Exploring the Influence of an Early Talent Development Program on Teacher Perceptions of Giftedness in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

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Abstract

This critical race case study sought to examine the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD. The central research question investigated was how the *Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Program (2009)* influenced teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. Data was analyzed using categorical aggregation to establish themes and patterns among the participants’ responses. Findings revealed the challenges participants experienced with assimilating the program goals of the early talent development program and identifying the characteristics of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students. The findings lead to four conclusions: teacher expectations of students were transformed as a result of observing for student potential; teachers perceived talent as latent versus developing; ongoing and differentiated professional development was vital for teacher assimilation of the *Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Program (2009)* goals; and implicit bias was found to be a contributing factor to deficit thinking which lowered teacher expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

*Keywords:* critical race theory, gifted identification, talent development, culturally and linguistically diverse students, case study
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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

There is an underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students being identified as academically gifted and talented.

The Topic

Gifted and talented programs are referred to as one of the most segregated educational programs (Ford, 2004; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). This challenging statement is derived from grave concerns with the underrepresentation of African American, American Indian, and Hispanic/Latino students, also referred to as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, in gifted education programs (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The National Association for Gifted Children estimates 6% of the student enrollment population to be considered gifted, but existing demographic patterns are not reflected in gifted and talented programs (Esquierdo, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2008).

Research Problem

Through a grant from the United States Department of Education Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Program, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) developed a MSDE Primary Talent Development (PTD) Early Learning Program (2009) intended to demonstrate that a talent development approach is effective in identifying and nurturing high achievement capabilities among low income, ethnically or linguistically diverse, and twice exceptional primary-age children. The goals of the MSDE PTD program include “providing opportunities for all children to develop and demonstrate advanced learning behaviors, including children from groups underrepresented in advanced programs” (MSDE, 2009, p. 5) and to build a profile of student strengths over time. The program, by
design, intended to build teacher capacities in the identification of gifted and talented students from underrepresented populations.

In 2010, Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) adopted the MSDE PTD Program and began a system-wide implementation of the program kindergarten through second grade. As of September, 2016, the majority of kindergartens, first and second grade teachers in AACPS were implementing the MSDE PTD program. This study sought to examine the influence of the MSDE PTD program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. The central research question in this study focused on teachers’ perceptions of giftedness and experiences which have shaped these perceptions.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

Ladson-Billings (1998) claims high quality education, including gifted education programming, has been almost exclusively enjoyed by White students. Ford (1998) further substantiates this idea by claiming equal access to a high quality education is privileged and based upon race. Furthermore, extensive research continues to perpetuate the notion that discrimination in gifted education programs does exist (Bonner, 2000; McBee, Shaunessey, & Matthews, 2010; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). This has lead researchers to posit African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students are overlooked in the gifted identification process in due part because of the subjectivity of teacher recommendations for gifted screening.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

The MSDE PTD program has been adopted by 14 school districts in Maryland. Of the 14 districts, there has been limited empirical research conducted on the impact of the program on the
identification for gifted and talented minority students. Consequently, there has been a lack of data specific to the influences of the program on teacher perceptions of gifted characteristics.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

The MSDE PTD program, by design, intended to build teachers capacity to identify giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. By identifying teacher perceptions of giftedness in minority populations, the school district can determine the influence of the MSDE PTD program.

**Significance of Research Problem**

There are three specific reasons this study should be considered significant. First, the problem of practice has local and national implications. The information gleaned from the study has the potential to impact gifted identification protocols and methods adopted by Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Secondly, there is limited empirical evidence specifically related to the impact of the MSDE PTD program and gifted identification practices. Finally, there are mixed results from similar areas of research related to teacher perceptions of gifted characteristics. Continued research is necessary and beneficial to the further develop the body of knowledge on teacher perceptions and gifted identification practices and talent development approaches.

The underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programs is a significant problem in education and society. Moon and Brighton (2008) assert, the need to serve students from diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds is “fundamental to the purpose of gifted education, which seeks alignment with the dual educational goals of equity and excellence” (p. 447). While *Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) legally ended school segregation based on race, the struggle for equal education opportunities is still ubiquitous to the academic experiences of African American students (Bell, 1979).
Gifted and talented students are evident in all cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic strata, yet there remains evidence of a gross disparity in the representation of CLD students formally identified as gifted and talented.

As described, the problem of practice identified in this study is important to education systems both locally and nationally. There are many stakeholders who play important roles in the gifted identification process, but none are more important than teachers (Moon & Brighton, 2008). Teachers are involved with students on a daily basis, regularly observing the skills and talents demonstrated by students. Hence probing the beliefs and perceptions teachers have of giftedness will provide insightful information into the issues surrounding the disparity outlined in the problem of practice.

Additionally, investigating whether teachers’ expectations are different for CLD students than white, European descent students will provide additional insight into teacher biases which impact the recruitment and identification of minority students. Research has presented mixed findings in this area of inquiry (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Extending the inquiry to investigate the degree to which the MSDE PTD program influences teacher biases has a significant impact on determining the effectiveness of the program. This brings the significance of the investigation to a local level, the MSDE PTD program is a program developed and authored within the state of Maryland and results of the study will likely be included in conversations about program evaluation.

Finally, the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.04.07.02 requires each local school system to establish a process for identifying gifted and talented students. This regulation specifies the identification process must use multiple indicators including potential, aptitude, and achievement. The MSDE PTD Program is currently being utilized by 14 counties in the state as a tool for measuring potential. Any empirical data collected on this program would provide significant information to the
governing body overseeing this COMAR regulation, particularly information gleaned from a study related to equity and access to gifted education.

**Positionality Statement**

As I prepared myself to become a scholar-practitioner, I was cautiously aware of the positionality through which I interacted with the literature. Fennel and Arnot (2008) claim researchers must “be prepared for the personal and professional consequences of turning one’s gaze within” (p. 533). Recognizing that researchers often have “personal attachments to, and views about, their personal interests” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 18) it was important to confront the biases which may influence the research process. Confronting and acknowledging biases early in the research process allows one to mitigate the potential impact. With the recommendations of these authors, I confronted positionality issues related to the prior knowledge I brought to the research process, personal experiences, personal biases, and predispositions related to my race, culture, and profession.

I bring significant experience as a practitioner in the field of gifted education to the research process. I am employed by Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD as an Advanced Learner Programs (ALPS) Central Office Resource Teacher. Recently, Maryland passed a Code of Maryland Regulation (COMAR), 13A.04.07.02, which stipulates all school districts within the state establish a process for identifying gifted and talented students. As an ALPS Central Office Resource Teacher, I supported the development of a Gifted and Talent Identification Policy in order to comply with the COMAR regulation. Experience with this process has potentially swayed and influenced my opinion on the research related to recruitment, identification, and retention of culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students. While the identification methods outlined in the policy paralleled best practices in the
field, as noted by the National Association for Gifted Children, preferences and priority were given to certain methods based on my subjectivity and those on the development committee.

Furthermore, one of my primary responsibilities has been the oversight of a system-wide implementation of a primary talent development program. This program, developed by the Maryland State Department of Education and funded by a Jacob K. Javits Department of Education Grant, intends to build a profile of student strengths over time by “providing opportunities for all children to develop and demonstrate advanced learning behaviors, including children from groups underrepresented in advanced programs” (MSDE, 2009, p. 5). The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Primary Talent Development (PTD) Early Learning Program (2009) aims to demonstrate that a talent development approach is effective in identifying high achievement capabilities, particularly among low income, ethnically or linguistically diverse, and twice-exceptional primary-age children.

Research has shown that teachers’ misconceptions about giftedness influence their ability to identify and recommend students for gifted and talented programs (Moon & Brighton, 2008). My work with teachers and the implementation of the MSDE PTD program has resulted in a bias towards research on teachers’ perceptions of giftedness. The fidelity of the MSDE PTD program rests in the ability of teachers to document targeted behaviors outside the academic areas. These targeted behaviors are coded by the demonstrated level of frequency and complexity. The significance of these coded, targeted behaviors rests in their perceived value for documenting advanced potential in students.

Part of my responsibilities with program oversight is to provide professional development on gifted characteristics and how it may manifest itself outside the academic areas (i.e. fluency and numeracy skills). These professional development programs are designed to transform teachers’ awareness of the potential biases they bring to the gifted and talented identification and recommendation
process. As such, my own biases are potentially affected by limiting my research to include only literature which supports my position. In advocating for the MSDE PTD program, I cannot let my biases prevent me from acknowledging another’s position on the continuum of understanding the purpose and goals of the program.

In the context of my research, I am culturally and linguistically different from the population being impacted by the results of the study. The challenges which culturally and linguistically diverse students encounter in their academic journey may be vastly different than those which I experienced as a student. I am not bi-lingual and I have not been deeply immersed, outside of periodic travel, in a culture where English was not the primary language being spoken. I also do not have the experience of being considered a minority in an educational setting. These cultural and racial differences are significant, but I do not anticipate they will negatively impact my ability to conduct a qualitative study on my problem of practice. As Briscoe (2008) asserts, a person’s demographic group should not be used to limit whose experiences they may research and represent citing instead that it may be “a cause for suspicion not the grounds for indictment” (p.38).

As I further considered potential biases to be confronted during my research, I acknowledged the assumptions I maintained as a former classroom teacher. I could not expunge these experiences and ideologies developed during my tenure. Conceivably, prior experiences and assumptions have merged with new to expand the perspective from which I approached the problem of practice. Having the benefit of considerable research in the area of gifted education has served to balance my extensive experience as a practitioner with that of a scholar.

In order to ensure my biases did not affect my objectivity as a researcher, I conducted extensive research on the identified problem of practice. This included an investigation into streams of literature in
the area of social justice. Research in this area lends itself to providing clarity to the deeply root issues related to equity and deficit thinking mindsets. I also solicited feedback from colleagues in the field of gifted education. Their experience and expertise allowed them to provide critical feedback on the results of a literature review.

Considering one’s positionality is fundamental to being a scholar-practitioner. Machi and McEvoy (2012) assert, biases can be controlled though careful introspection. Identifying and isolating these biases, opinions, and presumptions are a necessary component of neutralizing your position as a researcher. In addition, recognizing the factors which influence your positionality can “be a point of entry to the significance, the ‘why’ of the research” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 19).

Research Questions

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the research question was to gain insight into teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students and how those perceptions may have been influenced by using an early talent development program in the classroom.

Central Research Question

How has the MSDE PTD program influenced teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students?

The goal of this research question was to delve into participants’ experiences with the MSDE PTD program. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) share, asking about interviewee’s experiences with the research topic provides a broad entry to the topic. This also allowed the interviewee to choose which experiences they wanted to speak to first.
Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this section is to apply Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework for explaining the phenomenon of a disproportional representation between races in gifted education programs. A theoretical lens or framework is a guiding perspective or ideology which provides structure or advocates for the groups of individuals in the study (Creswell, 2012b). As such, CRT will be used to illuminate the issues of racism facing minority student access to high quality, gifted education programs. There are three main tenets of CRT being aligned with the problem of practice. The first is the belief that dominant ideologies are never race-neutral (Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009). As such, the application of CRT intends to expose evidence of White, European descent educators’ use of their own cultural norms to recognize giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The second, racism in education regularly occurs and is not aberrational (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The third belief, race is socially constructed and is central to the institutional oppressions facing CLD students, including that of equal access to gifted education programs. These three tenets are used throughout this section to explain how CRT has framed the area of research and supported the development of research questions.

Research & Theoretical Framework Alignment

The area of research for my doctoral thesis examined the relationship between teacher perceptions of giftedness among CLD students and the Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Development Program (MSDE PTD, 2009). The MSDE PTD program is an early talent development program for students in kindergarten through second grade. In districts which adopt the program, students participate in two S.T.E.M.-based learning modules annually. These S.T.E.M.-based modules are designed to provide students the opportunity to “develop and demonstrate advanced
learning behaviors, including children from groups underrepresented in advanced programs” (MSDE, 2009, p.5) while simultaneously offering teachers the opportunity to observe the manifestation of these non-academic talents; which may be indicative of advanced potential. The goals of the MSDE PTD program intend to build teacher capacities in the identification of giftedness among CLD students as well as expand the lens by which teachers perceive giftedness. CRT was significant to this area of research as it examined the structures by which culturally and linguistically diverse students are denied access into gifted programs and hence perpetuated racism in education.

**Origins of Critical Race Theory**

CRT is a relatively modern theoretical framework, emerging in mid-1970 from the work of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars as a new strategy for dealing with the emergence of a post-civil rights racial structure in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It was during this era that a movement toward more progressive stances against racism took shape. This was a result of ideological limitations found within critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Leading scholars and activists such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado promoted a new perspective or lens to examine racism and as such the construct of CRT originated. A central theme among critical race studies is a critical race theorists’ commitment to transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009). Critical race theorists not only try to understand the social situation facing the marginalized groups, they try to transform it for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Ladson-Billings (1998) is most widely recognized for first applying CRT to the domain of education; this lens or theoretical framework became a vehicle for examining evidence of racism in education. CRT as a theoretical framework applied to educational research would dictate that “race
should be the center of focus” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p.30). Subsequently, CRT was used to examine the context by which teachers form perceptions of giftedness in CLD students.

**Racism in Education**

It has been more than two decades since the U.S. Department of Education released *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* (1993), which alerted stakeholders to a disparity in the demographic representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education programs. The findings in this report sparked a sense of urgency among scholars and practitioners to address the failure of schools to fully develop students’ potential, even compelling stakeholders to consider the issue a “quiet crisis” facing education.

This “quiet crisis” in education was partly the result of years of educational reform movements focused on increasing the achievement of at-risk students while neglecting the talents of students, particularly African American and Hispanic students. Consequently, African American students are considered over-represented in special education and under-represented in gifted education (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Ford & Harris, 1990). The disproportional representation has resulted in gifted and talented programs being referred to as one of the most segregated educational programs (Ford, 2004; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010).

Furthermore, while *Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) legally ended school segregation based upon race, the struggle for equal education opportunities is still considered to permeate the academic experiences of African American students (Bell, 1979). Ladson-Billings (1998) even claims high quality education, including gifted education programming, to be almost exclusively enjoyed by White students. This is the result of institutions reifying the idea of whiteness as property, which is the idea that race is socially constructed and as such intertwined with the distribution of rights
and resources. De Cuir and Dixson (2004) substantiate the claim that access to high quality curricula serves to “reify this notion of Whiteness as property whereby the rights to possession, use and enjoyment, and disposition, have been enjoyed almost exclusively by Whites” (p.28).

The aforementioned reports galvanized a case to examine the proposed problem of practice through a critical race lens. If dominant ideologies are never race neutral, investigating the biases which may marginalize gifted CLD students aligns with one of the basic tenets of CRT.

**Influence of Cultural Norms on Gifted Identification**

It is well documented that affluent white students are more likely to be enrolled in gifted programs than minority or disadvantaged students (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Economically and educationally advantaged students have an enriched background which behooves them to score extremely well on norm-referenced tests which are traditionally used as early indicators of giftedness (Barstow & Baldwin, 1998; as cited by Abell & Lennex, 1999). Teachers’ beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students also may have an effect on their perception of giftedness in minority students (De Wit & Gubbins, 2011). Researchers have found that teachers who have received no training in the identification of gifted characteristics were more likely to nominate well-behaved students with good grades as opposed to students with high potential but who may not demonstrated the other positively perceived traits (Gear, 1978). It is even estimated that as many as 90% of children world-wide who were nominated as gifted by untrained teachers were more likely to have been high achieving conformists instead of academically gifted (Betts & Neihart, 1988). These statistics are significant to critical race studies because it reinforces the notion that dominant ideologies influence educational placement decisions.
As discussed, research has shown different cultures have different conceptions of giftedness (Ford & Harris, 1990; Sternberg, 2004). The challenge with identifying giftedness in students of different ethnic backgrounds is that the norms associated with educators own cultures are used to determine giftedness. Peterson (1999) claims, if teachers are from the dominant culture, “no matter how well intentioned they are, their cultural value orientation may interfere with referring nonmainstream [minority] children” (p.95). Sternberg (2004) examines the relationship between culture and intelligence claiming, “Intelligence cannot be meaningfully understood outside its cultural context” (p.325). This was significant to a study employing CRT because the described research area seeks to examine the issues perpetuating a disparity among CLD student representation in gifted programs.

### Institutional Oppressions Facing Gifted CLD Students

One of the goals of CRT is to address inequities experienced by individuals (Creswell, 2012). The proposed study intends to gain insight into teacher perceptions of giftedness among CLD students and the experiences which have shaped those perceptions. The pervasiveness of deficit thinking has been attributed as a principal barrier to the recommendation for gifted identification screening (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2001). As such, the purpose of the study has significant implications to the field of critical studies.

Deficit thinking is a mindset held by teachers which is explored within critical race theory suggesting that minority and low income students’ failure to succeed in school is based on “shortcomings socially linked to the student” (Skrla & Scheurich, 2003, p.107), resulting in a disproportionate placement in low-level classes. Under this premise, researchers claim teacher referrals for gifted screening serves as a gatekeeper; blocking minority student access to gifted programs due to the misperception of gifted characteristics (McBee, Shaunessy, Matthews, 2012).
Deficit thinking is also suggested to be a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2008). The roots of this research are based on the Jenkins (1936) study which found that despite high IQ scores, African American students were still not formally identified as gifted. According to Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) deficit thinking is “negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs about CLD groups that result in discriminatory policies and behaviors or actions” (p.292).

This theory is based on the belief that students are unsuccessful because of deficits or deficiencies in their lives. Culture, family, economic strata, and family are all considered to be causes of deficits or deficiencies. Research has shown that historical assumptions and beliefs about ethnic groups influence current deficit thinking models (Gould, 1981, 1995; Menchaca, 1997; as cited by Ford et al., 2003).

Teacher bias can also serve as a “gatekeeper” (McBee, 2006, p.103), blocking student entrance to the evaluation process for giftedness. Some school districts require a teacher referral or nomination before students can be evaluated for giftedness which demands consideration of the effect of teacher bias on the identification protocols. Keeping with the research that teachers’ biases effect the referral rate, the probability of nomination for CLD students is lower than white and Asian students (McBee, 2006).

Additionally, teacher subjectivity, which results from a teacher bias, can have a significant impact on the disparity among races in gifted programs. Research has shown teachers may “maintain more positive expectations for European American (White) children than for other ethnic minority children” (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007, p.261). The implications of this study reinforce the need to examine the protocols and screening tools used for determining eligibility for gifted identification
screening. The propensity of an educator to maintain higher expectations of Asian American and European American students than African American and Hispanic students may significantly impact the referral of minority students to be evaluated for giftedness. As research has shown, “Teachers may have attitudes and expectations for CLD students which consequently result in these students being overlooked for gifted and talented programs.” (Woods and Achey, 1990; as cited by Elhoweris, 2008, p.26)

**Examining the MSDE PTD through a CRT Lens**

The MSDE PTD program is designed to mitigate the issues related to deficit thinking and gifted identification. Recognizing a broad or multi-dimensional approach for determining giftedness benefits minority student identification, researchers propose a multi-criteria approach for identification (Gardner, 1983; Renzulli, 1978, 2002; Sternberg, Ferrari, Clinkenbeard, & Grigorenko, 1996). A multi-criteria policy provides teachers with a defensible, logical way to identify giftedness in students (Frasier, 1997). This method of identifying giftedness includes a broad variety of data points to inform the decision as opposed to a single score determination. The multi-criteria method may draw upon data presented by one of more of the following criteria: teacher observations, parent or student surveys, alternative assessments, student portfolios, juried performances, standardized test scores, and teacher referrals/recommendations.

The MSDE PTD program fulfills many of the suggested criteria outlined by a multi-criteria identification model. A requirement of the program is to collect student artifacts from talent development modules over three years. The artifacts are intended to capture specific thinking skills which are considered innate in all children, but when demonstrated at the greatest degree of intensity may be indicative of advanced talent. The targeted thinking skills include: creativity, leadership,
inquisitiveness, perceptiveness, resourcefulness, communicative, persistence. As the artifacts are collected, they are evaluated by teachers and given behavioral codes based on the intensity and frequency of response. Ultimately, the artifacts are compiled in a student portfolio which is evaluated during a formal gifted identification process at the end of second grade.

A multi-criteria approach also presents significant benefits; it expands the lens by which giftedness is evaluated or judged. It is also beneficial to minority students and low socio-economic students who are often overlooked by gifted education programs which rely solely on the restrictive nature of intelligence test scores or standardized tests. But there is some controversy with using a multi-criteria approach. This method still requires a reliance on human judgment and subjectivity.

In order to moderate the referral issues related to teacher bias, teachers should be made aware of potential biases which may cause them to view African American children as a collective or group as opposed to individuals (Rhodes, 1992). Through the implementation of the program, teachers are exposed to the diversity of characteristics and qualities demonstrated by gifted learners which may not be traditionally recognized as potentially gifted. Teachers subjectivity is based on their own cultural norms, if students are out of “cultural sync” with their teachers their giftedness will likely go unnoticed (McBee, 2006). Gifted education specialists are trained to recognize the characteristics of giftedness in students, but general education teachers may not have professional knowledge of the many dimensions of giftedness in students across races and ethnic backgrounds Rhodes (1992).

Educators need experiences which increase their awareness of cultural differences among diverse students relative to learning styles, communication styles, and behavioral styles (Ford et al., 2002). A lack of professional development specific to giftedness in CLD students perpetuates the issue of deficit thinking among educators. For example, the characteristics of giftedness may present itself differently
in rural, disadvantaged children and urban, low socio-economic, minority children than middle class white children or affluent minority children. Consequently, the misinterpretation of cultural differences may result in low teacher expectations of students. These misperceptions will continue to impact the identification of CLD students unless teachers participate in professional development which includes gifted education studies with a focus on diversity issues.

The MSDE PTD program intends to fill this gap by building teacher’s capacity for recognizing talent and giftedness from a multi-dimensional perspective. While the MSDE PTD program is designed to fulfill this potential gap in professional knowledge of identifying giftedness in CLD students, there is currently no empirical evidence surrounding the influence it may have on teacher perceptions of giftedness.

**Conclusion**

Establishing a theoretical framework informed and shaped the problem of practice, research questions, methodology, and analysis of findings employed by the researcher. An alignment of theory within these components served to frame the research. With this understanding, a CRT was used as a framework to examine the issues surrounding gifted identification among culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The United States is one of the most racially and culturally different nations in the world with projections showing that the nation will continue to witness demographic shifts in the near and distant future. Conversely, the educational field remains overwhelmingly populated by White, European descent educators with no projections of significant changes (Aud et al., 2011). The National Association for Gifted Children estimates 6% of the student enrollment population to be considered gifted, but existing demographic patterns are not reflected in gifted and talented programs (Esquierdo,
Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2008). It is a significant problem to investigate; children who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and economically disadvantaged (LSES) should have equitable access to gifted education services. This access is hindered by teacher bias and consequently teacher perceptions of giftedness which is the focus of the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introductory Statement

Gifted and talented programs are referred to as one of the most segregated educational programs (Ford, 2004; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). This challenging statement is derived from grave concerns with the underrepresentation of African American, American Indian, and Hispanic/Latino students, also referred to as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, in gifted education programs (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The National Association for Gifted Children estimates 6% of the student enrollment population to be considered gifted, but existing demographic patterns are not reflected in gifted and talented programs (Esquierdo, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2008). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights reports a lack of significant progress in reducing the disproportional representation of some ethnic groups in gifted and talented education (Ford, Moore, Whiting, & Grantham, 2008).

Topic Statement

An awareness of the inequitable distribution of gifted identification among minority students has served as a catalyst for researchers to identify reasons for the disparity. Several factors contributing to the disproportionate reflection of CLD students in gifted education will be presented in the literature review. The presentation of factors does not reflect a priority or ranking for the magnitude of impact.

One factor contributing to the disparity is the claim of biased referral, nomination, and recommendations. Teacher recommendations have traditionally been used as an early indicator for initial gifted screening, but research indicates teachers may exhibit preference for character traits which are perceived as gifted traits (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh & Holloway, 2005; McBee, 2006). As such,
researchers propose the teacher referral process serves as a gatekeeper; blocking minority student access to gifted programs due to the misperception of gifted characteristics (McBee, Shaunessy, Matthews, 2012). Researchers also claim the pervasiveness of deficit thinking (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2008; Grantham, 2002) contributes to the disparity. Deficit thinking, in an educational context, is founded on the premise that minority and low income students’ failure to succeed in school is based on “shortcomings socially linked to the student” (Skrla & Scheurich, 2003, p.107), resulting in a disproportionate placement in low-level classes. A third factor is a dependence on standardized testing and intelligence testing (Ford et al., 2008). Historically intelligence tests have been used as a standard instrument for determining giftedness, but research has shown it is not necessarily an accurate measure of intelligence for all people (Sternberg, 1999).

Context Statement

It has been more than two decades since the U.S. Department of Education released a report, National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent (1993), which alerted stakeholders to the status of gifted and talented education programs. The results of this report sparked a sense of urgency to address the failure of schools’ to assist students in reaching their fullest potential; even compelling readers to consider the issue a “quiet crisis” facing education.

This “quiet crisis” in education was partly the result of years of educational reform movements focused on increasing the achievement of at-risk students while neglecting the talents of students, particularly African American and Hispanic students. Consequently, African American students are considered over-represented in special education and under-represented in gifted education (Elhoweris et al., 2005; Ford & Harris, 1990).

Significance Statement
There are many reasons for which this literature review should be considered significant. First, the content of this literature review has local and national implications. The underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programs is a significant problem in education and society. Moon and Brighton (2008) claim, the need to serve students from diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds is “fundamental to the purpose of gifted education, which seeks alignment with the dual educational goals of equity and excellence” (p. 447).

While Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka (1954) legally ended school segregation based upon race, the struggle for equal education opportunities still permeates the academic experiences of African American students (Bell, 1979). Ladson-Billings (1998) claims high quality education, including gifted education programming, has been almost exclusively enjoyed by White students. Ford (1998) further substantiates this idea by claiming equal access to a high quality education is privileged and based upon race. Van Tassel-Baska, Patton, and Prillaman (1989) assert students whose gifts and talents are masked because they are racially and culturally different or socioeconomically at risk are often neglected or overlooked within programs for gifted and talented students.

Secondly, researchers posit that teachers play the most significant role of any stakeholder in the gifted identification process (Moon & Brighton, 2008). Hence, probing the beliefs and perceptions teachers have of giftedness will provide valuable insight into the issues surrounding the disproportionality among student group representation. Extensive research continues to perpetuate the notion that discrimination in gifted education programs does exist (Bonner, 2000; McBee et al, 2012; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). While there are mixed results related to the impact of teacher bias on the recruitment and nomination of CLD students in gifted programs (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), a review
of the literature may provide significant findings on the subjectivity of teacher recommendation tools. This has the potential to influence policy development and protocols at a local, state, and national level.

Additionally, as school enrollment becomes increasingly diverse, gifted education programs should reflect the demographics of school populations. All students benefit from a system which identifies the talents of students and provides avenues for advancement and enrichment. This “excellence for all” (U.S. Department of Education, 1993) policy serves to strengthen the education system by which all students are provided appropriately challenging academic experiences.

Finally, as America attempts to compete in a global economy, the process by which we attend to the potential talents of students is significant. High-achieving and gifted students should have access to appropriately challenging curriculum and teaching strategies. Global benchmarks and international tests indicate America is losing a competitive edge in claims of academic excellence (Zhao, 2012). