought up during the community meetings
are consistently addressed by the classroom teachers, and the responsibility is shared with the students when appropriate. The teachers use this time, to take full advantage of the teachable moments that occur all throughout the day. This became evident during my initial visit to the classroom, when a student was confused about what the word “bellow” meant. When the teacher used this word, a look of complex thought and a little confusion came across Kevin’s face. Ms. Ginger started by probing the other students to see if they had heard the word “bellows” used prior to that day. There were no immediate responses, and Ms. Ginger began to have the students begin to make educated guesses about what the word could mean, based on the context clues. The teacher wrote the word on the board, with the help of the students of course, and began to illustrate the words multiple meanings. Later on that week, a student was overheard using the word “bellow” in a conversation. This is just one of the examples of how the teachers not only model language for their students, but also make authentic connections from the classroom to real life.

In another instance of the teacher taking advantage of a teachable moment occurred when the cook was absent from school, and the kindergarten children demonstrated concern with her absence, and also with what were they going to eat for lunch that day. Instead of Ms. Ginger stating, “The cook is absent and Ms. Jackie will be cooking for us today,” the veteran teacher took the time to give clues to the students and had them figure out who would be cooking for them that day. “A staff member will be cooking lunch for us today, and it’s someone you know, but she is not a teacher,” was the initial clue Ms. Ginger gave to the students. Immediately they began searching in their
minds and making suggestions as to who Ms. Ginger may have been referring too. They began to call out names of teachers, and Ms. Ginger gently reminded them, “It’s not a classroom teacher, but it is a staff member.” More names were spewed from the children’s mouths as they began to draw nearer to the answer to the puzzle. Ms. Ginger affirmed they were indeed calling out the names of staff members, and not teachers, but the children still hadn’t guessed who would be cooking for them that day.

Community building occurs continuously throughout the school year, as opposed to an isolated beginning of the year routine. Students are not only encouraged to support each other, offer positive feedback and help each other when hurt or sad, that is the expectation. The positive classroom culture allows students to feel comfortable and confident in their classroom environment, and they feel valued as important, contributing members.

During conversations with Ms. Brenda, she illustrated the urgency of early exposure to academic language, primarily for African-American students. Ms. Brenda speaks passionately about the language and vocabulary deficiency amongst young African-American children. With her speech and language background, Brenda is adamant about preparing her students to be competitive by ensuring that they have daily access to higher level language. The students in her class are expected to speak using the extended vocabulary she has prepared them with when talking to her, and their classmates.

A common theme that emerged from the numerous interviews and classroom observation is the importance of introducing young children to a vast amount of
language. At multiple opportunities, the teachers were reminding their students to speak in complete sentences, use vocabulary they had learned previously, and think deeply prior to offering a suggestion to a question or asking a question of their own. Language is infused all throughout the classrooms, with center areas labeled in English and Spanish, and in the kindergarten classroom, they are posted in sign language as well. Objects in the classroom, for instance, the clock, table and chairs were also labeled. In the preschool classroom, the children are responsible for leading the circle time meeting, in a manner similar to what the teacher would offer, in both English and Spanish. The children begin by leading the class in counting to 100, and then they select another classmate to lead the next job, which is presenting the weather. The children use academic language to describe the types of clouds they see outside, how the weather has changed from the previous day, and what the implications for the weather are. Will they be able to go outside, will they need a jacket, etc… Then the next child is chosen, and so forth, until every child has completed a morning job. Although these children have small, three year old bodies, their ability to focus on the speaker, speak intelligibly about a topic and participate in rigorous learning activities is comparable to their seven year old peers.

When the kindergartners walked into the classroom, they deposit their previous nights’ homework in the designated area, filled with handwritten messages, created by the children. Homework consists of open ended drawings and writings, allowing the students to connect to their previous learning, as well as making personal connections to their home life. One of the students was very eager to share his homework and spoke very eloquently about the restaurants his family eats at, which represents his cultural
identity. The precocious child also informed me of the different types of “pho” restaurants there were, and which one his family preferred to eat at. Because he is very interested in maps, as a part of his homework, he drew a map to his favorite “pho” restaurant, he even included the address. This presentation from a student allowed the teacher to share her experiences eating at a “pho” restaurant. This is just one example of how the kindergartners in Ms. Ginger’s class were able to contribute to the culture and community of the class.

