

Running Head: GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATION DECISIONS

BY

MATTHEW A. MINGLE

A Dissertation Submitted to

The Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Education

Graduate Program in Teacher Leadership

Approved by

Dr. Tanja Sargent, Chair

Dr. Sharon Ryan, Committee

Dr. Lisa M. Antunes, Committee

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 2016

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

© 2016

Matthew A. Mingle

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

Teacher nominations are the most commonly used method for identifying students for full consideration to gifted education programs in the United States yet teachers receive little to no pre- or in-service training in the practice. Without changes to this reality, teachers' nominations are less reliable than other data sources because they are based on incomplete knowledge or misunderstandings of the characteristics of giftedness. In addition, when teachers have a great deal of autonomy in making nominations to gifted programs, their beliefs and biases can determine whether students have the opportunity to participate in such programs, regardless of the students' qualifications. This contributes to the persistent underrepresentation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse groups in gifted programs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the decision-making processes used by teachers when nominating students for one district's gifted education program. Survey, observation, and interview data were collected from 20 fifth and sixth grade teachers in a suburban intermediate school in New Jersey. The following research questions guided my study: (1) how do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs? (1A) how do teachers define giftedness? (1B) how do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness? (2) How might the teacher nomination process affect access to the gifted education program? Three main findings emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) definitions of giftedness varied among teachers; (2) personal and professional experiences drove the decision-making process; and (3) decisions lacked unity because some teachers were left out of the process altogether and others felt disconnected from its purpose. The implications of these findings are considered on the local and national levels with appropriate recommendations and suggestions for practice and policy. Administrators and teachers should seek opportunities for professional development specific to the local district's nomination expectations. Additionally, districts should consider alternative pathways into the gifted identification process including parent nominations and general screening of all students. Finally, there is a need for gifted education to gain status in federal education policy discussions and grant opportunities so that local districts have support for their efforts.

Keywords: gifted education, identification, nomination, professional development, underrepresentation

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Matthew and Nancy Mingle. Despite not attending college themselves, they supported and encouraged my educational pursuits as far back as I can remember. I know now that it was not always easy, but I never felt like anything related to learning was a burden and I could not have asked for parents to be more involved. It was not until becoming an educator that I realized how significant it was that I grew up always expecting that college was my destination no matter what it took.

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

Acknowledgements

At one of the first class meetings or orientation events, I can recall students from the cohorts ahead giving us advice about how to make it through this program. Most significantly, they emphasized that successfully earning a doctorate required a commitment from an entire network of people around each candidate. For me that group has taken several forms over the past years. Thank you to Jamie Cameron and Teagan Light for believing in me and understanding that sometimes I had to spend hours at the computer when we all would have preferred time together. Your love and support has been instrumental in getting me to this finish line. Thank you to Alison Mingle for encouraging me to begin this journey and sacrificing a great deal to help me reach my goals. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the Hillsborough and Madison boards of education and administrative teams for supporting me in many ways these past four years. To have had the good fortune to work in two wonderful school systems that support professional growth is something I value deeply.

One of the things that attracted me to this program was the organization in concentrations so that within the larger cohort communities might develop, providing for a support system throughout what would undoubtedly be a challenging journey. I had no idea that my Teacher Leadership colleagues and friends would become so integral to my experience – both professionally and personally – over these past several years. We have shared marriages, divorces, births of babies, and job changes with a degree of closeness and heartfelt concern that has made this such a rewarding process. I am most appreciative to Linda Edwards, Jennifer Kamm-Greco, Sandra Lynch, Michelle Macchia, David, Moser, Kristina Nicosia, and Susan Watkins for their steadfast support. I would like to extend an extra special thank you to Jennifer Kamm-Greco and Kristina Nicosia for inspiring me with their successful dissertation defenses

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

and their counsel and feedback regarding my own.

My committee members deserve my gratitude for agreeing to share this experience with me. I am grateful for the encouragement to begin work on this doctorate from Dr. Lisa Antunes. I am grateful to Dr. Sharon Ryan for her wisdom and guidance not only during this process but in essential courses in the program. I am grateful for the consistent support and positivity of my committee chair, Dr. Tanja Sargent.

I would like to extend my thanks to the administration and staff of the Arlington Public Schools who not only agreed to allow me to conduct my research there but offered every amenity they could to help me with logistical support. Although I cannot name the school or district here, they know who they are and I hope above all else that this research helps the dedicated teachers take another step forward to do what is best for the children they serve.

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	10
Conceptions of Giftedness.....	10
Teacher Nominations.....	12
Teacher Preparation.....	15
Teacher Bias.....	19
Whiteness and Institutional Racism.....	22
Discussion and Directions for Future Research.....	24
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	26
Logic Model.....	26
Research Site.....	27
Research Participants.....	28
Data Collection Procedures.....	31
Surveys.....	31
Observations.....	32
Interviews.....	33
Document analysis.....	34
Data Analysis Procedures.....	35
Surveys.....	36
Observations.....	36

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

Interviews.....	37
Validity.....	37
Research Limitations.....	38
Chapter Four: Findings.....	41
Definitions of Giftedness Vary.....	42
When all does not really mean all.....	43
Determining how to use positive characteristics.....	46
Misuse of negative characteristics.....	51
Personal Experience Trumps All.....	56
Teachers as parents.....	57
Impact of teacher experiences.....	60
Lack of experience.....	60
Great deal of experience.....	62
Distasteful nomination experience.....	64
Professional development.....	67
Teachers as students.....	70
Feeling Out of the Loop.....	71
Team-based collaboration.....	72
Gatekeepers of the gatekeepers.....	72
Making compromises.....	74
Mismatch of programs and services.....	75
Role of off-team staff members.....	77
Conclusion.....	79
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications.....	80
Discussion of Findings.....	81
Implications for Practice.....	85
Teacher training.....	85

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

Alternative pathways.....	88
Parent nominations.....	89
General screening.....	90
Broadening the definition.....	91
Implications for Policy.....	91
Federal grant programs.....	92
Suggestions for Future Research.....	94
Conclusion.....	96
References.....	98
Appendix A.....	108
Appendix B.....	110
Appendix C.....	111

GIFTED EDUCATION NOMINATIONS

List of Tables

Table 1. Trends in the Underrepresentation of Minority Students in Gifted Education Programs.....	2
Table 2. Underrepresentation in Arlington, Grades 3-8.....	4
Table 3. Sample Demographics.....	29
Table 4. Data Collection Timeline.....	34
Table 5. Positive Characteristics Identified.....	46
Table 6. Negative Characteristics Identified.....	52

List of Figures

Figure 1. Logic Model.....	27
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Gifted Children (2008) defines gifted individuals as “those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains” (p. 1).

According to Castellano and Frazier (2011):

(Gifted) students are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. They transcend socioeconomic status, geography, religion, sexual orientation, and handicapping conditions. They are found in housing projects, immigrant populations, trailer parks, Indian reservations, and the more traditional rural, urban, and suburban areas that typically define our great nation. In essence, they are found in every school they attend (p. XV).

This definition is in stark contrast to earlier approaches to gifted education where IQ test scores of 130 or higher were the most common benchmark for participation in gifted education programs. This change towards multiple measures and various domains began with the first federal definition of giftedness published in 1972. Today, 48 out of the 50 states (Massachusetts and South Dakota are the exceptions) have definitions of giftedness. Although intelligence is included in most of them, other factors from achievement to ability to specific academic areas to creativity and leadership also show up (Kaufman, 2012).

Despite general acceptance among policymakers and researchers that students from all types of backgrounds require gifted education services, students from traditionally underrepresented groups continue to be served by such programs at low rates, which leads to loss of potential talent development (Castellano & Frazier, 2011, p. XVI). As Table 1 shows, relative to the general population, culturally and linguistically diverse students (CLD) including African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, English language learners, students from low socio-

economic backgrounds, students from rural areas, and students with disabilities continue to be underrepresented in gifted education programs. This is evident even in communities where they make up the majority of school children (Bernal, 2002; Castellano, 2011; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). According to the United States Department of Education (Gentry, Hu, & Thomas, 2008), “Black, Latino/a, and Native American students were (as of 1993) underrepresented by 50-70% in gifted education programs” (p. 197). Several decades have passed since experts in the field first called for educators to take action to correct historical inequities in access to gifted education programs, yet little has changed. Additional research in recent years confirms the same discrepancies (see Card & Giuliano, 2015 and Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education, 2002). The problem is as severe as it is longstanding.

Table 1

Trends in the Underrepresentation of Minority Students in Gifted Education Programs

Student Population	1982	1992	2002
Hispanic/Latino	8.6 4.0 (u=53%)	13.7 7.9 (u=42%)	17.8 10.4 (u=42%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.6 4.7 (o=45%)	4.0 7.0 (o=43%)	4.4 7.1 (o=38%)
African American	25.8 11.0 (u = 57%)	21.1 12.0 (u = 41%)	17.2 8.4 (u=51%)

White			59.4
			72.6
			(o=18%)

Note. Percentages are rounded; top number indicates percentage of student population, and middle number represents percentage of gifted education. “o” indicates overrepresentation; “u” indicates underrepresentation. Percentage of underrepresentation was calculated using the following formula: $1 - (\text{percentage of gifted education program} \div \text{percentage of school district})$. Source: Ford (1998) and Ford, Grantham, & Whiting (2008).

One effect of the movement away from ability-based grouping or tracking strategies in the No Child Left Behind era has been an increased expectation for general classroom teachers to differentiate instruction for a wide variety of student abilities in heterogeneous settings. Despite research clearly indicating the need for ongoing professional development to support thoughtful use of ability grouping (Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner, 2002) and promising strategies identified through various studies, little research has been done to bring these efforts to scale, especially concerning the needs of gifted students. Analysis of student achievement that resulted from changes in the education system under No Child Left Behind reveals troubling gaps between the same groups underrepresented in gifted education programs and those groups not underrepresented. Yet Castellano (2011) asserts that successful principals of Title I schools (those with high percentages of students from low-income households) allocate a higher percentage of their budgets to the most able students while principals of lower-performing Title I schools typically do not. In other words, resourcing highly able, culturally diverse students can serve to diminish the achievement gap. Instead, African American students, for example, continue to be underrepresented in gifted programs and overrepresented in less desirable categories – special education, low ability groups and tracks, and among high school and college dropouts (Milner & Ford, 2007). Additionally, changing demographics in the United States

reveal that Hispanics make up a rapidly growing percentage of the overall population yet continue to be underrepresented in gifted education programs (Castellano, 2011). In 1972, students from CLD groups made up 22% of public school enrollment; as of 2005, they were 45% of the total population (Ford, 2010). According to Lewis, Rivera, and Roby (2012), “as student demographics change, sensitivity surrounding the assessment of CLD students must evolve in order to accurately identify potential giftedness in CLD students” (p. 23). It is within these contexts that this topic takes on a new sense of importance nationwide.

In this study, I conduct research on the teacher nomination process in a high performing suburban school district in New Jersey, which will be referred to as Arlington Public Schools. The issue of teacher nominations and their impact on which students ultimately participate in gifted education programs becomes more concerning in successful school districts where expectations for challenging students to the limits of their abilities exist. The application of Ford’s (1998) analysis (see table 1) to the Arlington Public Schools (see table 2) reveals even more stark discrepancies than contained within the national portrait. Hispanic students are underrepresented by 77% and African American students are underrepresented by 65%. Asian American students are overrepresented by 38%. The same general trends apply to this district as the national data; however, the gaps are larger, suggesting an even greater need for action.

Table 2

Underrepresentation in Arlington, Grades 3-8

Student Population	January 2013
Caucasian American	67.5 (n=2232)
	63.5 (n=364)
	(u = 5.9%)
Asian American	20.3 (n=672)

	32.6 (n=187) (o = 37.7%)
Hispanic American	6.9 (n=228) 1.6 (n=9) (u = 76.8%)
African American	5.1 (n=168) 1.8 (n=10) (u = 64.7%)
Pacific Islander	0.3 (n=9) 0.5 (n=3) (o = 40%)

Note. Percentages are rounded; top number indicates percentage of student population, and middle number represents percentage of gifted education. “o” indicates overrepresentation; “u” indicates underrepresentation. Percentage of underrepresentation was calculated using the following formula: $1 - (\text{percentage of gifted education program} \div \text{percentage of school district})$. Source of formula: Ford (1998).

As of January 1, 2013, the district’s gifted education program served 16.3% of the student body in grades three through eight (the grade span of the program). Within the gifted education program, 63.5% of participants were White, 32.6% were Asian American, 1.8% were African American, 1.6% were Hispanic, and 0.5% were Pacific Islander. The analysis of representation in the gifted program relative to the overall student body (see Table 2) reveals significant underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students and overrepresentation of Asian American students. This data in the local context reveals even more discrepancy in access to gifted education programming than at the national level.

Initial placement in Arlington's gifted education program takes place as students complete their second grade year and begin third grade. The process begins with all students taking the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). Students who score high on the CogAT then enter the full identification process, including an achievement test, an assessment of creativity, and feedback from parents and teachers. All students are screened to one degree or another. In all subsequent grades, however, teachers must nominate a student to start the identification process. There is no other means for being considered. School district leadership provides teachers with guidance for identifying the characteristics of giftedness – both positive and negative - when asking them to nominate students for consideration for the gifted and talented program.

This guidance document (see Appendix A) has been used by the district for more than a decade as the primary organizational structure for how teachers should think about students when making decisions about who to nominate for the program. I attempted to trace the document to its inception hoping to see information about the empirical base for the list or guidance about how to properly use it in the nomination and identification process. Although I found the list printed verbatim and with minor changes in a range of gifted education program websites throughout the country and in scholarly work, none of those instances included complete source information or clues to provide context. Next I tried to locate Dr. Suzanne Reichert, the person referenced as the document's source. A perusal of a board of education agenda located via a Google search of her name led me to her educational consulting firm, The Global Institute for Maximizing Potential, Inc. and there I discovered that the spelling of her name on the gifted characteristics sheet (in Arlington and everywhere else it's cited) differs from her use of it professionally (Richert versus Reichert). Subsequent searches led me to find a litany of articles written by Dr. Richert on the issue of identification and more specifically the

identification of students from diverse backgrounds. This research, beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the early 1990s, is among the most cited in the field during that time frame regarding characteristics that teachers can and should look for when deciding which students to nominate for gifted education programs.

This search culminated in a phone call conversation with Dr. Richert (October 17, 2015) during which I was able to discuss the genesis of the characteristics used in Arlington as well as the various approaches to using them. To the best of her knowledge, the document shared with teachers in Arlington comes from the work she did in a 1982 publication for the United States Department of Education on identification. That full report contributed to the development of numerous gifted education programs in New Jersey that relied on the same foundational research. Unfortunately, many of those programs have either been discontinued in the decades since or continue in a modified form that uses the same foundation without the professional development and context that came along with the original push in the 1980s in Arlington and elsewhere. “The real issue is to distinguish between academic achievement, which is conforming to teacher expectations, and gifted potential which is a different thing. Giftedness requires creativity, individuality, and often rebelliousness” (Richert, interview, October 17, 2015). Dr. Richert pointed to a research base, described in my literature review, that suggests that teachers who are not trained in the characteristics of giftedness, especially negative characteristics, are unreliable sources of identification data who perpetuate a system that uses white, middle-class standards of behavior and school experience to judge students from diverse backgrounds leading to a re-segregation of the public education space by taking students already achieving in this white, middle-class educational system and giving them their own school-within-a-school with innovative teaching and good resources (interview, October 17, 2015).

In a recent pre-dissertation qualitative research study, I interviewed six classroom teachers to identify what role teacher training plays in creating the underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in Arlington's gifted and talented education program. The study addressed one research question: In what ways do teachers' understandings of the characteristics of giftedness affect their decisions to nominate African American and Hispanic students for the gifted and talented program? There were two findings from this study that drive the additional research in this subsequent study: 1) Teachers do not share a common understanding of giftedness and 2) Teachers lack adequate training in how to identify students for gifted education programs.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the decision-making processes used by teachers when nominating students for one district's gifted education program. For the purpose of this study, the teacher nomination process refers to the timeframe from when teachers receive nomination forms and characteristics of giftedness from the district supervisor responsible for gifted and talented education until teachers turn in their nominations, a period of approximately one month. This study sought to answer two primary research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?
 - a. How do teachers define giftedness?
 - b. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?
2. How might the teacher nomination process affect access to the gifted education program?

This study will attempt to elucidate teachers' understandings of the characteristics of giftedness as well as how these understandings contribute to their decisions about which students to nominate. The goal is to use the resulting information to provide district leadership with insight about what role teachers' perceptions of giftedness and the nomination process may play in contributing to the underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in the gifted and talented program. Significantly, this knowledge will bridge the gap between the research base and the local site of practice so an action plan can be developed to address the underrepresentation.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teachers' tendency not to nominate diverse students to gifted programs may be affected by their conceptions of giftedness, background, and biases. This literature review focuses on how teachers learn about the characteristics of giftedness and apply that knowledge to their decision-making processes when tasked with nominated students to such programs. In order to investigate the specific ways teacher make decisions, a deeper understanding of the literature base in these areas must be developed. To guide the selection of pertinent studies, I developed one research question to explore: (a) how do teachers develop their understanding of giftedness and the gifted education nomination process? The literature is organized into three sections based on the results of my search: conceptions of giftedness, teacher preparation, and teacher bias.

Conceptions of Giftedness

The New Jersey Department of Education (2010) defines gifted and talented students as “those students who possess or demonstrate high levels of ability, in one or more content areas, when compared to their chronological peers in the local district and who require modification of their educational program if they are to achieve in accordance with their capabilities.” This definition aligns with those of most other states that attempt the task of clarifying gifted education in such a way. However, there is a great deal of variability in defining giftedness in the literature. In a meta-analysis of 104 empirical articles, Carman (2013) found a lack of consensus regarding what qualified a person as gifted. Although her analysis was done in the context of the need for consensus to allow for better comparability across research studies, the finding is important to any study of a gifted education program.

The roots of modern gifted education can be traced to the works of Francis Galton (beginning in 1869), Alfred Binet (beginning in 1908), Lewis Terman (beginning in 1929), and

Leta Stetter Hollingworth (beginning in 1942) (Morelock, 1996). The cumulative effect of their work included the creation and use of IQ scores, the idea that individuals could have extraordinarily different levels of achievement and ability, an understanding that such differences required modifications of the standard school experience, and even the social-emotional ramifications of such intense differences among individuals. These early decades of gifted education research centered around two main concepts: 1) Giftedness refers to an increased capacity for reasoning that begins to manifest in childhood and 2) Giftedness refers to a level of development that outpaces other chronological peers. This definition generally centered on a narrow idea that giftedness was about general mental ability alone (Jensen, 2004).

Race and ethnicity have been inextricably linked to the field since at least the 1950s. In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and other efforts to desegregate schools, the use of IQ scores and other devices to group students in specialized academic programs came under great scrutiny, especially as they were used to maintain separate educational systems specifically for the purpose of racial discrimination (Tannenbaum, 1983). In the 1970s and 1980s, a new round of educators and researchers renewed the field as an inclusive, performance-based system that expanded to talent development rather than solely intellectual gifts. The leaders of this movement included Joseph Renzulli, Howard Gardner, Robert Sternberg, and others.

The sparse empirical basis for gifted education has long been a source of contention among critics. The first prospective study of intellectual giftedness based on longitudinal data was published in 1994 (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, & Guerin). The researchers studied a randomly selected group of 107 middle-class children for eight years. Once some students were classified as gifted based on IQ scores at the age of eight, the researchers went back through the

previously collected data to attempt to identify evidence that might have been predictive of the ultimate classification. The study found that the gifted children were quantifiably different from their very first year of life. They required and received more stimulation, demonstrated more engagement and persistence in high-demand tasks, and progressed more rapidly over time (Gottfried et al., 1994). Research in the 20 years since this landmark study has branched out into brain-based fields as well as social constructs of giftedness. Renzulli (1999) summarized his nearly three decades of contributions to the field, commenting that “we are dealing with an almost infinite number of interactions in the making of giftedness” (p. 8). He suggests that future research in the field of empirically defining and depicting giftedness must focus on human traits as depicted by young people in the midst of doing demanding work that requires optimum creative production.

Teacher Nominations

Many gifted programs require nominations from teachers before students enter the identification screening process. The literature is mixed on the ability of teachers to effectively nominate CLD students for gifted programs (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Gentry, Hu, & Thomas, 2008; McBee, 2006). A series of empirical studies found that teachers do not recommend Black or Hispanic students as often as White students even when they have same or better test scores and/or academic records (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Although there is evidence that teachers, in general, evaluate Hispanic students less favorably than White students, for example, it is hard to separate ethnicity from other factors such as mastery of English and socioeconomic status, thus making it difficult to draw conclusions (McBee, 2006). In fact, teachers are also less accurate (correctly nominating students who ultimately gain entrance to a

program) when nominating students from low socioeconomic backgrounds than they are students from high socioeconomic backgrounds (McBee, 2006).

McBee (2008) analyzed the quality of nominations to gifted programs as defined by whether nominated students performed well in a gifted program through the analysis of a large dataset of existing state-level elementary school student data. Schroth and Helfer (2008) surveyed a random sample within the national populations of elementary school teachers, gifted education specialists, and administrators to better understand preferences of various groups for different nomination pathways. Elhoweris (2008) used vignettes to gauge participants' nomination decisions by adjusting variables so that only CLD characteristics differed between candidates. These three studies relied on quantitative research methods to describe the data. Michael-Chadwell (2010) and Peters and Gentry (2012) focused on smaller samples, parents and teachers in one district and students in one school respectively, through the use of qualitative methods such as interviewing combined with descriptive analysis of existing data. Despite the wide variety of methods, all four studies aimed to better understand the role of teacher nominations in the identification of students for gifted programs from CLD groups.

The research reveals troubling discrepancies related to teacher nominations for gifted education programs. While teachers believe their nominations to be highly effective and extremely important (Schroth & Helfer, 2008), more than 70% of African American parents believed the teacher nomination process was broken for their children and must be adjusted to meet the needs of gifted students from minority populations (Michael-Chadwell, 2010). Compounding this discrepancy is the finding that parents of African American and Hispanic students are far less likely to take advantage of alternative pathways to gifted nominations such as from parents themselves than their White or Asian American counterparts (McBee, 2006). As

a result, despite the finding that *nominated* African American students, for example, qualify for gifted programs at 82% the rate of White students, the access gap grows exponentially because African American students are only nominated at 31% the rate of White students (McBee, 2006). These results corroborate the anecdotal evidence shared by parents in the Michael-Chadwell (2010) study that the system simply does not work for students from CLD groups.

These studies delved into explanations and potential solutions. Peters and Gentry (2012) examined the possibility of using a combination of group-specific norms and teacher rating scales to make placement decisions. Group-specific norms refer to the approach of considering students only as they compare to students from similar racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and/or linguistic backgrounds (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2000; Milner & Ford, 2007). Combining the practice of considering students within such groups with the use of clearly defined teacher rating scales locates more students for gifted programs than traditional approaches (Peters & Gentry, 2012). As parents suggested (Michael-Chadwell, 2010), however, even empirically sound teacher rating scales require the provision of professional development for teachers responsible for making nominations, not only related to the tool but also in the area of characteristics of giftedness and how they manifest in students from CLD groups differently than from majority groups.

These studies bring up to date the research base from the 1950s-1980s that Richert summarized in 1992. “In most districts, teachers tend to be involved in identifying students for programs. There is ample evidence from several studies that teachers without training in characteristics of the gifted are often unreliable sources of identification data” (p. 6). As others have found, this does not mean teachers *cannot* be good sources of information. “At all grade levels, teachers, but only if they are trained in negative characteristics of the gifted, are

particularly good sources of observations about creative behaviors. Without such training, data from teachers may offer information even less useful than standardized tests” (Richert, 1992, p. 14).

The complicated interplay of biases, misunderstandings, lack of preparation, and other factors makes pinpointing the exact cause of the relationship between teacher nominations and underrepresentation difficult. However, the data reviewed here support McBee’s (2006) conclusion that current teacher nomination practices are significant in the differential in representation among gifted program participants. The noted problems with teacher nominations of culturally and linguistically diverse students notwithstanding, the research continues to advocate the use of teacher judgment as part of a multi-measure identification system (Westberg, 2012). This acceptance of and advocacy for teacher nominations and evaluations has not always been the norm in the field. In fact, the standard belief until the mid-1990s was that validity and reliability concerns with teacher input were too severe to count on it. This about-face is due to a more sophisticated analysis of the methodology used by early researchers that now shows it to have been flawed and the development of scales that guide teachers’ input in a more controlled way (Westberg, 2012) that lead to more accurate and reliable nominations. This conflict suggests the need for additional research to gain a better understanding of the issues and research-based recommendations for moving forward more effectively.

Teacher Preparation

Pre-service preparation fails to provide a foundation to support fledgling teachers in their quests to meet the needs of gifted students (Callahan, Cooper, & Glascock, 2003; Chamberlin & Moore, 2006; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994; Matthews & Foster, 2005). Moreover, in-service professional development, the main source of training in gifted education (Bangel, Enersen,

Capobianco, & Moon, 2006), falls short in helping practicing teachers strengthen their repertoire of skills in this area (Callahan et al., 2003; Latz, Speirs Neumeister, Adams, & Pierce, 2009; Reis & Westberg, 1994). In fact, more than 60% of public school teachers reported receiving no training related to teaching gifted students (Reis & Westberg, 1994), yet the combination of a No Child Left Behind-led focus on struggling students and dwindling resources as a result of recent budget cuts means regular classroom teachers are taking on more of the responsibility for educating gifted students (Johnsen, Haensly, Ryser, & Ford, 2002; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). Even when they are not solely responsible for the classroom instruction of gifted students, regular classroom teachers play an integral role in identifying students for gifted programming. According to Pajares (1992), individuals who go into teaching are likely to have been successful students. When combined with the research on teacher bias related to the teaching corps not representing the diversity of the student body I will describe later, the mismatch between teachers and the students they serve is magnified. Therefore a need exists for high-quality professional development to support the implementation of best practices among teachers of gifted students, including those related to selecting students for gifted education programs.

Three of the studies reviewed here explored the developing understanding of gifted education among undergraduates enrolled in courses designed to prepare them for teaching careers. Goodnough (2000) collected data over a six-week period from six students who were enrolled in an introductory course which aimed to encourage understanding of how to differentiate instruction for high-ability learners. Through qualitative methods, Goodnough gathered information about how students' conceptions of giftedness evolved as a result of the course. Bangel et al. (2006) used interviews, lesson plan reviews, and observations of classroom

teaching to collect data from five students enrolled concurrently in an online course on gifted education and in a practicum experience that included instructing gifted children in a Saturday enrichment program. Bain, Bliss, Choate, and Brown (2007) collected data from 210 students in a sophomore-level human development course and 75 students in a senior-level educational psychology course who completed an attitudes and perceptions of giftedness survey. All three of these studies present external validity challenges. Goodnough (2000) and Bangel et al. (2006) used small sample sizes that may reduce the generalizability of the findings. Although the sample used by Bain et al. (2007) includes likely future teachers, the large sophomore subgroup includes quite a few students who will not go into education. Such concerns notwithstanding, these three studies provide important contributions to the knowledge base regarding the effectiveness of pre-service coursework on guiding perceptions of future educators towards gifted education.

The other four studies contained in this review explored the impact professional development has on in-service teachers. Using student responses from a first day of class questionnaire about the characteristics of gifted students, Copenhaver and Mc Intyre (1992) collected data from 85 teachers enrolled in a graduate course on developing curriculum for gifted students. Hansen and Feldhusen (1994) studied 82 teachers of gifted students, 54 with formal training in gifted education and 28 without. Their methodology included classroom observations, student and teacher questionnaires. Reis and Westberg (1994) assigned 181 general elementary educators from 20 school districts across the United States to one of three treatment groups related to the amount of support they would receive while trying the research-based instructional method curriculum compacting with gifted students. Data from teacher self-reporting and independent ratings of materials turned in by the participants formed the basis of the data

analysis conducted for the study. VanTassel-Baska et al. (2008) compared 67 secondary educators of the gifted from Singapore with 33 teachers of advanced high school students from the United States using a classroom observation scale. The challenge with bringing these four studies together into a cohesive analysis centers on their different purposes. The first two featured similar sample sizes and teacher demographics, making their comparability to one another strong. Reis and Westberg (1994) capitalized on a national network of school districts affiliated with their work at The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and the resources provided by a federal grant. Of all the studies considered in this review, the findings from this study have the greatest generalizability as a result. The conclusions used from the VanTassel-Baska et al. (2008) study were drawn out of a larger cross-cultural analysis. Although the research reviewed in this section served a variety of functions in its original form, the high internal validity and strong generalizability make these studies worthwhile contributors.

The studies reviewed here indicate a significant gap between pre- and in-service teachers' perceptions of gifted education and the research base in the field. The surveys used by Bain et al. (2007) and Copenhaver and Mc Intyre (1992) revealed attitudes among educators without formal training in gifted education that threaten the foundation of the field built by gifted education proponents. Inexperienced teachers of the gifted labeled student characteristics such as boredom, rebelliousness, and laziness as negative traits while experienced gifted education teachers were more likely to recognize the same characteristics as the natural outcome of frustrating experiences in learning environments that were not meeting students' needs (Copenhaver & Mc Intyre, 1992). Seventy-six percent of the participants in the study by Bain et al. (2007) agreed that "children who are truly gifted are likely to excel even if they do not receive special services" (p. 460) while 58% of respondents identified the regular classroom as the optimal setting for

meeting gifted students' needs. Interestingly, respondents were more likely to prefer pull-out programming if they themselves were identified as gifted as students - 51% support compared to 42% support among non-gifted participants (Bain et al., 2007). Answers to questions about grouping, elitism in gifted programs, acceleration, and enrichment further demonstrated a disconnect between participants with no training in gifted education and researched-based best practices. Without targeted training, these future teachers are likely to maintain their beliefs once they are in the classroom (Kagan, 1992).

The studies suggested that even one course dedicated to gifted education served to change pre- and in-service teachers' perceptions of gifted education and gifted students. Goodnough (2000) found that the six participants in her study demonstrated improved understanding of gifted learners. Significantly, this improved understanding took the form of completely changed perspectives for some participants. The participants in the study conducted by Bangel et al. (2006) reported the online course and practicum experience in which they engaged improved their understanding of gifted students' needs and characteristics. In line with the concept of accomplished novices (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000), participants in this study recognized additional needs for further professional development while acknowledging their gains. These improvements indicate potential benefits from even minimal training in gifted education. On the contrary, one study that sought to assess the impact after a year intervened between the time of the training and the survey found a decrease in commitment to goals that had been high on teachers' list of priorities originally (Cashion & Sullenger, 2004).

Teacher Bias

Siegle (2001) contends that teachers' beliefs and biases can determine whether students have the opportunity to participate in gifted education programs, regardless of their

qualifications. Numerous studies over several decades hold that regardless of their own backgrounds, many teachers hold stereotypes about gifted students that could affect their decision-making processes related to gifted education nominations. These stereotypes concern gender (Powell & Siegle, 2000), socio-economic status (Frey, 2002; Moon & Brighton, 2008; Rohrer, 1995), and race or ethnicity (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; George & Aronson, 2003; Moon & Brighton, 2008).

A mixed methods study conducted by Carman (2011) attempted to determine the levels of stereotypic thinking related to giftedness among pre- and in-service teachers. Using a survey that produced quantitative and qualitative results, participants were asked to describe an imaginary gifted person and then answer a series of questions related to six areas: gender, ethnicity, age, learning interests, talents, and use of glasses. A level of stereotypic thinking was determined based on the number of stereotypes respondents' agreed with. The study found that 81% of pre-service teachers and 70% of in-service teachers held stereotypic thoughts about four or more of the six areas. The fact that 85% of pre-service teachers imagined a white gifted person suggests that there may be a relationship between teacher bias and nomination decisions for gifted programs. Although in-service teachers were found to believe in fewer stereotypes, the difference was not statistically significant, most likely due to the sample size.

A similar study provided teachers with vignettes about fictitious students and varied the race or ethnicity to see how elementary school teachers' decisions to refer the students to gifted education programs changed (Elhoweris et al., 2005). The study's results found a link between students' race or ethnicity and teacher decisions and suggested that teachers' stereotypes may act as a gatekeeper to gifted educational opportunities. Although these studies and others (Hyland, 2005) do not suggest that teachers are purposefully discriminating against CLD students, they

consistently find issues even with the most well-intentioned educators having a negative impact on CLD students' experiences.

Particularly interesting is a study that, among other things, compared the perceptions of teachers from CLD groups to those from the majority (Hargrove & Seay, 2011). Since most students of all backgrounds interact most often with white teachers, this study provides important context. Through surveys of 370 K-8 public school teachers in North Carolina, it was found that 68.3% of minority teachers felt prejudicial attitudes held by teachers were a barrier to the identification of minority gifted students while only 16.5% of white teachers agreed. Moreover only 18.1% of white teachers felt that bias in standardized assessments were an issue compared to 66.3% of minority teachers. Hargrove & Seay (2011) concluded that school leaders must facilitate open, ongoing dialogue through professional development settings to make teachers aware of these issues so they can be addressed.

There is strong support in the literature for the development of a teaching corps that reflects the diversity of the student body (Bernal, 2002; Castellano, 2011). Like students, however, teachers from CLD groups are underrepresented in gifted education. Bernal (2002) says, "The problem of equitable representation of students from nondominant ethnic groups will never be solved until GT (gifted and talented) programs attract, train, and retain teachers from nondominant ethnic groups as teachers of GT children" (p. 85). Milner and Ford (2007) connect this issue of teacher diversity to the previously identified problem of lack of teacher training. "Although a student's culture and way of experiencing the world may be different from that of their teacher, it is not necessarily deficient" (Milner & Ford, 2007, p. 167). "Teachers from any ethnic, cultural, or racial background can be successful with any group of students when the teachers have the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs about teaching,

learning, and their students" (p. 170). So the underrepresentation of teachers from CLD groups presents two barriers to access for students from CLD groups: 1) Teachers must be able to identify characteristics of giftedness in students who may have different cultural norms governing how they express these characteristics and 2) Teachers are not getting the kind of professional development and pre-service training they need to be able to overcome the cultural differences between them and their students.

The cultural mismatch that emerges diminishes the likelihood of success for students from CLD groups who overcome the barriers to entry to participate in a gifted and talented program. Castellano (2011) defines cultural competence as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals that enable effective interactions in a cross-cultural framework" (p. 384-5). "This cultural mismatch or clash between educators and students contributes to low teacher expectations of students, poor student-teacher relationships, mislabeling, and misinterpretation of behaviors" (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008, p. 297). Teacher preparation, both as a general topic and more specifically related to gifted education, tends not to prepare future educators to be culturally competent (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Starko, 2008). Instead of theory-based classes or tiptoeing around sensitive racial issues, Carter (2005) recommends that current and future teachers engage in extensive simulation exercises that put them into different roles where they can experience shifts in power and privilege. The combination of a teaching corps that does not reflect the diversity of the student population and the lack of training for teachers to handle this mismatch leaves students at the mercy of a system to which they are outsiders.

Whiteness and institutional racism. Teacher bias related to gifted education nomination decisions exists within a larger social construct. Whether implicit or explicit, some teachers hold

low expectations of students from particular backgrounds (Ryser, 2011) whether based on experiences they have had personally, prejudices, or reliance on assessment tools that may not appropriately reflect cultural norms of all students. As a starting point, Peterson and Davila (2011) suggest the simple recognition that racial and ethnic identity and backgrounds are important and experienced by people of all backgrounds. They point out that discussion of the existence of white privilege and how it might contribute to institutional racism in our public schools can lead to discourse on a variety of issues related to equity and access to educational opportunities, not just gifted education programs (Peterson & Davila, 2011). Michie (2007) argues that “while some White people are willing to acknowledge that people of color continue to be disadvantaged in a variety of social arenas, they are less inclined to concede the inverse: that they are inevitably advantaged as a result” (p. 6-7). Similarly in a study of pre-service teachers enrolled in a multicultural education class Amos (2010) found that minority participants in the class perceived their white peers to talk about whiteness as if it was the default, “normal” way of being. This reality, and the day-to-day expressions of it through seemingly minor, insignificant ways of speaking or acting, combined to cause frustration, despair, and fear among these future teachers of color. Even in settings where racial identity and its application to the classroom as facilitated by an expert in the field is the explicit focus, difficulties and conflicts emerge.

This is not to say that there are not pre-service teachers grappling with such issues and endeavoring to teach in ways that challenge white norms. Pearce (2012) argues that contrary to the in vogue practice in some circles to consider oneself “color blind” in the “I don’t see race” sense, we should be paying more attention to the work of people like Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001) who found that progressive new teachers from a variety of racial backgrounds shared

certain characteristics. Such practitioners were committed above all else to the academic achievement of their students, understood that culture plays an important and complex role in the learning process, and understood that the teaching and learning process in which they were engaged existed within a wide social and political context (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Pearce (2012) conducted a longitudinal study of novice teachers in London that followed them from their final year of pre-service education through their fifth year in schools. She found that new teachers who take it upon themselves to design learning experiences that acknowledge and honor students' backgrounds are a key factor in closing the gap between governmental and commercial systems that continue to either tell one whitewashed story of history or superficially address cultural and linguistic diversity. In other words, teachers on the front lines can have a significant impact on diminishing institutional barriers to equity in schools.

It is telling that the research addressing interventions to close gaps related to institutional systems that perpetuate bias is focused on programs in teacher preparation programs. Research related to in-service interventions is hard to find and rarely goes beyond a one-time assembly. Yet, the existing research suggests that on staffs of mostly white, middle-class teachers, the very concept of whiteness must be made conscious and explored through open dialogue and discussion in order to allow for the possibility of addressing inherent biases that may be affecting discriminatory practices in systems such as a gifted education identification process. How this can be addressed safely and effectively remains a challenge, but ignoring the existence of the reality wherein the demographics of the teaching staff rarely reflect that of the student body perpetuates the problems.

Discussion and Directions for Future Research

The literature related to teacher preparation in the field of gifted education suggests that most practicing educators have little training in recognizing the characteristics of giftedness in the students they teach. As a result, teachers tasked with nominating students for such programs rely on anecdotal experiences as students and teachers, preconceptions about gifted education and student characteristics, and other methods not supported empirically to make decisions about who to nominate. With teacher education programs expected to provide pre-service teachers all there is to know about children, pedagogy, and content in a brief program experience, it is unlikely that deep learning in the area of gifted education is coming to this realm in the near future. However, the research indicates that even minimal exposure to gifted education, especially when that exposure is related to the local district's program (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010), has a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of giftedness and abilities to recognize and support students appropriately.

Further research on teachers' conceptions of giftedness and their roles within the nomination and identification processes within the local context is needed to understand the causes of the defined problem of practice. Promising findings in the literature suggest that even short-duration professional development can have an impact on teachers' knowledge and decision-making as it relates the nomination process for gifted education programs. Regardless of the findings in the literature, local conditions may or may not align. Therefore the perspectives of those directly responsible for nominating (classroom teachers) are important to consider before developing a plan of action to address the issue of underrepresentation as exacerbated by lack of training.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Since I was interested in capturing the actual lived experiences and perspectives of multiple participants, this research design called for a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) consisting of four methods of data collection: surveys, observations, individual interviews, and document analysis. According to Yin (2012), a case study design is best for inquiring about a contemporary phenomenon within its existing context where the boundaries between the two are difficult to define. This design strengthened my ability to draw conclusions from the findings by increasing validity through the triangulation of multiple data sources (Creswell, 2009) leading toward the study's research questions.

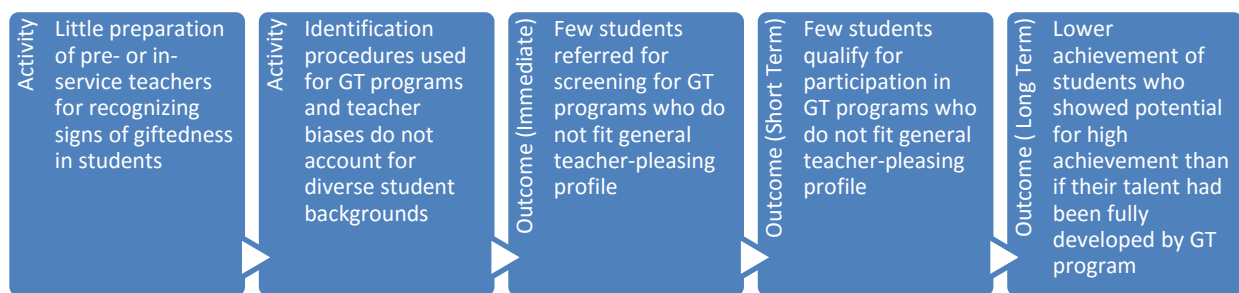
Logic Model

Patton (2008) refers to the role logic models play in bringing together theory, actions, and outcomes to visually depict a program. The modeling process helps reveal potential questions for further consideration in a program evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). The logic model below (see Figure 1) portrays a series of activities that lead to negative outcomes for students from a range of backgrounds that do not align well with the traditional definitions of teacher-pleasing students who have learned how to play the game of school well. During their training, pre-service teachers receive little to no training in gifted education in general (Chamberlin & Moore, 2006; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994) and nearly none in recognizing signs of giftedness in students from diverse backgrounds, which leads to small number of students from such backgrounds receiving nominations for gifted programs. As a result of making up a small proportion of the overall pool of candidates plus institutionalized biases in assessments and other identification tools, few students qualify for participation in gifted programs who do not fit the image of success in the dominant culture (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). In the long

term, students who might have benefitted from gifted education programs may not develop to the greatest extent possible leading to lower achievement than their potential indicated possible (Castellano, 2011). This study focused on eliciting meaning behind the first two stages of this logic model to better understand how we might alter them in the future to change the trajectory of stages three through five.

Figure 1

Logic Model



Research Site

This study took place in a large suburban school district in New Jersey, which serves a community of nearly 40,000 residents and 7,500 students in grades preK through 12 in nine schools – six preK/K-4 schools and one each for grades 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12. The student body is 67.5% White, 20.3% Asian American, 5.1% African American, 6.9% Hispanic, and 0.3% Pacific Islander. I will refer to the district as the Arlington Public Schools. The mostly middle class community demographics contribute to high college enrollment rates for graduating seniors and strong performance relative to peer institutions across the state. Parents are actively involved in school events and advocate for their children's education. This includes strong support for a formal gifted education program that serves a large number of students in the district.

Arlington's gifted education program serves students in grades three through eight. Each spring, the district conducts a screening process of all second grade students for initial placement in the program. This screening begins with the Cognitive Abilities Test and then, for students who perform at a high level against local norms, continues with an achievement test, a creativity measure, and feedback from parents and teachers. In subsequent years, students can only be considered for the program if they are nominated by a teacher. Once nominated, the identification process includes other measures such as ability and achievement scores and parent and teacher feedback.

The program students receive takes two forms. In grades three and four, students are pulled out of their core academic classes twice a week for between two and three hours to meet in small groups with a gifted education specialist. There, students engage in a range of learning experiences tied to a series of learning domains that include fluent and flexible thinking, originality, and imagination rather than any particular content area. The program is designed to enrich students' experiences in other aspects of the school program. The program shifts to a social studies-focused curriculum when students move to the district's intermediate school in fifth grade. Rather than being pulled out of core academic courses, the gifted program replaces social studies. Students learn the regular district-approved social studies curriculum in an environment where they are surrounded by similarly identified students and teachers are encouraged to approach the content in ways that might better match students' interests and needs.

Research Participants

Surveys were sent to all 44 fifth and sixth grade team-based classroom teachers and the five special education teachers who support their classes at the district's 1200 student

intermediate school. These teachers are responsible for teaching the core academic subjects of literacy, math, science, and social studies to all general education and mainstreamed special education students in the district. This sample was selected because it included a large number of teachers in one location, all of whom participate in the gifted education nomination process. In addition, locating all of the participants in one school made the implementation of observations and interviews more convenient to the participants and me. From this larger group, purposeful sampling was used to maximize variation by years of experience and subject matter taught for the observations and individual interviews. Ten fifth grade teachers (who work in five teams) and the two special education teachers who support their classes were selected for observations and individual interviews. Seven sixth grade general education teachers were selected for individual interviews. Four teachers participated in all three data collection processes – survey, observation, interview – providing me with a deep understanding of their thinking and action as it related to my research questions.

Table 3*Sample Demographics*

Participant	Teaching Assignment	Years in District	Training in Gifted Education	Survey, Observation, Interview
Andrea	Supervisor of Gifted & Talented	1-3	No	I
Barbara	Math/Science	1-3	No	O, I
Betty	Special Education	6-10	No	S
Bonnie	Math/Science	4-5	No	All
Cathy	Literacy/Social	10+	No	All

	Studies			
Colleen	Literacy/Social Studies	1-3	Yes	S
Gina	Math/Science	1-3	No	O
Heather	Literacy/Social Studies, Gifted and Talented	10+	Yes	S, I
Jared	Math/Science	6-10	No	S
Lauren	Literacy/Social Studies, Gifted and Talented	10+	No	S
Maureen	Literacy/Social Studies	10+	No	S, I
Michael	Math/Science	10+	No	S
Myra	Literacy/Social Studies	1-3	No	All
Noreen	Math/Science	10+	Yes	S, I
Pamela	Literacy/Social Studies, Gifted and Talented	10+	Yes	S, I
Rebecca	Literacy/Social Studies	1-3	No	All
Sam	Literacy	10+	No	S, I

Sandra	Gifted & Talented	10+	Yes	I
Susan	Literacy/Social Studies, Gifted & Talented	10+	No	S, I
Wendy	Literacy/Social Studies (Previously taught Gifted & Talented program)	10+	No	S, I

Data Collection Procedures

Over the course of six months, qualitative data were collected through four sources: surveys, observations, interviews, and documents. Specifically, surveys were collected between January and June 2015, observations were conducted in March 2015, interviews were conducted in March and April 2015, and documents were collected from January until June 2015.

Surveys. The self-report survey was adapted from the Project CLUE survey (Speirs Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007), which was developed as part of a long-term grant project and has been administered and calibrated several times as part of ongoing research studies. The purpose of this open-ended survey (see Appendix B) was to gather information about teachers' perceptions about the characteristics of giftedness. First, the survey directed participants to define giftedness and indicate common characteristics and behaviors of giftedness in general. Then, the survey directed participants to list students on their rosters who have been identified for gifted services along with information about the characteristics and behaviors they exemplify. Finally, the survey directed participants to note any students who they

have concerns about in terms of giftedness along with the characteristics and behaviors that cause these concerns. Additionally, demographic information about the participants was collected. The surveys were sent to all fifth grade teachers just before the annual nomination period opened in January 2015 and to all sixth grade teachers after the nomination period closed in April 2015. The survey was introduced in person at an existing meeting time and participants were asked to complete it digitally. Teachers were reminded of the survey periodically via e-mail messages.

Observations. To best understand how teachers make decisions regarding nominations for gifted education programs, I observed the selected fifth grade teacher teams while they talked through their nominations during a team planning period. These observations took place during a regularly scheduled meeting and lasted for the 40-minute duration of the meeting. This source of data provided me with information from the true setting through a firsthand encounter. In addition, the observation data helped triangulate emerging findings from the surveys and interviews (Merriam, 2009). I audio recorded all observations using a digital audio recorder and took handwritten field notes. At the conclusion of each set of observations, I added initial thoughts regarding themes that were emerging. I originally planned to use the field notes regarding the context of the observation to help shape my analysis however it became clear that the richness in the observation data came from the participants' words and not my notes so they were not integral as the process evolved. In order to maximize the usefulness of this data, I conducted all observations myself and wrote highly descriptive field notes that captured descriptions of what was taking place, direct quotations, and my own commentary (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews. As one purpose of this study was to ascertain teachers' perceptions, I employed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C). The semi-structured interview allowed participants to describe their experiences with gifted education from their unique perspectives. The fluidity allowed in the semi-structured format made it possible for me to respond to the interviews as they progressed to get rich accounts (Merriam, 2009). The main function of the interviews was to deepen the data obtained through the initial surveys and observations. The interview questions aimed to gather information-rich narratives that helped me connect the broader research in the field with the local problem of practice.

The interview protocol included seven questions that attempted to address the research questions. First, interviewees were asked to reflect on their experiences nominating students for the gifted program. Next, they were asked to describe their general conceptions of giftedness. Responses served as a check on data received through observations and surveys. Then, participants were asked to describe professional development they received prior to the study to set a context for considering perceptions of teachers who might have a variety of prior experiences. If necessary, a probe was used to encourage participants to talk about characteristics of giftedness directly. Finally, participants were asked to think about an imaginary gifted person and describe that person. If appropriate, questions related to the participants' observed decision-making were added to deepen my understanding of how they came to their decisions.

Interviews were conducted at a convenient time for the participants. This was before or after school, or during teachers' preparation or lunch periods. All interviews took place in an office at the teachers' school. I audio recorded all interviews using a digital audio recorder and took handwritten field notes. At the conclusion of each set of interviews, I added initial thoughts

regarding themes that were emerging to my field notes. The combination of these documentation methods allowed me to maximize the data collected (Merriam, 2009).

A final interview was conducted with the supervisor of the district's gifted and talented education program several months after the initial data collection period. This timeline was selected to allow me to probe deeper into claims made by teachers and the emerging themes coming from the data analysis. Additionally, the interview provided the opportunity to learn about the processes used by the district to communicate with teachers about the nomination process and tools.

Document analysis. Documents can provide important data that were not created for or affected by the research process (Merriam, 2009). For this reason, such data can strengthen the qualitative research process that predominantly relies on interviews (Merriam, 2009). Knowing the importance of official communications related to the nomination process in the district and the “ready-made source of data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 139) documents can provide, I collected paperwork and memoranda provided by the supervisor of the gifted education program to classroom teachers that explained the nomination procedures and characteristics of giftedness. In order to prepare the documents for analysis, I created a document summary form (Miles & Huberman, 1984) that tracked key demographic information about any such document, a summary of its contents, and initial thoughts about how it could inform my research.

Table 4
Data Collection Timeline

Procedure	Location	Date
Survey	Teachers' Classrooms	January – May 2015
Observations	Teachers' Classrooms	March 2015
Individual Interviews with	School Conference Room /	April – June 2015

Teachers	Teachers' Classrooms	
Individual Interview with Supervisor	Public Location	August 2015
Document Analysis	District Office	Ongoing December 2014 - June 2015

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (2009) suggests a six-step process for analyzing data: 1) organize and prepare the data; 2) read through all of the data; 3) code; 4) develop categories/themes for analysis; 5) determine how to represent themes; and 6) interpret (p. 189). These steps will be explained throughout this section. To ensure validity and increase the value of the collected data, these steps were utilized several times as data was collected through each procedure described previously with surveys analyzed first, observations analyzed next, and interviews analyzed last. In addition to this linear approach, I applied a recursive strategy for considering the emerging themes from each round of data analysis and then applying new insights to future rounds of data collection and analysis. Following the interview data analysis, I returned to the previous data sources to recode. This was necessary to ensure that all relevant data from each round of data collection ended up in the overall analysis. Since certain themes were not identified until later rounds, this process was very important to confidently concluding the analysis process. Ultimately, one coding scheme was developed and applied with all three data sources as a result. The district documents did not serve as a data source for analysis in and of themselves. Instead, the documents provided a tool to confirm or refute statements made by participants during other

rounds of data collection and an overall structure through which I could organize the data for analysis.

Surveys. To prepare the survey responses for analysis, responses were categorized and tallied under the broad themes included in the district's adopted list of characteristics of giftedness (see Appendix A). I applied a quantification strategy (Merriam, 2009) to count the number of participants who mentioned any of the 12 characteristics or 10 concomitant difficulties listed in the document. I then created a table, calculated the total number of participants for each item, and then calculated the percentage of participants who identified each area. This process gave me a visual summary of the relationship between the survey responses and district expectations and helped ground my analysis in the context of the school setting (Merriam, 2009). Most importantly, I looked for patterns in the survey responses that helped narrow my focus during observations and interviews.

Observations. I organized the observation data first by using the transcription service Rev. Next, I coded the transcripts using the same characteristics from the surveys. Several additional characteristics were identified beyond those used by the district. When these characteristics came up more than once, I added them to the table and recoded the original surveys accordingly. The combination of survey responses and observation results were used to fine-tune the interview questions for the individual meetings with participants to help confirm initial ideas or lead towards a new understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, the observation data began to make concepts from the surveys more concrete. For example, when respondents talked about disagreement during the surveys, the information was out of context and difficult to understand. When I observed disagreement firsthand during an observation, I was able to go back to the surveys and place the responses into a better context while also looking

ahead to the interviews so that I could probe further. Potential sub-headings for my findings started to become apparent at this time as well.

Interviews. I organized my interview data first by transcribing the audio recordings using the transcription service Rev. Then, I conducted an initial coding of the interviews using the characteristics identified by the district and through the observation transcripts by hand. When new characteristics emerged in the interviews only, I added them to the list and then reread and recoded the survey and observation data. This process of coding and recoding helped me reduce the data into manageable chunks for interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Next, I reorganized the data excerpts by code to read and reread to make meaning of the data using Microsoft Word. I sought to identify relationships between and among participants' responses to begin describing underlying themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As I conducted this analysis, I worked to condense the data into general categories that informed my findings. Throughout the process, I compared the emerging themes to my initial thoughts that came from the surveys and observations.

Validity

Common threats to validity in the qualitative methods have been reduced in several ways. One way this was done was by using one researcher for all interviews and observations (Merriam, 2009). My previous role in the district provided me with significant background knowledge regarding the district, problem of practice, and participants. Although the possibility exists that participants may have had difficulties being completely open due to my prior role as a school administrator, I attempted to ameliorate such challenges by 1) addressing confidentiality and roles at the beginning of each interview, 2) triangulating the interview data with document analysis, survey results, and observations (Creswell, 2009), and 3) providing interviewees the

opportunity to review the transcripts and check emerging themes to clarify any misunderstandings. After transcribing each interview, I sent the copy to the participants so they could review the accuracy and also provide additional context to their responses if desired. One participant responded with adjustments. The lack of response from other participants suggests that the interview transcripts fairly represent the views of the participants. This improved the reliability of the raw data (Creswell, 2009). When the different accounts and data sources converge into a clear theme, the validity of my study improved (Creswell, 2009).

A notable validity concern for this study was the potential for social desirability bias (Gordon, 1987; Nicotera, 1996) in participants' responses. That is, participants may have felt internal pressure to answer in ways that will not be considered "racist" or otherwise inappropriate. To combat this concern, the data collection tools were developed in such a way that race was never identified as a factor. Applying Gordon's (1987) recommendations for alleviating social desirability bias, my introduction to the survey and interview data collection included stressing that the information provided by participants is important and needs to be honest and accurate to be useful and that the responses will be kept confidential.

The presentation of the results of this research plan integrates quotations from the various phases of the research design. In addition to the benefits of this design for academic audiences, teachers' reflections will be valuable for school administrators who may want to utilize the findings to shape future professional development in this school district. The methods used in this design plan reflected the desire to discover meaningful findings for use in this school district's particular context. Therefore the intent of this study was to analyze the issue in one context with no guarantee of generalizability to other settings (Creswell, 2009).

Research Limitations

Of the fourteen teachers who participated in individual interviews, the only three who said they began their thinking about who to nominate by directly considering the characteristics provided by the district happened to be three of the six people observed and three of the four people described previously in individual case studies. The Hawthorne Effect emerged in social science research after gains in a factory's production were explained away as being caused by the attention paid to employees while being observed. The idea that observation alone could have such an effect on the observed phenomenon is often considered when discussing research findings based largely on observation. Cook and King (1968) conducted an in-depth study into the Hawthorne Effect in educational research and concluded that the idea of the Hawthorne Effect is largely perception and intuition rather than empirical in nature.

My previous role in the district provided me with significant background knowledge regarding the district, problem of practice, and participants. Although the possibility exists that participants may have had difficulties being completely open due to my prior role as a school administrator, I attempted to ameliorate such challenges by addressing confidentiality and roles at the beginning of each interview, triangulating the interview data with surveys, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2009), and providing interviewees the opportunity to review the transcripts to clarify any misunderstandings. When the different accounts converged into a clear theme, the validity of my study improved (Creswell, 2009).

Prior to my role as researcher, I served as the supervisor of the gifted education program in the research site. As the school administrator responsible for the program's oversight and an advocate of gifted education personally, I have self-interest in the findings of this study. I carefully followed appropriate data collection and analysis procedures and triangulated my data to increase confidence that my findings were based on the data rather than preconceived notions.

The participants in my study volunteered to give up their limited personal time before, during, or after school to complete the survey and/or participate in an interview. This demand on time may have had a negative effect on encouraging teachers to participate more fully. Even with the provision of time during a faculty meeting to complete the survey, the participation rate remained below 50%. That said, the diversity in years of experience, grade level taught, and content area reflects the overall teaching staff in a way that suggests a variety of input.

The study included only one of the district's nine schools. This decision was made purposefully to concentrate my analysis and to focus on the grade levels where the decision-making process is most critical due to the transition from elementary to intermediate school and a general gifted education program to one delivered through social studies. It is possible that expanding the study to include elementary or middle school teachers, who also make gifted education nominations in this district, would change the overall themes or findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In gifted education, perception is reality. “A lot of times...you tend to hear the comment, ‘I can’t believe he’s in (gifted and talented program)’ as opposed to a dialogue of, ‘Hey, you know what? This kid could be a (gifted) kid...’ There’s still a mindset that a gifted child is your perfect student” (Noreen, interview, June 8, 2015). This perception of perfection was what Richert was trying to combat through her work with New Jersey schools in the 1980s when she published the list of positive and negative characteristics teachers should look for in students who might be showing gifted potential (interview, October 17, 2015) that continues to be used in Arlington as the primary means of evaluating students for nominations to the district’s gifted education program. Yet 30 years later, in one of the few districts in New Jersey maintaining a large gifted education program, the same conversations, misunderstandings, and inconsistencies persist.

This is why my study sought to answer the following two primary research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?
 - a. How do teachers define giftedness?
 - b. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?
2. How might the teacher nomination process affect access to the gifted education program?

Participants had the individual option to complete the survey or interview or both (See Table 3). Five people participated in the survey only, two people participated in the interview only, and 11 people participated in both individual data collection processes. Observations were

limited only to teams where both teachers gave consent and participated in at least one of the individual data collection methods. This included three teams. When participants completed more than one round of the process, I was able to triangulate responses to surveys with observed discussions or a more in-depth individual interview, for example. This gave me a more complete picture of their thinking and decision-making process.

Three female teachers and one male teacher qualified for in-depth discussion by virtue of having participated in all three methods of data collection – survey, observation, and interview. To protect the confidentiality of the one male participant, pseudonyms will be used. Since there was only one male participant and his participation was known to others due to the observation phase, I determined that the use of male pseudonyms or male gendered pronouns would decrease his protection more than it would benefit my study (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Although this diminishes my ability to report and analyze gender differences, protecting the participant's anonymity was paramount because this study will be shared with district administrators for consideration when addressing the problem of practice. Furthermore, since gender differences were never intended to be a focus of this research study, I believe the lost opportunity is negligible.

In this chapter, I synthesize the information contained within the four complete cases (Bonnie, Cathy, Myra, Rebecca), and consider it along with the contributions from all other participants. Three themes were found: 1) Definitions of giftedness vary; 2) Personal experiences trump all; and 3) Feeling out of the loop can fragment decisions. Anecdotes from various participants are used throughout the chapter to help demonstrate how these findings were reached.

Definitions of Giftedness Vary

Due to its importance to the nomination process, this list of characteristics of gifted children developed by Richert and used by districts such as Arlington (see Appendix C) serves as an organizing framework for teachers as they reflect individually on potential students for nomination and when they interact with other teachers and administrators regarding the nomination and identification process. All but one person interviewed individually cited the nomination packet sent out by the program's supervisor, including the list of characteristics, when asked to describe the process for identifying students for the gifted program although there were a range of uses mentioned. With this in mind, my consideration of how teachers conceptualize giftedness centers on the characteristics and how teachers perceive them in different ways. Later in this section, I discuss the characteristics explicitly as they appear on the district documentation and in the way they came up in discussion with and among teachers. This conflict between the guidance document and teachers' realities was a theme throughout this study

When all does not really mean all. As described earlier, the school district provides teachers with a list of characteristics they need to consider when making nomination decisions. Although this document does not contain a definition of giftedness per se, it does provide a de facto philosophy in its organization. Namely, the document begins with the statement that "all of the following characteristics should be clearly evident on a consistent basis across all subjects" and follows with lists of characteristics organized into positive and negative traits.

Some teachers struggle when considering their students against this long list of characteristics. One of the school's gifted education teachers, Sandra, expressed this conflict:

Even (with) the characteristics, sometimes it's hard because (teachers) say, "well, (students are) very disorganized" and I'll say, "that doesn't necessitate that (students are)

not (gifted) students.” Sometimes they’ll (teachers) think that it has be all of the characteristics...and it’s not. It certainly should be some, but sometimes it’s a gut feeling that they have” (interview, June 9, 2015).

In this example, a conflict emerges because although the district’s own paperwork says “consistent...across all subjects,” this gifted education teacher is suggesting that other teachers should rely on gut feelings to some degree. In the survey, when participants were asked to define giftedness, 50% of respondents that giftedness could be in one or several areas. No survey respondent suggested that giftedness had to manifest itself across all disciplines as the list states.

Myra and Bonnie talked about the challenge of knowing where the line was between following the guidance memo and paperwork to the letter and using professional discretion while I observed them making such decisions. Rebecca and Gina turned to me during the observation for clarification that I could not provide, about how they were supposed to use the list of characteristics to help them narrow down their decision. Bonnie sums up the frustration with this aspect of the guidance document by saying:

I would defy you to find any (gifted) student that meets every single piece of that criteria...by following the (guidance), it was more that I felt like I did a disservice to this student who really needed me to be challenged. That made me angry and it made me feel like I didn’t do my part as a teacher. (interview, April 8, 2015)

While observing Myra and her teammate Bonnie (March 11, 2015), this second-guessing and confusion came out several times.

Myra: That’s the tool we’ve been given. We’ve got these two (characteristics), plus...that second one, that is still kind of vague to us.

Bonnie: I guess I'm just thinking, in the past I think we've followed this to the tee and have had regret... We got stuck on it. I remember, it says "should be clearly evident on a constant basis across all subjects." All subjects. All of the following characteristics.

Myra: That's ridiculous because that's not the way it works.

Bonnie: We follow the rule. Then I think that what happened was... a kid that should have been challenged wasn't.

Myra and Bonnie recognized and articulated the conflict they felt between their personal and professional judgment and their understanding of district expectations.

To bring some concrete process to what she perceives as a confusing, unclear one, Myra came into her team meeting prepared with a great deal of standardized assessment data and proceeded through a linear discussion about each student whose test scores suggested consideration. This approach contrasts starkly with the more emotional gut feelings that the two partners were wrestling with related to the prior year's candidate. Myra summed up her approach: "I think without a better understanding of what the process really is, you are blindly looking for rationale behind your decisions to or not to nominate a student" (interview, April 6, 2015). In the absence of clear direction and professional development, teachers are left to make their own decisions about how to interpret district forms and guidance.

Wendy summed up the inner monologue that others alluded to. "I don't want to be the person that might miss something that maybe hasn't been seen before... Some of the kids that we nominated, they might not be there. They might not be there, but I wanted to give it a shot rather than just saying no" (interview, June 9, 2015). Others concurred with this discomfort in being a gatekeeper to consideration for the program, especially when they felt confused about the

process or criteria, or felt a disconnect between gut feelings and formal requirements. Susan expressed this issue by saying:

I don't want to be the one to deny anybody because there's certain testing that I'm not privy to because I'm not trained in it. I don't want to be a gatekeeper for that. If I think somebody has an indication, I'll talk with other colleagues, but even if they say no and I think so, I would still nominate them. (interview, June 8, 2015).

This approach of nominating students even if they do not necessarily meet all of the program criteria is not universal to all teams which is why sometimes students who might have been nominated in one place are left out somewhere else. Despite consistent instructions from the district supervisor, common look-fors, and a standardized nomination form, a great deal of autonomy is left to each team and perhaps even to each individual therein. In other words, when the district seeks to identify all students who would benefit from the gifted and talented program, all does not mean the same thing across the board.

Determining how to use positive characteristics. The district-provided guidance includes a list of 12 characteristics with positive connotations reflecting student learning. Like the phrase “across all subjects” described in the previous section, teachers’ use of the list of positive characteristics did not follow a common pattern. As part of my analysis of the three main data sources – surveys, observations, and interviews – I coded responses that aligned with these characteristics and quantified their acknowledgement (see table 5). This section provides an overview of the characteristics where participating teachers focused their analysis when deciding which students to nominate for the gifted education program.

Table 5
Positive Characteristics Identified

Characteristic	N	Percentage
Has vocabulary or knowledge in a specific area that is unusually advanced for age or grade	12	63%
Grasps concepts quickly, easily, without much repetition	4	21%
Has unusual insight into values and relationships	10	53%
Asks more provocative questions about the causes and reasons for things	8	42%
Evaluates facts, arguments, and persons critically	5	26%
Enthusiastically generates ideas or solutions to problems and questions	4	21%
Flexible	2	11%
Capacity for task commitment in areas of interest	14	74%
Keen sense of humor and often perceives humor in situations others are unaware of	3	16%
Takes intellectual and emotional risks in expressing or trying out original ideas; shows emotional and esthetic sensitivity	7	37%
Prefers to work independently	2	11%
Intensely curious about many things	9	47%

There were three characteristics identified by a majority of participants: capacity for task commitment in areas of interest (74%); has a vocabulary or knowledge in a specific area that is

unusually advanced for age or grade (63%); and has unusual insight into values and relationships (53%). These three characteristics are observable in regular classroom interactions across content areas and can be measured regularly through informal assessment systems by teachers. With the possible exception of the use of the word “unusual” in one characteristic, these are phrases with positive implications for students and are easily communicable with students and their parents.

Pamela teaches in the general education and gifted education settings and sometimes has the same students in both for different subjects, which allows her to dig into student interests that may go beyond the norm. For example, she described a student who is passionate about Roman history, which is not a topic in her curriculum. Pamela looks for students with these kinds of nearly obsessive interests as possible nominees for the gifted program because they have “intellectual needs (that) need to be satisfied someplace else” (interview, June 8, 2015). She went on to say:

They’re (gifted students) usually hungry for knowledge. They find usually unique interests and it’s usually not mainstream interests as well...They’re filling their time that way and they also may be a little bit quirky because they have these intellectual needs that supersede what society is interested in...They’re usually a very unique kind of person that’s just hungry for knowledge and looks for that intellectual satisfaction.

(interview, June 8, 2015)

For Pamela, clear passion for this specific area of interest might be enough to nominate the student for the gifted program even though it is just one of the 12 characteristics on the list.

Several participants described the concept of intrinsic motivation within other characteristics although it does not show up on the list by name. For example, Bonnie talked about looking for “inherently curious” students who take it upon themselves to ask questions,

even if they are about topics unrelated to the particular day's lesson focus (interview, April 8, 2015). Myra, too, described ideal students for the gifted program as "self-motivated, self-driven" (interview, April 6, 2015). The perception that students who should be nominated for gifted programs are also motivated without the need for a great deal of pushing from adults seems to be commonly held despite the fact that this is not an explicit expectation from the district.

On the other end of the spectrum, there were five positive characteristics identified by fewer than 25% of the participants: flexible (11%); prefers to work independently (11%); keen sense of humor and often perceives humor in situations others are unaware of (16%); grasps concepts quickly, easily, without much repetition (21%); and enthusiastically generates ideas or solutions to problems and questions (21%). Flexible turned out to be difficult to quantify due to its lack of context and definition in the guidance. Others had mixed reviews from teachers. In some cases, teachers talked about students who prefer to work independently in more negative terms, thinking about in contrast to the expectation that 21st century learners must be collaborative and team-oriented. Similarly, students who enthusiastically generate ideas can sometimes become overbearing on the rest of the class and teachers can become exasperated at trying to manage the questions while also working with 25 other students. One participant, Susan, summed up this challenge. "Some colleagues, when you're making a group decisions, will say, 'Well, this person doesn't deserve it.' My position is, 'Well, this person needs the challenge'" (interview, June 8, 2015). Such individual interpretation leads to the placing of weighted values on the positive characteristics causing inconsistent application of what seems to be a standardized system for identifying students for nomination.

Myra was one of the few to expressly identify students who prefer to work independently as possibly worthy of nomination. "They might not be the best workers in groups because they

do have a vision of what they want” (interview, April 6, 2015). On the contrary, Wendy noted that she tends to notice extroverts. “I tend to the kid who is a high participator in class, willing to do something other kids would be unwilling to do” (interview, June 9, 2015). Although she goes on to say that she also keeps in mind the introverted student, the challenge of getting to know each student as an individual when they exist in a class of 25 students and a total teacher load of over 100 students is quite difficult.

When looking across all data sources, Cathy identified six of the twelve positive characteristics from the district paperwork as reasons she believed students should be considered for the gifted program. Cathy’s main determinant, however, was a commonly used term among my study participants – out-of-the-box thinker. She defined it as when students do things in ways that are atypical or unexpected. Here, too, discrepancies between the words of the teachers when speaking with each other and me and the actions ultimately taken emerged. While talking through nomination prospects with her teammate (observation, March 11, 2015), a student came up for discussion who gets extra time as an accommodation due to an impairment.

Cathy: She has a (Section) 504 (plan) so she gets that extra time. But, it takes her double time.

Partner: But should that hold it against her though?

Cathy: No, but if she’s in a (gifted) class and everybody’s going...

Partner: ...that’s true.

Cathy: I worry that she gets stressed. She gets stressed with overload...I just think (the gifted program) would be an extra stress for her.

Cathy and her partner believe this student demonstrates many of the characteristics of giftedness, including out-of-the-box thinking yet the conversation is about a need for accommodation and

perceived stressors, areas not mentioned in the district's guidance for making decisions about who to nominate.

The data points the overall theme that definitions of giftedness vary. In this case, the district provides teachers with a research-based list of positive traits often observed in gifted children with instructions that they be considered as part of the decision-making process during the annual teacher nomination period. Teachers undergo independent methods to weight the various characteristics and determine which are more or less important and what else should be considered before making final decisions. The result is the appearance of a consistent approach that is not supported by the data.

Misuse of negative characteristics. Along with the previously described positive characteristics, the district provides a list of 10 negative characteristics, referred to as concomitant difficulties, for teachers to consider when making placement nominations. Unlike the positive characteristics, even teachers who used the characteristics as their primary means of thinking about students did not go line by line through the negative characteristics. When they were mentioned, it was in an isolated way, not through a methodical consideration. In some cases, the negative characteristics were used to justify excluding students from consideration even though it was intended to do the opposite. As a result, none of the negative characteristics was identified by a majority of the participants as something looked for when deciding which students to nominate (see Table 6). Half of the characteristics were mentioned by fewer than 25% of the participants: may make jokes at inappropriate times (0%); may perceive injustices and assertively oppose them (5%); has high tolerance of disorder or ambiguity; may be patient with details or restrictions (5%); may dominate others because of abilities (11%); may be impatient or critical of self and others, including the teacher (16%).

Table 6
Negative Characteristics Identified

Characteristic	N	Percentage
Bored with routine tasks and may refuse to do rote homework	7	37%
May perceive injustices and assertively oppose them	1	5%
May refuse to accept authority and be non-conforming	3	16%
May be impatient or critical of self and others, including the teacher	3	16%
May dominate others because of abilities	2	11%
Has high tolerance of disorder or ambiguity; may be impatient with details or restrictions	1	5%
May resist working on projects s/he is not interested in; bored with routine or repetitive tasks	5	26%
May make jokes at inappropriate times	0	0%
May be highly individualistic, non-conforming and seem stubborn	9	47%
May interrupt or ignore class activities to pursue interests	7	37%

In Noreen's interview, she described one of her students who she says has grown more isolated over the course of the school year due to being outspoken. "I don't think he has a very good concept of what's considered socially and non-socially acceptable" (June 8, 2015). She went on to identify why this can be so challenging for children:

The kids are trying to figure out who they are. They're trying to figure out who they are as people, as students, as children to their parents...for a child who does think outside of what may be considered the norm, (he or she) may feel isolated because they don't know how to speak to their parents about, "Well, I'm having different kinds of thoughts than other people." They don't know how to necessarily always talk with their peers about that if they feel like their peers aren't as forthcoming about how they're thinking. (interview, June 8, 2015).

As one of the few participants with extended training in gifted education, Noreen described feeling isolated herself in advocating for children like this. Like the child who feels like others are not thinking about things the same way, a teacher who is focused on negative characteristics and sees them as reasons to *include* a student in the gifted education program may struggle based on the fact that a majority of teachers do not mention such characteristics as part of their thought process when making decisions about nomination. "A lot of times because of their (students) personalities and some of the traits that really go along with giftedness, they're anything but the perfect student. You have to find a way to reach them to have them meet their potential" (interview, June 8, 2015).

When I asked Wendy to imagine a gifted person, she began by describing someone who does not worry about what other people think and is comfortable with who he or she is regardless of society's expectations. For the world of students, she translated this to someone who "doesn't necessarily fit in school" (interview, June 9, 2015). Yet later in the interview, she identified teacher-pleasing behaviors like high participation in class as what she notices most. This struggle between recognizing and even wanting to identify students who demonstrate negative characteristics and the easier task of identifying students who are "good" in class was shared by

other participants. Like Wendy, Rebecca at times struggled with focusing on negative characteristics she identified as important rather than teacher-pleasing behaviors while working through the nominations with her teammate. She expressed concern about nominating a student who does not talk a lot in class despite that being one of the concomitant difficulties in the district's paperwork. At one point, she recognized that grades could be a misleading indicator but then went back and forth about whether a student who fails to complete homework should be considered. Contradictions emerged regarding classroom behavior as well. "He's always fooling around...I have to basically move him on a daily basis, which for me, that would be a reason not to put somebody into (the gifted program)" (interview, April 8, 2015). Like ignoring class activities and failing to do homework, interrupting class was listed on the district-provided paperwork as a possible characteristic of a student who should be considered for the program. Yet, here Rebecca is using behaviors that are not teacher-pleasing as a reason to exclude a student from nomination consideration.

Rebecca recognized this tension during her individual interview (April 8, 2015). When asked what kind of characteristics she looked for when putting together her list to recommend, she began with the term compliance before going on to other characteristics like out-of-the-box thinker and analytical ability. She also took the list crafted with her partner and then eliminated students who did not perform well on the previous year's standardized assessment. Yet when asked to describe a student on her team who is a poster child for the gifted education program, Rebecca described a twice exceptional child who calls out in class and thinks in ways that differ from the norm considerably. This back and forth movement among different beliefs about the characteristics of giftedness reflects Rebecca's confusion and inexperience. "I wish that there was some more information or something that I could be exposed to, to help me out...My idea of

what a gifted student is could be something completely different than another teacher that's nominating students for the same program" (interview, April 8, 2015).

Throughout the different parts of the data collection process, Myra identified only three of the positive characteristics of giftedness as what she looked for while mentioning five of the concomitant difficulties, the highest number of any participant in the study. That is, Myra says that she is looking for students who may not exhibit teacher-pleasing behavior; Rather, she is interested in students who do not conform to the regular classroom norms due to some gift. Yet Myra chose to begin by identifying students who had standardized test scores similar to or higher than students already in the gifted program as a gatekeeping device to the nomination process. This approach did lead to Myra considering a student who she did not anticipate as a potential nominee, but it also excluded any student who did not conform enough to the typical school environment to succeed on the prior year's standardized assessment.

Despite recognizing that the list of characteristics should be important to their work, Gina expressed frustration in response to Rebecca when she said, "I don't know what that means" (observation, March 11, 2015) when referencing specific characteristics on the list. The fact that all but one interview participant cited the characteristics as integral to the decision-making process suggests that the district leadership has successfully communicated the message that there are particular qualities to look for in a gifted student and a common approach for doing so. However, the practices described by participants ranged a great deal in where this guidance fit into their process. Myra and Bonnie, for example, shared in individual interviews that they begin with the characteristics provided to them and then identify students who match (interviews, April 6, 2015 and April 8, 2015 respectively). These statements reflected what I observed in their team meeting (March 11, 2015). The only other participant who said she began with the characteristics

was Rebecca (interview, April 8, 2015) and this claim was also supported by my observation (March 11, 2015). Of the 13 teachers who participated in individual interviews, four said that they begin with the explicit focus of the district-provided characteristics. “There are kids who deserve to be in (the gifted education program), who for whatever reason, will never be nominated because they’re not perfect” (Maureen, interview, June 8, 2015).

The struggle between teachers’ desires to nominate based on gut feelings or hunches and the directions they receive from the district leads many to turn to their personal experiences for guidance. These experiences come from a range of roles and life moments both inside and outside the school environment.

Personal Experience Trumps All

Teachers’ approaches to education are defined by myriad factors including their own life experiences. Participants in this study talked about their careers, student teaching placements, undergraduate and graduate coursework, experiences their own children had with gifted education programs, and personal experiences as students in K-12 settings with gifted education. Defining moments within any of these realms played a significant part in how teachers make nomination decisions than anything distributed by the district or showing up on a nomination form.

Three participants described a process whereby they would have a discussion about students who they felt should be nominated and then go to the documentation. In other words, the teachers considered a range of factors based on personal preference and then fit the identified students into the characteristics provided by the district, rather than the other way around. Interestingly, these same participants mentioned being contacted by parents, which led them to give consideration to the students. In all of these cases, the teachers ultimately decided not to

nominate the students despite the parental request. Cathy stated, “Using my years teaching I was able to talk those parents out of pursuing it any further...I think some of those kids truly have that thinking, but they’re not those stellar students so we (teachers in general) don’t recommend them” (interview, April 8, 2015). Cathy is connecting parental requests for nomination to her belief that teachers commonly push through students who do well in class rather than students who may be struggling in class, but who show the potential to excel in the right situation.

Heather, another veteran teacher, shares Cathy’s analysis in that realm. “I started by looking at my kids and thinking about which ones seemed to be outside of the box thinkers, that had enthusiasm for learning” (interview, June 9, 2015). Heather went on to explain that when she encounters students not performing well in class, she tries to get beyond the surface to find the root of the issue. “If it is a child who is gifted but hasn’t been identified yet, then that’s a problem if they’re not performing because they’re bored, and they’re not having the experiences they need to satisfy their brain, satisfy their mind” (interview, June 9, 2015). So despite not beginning with the district guidance at the forefront of her mind, Heather too is looking for students who may need a different setting to be successful, which matches the spirit of the characteristics document if not the specific process. These examples begin to illuminate the role of personal experiences from a variety of realms that affected how teachers made decisions about who to nominate.

Teachers as parents. Five participants – Bonnie, Cathy, Noreen, Susan, and Wendy – spoke about the importance of their experiences as parents to their process for making decisions about who to nominate for the gifted education program. Cathy, more than the others, shared strong feelings related to watching her children go through the gifted education screening process numerous times in Arlington. “My daughter was nominated three times and I love her,

she's a hard worker, but she's not gifted" (interview, April 8, 2015). The stress Cathy saw her daughter endure after going through the nomination and placement process year after year after year led to her own philosophy that students should not be nominated over and over again, believing that such an experience does more harm than good. Based on her experiences as a parent, Cathy felt that repeated testing was not in one of her student's best interest either. Cathy and her partner decided not to move forward. Cathy commented to her partner, "Why test a kid unnecessarily? If they don't get in, then what are we doing to them? (observation, March 11, 2015)" She promised her partner that she would call the student's mother to talk it through – mother to mother.

Bonnie, too, came to her understanding of giftedness and her approach to the nomination process by way of her experiences as a parent of a child who attended school in Arlington. After hearing her son's friends talk about themselves after the decisions were mailed home, she felt that they were defining a major part of their self-image on the basis of the gifted label. Despite her misgivings, she allowed her son to go through the process and he was identified and placed into the gifted education program. He loved the experience until the middle school years when it changed to a content-specific advanced class setting. After a year of negative experiences, Bonnie pulled her son out of the program. In her interview, Bonnie admitted that her beliefs about the current gifted program are based on her experiences years ago. "Any understanding I have would be based on my own understanding as a parent, so I don't really know exactly how (students are identified). I don't know how it's changed over the years so I'm not sure what they're currently doing to identify students for the program" (interview, April 8, 2015). Not only are parental experiences important, they are long-lasting. Bonnie is a veteran teacher with years

of teaching experience and contact with colleagues to draw upon yet it is her long ago experiences with her son that inform her decision-making.

Noreen, Susan, and Wendy bring to the process experiences as parents with gifted education programs in other districts. None of their children participated in gifted programs yet they discussed parenting in general as informative. Noreen's son is twice exceptional and struggles academically. "Just because a child isn't excelling in everything doesn't mean that the child is not going to excel in one thing. I think that really helped open my eyes and see a lot of kids in a totally different light" (Noreen, interview, June 8, 2015). Throughout her interview, Noreen shared ideas about identifying students who may not be teacher pleasers. Based on her parental experiences and professional learning she participated in on the topic, she reflected on her own beliefs and processes as having evolved considerably over the past several years.

Susan felt that her experiences as a parent changed her perspective in important ways. Being around a child 24 hours a day allowed her to see gifts emerge in ways that are hard to notice in the classroom environment. "You don't have to be a parent for that, but you need to be around them (children), then you realize 'There are so many facets to children'" (interview, June 8, 2015). These insights into her own child informed her approaches both at home and in the classroom. She changed her son's school to increase the academic challenge and tried to find ways to include students in the nomination process who might not perfectly meet the criteria. Earlier, I shared Susan's inclination to not act as a program gatekeeper. She speaks from experience, including as a parent, to other parents in much the way Cathy does and finds these conversations to be powerful and effective.

Wendy's experiences as a parent were less related to the nomination process and more to communication between home and school in general. She described a system by which parents

have the option to opt their children into a gifted education screening assessment annually. “I feel like as a matter of respect if it really is a team approach to educating a child, that I do think as a parent, it’s nice to be involved” (interview, June 9, 2015). Having spent a few years teaching in Arlington’s gifted program, Wendy’s thoughts here and as described earlier related to the appearance of being a gatekeeper to the program reflect her belief that maybe the problem is not solely about how teachers make nomination decisions but about the fact that they have such a significant role in the first place. She sees herself as a parent first and in that role believes that parents should have more discretion over whether their children get considered for gifted education opportunities.

Impact of teacher experiences. Nearly all the participants discussed how their experiences as teachers inform their decision-making process for gifted education nominations. In some cases (Barbara, Betty, Gina, Rebecca, Sam) it was a lack of experience – either in teaching generally or with gifted populations specifically – that was most notable. For others (Cathy, Wendy) teaching experience has helped shift their thinking about who should be in the gifted program. For two participants (Bonnie, Myra), prior experience in the nomination process defines their current process. Additionally, teachers’ experiences with professional development affect how they think and feel about gifted education.

Lack of experience. Three participants (Barbara, Gina, Rebecca) made comments that explicitly reflected their lack of confidence due to being novice teachers with essential no training in gifted education. During my observation (March 11, 2015) of a team meeting between Gina and Rebecca, one exchange in particular exemplifies this issue:

Rebecca: I mean she's on my list as somebody to look at. She's definitely intelligent, and she's a really hard worker. She puts a lot of effort, but I don't know if that's necessarily (gifted program) material.

Gina: ...Again, I don't know (gifted program) material...

Rebecca: ...I don't know if they have to have those qualities. I think these are the ones. I don't know.

Later in their meeting, confusion returned. While thinking about particular characteristics, Gina said, "Unusual insight into values and relationships. I don't know what that means" (observation, March 11, 2015). Rebecca, too, returned to her discomfort. "I don't know. I don't know what to do. It's really frustrating and hard. I feel like we don't have a lot of direction" (observation, March 11, 2015). These teachers are expressing frustration and a lack of confidence with using the district-provided instrument. This relates back to their lack of years as teachers because they are more likely to rely on guidance because they have yet to develop their own approaches based on prior experiences.

These concerns notwithstanding, Gina and Rebecca, and all novice teachers, are expected to make recommendations for the gifted program. In this case, both teachers on the team are novices, exacerbating the problem. When a novice is paired with a veteran, as is the case for Barbara and Cathy, the veteran assumes most of the responsibility for both training the novice teacher and making decisions. Barbara described this relationship and how her lack of experience plays into it in detail:

All I know is based off of what Cathy has told me...and she takes on all the responsibility of writing any of the documentation up...Overall, she's the one that introduced me to all

of it. I had maybe an hour of training during the summer before I started teaching. That's all the exposure I had to it. (interview, April 8, 2015)

Even that little bit of exposure – provided to all new staff members in the district each summer – did not make the new teachers feel prepared. According to Barbara, “I think they crammed so much in our head that it was just like what qualities do you see in a gifted student, and giftedness does not necessarily have to be somebody that is not classified” (interview, April 8, 2015). The novice teacher participants in this study were clear in their message that they feel overwhelmed with the responsibility to nominate students for the gifted program.

Great deal of experience. For mid-career and veteran teachers, years of experience drive decision-making. After seeing hundreds or thousands of students in the classroom, instincts and intuition take on greater import. The main problem Cathy saw in the process used by her colleagues was an overemphasis on students who perform well in class rather than students who, as she describes them, are free thinkers who take risks in the classroom. “Giftedness is rare in children. Giftedness to me is a special child who thinks differently than others... They look at the world through a different lens and use strategies that aren't the norm when solving problems” (interview, April 8, 2015). From Cathy's point of view, the gifted education nomination and identification process should be finding hidden gems not served by the regular educational program rather than adding another feather to the cap of academic stars and these hidden gems can be found by the discerning eye of an experienced teacher.

Despite these stated views, Cathy's responses suggested other motives. When asked to describe the characteristics she looked for when deciding whether to nominate students, Cathy identified two things that would eliminate a student from consideration in her mind – not completing work for class and ignoring class activities. “There is one student (in the gifted

program), he wasn't doing any of the work. He was fooling around all the time, he didn't listen, he was a C or below student yet in the (gifted) program. I just didn't understand it" (interview, April 8, 2015). The district's own list of characteristics of giftedness identifies "bored with routine tasks and may refuse to do rote homework" and "may interrupt or ignore class activities to pursue interests" as difficulties gifted children may face in the classroom. Still, Cathy's expression of exasperation over a student who fits those qualities being in the program indicates some dissonance in her stated beliefs and her application of those beliefs despite many years of teaching experience.

Cathy used one other method for identifying students based on her years of teaching experience. She liked to compare current students to students she believed exemplified the characteristics of giftedness during previous screening periods. Cathy described one student as the "pillar" against whom she compared all other students in a particular year because he was so clearly a gifted student (interview, April 8, 2015). She brought this belief to her meeting with her teaching partner. There, the two teachers went down the list of characteristics provided by the district and compared the students they were considering against this pillar (observation, March 11, 2015). Rather than comparing students against abstract concepts on a piece of paper, Cathy and her partner chose to compare them against concrete examples they could see every day.

Interestingly, Wendy also expressed a deep belief and desire to identify students who might be quirky in class or otherwise not emerge as top candidates for a gifted program due to classroom behavior. "Ten years ago I would be like, 'Nope, that kid doesn't put any effort into school. Nope, that kid doesn't turn anything in.' I think I'm more open to that type of student now" (interview, June 9, 2015). Wendy credits this evolution to her twenty plus years teaching experience and a brief stint teaching in the gifted program. "I think teaching that program

changed the way I thought about teaching. What really happened was it trickled down more into providing more choices to the on-level kids” (interview, June 9, 2015). Yet, just like Cathy, Wendy’s stated beliefs did not always match her actions.

Wendy shared that she notices extroverts most easily in class, a common teacher-pleasing characteristic. Specifically, she referred to students who speak and participate at high levels, stay at the end of class to talk one-on-one, and shares related information with her. The challenge with this focus is clear. Students who pull back from class due to boredom or difficulty adapting to the level of their peers are unlikely to do those things in the classroom setting. This makes identifying them difficult. Later in her interview, Wendy described an ideal gifted student as one who “doesn’t necessarily fit in school” (interview, June 9, 2015). This contradiction complicates the nomination process and potentially contributes to perpetuating a system whereby bright students who play the game of school well are nominated and gifted students who do not fit into the norm are not. Such a complication makes it unclear whether a great deal of experience is positive or negative to how teachers decide who to nominate for the gifted education program.

Distasteful nomination experience. Whether experienced or novice, a strongly negative experience left an impact on two study participants. Bonnie and Myra feel discouraged and not a little betrayed by how the nomination process made them feel in the past. Bonnie had a strong gut feeling that a student should have been nominated but agreed not to do so based on her and her partner Myra’s understanding of the district’s guidance.

There was a student that I really wanted to nominate and we kept looking at the task commitment thing and it was like “all right, the student didn’t fit” and as much as I wanted him to fit on some of that, he didn’t, so I didn’t nominate him. Then I found out that he was recommended in sixth grade...a lot of the teachers don’t follow all those

questions. By following the questions, it was more that I felt like I did a disservice to this student who really needed to be challenged. That made me angry and it made me feel like I didn't do my part as a teacher. (interview, April 8, 2015)

Myra talked about the same situation. "The form talked us out of nominating him...It was interesting to find out that a year later, he was nominated and identified" (interview, April 6, 2015). This experience led Myra to doubt her understanding of the process, the criteria, and her own judgment. With those same concerns in mind, Bonnie now advocates nominating students based on instincts even if they do not exactly fit the criteria provided by the district. While discussing nominations with Myra (observation, March 11, 2015), she said "I'd rather err on the side of advocating for the student and then let the testing sort them out. If we think there was a chance, I would say that we recommend."

Myra's experience with this particular student was buoyed by her attendance at a few professional learning events that addressed the issue of underrepresentation in gifted education programs as part of a certification program just two years prior to participating in this study. Myra remembers thinking, "'Our (gifted) program is certainly not lily-white, but it is certainly lacking in African Americans'" (interview, April 6, 2015). Myra described the challenge of thinking about this problem within her sphere of influence when considering her two African American students:

I wanted to make sure, in my own mind, that I wasn't proliferating a problem. One student clearly was not (a gifted student). The other student made me think. He was antagonistic about certain things. He was headstrong. He was opinionated. Somebody might look at that and think, "He's not playing the game the right way." Playing the game the right way gets back to that idea of out-of-the-box thinker. Just because he doesn't

play the game the right way doesn't mean he's not good at what he does (interview, April 6, 2015).

In the end, Myra did not nominate the student based on an assessment that he did not meet the district's criteria of demonstrating the characteristics of giftedness across multiple settings. Yet the student was nominated and identified later, leading Myra to question her approach and the process itself.

Because of Myra's exposure to the issue of underrepresentation and her experience with this student, she has spent a lot of time reflecting on the issue and the impact she can have on it as one teacher with a limited scope. At the time of her interview, Myra had only one African American student among her 47-student load. Myra said, "I'm not sure if we have enough of the sample size to really be a good representation of what's really going on" (interview, April 6, 2015). Again, without clear school or district data or guidance, Myra turns to her professional experiences for guidance.

When coupled with the lack of feedback about whether nominations are accurate or successful as defined by a nominated student ultimately being identified for the program, Bonnie and Myra's experience takes on greater importance. The only feedback they have received in their time working together was when a student was nominated by someone else and placed in the gifted education setting. They now doubt their abilities even though it is possible that every single other decision they have ever made was the correct one. A single distasteful experience led her to conclude that it might be better to err on the side of nominating a student. Whether this is the right decision is inconsequential; it is the only decision Myra feels safe making based on her prior knowledge.

Professional development. Time and time again participants expressed feelings of frustration and confusion about gifted education and nominations and the need for training. Both the provision and lack of professional development affected participants' decision-making processes.

Sandra is one of the few teachers to have participated in a formal graduate program in gifted education, earning a certificate for completing a 15-credit sequence of coursework. "I think it (the program) opened up my eyes a lot to the underachievers and how to best help them. I think those classes help you to understand that there's no one gifted person; you have to really deal with each in their own individual way" (interview, June 9, 2015). Another participant in the certificate program, Noreen, echoed Sandra's statements:

I think it (the program) definitely opened my eyes. I think that before I went into the program, I was starting to think that my view of giftedness wasn't quite right...I was a gifted child, but I was always that straight "A" student...I was starting to suspect that perhaps there was something more to giftedness. Then, when I went to the program, it really opened my eyes to the idea of there is this asynchronous learning and it doesn't necessarily have to be in all subjects. It could be in just one particular area. Just because a child isn't excelling in everything doesn't mean that the child is not going to excel in one thing. (interview, June 8, 2015)

Such positive reflections on completing a rigorous graduate program are great, but that is the experience for only a few.

Bonnie succinctly summarizes the challenge being felt by many of the participants, "We need professional development; we need to know what we're nominating for" (interview, April 8, 2015). Cathy is a veteran teacher with over ten years' experience teaching literacy and social

studies. She is well respected among her peers and one of the first to volunteer for new projects or committees that have the potential to improve the student experience. Despite her years in the classroom and in this district in particular, she reported that she never received professional development related to gifted education in pre-service courses, graduate school, or through in-service opportunities. Cathy remarked, “I wish there was training because I don’t think I really know...even after doing it for so long. I think I know but perhaps not” (interview, April 8, 2015). Wendy’s frustration appears to concur. “I don’t get any feedback whether they do make it in or not and, if not, why not. I don’t really feel a lot of guidance as to am I on the right track” (interview, June 9, 2015). With that in mind, Wendy continues to try different things and meander from one approach to another without clear reasons for her decisions other than the general reliance on personal experience.

On the other end of the experience spectrum is Rebecca, a new teacher, fresh out of a traditional teacher preparation program, teaching literacy and social studies. Without much personal history with gifted education programs as a teacher, no formal preparation during pre-service education, and only a one hour overview of gifted education during new teacher orientation, Rebecca feels ill prepared for the responsibility of nominating students for the program. She described her knowledge of how students get nominated and placed with clarifying phrases like “so far,” “I guess,” and “I’m not sure.”

Interestingly, despite her inexperience, or perhaps because of it, Rebecca identified nine of the twelve positive characteristics associated with giftedness through one means or another, the most of any participant in the study. As she came to the meeting with her teammate prepared with the district guidance and checklists ready to go, it is quite possible that her answers and decisions were based very carefully upon the provided materials rather than her own experiences

as a student, teacher, parent, etc. Her partner has even less teaching experience so neither brought much context to the discussion beyond what was in black and white in front of them.

Myra is a novice teacher with fewer than three years' experience teaching literacy and social studies. She came to Arlington by way of an alternate certification program after working in another industry. Like Cathy, she is well respected among her peers and often can be found working on new initiatives and projects with her own students and those of the school at large. Myra, too, reported never receiving any formal professional development related to gifted education although she did attend a lecture from an expert in the field while attaining her certification. The speaker was Donna Ford, a researcher and professor at Vanderbilt University who has established herself as a go-to resource on issues of underrepresentation of minority groups, especially African Americans, in gifted education programs. Reflecting on that presentation, Myra said, "That (the lecture) made me more cognizant of it (underrepresentation). I look around and say, 'Our...program (is) certainly not lily white, but it is certainly lacking in African Americans'" (interview, April 6, 2015). When it came time to nominate students that spring, Myra felt concern over whether she was contributing to the underrepresentation of African American students. This one exposure to gifted education professional development continues to affect Myra's thinking and approach related to nomination decisions.

Pamela, one of the district's gifted education teachers, encounters the professional development issue from a different perspective. Rather than receiving it, she finds herself in the position of providing support to her colleagues. "I've kind of given a little professional development by being in the library and being available for regular teachers to come and have a question and answer session. On the nominations, we haven't had any" (interview, June 8, 2015). Nearly all participants mentioned the need for support with nominations, specifically

professional development, yet according to Pamela, when the opportunity is available for voluntary learning, no one takes advantage of it.

Teachers as students. Four participants (Barbara, Heather, Noreen, Susan) cited their experiences as students as having an impact on the way they think about gifted education as teachers. Of the four, only Noreen characterized herself as gifted with the other three specifically pointing out that they were not part of a gifted education program. Susan's experience not being identified relates to her openness to consider untraditional factors.

I remember I was always tested. Then it was called gifted and talented, but I have severe limitations in spatial relations. My brain just does not work that way and so I never made the cut...I'm thinking I wish that I'd been given the opportunity to think in that way...

There's no connection between any diagnosed learning difference and what we used to call gifted and talented skills. (interview, June 8, 2015)

Earlier, I shared information about how Noreen's experiences with her son mirrored this sentiment shared by Susan. Personal experiences with learning differences led each to conclude that giftedness cannot be boiled down to one test. For Noreen, this lesson took longer to sink in. "I was a gifted child, but I was always that straight "A" student" (interview, June 8, 2015). As previously discussed, Noreen credits her experience with her twice exceptional son and the knowledge she gained in a graduate program dedicated to gifted education for her mindset shift. Others' experiences as students around the periphery of gifted education did not have the same impact.

Neither Heather nor Barbara participated in their district's gifted education programs. For Barbara, this is particularly important as she went through the Arlington schools. "I never did go into the gifted and talented program so I feel like it always has been if the parents really wanted

your kid to be there, that's where they ended up" (interview, April 8, 2015). Her perception of what the program entailed was that students there were always the ones already doing well in school. She remembers being confused, thinking to herself "'I was doing really well so why am I not even considered?'" (interview, April 8, 2015). Heather remembers her experience differently. "I think that they just looked at me and said, 'She doesn't fit the bill.'" (interview, June 9, 2015). Unlike Barbara who expressed some resentment, Heather said, "I've just always thought it was the kind of experiences where they needed more than what was happening in the traditional classroom...I guess a little bit of my training ties in with this too. It's no real difference than special education" (interview, June 9, 2015).

In closing, personal experience trumps all. The complex combination of teachers' experiences in the classroom and school environments, as parents, and as students themselves contributes the ways in which individuals approach gifted education nomination decisions. In the case of this study, those experiences appear to take on an even greater role due to the perceived lack of training and guidance.

Feeling Out of the Loop

One challenge commonly cited by participants was being left out of the gifted education nomination loop. Feeling disconnected from colleagues or the program feeds teachers' need to be self-reliant as the primary resource for defining giftedness, observing it in students, and applying a self-created framework for decision-making. This disconnect typically happens in one of two ways: First, the nomination information is disseminated through the social studies teachers and in some cases those teachers then become responsible for the nominations, sometimes without any input from the rest of the team. Relatedly, confusion about how the program relates to what teachers of other subject areas see in their classrooms on a daily basis affects teachers' decision-

making in different ways. Finally, teachers who move among teams such as literacy specialists and special education teachers do not share common planning time with the team teachers, so they do not usually participate in the discussion about gifted education nominations unless there is an exceptional situation. In this section, I will share teachers' feelings about how these challenges, primarily with communication, affect their approach to deciding which students to nominate for the gifted education program in Arlington.

Team-based collaboration. Throughout all forms of data collection including an interview with the gifted education program's supervisor, participants explained that the nomination process begins when the social studies teachers receive information and then facilitate the sharing of that information with their teammates. The consistency breaks down as participants discussed the next steps. A range of practices emerged with different degrees of collegiality and shared responsibility. Myra, a social studies teacher, sums up the potential problems. "Were I to do it in isolation, the number of students nominated would be different. Some students that may be nominated if it was done in a different form would definitely be different" (interview, April 6, 2015). Since the social studies teacher on the team receives the information needed to begin the nominating period, he or she becomes the key contact person for other teachers for the duration of the process.

Gatekeeper of the gatekeepers. Describing her social studies teacher colleague, Barbara said, "All I know is based off of what (she) has told me, because I teach math and science...and she takes on all the responsibility of writing any of the documentation up" (interview, April 8, 2015). Wendy described the same situation from the opposite perspective:

I try to talk to the team because I feel like sometimes it's focused on just the opinion of the teacher, the way we do it here. I don't really think that's the way that in my mind it

should go. Usually I'll reach out to the whole team and...try to do it together as a group.”

(interview, June 9, 2015)

Noreen, another non-social studies teacher described the ideal process versus her experiences:

Essentially the way it works now is it goes to the social studies teacher on the team. If it's working properly, I believe the social studies teacher on the team should be discussing all of the kids with the rest of the team, but that doesn't always occur. I think that each team is handling it differently...This year, we didn't really have a whole lot of discussion as a team about kids that we thought we might want to nominate. (interview, April 8, 2015).

Another non-social studies teacher, who is not being identified even by pseudonym by her request, described being left out of the process even as one of the team teachers. This desire for additional protection was unique to this one interview. The teacher explained that things changed this year for an unknown reason and the social studies teacher made nominations without any input from the team.

Like the unnamed teacher, Rebecca described changes to process that can occur as personnel change from year to year. “The person who I took over for, I think she just did it herself. I don't think that her partner was a part of it” (interview, April 8, 2015). Now that the team has changed, she sees the process differently. “I wanted to do it as a team just because I don't want it to be only on me. I want to be able to say, ‘I spoke with my partner about this too’” (interview, April 8, 2015). Unfortunately, Rebecca's partner, at least from her perspective, is not as keen on participating. My observation of their team meeting supported this perception as Rebecca did most of the organizing and facilitating of discussion. Whether the fault lies with the social studies teacher or others on the team, the experiences described in this section contribute

to the larger theme that not everyone is keyed into the nomination process to the same degree, leading to fragmentation among team-based teachers in terms of decision-making.

Making compromises. The district expectation is that each team makes nominations to the gifted program as a group. There appeared to be three approaches used when consensus could not be reached: 1) allow individuals to make the nomination despite a teammate's disagreement; 2) not nominate the student; 3) average the ratings together into a compromise submission. The first two approaches seemed to be used more often since they did not require the team to come together to resolve conflict. Each of the approaches reflects a fragmented decision acting in contradiction to the appearance of team unity in the decisions.

Maureen explained the first system. After discussion on the team, if one person feels a student should be nominated, the team puts it through, even if it is not unanimous. "Everybody deserves a chance is where we're coming from" (interview, June 8, 2015). Rebecca's team took the opposite tact when dealing with a student who demonstrated success in math but not in the humanities. "We didn't nominate him because we know that it's really going towards social studies and I just didn't see it on my end" (interview, April 8, 2015).

At the conclusion of the observation (March 11, 2015) Myra and Bonnie had not reached consensus on all of their nominations due to these different philosophies and views. In her interview (April 8, 2015), Bonnie described the way the process divided the team and the stress it created for her personally. Even still, she felt strongly that not pushing for particular students would be even worse, once again citing the instance of the student from the past. "(I) feel like we need professional development; we need to know what we're nominating for...I find the whole thing really frustrating" (interview, April 8, 2015). Myra's reflection on how they handled the differences of opinion about the final nominations also captured the tension. Myra described a

compromise where the two teachers in essence “averaged” together their assessments of students. So where Myra might have seen a student performing very high and Bonnie very low, the result would be a nomination in the middle.

It may result in him not being further tested. If I had gone with strictly Bonnie’s interpretation of this student, then it would have looked quite a bit different. Likewise, if I had done it based on my own, he wouldn’t have been nominated to begin with.

(interview, April 6, 2015).

While there were some unanimous decisions described in interviews and observed in team meetings, participants spoke a great deal about conflict. The different approaches to dealing with disagreements described in this section support the finding that decisions fragment when individuals feel out of the loop on the decision-making process.

Mismatch between program and services. Another challenge that manifests itself through team-based disagreements is an apparent disconnect between the program offered as a social studies replacement, and characteristics and other identification instruments that focus on a wider array of skills and dispositions across numerous content areas and situations. For team teachers of subjects other than social studies, this dissonance between program and services leads to additional feelings of isolation. Myra says:

I think the challenge that we face is because we know that, ultimately, it (the program) is social studies based...They are in no way, shape, or form a good candidate for the (gifted) program as it’s administered in our district. Yet, they may exude many of those characteristics in another discipline, like science or math... Quite frankly, there’s students that we did nominate...solely because of Bonnie’s feeling about them with regard to math and science (interview, April 6, 2015)

The fact that the nomination paperwork is disseminated through the social studies teachers exacerbates the confusion. Myra addressed this issue. “If it’s only sent to me, a social studies teacher, are they only looking for the feedback from social studies teachers? Look for better clarification to improve the process for next year” (interview, April 6, 2015). Bonnie expressed the same types of questions. “Are we looking for social studies types of thinkers or are we looking for students that fit the gifted and talented? ... Do we nominate those kids we think are truly (gifted) students even if they don’t fit the social studies model? (interview, April 8, 2015)” As the gifted education teacher, Sandra often gives advice to her colleagues about this issue. “So should they (students) be nominated just because of the type of program we have? I usually say I think they should be nominate and give them the chance to get in or not” (interview, June 9, 2015).

During their team meeting, Gina and Rebecca engaged in a dialogue that exemplifies these strains between content areas:

Gina: I am looking at (characteristic) 12. He is very curious.

Rebecca: Yes, he is very curious. He prefers to work independently. I mean, there are times when he would rather work by himself, but I feel like it’s because he doesn’t want to be held down by somebody else. He wants to be able to work.

Gina: I see the complete opposite. He will not work by himself because I think he doesn’t know how to do the work by himself in math.

Bonnie and Myra addressed these challenges head on when I observed their team meeting. Near the end of the discussion, Bonnie said:

It would be interesting to swap classes one day. I'd like to see these guys in lit(eracy)...I was thinking about that today, that it would be fun to teach each other's class one day. You really will see them differently. It used to be, when we taught all the subjects...that you got to see them in those areas. We don't get to see that now. (observation, March 11, 2015).

Both teachers expressed their concerns about the process and how it caused a strain on them during the follow-up interviews. The disagreements about which students to nominate were not resolved and ultimately one student was nominated against Myra's wishes. Although she submitted the name, she also sent an email to the supervisor to explain that this was not a consensus recommendation. Bonnie captured the essence of their feelings. "It causes stress because we don't know what we're nominating for, social studies or gifted students. I find the whole thing really frustrating" (interview, April 8, 2015).

Role of off-team staff members. For specialists who do not work on one team, the obstacles to providing input and clear communication can be greater since little common planning time exists. Pamela, one of the gifted education teachers, described a situation regarding a student who she knew from a co-curricular program. "I would have nominated the kid personally, but he's from another team..." (interview, June 8, 2015). Betty, a special education teacher who works with two teams of teachers, explained that when one of the teams has time together, she is teaching with another team. This makes it difficult to get in the same room to discuss students' progress at all, never mind for the labor-intensive process of gifted education nominations. Even trying to think of a time when she participated in the process, the most she could come up with was "I'm trying to think back to when I first started teaching. They maybe would have asked me, 'oh, we're thinking about this one, what do you think?'"

(interview, June 9, 2015). Betty's main reason for participating in the study was to express frustration that she feels students classified as in need of special education services may be overlooked in the nomination process despite the possibility of them being twice exceptional. "Do they (students) just kind of get pushed aside because they (teachers) don't understand what twice exceptional is?" (interview, June 9, 2015).

For teachers like Betty, getting information is a big part of the problem. "I don't actually know a whole lot about it (nomination process)...I unfortunately am not ever privy to sit in those meetings with my teams" (interview, June 9, 2015). Sam, a literacy specialist expressed a similar sentiment. "I don't really have much information in regard to the process, only from what I've heard my team members talk about. It's somewhat limited" (interview, April 8, 2015). Sam painted a more complicated portrait though. Although she did recognize that some of the conversation about nominations had to take place when she was not available much like Betty expressed, Sam felt that she was given plenty of opportunity to express her views to the team teachers. "We (Sam and the two team teachers) talk often about where the kids are...We have a lot of ongoing dialogue, so in that regard, I'm always brought into the conversation" (interview, April 8, 2015). Despite Sam's initial thoughts about being included, she has never nominated a student for the gifted education program.

The gifted education nomination process in Arlington is time-consuming and comes with a great deal of responsibility. As the only way into identification process, teachers feel pressure to get it right, including from an involved parent community. Yet many of the participants in this study described feeling out of the loop from the process, even when simultaneously expressing a feeling that they were singlehandedly the ones most responsible for doing the work. Overall, it appears that input from non-team teachers depends a great deal on the relationships those

teachers have with the team-based teachers. This same idea holds true for the team teachers themselves where some teams work quite effectively together with shared responsibility for the decision-making and completion of requisite paperwork while other teams struggle to come to common ground or to contribute to the final products equitably.

Conclusion

In Arlington, teacher nominations act as the only way into the identification process for the gifted education program in grades three through eight. The process is time-consuming and requires a great deal of coordination among teachers. In this chapter, I presented findings organized into three themes: 1) Definitions of giftedness vary; 2) Personal experiences drive decision making; and 3) Feeling out of the loop fragments decisions. These themes address the research questions that guided this study by exploring how teachers' definitions of giftedness and the experiences that led to those understandings contribute to the decisions they make about which students to nominate for gifted education. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings on policy and practice in Arlington and beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In chapter four I described the three key findings from this study: 1) Definitions of giftedness vary from person to person and from district definition to individual interpretation; 2) The experiences of teachers in a variety of personal and professional realms drive their decision-making processes about which students to nominate for the district's gifted education program; and 3) When teachers feel like they are out of the loop on the decision-making process, recommendations are made without the benefit of the full context of students' abilities. In this chapter, I will discuss these findings within the context of my literature review to consider the implications for practice in Arlington specifically and all schools more generally as well as for policy. In addition, I will consider the limitations of my study and suggestions for future research in gifted education.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the decision-making processes used by teachers when nominating students for one district's gifted education program. By following a group of teachers in one school throughout the nomination period, I gained insights into teachers' decision-making processes through survey collection, observation, and interviews. These insights can help bridge the gap between the research base and the local site of practice so an action plan can be developed to address underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) groups in the district's gifted education program. The research addressed two primary questions and two sub-questions:

1. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?
 - a. How do teachers define giftedness?
 - b. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?

2. How might the teacher nomination process affect access to the gifted education program?

All 44 fifth and sixth grade teachers were invited to complete a self-report survey about their perceptions of giftedness during the nomination period. Seventeen teachers submitted complete survey responses. Next, I observed six fifth grade teachers from three two-person teams while they met to discuss which students to nominate for the gifted education program. Then, after the nomination decisions were submitted to the district, I conducted individual interviews with fourteen teachers and the supervisor of the gifted education program. While these interviews followed a pre-determined protocol, they gave me the opportunity to probe in areas that emerged during surveys and observations. At the same time as these linear data collection timelines, I analyzed several documents used in the district including the memo sent to all staff with instructions for nominating students, the nomination form itself, and an overview presentation given to new employees about gifted education.

Discussion of Findings

My findings confirm what has already been part of the literature base in gifted education. Teachers in Arlington, like teachers everywhere, develop unique definitions for what it means to be gifted and individual approaches for identifying gifted students to fill the void created by a lack of pre- and in-service training in the field. This study adds to the literature by providing rich accounts of how these challenges manifest themselves in a particular school and district. The localized focus of the study provides context for district leaders to consider when making decisions about how to meet the needs of teachers and students in the future.

The lack of common understanding of the characteristics of giftedness and the process for nominating students for the program in Arlington reveals a lack of consistent understanding and approach. In order for administrators, staff, students, and parents to feel confident with the

results of the gifted education identification process, it will be important to build shared purpose in these areas. Arlington is not alone in dealing with this issue. As Carman (2013) found in her meta-analysis, consensus on working definitions of giftedness is rare. This fact speaks to the critical need to address this confusion on the local level to ensure common understanding about what the gifted education program is and is not.

The tension between seemingly positive characteristics and typical classroom environments that require conformity to a different set of norms speaks to the impetus for creating gifted education programs in the first place. According to Richert (interview, October 17, 2015), “Teacher pleasing behavior and academic achievement predict academic achievement; they do not predict giftedness.” In the words of Myra (interview, April 6, 2015), supported by Fried (2005) and Pope (2001) in their books, “The Game of School: Why We All Play It, How It Hurts Kids, and What It Will Take to Change It” and “Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students” respectively, some kids just learn how to play the game of school better. But is that why gifted education programs in general, or in Arlington more specifically, exist?

The need for a common response to that question and more specific questions about the nature of giftedness and how to identify it is clear based on results of this study. The current condition in the district on this front is one of confusion and misunderstanding. Time and time again participants reported not understanding the guidance from the district, the nomination forms, the role of different professionals, the connection between nomination and programming, or some combination of those things. As a result, each individual and team determine how to approach the nomination process based on a myriad of considerations that all come down to their

perspectives. Well-meaning teachers use their best judgment to make decisions; no one feels completely comfortable with the results.

Even within the areas of acknowledged consistency – the list of positive and negative characteristics for example – I observed mixed benefits. Only three of the 22 characteristics on the lists were identified by the majority of participants in this study. As I discussed in the literature review, the research base suggests that even minimal exposure to gifted education topics can help prepare teachers to more accurately gauge students' gifts and recognize them for formal programs (Bangel et al., 2006; Goodnough, 2000) yet that training is not taking place in Arlington or just about anywhere else.

The underrepresentation of students from diverse groups is significant, especially for African American and Hispanic students (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education, 2002; Gentry, Hu, & Thomas, 2008), with larger gaps locally than those reported in national studies. This study was not designed to determine the cause for Arlington's underrepresentation of students from CLD groups in its gifted education program. Since teacher nominations act as the only mechanism for consideration of students for the program in grades three through eight, it is possible to consider connections between this study and the issue of underrepresentation.

Several studies found that teachers nominate African American and Hispanic students at lower rates than White students, even when all indicators are equal across the groups (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Gentry, Hu, & Thomas, 2008; McBee, 2006). There is also research to suggest that making teachers aware of this issue helps remediate the situation (Carter, 2005; Goodnough, 2000; Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). The need for professional

development is clear. This training is needed on a range of gifted education topics, issues of diversity clearly among them.

The issue of underrepresentation cannot be addressed by isolated teachers trying to single-handedly change larger trends. Myra had contact with only 47 of the 600+ students in a single grade level in her school. Instead of relying on motivated individuals to take small actions, the district must consider system-level changes to process that could have a larger impact on the issue. No participants shared overt examples of stereotypical thinking or racism that might be affecting their decision-making processes. However, as depicted in the logic model (see figure 1) that guided the design of this study, it is the combination of teacher preparation and identification methods that lead to few diverse students being considered for gifted programs. Additionally, the research suggests that teachers and institutions often consider the majority experience as the default or “normal” experience (Amos, 2010). As a result, classroom behaviors that stray from what Myra referred to as “playing the game” may not be considered in a positive light. This subtle shift in expectations may be exacerbating the issue of underrepresentation in Arlington in ways that this study could not specifically identify.

Although this study was not intended to determine the cause of Arlington’s underrepresentation of CLD students in the gifted education program, Myra’s experience speaks to the difficulty of separating this particular issue from the study’s focus on how teachers determine who to nominate for the district’s program. There is a strong need for professional development in the characteristics of giftedness, including how such traits manifest in students from different backgrounds. Only when teachers confront their beliefs and biases directly can they begin to see past them to identify students appropriately (Siegle, 2001). How Arlington’s leaders might go about addressing these needs is discussed later in this chapter.

Implications for Practice

In Arlington, teachers' nominations act as gate-keepers to the gifted education program. According to district guidance and teacher perception, students cannot be considered for the district's gifted program without a teacher completing a nomination form. Although ultimate placement is determined through the district's multi-metric identification matrix, which includes academic and cognitive measures combined with teacher and parent perceptions, it is first the judgment of teachers that determines whether students can access the process. As a result, the role of teachers and how they make decisions about who to nominate are critical to the final make-up of the students in the gifted program. Teachers in Arlington currently make their decisions based almost entirely on personal experience rather than a consistent and consensus application of the district guidance. Without changes to that reality, teachers' nominations might as well be eliminated based on Richert's (1992) assertion that untrained teachers are less reliable than other data sources. With this in mind, administrators and teachers in Arlington would be well advised to consider improvements in two areas: 1) training teachers to nominate and 2) alternative pathways into the identification process.

Teacher Training

Teachers are well positioned to observe and communicate information about potential giftedness in their students but only when they are trained, particularly in the negative characteristics of the gifted. In gifted education programs across the United States, teacher nominations remain the most commonly used non-standardized instrument (Kamenetz, 2015) with 86.5% of districts reporting them as a factor (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013). Untrained teachers, on the other hand, provide information that is even less useful than standardized test

results (Richert, 1992). That is, a system in which teachers are left to their own experiences and instincts might as well not even include teachers in the process at all.

Just like the teachers in Arlington called for time and time again, the importance of high-quality professional development is a theme in the literature related to identifying students for gifted education programs. Yet such professional development in the field of gifted education is extremely rare, especially in states like New Jersey where there is little emphasis on it at the state level, leaving nearly all decisions in the hands of local educational leaders who consider it against the overwhelming list of needs for professional learning time and attention. Even using a modest definition of training that meant as little as one experience with gifted education-focused professional development only 36% of the study's participants reported receiving any. This creates a significant challenge for operating an identification system that relies so heavily on teachers as gatekeepers into consideration. VanTassel-Baska (2004) takes it even further. "The pathway for considering the concept of giftedness through a curricular lens is by analyzing the underlying characteristics of gifted children and organizing curricula that are responsive to them (p. 169). It is not enough to learn the characteristics for identification purposes; culturally relevant information should inform instruction as well. With a system in place that does not train pre- or in-service teachers to adequately address the needs of gifted students during the nomination process or in classrooms, teachers turn to other sources to learn about giftedness and develop personal definitions and responses over time, exacerbating the challenge of combatting inconsistencies in approaches to nominations.

Richert contends that untrained teachers are capable of providing only very limited input to the process (interview, October 17, 2015) yet that is exactly what is happening in Arlington. Arlington is not alone in providing limited training to teachers in gifted education identification

practices. Only 15.6% of districts reported providing professional development for identification of gifted students and 10.7% on the characteristics of gifted students (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013). Yet the research is clear that adequately trained teachers are essential to gifted identification and delivery (Clarenbach, 2015). Richert (1987) recommended that limited professional development time for teachers be focused on negative characteristics. Her research in this area led to the development of the list of characteristics currently in use in Arlington. However, there is now a gap between the origination of the document and teachers' training in how to use it. Even more alarming, perhaps, is the fact four of the seven participants (57%) who have been directly involved in delivering the district's gifted education program report that they have received any training in gifted education. To combat this obvious problem, districts should be devoting resources to preparing all teachers to nominate and instruct students from diverse backgrounds who need something different from the norm to be successful (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). This training should include, at a minimum: an overview of the district's gifted education services, information about how the district's nomination and identification processes work, annual refresher training on the teacher's role in nominating students, culturally relevant information to assist with identifying CLD students, and connections to prior pedagogical knowledge that would assist in applying preservice and previous in-service training to gifted students in a general classroom setting.

A key recommendation for Arlington is the provision of specific professional development related to the characteristics of giftedness, how they manifest in the classroom, and how to translate that information to the district's nomination process. Rather than recommend an untenable training regimen that calls for a great deal of time and resources that are simply not available in most public school districts for this particular topic, I suggest that Arlington's

administrators responsible for the gifted education program begin with an explicit discussion about the issue of underrepresentation and how it comes to be in the district. This conversation must be scheduled to coincide with the opening of the nomination process so that teachers can immediately apply their new knowledge to their practice. A simple agenda wherein the district's gifted services are explained, the current data on underrepresentation is shared, and then the characteristics of giftedness are considered in light of cultural differences would be a wonderful start to what should become an annual review minimally. It is critically important that efforts are taken to ease into these topics by first building trust and creating safe spaces for teachers to discuss issues of race. With the recent resurgence of attention to the issue in professional literature, it may be helpful to begin by reading articles about the issue in other schools to allow dialogue to flow before bringing the concerns home.

Alternative Pathways

Given the competing challenges for teachers and districts, it is unlikely that significant time or money will be devoted to professional development for gifted education in general or identification and nomination practices more specifically. With that in mind, alternative methods for identifying students for gifted programs that rely less on teachers should be considered. Richert (1992) recommends the use of disaggregated data to place students into the gifted program in ways that represent the overall demographics, peer nominations from students, self-nominations beginning around grade four, and ongoing assessment of student progress. Rather than combining these various data sources into a matrix of some kind, any one of these means could be enough to identify a student for services.

Participants in this study referenced being on the receiving end of what some might call advocacy and others might call pressure from parents who wanted their children considered for

the gifted education program. Such experiences are common in white and Asian, middle class and higher socioeconomic areas but much less so among parents of minority children (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). Districts can and should be proactive about communicating all aspects of the gifted education program, including the nomination and identification processes, with all parents. When teachers in Arlington were contacted by parents, they gave careful consideration to the child, consideration that might not have been given with the parent outreach. Though this is no guarantee of program placement, helping parents of CLD students access the system would be beneficial to leveling the playing field.

Addressing the problem of practice in Arlington as it relates to teachers' role in the gifted education identification process will require political will, administrative commitment, and resource allocation in the way of professional development, time, and desire. Such change does not come easily, or quickly. At the same time that professional development attempts to support teachers in becoming better informed and prepared for their role here, Arlington should consider other means of identifying students as well. Although previous district program evaluations and adjustments have attempted to address issues like underrepresentation, the problem remains. Klug (2004) asserts that one reason change never comes to majority white, upper-middle class schools is that the racist practices are institutionalized. Rather than one or more staff members actively doing something to suppress students from CLD groups, the whole system is designed in a way that has the same effect. The only way to overcome such systemic obstacles is to change the system.

Parent nominations. The second most common way into the gifted nomination process nationally is through a parent nomination (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013). In Arlington, this is not an option, at least formally. The teachers who participated in this study indicated that they have

been given guidance from the district supervisor that parent requests for nominations should only be honored if the teachers agree with the assessment. However, some teachers, especially novices, feel that pressure more acutely. In addition, their lack of experience with gifted nominations made them a bit uneasy about ignoring a parent's input. One participant, Wendy, described how her children's district invites parents into the process annually through a formal process. All parents have the option to bring their children in to take a screening test on a Saturday. When the results are in, detailed information about the students' performance goes home. "It's most empowering to the parent to be like, 'here's my kid, here's my information, and here's why'" (interview, June 9, 2015). Allowing an open testing process to all parents may be burdensome and costly in a large district like Arlington, but it would certainly decrease the level of pressure on the teacher nomination process. In reality, it could be less burdensome and costly than developing a professional development program that successfully addresses all of the other challenges described.

General screening. In Arlington, all students are screened for the gifted education program in second grade, beginning with the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) and continuing with teacher and parent feedback, an academic achievement test, and a creativity assessment for students who score within a certain range on the CogAT. This practice is supported in the research (Kamenetz, 2015; Nisen, 2015) as an important way to provide for equity and access to gifted programs because it includes students who may not always exhibit teacher-pleasing behaviors in the classroom. Despite this promising practice in early elementary school, it is not repeated at any other grade level in Arlington.

Due to the change from a general gifted education program to one housed in the social studies beginning in grade five and the confusion this causes teachers when they nominate

students, Arlington should consider a general screening late in grade four. This would assist in realigning program enrollment based on emerging needs as students develop through the elementary years and would begin the intermediate school years with a crop of students identified specifically for the program that exists. An additional benefit of a second general screening would be the acknowledgement that younger students' success of assessments reflects supportive home environments as much as abilities (Kamenetz, 2015). A later screening could allow students who might have started well behind their peers to qualify for the program.

Broadening the Definition

These approaches are challenging but important consideration for Arlington. There is one other area to consider that could significantly reduce the burden of change and give a more accurate assessment of the current realities. Arlington applies its gifted education label to only one program – a social studies class. Broadening that definition to bring all advanced course work and enriching activities under one umbrella would help show the entire learning community a different view. For example, advanced music students perform in particular ensembles for music class. Is this not a form of gifted identification? The best athletes compete on travel teams. Is this not a form of talent identification and development? One of the biggest contributors to underrepresentation in gifted programs is the overreliance on measurements of general intelligence, such as IQ tests, where racial disparities are greatest (Gottfredson, 2004). The provision of a large menu of programs and services for students with all different types of gifts and talents can play an important role in addressing underrepresentation. Redefining the problem through a thoughtful assessment of current capacities in areas that are not typically considered part of the gifted education program would be a good first step.

Implications for Policy

In the No Child Left Behind Era of federal education policy, a great deal of state and local attention turned to ensuring that districts and schools did not end up on a list of sanctioned institutions due to students' underperforming on standardized assessments. Coupled with significant budget constraints in schools in the late 2000s due to the global economic recession, gifted education programs were significantly reduced or eliminated in many districts (Finn & Wright, 2015). A new federal education era is now beginning under the Every Student Succeeds Act and there may be some new opportunities for policy guidance in this area.

A significant roadblock to policy guidance in gifted education is the state-by-state nature of decision-making in this field of education. These variances led the National Association for Gifted Children to research and publish an annual state of the states report on gifted education. This report provides useful guidance for advocates of gifted education in states like New Jersey where there is a state mandate for services but little guidance, no certification requirement or process, and no targeted funding. Certain states, like Georgia, provide full state funding of gifted and talented education programs that follow state-mandated policies and procedures. Teachers are certified. New Jersey, on the other hand, cannot even report most categories of information when responding to the annual survey because of how little attention it pays to gifted education programs. Federal grants, then, provide the most likely avenue for districts looking to expand opportunities for CLD students through a gifted education program.

Federal Grant Programs

Historically, federal funding for research and program implementation in the area of gifted education has come from only one source commonly referred to as the Javits Act. Although the program and funding have taken several forms through various iterations of federal education law, this relatively small grant program has been the primary funder of national

research centers on the gifted and talented and experimental programs addressing a range of gifted education issues including identification and equity. In the early 2010s, this funding stream was eliminated during federal budget reductions. Although funding returned in 2014, long-term viability remains a question as the federal education department prepares for the most significant changes since 2001.

In the 1980s, New Jersey was at the forefront of addressing the issue of equity in gifted education programs. A 1994 study by O'Tuel reported positive findings in a Javits Grant-funded program designed by Dr. Susanne Richert for use in 30 schools in eight districts in New Jersey. The program, Academic Programs for Gifted with Excellence and Equity (APOGEE), identified 25% of a school's population for special programming. The increased percentage over typical gifted education programs reflected the inclusion of representative students from typically underrepresented subgroups including racial and ethnic minorities, students with limited English proficiency, and students receiving free or reduced price lunch. Notable to this study, APOGEE students were considered based on teacher, student, or parent nominations and extensive staff development was required for teachers to instruct in the program (O'Tuel, 1994). Although APOGEE still exists in isolated schools and districts, it never scaled across the state as Richert hoped. The reasons are many for the demise of this promising program, but certainly the lack of support in federal and state grant programs played a role.

The best way to combat the uncertainty of a small targeted grant program is to allow moneys from the larger sources of federal funding such as Title I and Title II to be used to support gifted education. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) (2016) reports that ESSA will do just that. The next step then is for professional associations to help local administrators responsible for managing federal grants understand the new guidelines as they

become available. Unlike the era wherein nearly all accountability attention was focused on students performing below proficiency, an opportunity now exists to place equal attention on students performing above proficiency, but that will not happen automatically. Gifted education proponents must advocate for its inclusion in the regulations that are yet to be drafted to support the implementation of ESSA beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

Suggestions for Future Research

Originally, I planned to look at the issues of underrepresentation and institutional racism however my direction shifted. It would be great if future researchers continued exploring these issues within the context of schools, especially in suburban areas where there is a dearth of empirical research in these areas. Most research on the issue of underrepresentation in gifted education programs focuses on urban areas where White students are in the local minority yet dominate the rosters of specialized programs. A common recommendation for dealing with that situation over the past 30+ years has been to disaggregate identification decisions (Ford, 1998; Richert, 1992). That is, students should be considered within various subgroups so that programs represent the full demographic range of the school or district. At the local suburban level in districts like Arlington, however, consideration of this approach raises different questions about equity and reverse racism. Further research on applying disaggregated decision-making practices in suburban areas is needed to determine a process that addresses these concerns while increasing access for CLD students.

The study design was based on methods from prior research that successfully drew thoughts about CLD students out of participants. However, the conditions were not successfully cultivated for the same type of response from the participants in this study. This may have been caused by my prior relationship with the participants and their knowledge that I was interested in

the issue of underrepresentation due to previous discussions and the questions that were posed in the survey. Another fact was likely timing. Since the interviews occurred in the midst of the nomination process, applicants' thoughts were centered on the characteristics and all the considerations related to making decisions about who to nominate. In other words, there was a hyper focus on doing the right thing. Had the questions about imagining a gifted person been given months in advance when the issue of giftedness was further from their thoughts, participants may have gone to their subconscious more easily. Another tactic that could improve the connection between interview responses and the issue of underrepresentation would be to ask participants to draw the person rather than describe or to require that they provide descriptions in various areas including gender, race, ethnicity, age, etc.

Future research in the district should attempt to measure the effects of various interventions that may be attempted to reduce underrepresentation, some of which were already in progress at the time of my study. A notable difficulty in conducting site-based problem-of-practice research is isolating variables to determine which input changes are leading to output changes. District leaders should take care to move methodically when addressing issues described in this study or beyond to allow for careful program evaluation and needs assessment. This problem may also be addressed by asking teachers to consider their definition of giftedness and what it "looks" like at a time that is more removed from the nomination process. It is possible that participants in this study adjusted their responses to a research setting and their knowledge that diversity was somehow an area of focus.

Although the research regarding teacher training is positive, it is incomplete. Little study has been done on the provision of in-service training specifically related to making nomination decisions for gifted education. Even when the topic is studied, it is often done in large districts

with extensive gifted education programs and certified staff. In districts like Arlington and states like New Jersey where districts tend to be smaller and no certification exists, it is much more common for teachers to be charged with identifying and serving gifted students with no background in the field. Further research is needed to determine which interventions can have the biggest impact in such settings so that well-meaning administrators can be efficient in providing support to staff in an environment where gifted education professional development struggles to compete for time and resources.

Conclusion

The research base related to identification for gifted and talented education programs clearly advises program administrators to utilize multiple measures, including teacher input, rather than relying on assessment results alone. However, the literature related to teacher preparation in the field of gifted education suggests that most practicing educators have little training in recognizing the characteristics of giftedness in the students they teach. As a result, teachers tasked with nominating students for such programs rely on anecdotal evidence garnered through their experiences as both students and teachers, preconceptions about gifted education and student characteristics, and other methods not supported empirically to make decisions about who to nominate. With teacher education programs expected to provide pre-service teachers all there is to know about children, pedagogy, and content in a brief program experience, it is unlikely that deep learning in the area of gifted education is coming to this realm in the near future. However, the research indicates that even minimal exposure to gifted education, especially when that exposure is related to the local district's program (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010), has a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of giftedness and abilities to recognize and support students appropriately.

In this study, I found that teachers define giftedness in a variety of ways based on their personal experiences more than anything else and that teachers feel out of the loop regarding the decision-making process. Even those teachers most responsible for making nominations struggle to understand the full process and their role within it. Yet there are promising recommendations in the research that can support the local needs in Arlington.

References

- Ackerman, C. (1997). Identifying gifted adolescents using personality characteristics: Dabrowski's overexcitabilities. *Roeper Review*, 19, 229-236.
- Amos, Y. T. (2010). "They don't want to get it!": Interaction between minority and white pre-service teachers in a multicultural education class. *Multicultural Education*, 17(4), 31-37.
- Bain, S. K., Bliss, S. L., Choate, S. M., & Brown, K. S. (2007). Serving children who are gifted: Perceptions of undergraduates planning to become teachers. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 30(4), 450-478.
- Bangel, N. J., Enersen, D., Capobianco, B., & Moon, S. M. (2006). Professional development of preservice teachers: Teaching in the super Saturday program. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 29(3), 339-361.
- Bernal, E. M. (2002). Three ways to achieve a more equitable representation of culturally and linguistically different students in GT programs. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 82-88.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind experience, and school. Expanded edition*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Callahan, C., Cooper, C., & Glascock, R. (2003). Preparing teachers to develop and enhance talent: The position of national education organizations. National Association for Gifted Children.
- Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., Oh, S. (2013). *Status of elementary gifted programs*. Charlottesville, VA: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.
- Card, D. & Giuliano, L. (2015). *Can universal screening increase the representation of low income and minority students in gifted education?* Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21519>

- Carman, C. A. (2011). Stereotypes of giftedness in current and future educators. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34(5), 790-812.
- Carman, C. A. (2013). Comparing apples and oranges: Fifteen years of definitions of giftedness in research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 24(1), 52-70.
- Carter, P. (2005). *Keepin' it real: School success beyond black and white*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cashion, M. & Sullenger, K. (2000). "Contact us next year": Tracing teachers' use of gifted practices. *Roeper Review*, 23, 18-21.
- Castellano, J. A. (2011). Cultural competency: Implications for educational and instructional leaders in gifted education. In Castellano, J. A. & Frazier, A. D. (Eds.), *Special populations in gifted education: Understanding our most able students from diverse backgrounds* (pp. 383-400). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Castellano, J. A., & Frazier, A. D. (2011). *Special populations in gifted education: Understanding our most able students from diverse backgrounds*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Chamberlin, S. A., & Moore, A. D. (2006). Cognizance of gifted education among elementary-education professors from MCREL member states. *Roeper Review*, 29(1), 49-54.
- Clarenbach, J. (2015). Expanding the view of giftedness: Five districts share a mission to develop underrepresented students on the cusp of excellence. *School Administrator*, 8(72), 18-21.
- Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education. (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education* (M. S. Donovan & C. T. Cross, Eds.). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- Copenhaver, R. W., & McIntyre, J. (1992). Teachers' perception of gifted students. *Roeper Review*, 14, 151-153.
- Corden, A. & Sainsbury, R. (2006). *Using verbatim quotations in reporting qualitative social research: Researchers' views*. York, England: University of York.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Elhoweris, H., Mutua, K., Alsheikh, N., & Holloway, P. (2005). The effect of the child's ethnicity on teachers' referral and recommendation decisions in the gifted/talented programs. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26, 25-31.
- Elhoweris, H. (2008). Teacher judgment in identifying gifted/talented students. *Multicultural Education*, 15(3), 35-38.
- Fiedler, E. D., Lange, R. E., & Winebrenner, S. (2002). In search of reality: Unraveling the myths about tracking, ability grouping, and the gifted. *Roeper Review*, 24, 108-111.
- Finn, Jr. C. E. & Wright, B. L. (2015). The obstacles deterring gifted education. *School Administrator*, 8(72), 34-36.
- Ford, D. Y. (1998). The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education: Problems and promises in recruitment and retention. *The Journal of Special Education*, 32(1), 4-14.
- Ford, D. Y. (2010). Culturally responsive classrooms: Affirming culturally different gifted students. *Gifted Child Today*, 33(1), 50-53.
- Ford, D. Y., Grantham, T. C., & Whiting, G. W. (2008). Culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education: Recruitment and retention issues. *Exceptional Children*, 74(3), 289-306.
- Ford, D. Y., Harris III, J. J., Tyson, C. A., & Trotman, M. F. (2000). Beyond deficit thinking:

- Providing access for gifted African American students. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 52-58.
- Fried, R. L. (2005). *The game of school: Why we all play it, how it hurts kids, and what it will take to change it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Frey, A. (2002). Predictors of placement recommendations for children with behavioral or emotional disorders. *Behavioral Disorders*, 27, 126-136.
- Gentry, M., Hu, S., & Thomas, A. T. (2008). Ethnically diverse students. In Plucker, J. A. & Callahan, C. M. (Eds.), *Critical issues and practices in gifted education: What the research says* (pp. 195-212). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- George, P. & Aronson, R. (2003, March). *How do educators' cultural belief systems affect underserved students' pursuit of postsecondary education?* Honolulu, HI: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.
- Goodnough, K. (2000). Fostering liberal views of giftedness: A study of the beliefs of six undergraduate education students. *Roeper Review*, 23(2), 89-90.
- Gordon, R. A. (1987). Social desirability bias: A demonstration and technique for its reduction. *Teaching of Psychology*, 14(1), 40-42.
- Gottfredson, L. S. (2004). Realities in desegregating gifted education. In D. Boothe & J. C. Stanley (Eds.), *In the eyes of the beholder: Critical issues for diversity in gifted education* (139-155). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Gottfried, A. W., Gottfried, A. E., Bathurst, K., & Guertin, D. W. (1994). *Gifted IQ: Early developmental aspects – The Fullerton Longitudinal Study*. New York: Plenum.
- Hansen, J. B., & Feldhusen, J. F. (1994). Comparison of trained and untrained teachers of gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 38(3), 115-123.

- Hargrove, B. H., & Seay, S. E. (2011). School teacher perceptions of barriers that limit the participation of African American males in public school gifted programs. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34(3), 434-467.
- Hyland, N. E. (2005). Being a good teacher of Black students? White teachers and unintentional racism. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 35, 429-459.
- Jensen, A. R. (2004). The mental chronometry of giftedness. In D. Boothe & J. C. Stanley (Eds.), *In the eyes of the beholder: Critical issues for diversity in gifted education* (157-166). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Johnsen, S. K., Haensly, P. A., Ryser, G. R., & Ford, R. F. (2002). Changing general education classroom practices to adapt for gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 46(1), 45-63.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(2), 129-169.
- Kamenetz, A. (2015). *Who are the 'gifted and talented' and what do they need?* Retrieved September 28, 2015 from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/09/28/443193523/who-are-the-gifted-and-talented-and-what-do-they-need>
- Kaufman, S. B. (January 4, 2012). Who is currently identified as gifted in the United States? *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/beautiful-minds/201201/who-is-currently-identified-gifted-in-the-united-states>
- Klug, B. J. (2004). Children of the Starry Cope: Gifted and talented Native American students. In D. Boothe & J. C. Stanley (Eds.), *In the eyes of the beholder: Critical issues for diversity in gifted education* (49-71). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Latz, A. O., Speirs Neumeister, K. L., Adams, C. M., & Pierce, R. L. (2009). Peer coaching to improve classroom differentiation: Perspectives from project CLUE. *Roeper Review*, 31(1), 27-39.
- Lewis, L. C., Rivera, A., & Roby, D. (2012). *Identifying & serving culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Describing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Matthews, D. J., & Foster, J. F. (2005). A dynamic scaffolding model of teacher development: The gifted education consultant as catalyst for change. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 49, 222-230.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McBee, M. T. (2006). A descriptive analysis of referral sources for gifted identification screening by race and socioeconomic status. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 17(2), 103-111.
- Michael-Chadwell, S. (2010). Examining the underrepresentation of underserved students in gifted programs from a transformational leadership vantage point. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34(1), 99-130.
- Michie, G. (2007). Seeing hearing, and talking race: Lessons for white teachers from four teachers of color. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 9(1), 3-9.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Milner, H. R., & Ford, D. Y. (2007). Cultural considerations in the underrepresentation of

- culturally diverse elementary students in gifted education. *Roeper Review*, 29(3), 166-173.
- Moon, T. R., & Brighton, C. M. (2008). Primary teachers' conceptions of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 31, 447-480.
- Morelock, M. J. On the nature of giftedness and talent: Imposing order on chaos. *Roeper Review*, 19(1), 4-12.
- National Association for Gifted Children. (2008). What is giftedness. Retrieved November 4, 2013, from <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=574>
- National Association for Gifted Children. (2016). Questions and answers about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Retrieved February 5, 2016, from <http://www.nagc.org/get-involved/advocate-high-ability-learners/nagc-advocacy/federal-legislative-update/every-student>
- New Jersey Department of Education. (2010). Gifted and talented requirements. Retrieved November 20, 2012, from http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/g_and_t_req.htm
- Nicotera, A. M. (1996). An assessment of the argumentativeness scale for social desirability bias. *Communication Reports*, 9(1), 23-25.
- Nisen, M. (2015). Tackling inequality in gifted-and-talented programs. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved September 17, 2015, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/inequality-gifted-programs-schools-testing/405013>
- O'Tuel, F. S. (1994). APOGEE: Equity in the identification of gifted and talented students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 38(2), 75-79.

- Pajares, M. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 307-322.
- Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization focused evaluation* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pearce, S. (2012). Confronting dominant whiteness in the primary classroom: Progressive student teachers' dilemmas and constraints. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(4), 455-472.
- Peters, S. J., & Gentry, M. (2012). Group-specific norms and teacher-rating scales: Implications for underrepresentation. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 23(2), 125-144.
- Peterseon, R. R. & Davila, E. R. (2011). Are the walls of injustice tumbling down? *Educational Foundations*, Summer-Fall, 37-58.
- Pope, D.C. (2001). *"Doing school": How we are creating a generation of stressed out, materialistic, and miseducated students*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Powell, T. & Siegle, D. (2000). Teacher bias in identifying gifted and talented students. *The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented Newsletter*, Spring, 13-15.
- Reis, S. M., & Westberg, K. L. (1994). The impact of staff development on teachers' ability to modify curriculum for gifted and talented students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 38, 127-135.
- Renzulli, J. S. (1999). What is this thing called giftedness, and how do we develop it? A twenty-five year perspective. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 23(1), 3-54.
- Richert, E. S. (1987). Rampant problems and promising practices in the identification of disadvantaged gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 31(4), 149-154.
- Richert, S. E. (1992). *Equitable identification of students with gifted potential*. Topeka, KS: Kansas State Board of Education.
- Robinson, A., Shore, B. M., & Enersen, D. L. (2007). *Best practices in gifted education: An evidence-based guide*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

- Rohrer, J. C. (1995). Primary teacher conceptions of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 18, 269-283.
- Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ryser, G. R. (2011). Fairness in testing and nonbiased assessment. In Johnsen, S. K. (Ed.), *Identifying gifted students: A practical guide* (2nd ed.) (pp. 63-74). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Schroth, S. T., & Helfer, J. A. (2008). Identifying gifted students: Educator beliefs regarding various policies, processes, and procedures. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 32(2), 155-179.
- Siegle, D. (2001, April). *Teacher bias in identifying gifted and talented students*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
- Siegle, D., Moore, M., Mann, R. L., & Wilson, H. E. (2010). Factors that influence in-service and preservice teachers' nominations of students for gifted and talented programs. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 33(3), 337-360.
- Speirs Neumeister, K. L., Adams, C. A., Pierce, R. L., Cassady, J. C., & Dixon, F. A. (2007). Fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of giftedness: Implications for identifying and serving diverse gifted students. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 30(4), 479-537.
- Starko, A. J. (2008). Teacher preparation. In Plucker, J. A. & Callahan, C. M. (Eds.), *Critical issues and practices in gifted education: What the research says* (pp. 681-694). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Tannenbaum, A. J. (1983). *Gifted children: Psychological and educational perspectives*. New York: Macmillan.

- VanTassel-Baska, J. (2004). Curricular diversity and the gifted. In D. Boothe & J. C. Stanley (Eds.), *In the eyes of the beholder: Critical issues for diversity in gifted education* (167-178). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- VanTassel-Baska, J., Feng, A., MacFarlane, B., Heng, M. A., Teo, C. T., Wong, M. L., . . . Khong, B. C. (2008). A cross-cultural study of teachers' instructional practices in Singapore and the United States. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 31(3), 214-239.
- VanTassel-Baska, J., & Stambaugh, T. (2005). Challenges and possibilities for serving gifted learners in the regular classroom. *Theory Into Practice*, 44(3), 211-217.
- Westberg, K. L. (2012). Using teacher rating scales in the identification of students for gifted services. In Hunsaker, S. L. (Ed.), *Identification: The theory and practice of identifying students for gifted and talented education services* (pp. 363-379). Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case study research (3rd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix A

Arlington School

REACH: The Program for Gifted and Talented Education

Characteristics of Gifted Children

When considering a student for the REACH program, all of the following characteristics should be clearly evident on a consistent basis across all subjects.

Characteristics

- 1) Has vocabulary or knowledge in a specific area that is unusually advanced for age or grade.
- 2) Grasps concepts quickly, easily, without much repetition.
- 3) Has unusual insight into values and relationships.
- 4) Asks more provocative questions about the causes and reasons for things.
- 5) Evaluates facts, arguments, and persons critically.
- 6) Enthusiastically generates ideas or solutions to problems and questions.
- 7) Flexible.
- 8) Capacity for task commitment in areas of interest.
- 9) Keen sense of humor and often perceives humor in situations others are unaware of.
- 10) Takes intellectual and emotional risks in expressing or trying out original ideas. Shows emotional and esthetic sensitivity.
- 11) Prefers to work independently.
- 12) Intensely curious about many things.

Concomitant Difficulties

- 1) Bored with routine tasks and may refuse to do rote homework.

- 2) May perceive injustices and assertively oppose them.
- 3) May refuse to accept authority and be non-conforming.
- 4) May be impatient or critical of self and others, including the teacher.
- 5) May dominate others because of abilities.
- 6) Has high tolerance of disorder or ambiguity. May be impatient with details or restrictions.
- 7) May resist working on projects s/he is not interested in. Bored with routine or repetitive tasks.
- 8) May make jokes at inappropriate times.
- 9) May be highly individualistic, non-conforming and seem stubborn.
- 10) May interrupt or ignore class activities to pursue interests.

Characteristics were developed by Susanne Reichert, Ph.D., EIC-South, NJ Dept. of Education

Appendix B

Name:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Years teaching:

Years teaching in this school:

Have you ever received any professional development or formal course work in gifted education? If yes, please describe.

1. Please share your personal definition of giftedness.
2. What kinds of characteristics do gifted students typically have?

Please answer the next two questions if they are applicable to your current student rosters.

3. List the names of one or two students on your rosters who have been identified for the REACH program who you think exemplify your definition of giftedness. What characteristics and behaviors do these students demonstrate to help you know they are gifted? Feel free to include details or stories to help.
4. List the names of one or two students on your rosters who have been identified for the REACH program who you think do not exemplify your definition of giftedness. What characteristics and behaviors do these students demonstrate to help you know that they are not gifted? Feel free to include details or stories to help.

Appendix C

Interviewee:

Time:

Location:

Notes:

1. To begin, please describe your understanding of the REACH nomination and identification process.
2. What kinds of professional development have you received related to REACH nomination procedures prior?
3. Take a moment to think about an imaginary gifted person. Try to see the person in your mind. What do they look like? What kinds of things do they enjoy learning about? What kinds of things do they enjoy doing in their free time? If you had to describe this person to a friend, what would you tell them?
4. What characteristics will you look for in students when deciding who to nominate for REACH this year?
5. (Insert question(s) applicable to observation of teachers' nomination decisions)
6. Is there anything else you would like to share?