Although Ms. Brenda’s and Ms. Ginger’s approach to instruction is slightly different from one another, their overall goals for their students is the same; to provide authentic learning experiences for each of the children in their care which allows them to be creative, culturally competent, valued, contributing members of their classroom community, and to ensure academic preparation for later years in school.

**Research Question Four**

*What is the educational significance of the processes and conditions implemented by The Hope Center?*

Many people will express a concern for the lack of quality early childhood education programs, and many will support the notion that early education is indeed the best education, primarily for gifted children. As discussed in chapter one, Whitmore suggests that the impact of not receiving early and appropriate gifted programming can lead to potentially irreversible educational deprivation effects (1988). To support this, there are a multitude of resources available which identify what quality early childhood classrooms look like. There are a plethora of program models and other resources
available for these classrooms, but not a significant amount for gifted preschool programs, and even less for African-American gifted early education programs. The programs available at The Hope Center, and the population they serve, is a significant step in the right direction towards providing quality gifted education, as well as narrowing the achievement gap between African–American students and their Caucasian peers.

By spending time at The Hope Center, I was able to witness what all of our children deserve, a hands-on learning environment that challenges children to think, to learn about themselves and the world around them and to know they are valued. The notion that these children know their opinions matter and that they are important, is essential to developing the whole child. If the vast majority of our culturally diverse, gifted children received this type of introduction to the world of education, perhaps there would be less high school drop-outs, less over-identification of African-Americans in special education and misbehaviors of unidentified gifted students not being challenged.

The Hope Center strives to work with the individual child, as well as the whole family, by providing opportunities for families to be involved in their child’s schooling, right from the beginning. Families are the initial identifier for their child to receive gifted services at The Hope Center, and are integral part of their education from that point on. The Hope Center continues to develop the family by creating advocates for their children, and encourages them to be members of the learning community. Establishing parent focus groups is just the beginning of what Hope offers their families to ensure their voices are heard. The context of these groups are parent derived, and serves as an outlet
for families to come and have candid conversations about their children, school and other factors that may affect their family dynamic.

By first acknowledging that the population exists, *The Hope Center* is making immense strides towards identifying and meeting the educational needs of the young, Black, gifted child. Although they serve only a small portion of the gifted population, the children in the gifted programs at Hope are being afforded opportunities that they may not have traditionally received until the third grade. This early exposure to quality gifted education can potentially have a long-lasting effect in a child’s life, and a definite positive impact on their educational career.

**Research Question Five**

*What are some of the implications for similar programs?*

When creating quality early childhood programs for typically developing children, there are a myriad of different models and philosophies that exist; Montessori, High-Scope, play-based, project approach, half-day, full-day, Head Start, etc… In contrary, there doesn’t appear to exist an ideal model for programs for *gifted* preschool children. I’ve often heard people say, that a quality program for a gifted child would be good for all children, and that may be true, but our gifted students, that minute percentage of the population, deserve a program specified to meet their learning needs. *The Hope Center* provides that program where gifted children can flourish. Where they are allowed, and encouraged, to be their precocious selves. Where they can engage in play and in conversation with like peers, and not looked at as being odd, or different. These children deserve a school setting where their gifts and talents are encouraged, not stifled.
Our gifted students deserve the same opportunities as the majority, and they deserve to have those opportunities in preschool, and not have to wait until the third grade to be identified as requiring special services.

Imagine if our society provided early childhood interventions for the potentially gifted, at the ripe age of three and four. Imagine the endless possibilities of what those young minds could create, and what they could become, if given the early opportunity. It is our responsibility to educate all of our children, not just the majority of them. It is our duty to assess the needs of all children, and provide adequate educational opportunities for them that will allow them to reach their full potential. It is also our responsibility to recognize the needs of the culturally diverse learners, and to provide culturally rich and culturally responsive learning environments, where students not only learn about their own cultural heritage, but learn to value and appreciate the cultures that make up the world around them as well. This level of cultural competence only evolves when students are in classrooms, with culturally responsive teachers who make being culturally accepting an essential value in their classrooms. With these culturally responsive gifted early education classes offered at The Hope Center, they are doing their part, they are providing enriched learning experiences for young gifted children by building a strong classroom community, taking advantage of teachable moments and by establishing rigorous language expectations of all their students. The Hope Center is doing their part to ensure that young African-American children do not fall victim to the achievement gap that is waiting for them when they enter traditional public school. They are doing their part to make sure all of our children receive the education they deserve, not just most of
the children. *The Hope Center* serves as a model example of how such a program can be implemented, and how when seeds of hope are planted, tended to and nurtured, how they will indeed flourish and grow into a garden of learners that knows no limits.

**Implications for Further Research**

One limitation of this research study is there was only one gifted program observed. *The Hope Center* has two gifted classrooms, one full day kindergarten and two half day preschool classes. More valuable information could be gained from observing in multiple gifted preschool classrooms, and perhaps programs that impact a greater amount of children. This educational case study is limited to identify the immediate impact on a small community of children, but the field of gifted education could greatly benefit from a larger qualitative study.

Additionally, there remains a need for longitudinal studies, which would examine the long-term impact of early childhood education on gifted learners. Potentially following students from their early schooling thru perhaps third grade, could illustrate the need for early intervention, to see what could potentially be lost during the primary grades if students are not identified as gifted early on.

**Closing Comments**

Ladson-Billings (1992) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional and political learning by “using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p. 382). Consequently, culturally responsive teachers examine the whole child, rather than separating the child into what is learned at home, what is learned at school, what is learned in the world. In this research study, I have
examined two unique programs, intent on identifying and meeting the needs of the young, gifted, African-American child. Although this examination into the world of gifted education was brief, it is an initial step to developing an understanding of the importance of early identification of gifted learners and how this process can impact a group of people. It is possible, to identify children for gifted programming at an early age, there is proof of this at The Hope Center. What also dwells in the walls of The Hope Center is the confirmation of African-American gifted children, they too exist. Our educational system seems to de-prioritize the need for developing the intellectual gifts of students, and fostering those gifts at a young age. With more programs similar to The Hope Center, designed specifically to find young gifted learners and even more specifically, to identify children of color, our American school system could be that much closer to closing the ever-widening achievement gap. Geneva Gay states it simply in the opening chapter of her Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, research & practice book:

Too many students of color have not been achieving in school as well as they should, and can, for far too long. The consequences of these disproportionally high levels of low achievement are long-term and wide-reaching, personal and civic, individual and collective. They are too devastating to be tolerable (p.1)

The under-identification of gifted learners does not just affect the individual learner; the under-identification of African-American students does not just affect the individual culture. The under-identification of children for gifted programs affects our entire global society. The collective “we” have to take a step in reversing the disproportionality that has plagued our schools for far too long. This study serves as a step towards identifying
how does a garden of learners grow, how one school community can indeed plant seeds of hope, and watch young gifted minds flourish.
References


Appendix A

Place of Interview:
Date of Interview
Interviewer: Danielle Harris
Interviewee:

Please take a moment to review each of the questions, and formulate your thoughts and ideas to best answer each of the questions. Please be as detailed as possible.

1. Tell me about your early childhood teaching experience.
   a. How long have you been in the field, have you always worked with young learners, etc…?
   b. At what point did you realize you wanted to work with gifted youth?
   c. What experiences have you had working with typically developing youth?

2. What differences do you notice between the gifted learners in your current classroom and previous experiences you’ve had with typical learners.
   a. How does a typical classroom look different from a gifted early childhood classroom?
   b. How do you personally define giftedness, and how does that definition influence your practice?

3. What ways do you differentiate instruction for the varying levels of students in your class?
   a. What are some of the learning differences you see amongst the students in your class?
   b. How do you alter the curriculum for each student?

4. What are some unique characteristics you would share about your students and classroom environment, with someone who is unfamiliar with the setting.

5. What else would you like to share with the researcher prior to beginning classroom observations?
6. Thank you for taking the time to share your educational philosophy and practice with me. Should I have additional questions, who should I contact within the agency?
Appendix B

Informed Consent
You are invited to participate in an educational criticism and connoisseurship research study of the experiences teachers and administrators have that work at The Hope Center. The research is being conducted to fulfill dissertation requirement for a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Denver.

The Research
For this research, I am asking that you agree to participate in two interviews, 60-90 minutes each, to be conducted in a location of your choice. I will ask you to talk about your experiences in education, in addition to your experiences working with gifted learners at The Hope Center. Each interview will be audio-recorded, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts of your recordings to make corrections. In addition to the two formal interviews, I am requesting to be able to observe in the gifted classrooms for a span of up to two weeks, or ten full days, during the course of your instructional periods. After we have complete the interviews and observations, I will share with you the themes that I perceive, and you will have an opportunity to respond to my observations.

Risks
There are no foreseen risks that may occur to the participants.

Benefits
By participating in this study, your professional experiences, best practices, and opinions about early childhood gifted practices will be shared with others in the field, in order to best meet the educational needs of early gifted learners everywhere. In reflecting on and sharing your experiences, you will be contributing to the awareness of the necessities of early identification of gifted, African-American students.

Confidentiality
In order to keep your information safe, your name will not be attached to any of the data, but rather, a pseudonym will be used in all of the written materials associated with this research. The voice recordings produced during the interviews will be erased immediately after they have been transcribed, and I will be the only one with access to the recordings. The results from the research will be used for the purpose of dissertation and may be shared at a meeting with members of my committee. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published.
Special considerations
Please know that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and is in no way an obligation of our relationship. You may, at any time, decline to answer any question without having to qualify for your reasons for doing so. You may, at any time, request a break, terminate the session, or remove yourself from the study, without loss of benefit, and without having to qualify your reasons for doing so. You may withdraw from this investigation with full confidence that any information you have shared with me will not be included in the study. You will be given a copy of your interview transcripts for your records. In addition, you will receive a copy of the research results.

Whom to Contact
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at 720-883-4313, Dr. Bruce Urhmacher dissertation co-chair at the University of Denver at 303-871-2483, or Dr. Nicole Russell, dissertation co-chair at the University of Denver at 303-871-2487. Also, if you have concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or du-irb@du.edu, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

If you agree to these statements and conditions and you agree to participate in this study, please sign below.

I have read and understand the foregoing description of this research project. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature: __________________________________________
Date: _______________________________________________

Please Print:
Name: _______________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________
Phone: ____________________________ E-Mail: __________

_____ I agree to be audiotaped (during interviews)
_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped (during interviews)
Signature: __________________________________________ Date: _______________________

_____ I agree to be audio-taped (during classroom observations)
_____ I do not agree to be audio-taped (during classroom observations)
Signature: __________________________________________ Date: _______________________

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Appendix C

Events

Agency Wish List

Gifted Program

HOPE Academy: An Inner-City Program for Gifted Children

- Does Your Child or Grandchild . . .
- Make up stories, invent things?
- Seem to be in constant motion?
- Use lots of big words?
- Remember everything?

Parents are often the first to recognize that their child is "really smart" and different from other children. HOPE Academy's mission is to help families of all cultures, backgrounds, and incomes receive equal opportunities to develop their children's special gifts.

What Does "Gifted" Mean?
Knowing your child is different may seem scary. In fact, gifted children who are not given chances to develop their abilities may show negative behaviors, such as constant daydreaming, challenging authority and being disruptive.

But giftedness also means that your child has exceptional potential and, if given the proper education, can achieve great things.

How Can Hope Help?
HOPE Academy for Gifted Children has studied the development of gifted children for decades. We use special tools to help
identify gifted children as young as three years old. We know that the earlier gifted kids are identified, the sooner we can help them reach their potential.

The HOPE Academy program provides a challenging, rewarding and nurturing environment for gifted kids, where they learn at their own pace.

Our Programs Include:
- a 4-M curriculum: multiple intelligence, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-discipline
- reading, computer & math skills
- summer math & science camp
- language arts
- physical education
- community resources
- creative arts

We Can Help By:
- providing financial assistance to deserving families
- offering your child a challenging curriculum
- creating an environment where gifted kids will develop skills and abilities
- using multicultural and multilingual materials
- encouraging family and community involvement
- applying appropriate teaching styles

Approximately 80% of HOPE Academy students have graduated to other gifted programs in private and public schools.
- Nearly 90% of parents who suspect their child may be gifted are right!
- Gifted children, like all kids, need the right environment to develop their skills.
Appendix D

HOPE CENTER
Early Childhood Education Program
3900 Elizabeth Street • Denver, Colorado 80205-4244 • (303) 888-1800
HOPE ACADEMY PARENT/COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE
For Gifted Children
Page 1 of 3

Please print

Child’s Full Legal Name: ___________________________ Last Middle First
Grade: ________ Gender: M ☐ F ☐ Birthday: __________ Week _______ Year/Grade of Birth: ________

Relation: ___________ Address: ___________ Apartment: ___________ City: ___________ State: ___________ Zip: ___________

Parent 1: ___________________________ Phone: ___________ Parent 2: ___________________________ Phone: ___________

Form Completed By: ___________________________ Date: ___________ Signature: ___________

Race/Ethnicity

1. What is the child’s ethnic background? Is child Hispanic or Latino? ☐ Yes ☐ No. 

2. Which of the following groups describes the child’s race? (Select all that apply)

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native  ☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American  ☐ Hispanic
☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander  ☐ Other

3. Which of the following describes the child’s ethnicity? (Choose only one)

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native  ☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American  ☐ Hispanic
☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander  ☐ Other

Directions: Please read each statement. Using the scale below, select how often this child displays each characteristic. Mark your answer on the line following each statement. Please do not collaborate with another person when completing the survey.

NEVER  SELDOM  SOMETIMES  OFTEN  ALWAYS

1. Appears to know how other people feel. ___________________________

2. Able to tell how things are alike and different. ___________________________

3. Likes to imitate songs heard on radio and T.V. ___________________________

4. Likes to make up games, rhymes, and/or interesting stories. ___________________________

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5. Enjoys listening to stories.

6. Curious about many things and asks many questions about things around him or her.

7. Able to remember information from stories that have been read or told to her/him.

8. Able to give many answers to the same problem.

9. Interested and eager to learn.

10. Teaches her/his friends songs, dances, and games.

11. Dramatic when speaking or pretending.

12. Can be bossy or pushy with friends.

13. Speaks more than one dialect. (Standard and "Street")

14. Uses big words.

15. Understands the morals of stories.


17. Learns information quickly and easily.

18. Demands a reason for things.

19. Questions ideas and beliefs.

20. Likes to make up jokes and has a good sense of humor.

21. High energy level.

22. Very witty or clever.

23. Gets interested in things for a long time.

24. Asks odd or unusual questions.

25. Likes to take things apart and see how they work.

26. Often does things differently than other children.

27. Can do things that seem difficult.

28. Understands other's point of view.
29. Talkative in her/his own home.
30. Good memory.
31. Has a large vocabulary.
32. Likes to spend time with older children.
33. Likes to read.
34. Willing to take risks.
35. Enjoys challenges.
36. Enjoys solving problems.
37. Has a big imagination.
38. Is independent.
39. Bored easily when things are easy or familiar.
40. Sensitive or emotional.

Additional comments: ____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Please return to: HOPE Center, Inc.
3400 Elizabeth St.
Denver, CO 80205
Attn: Social Service Coordinator

GCPCO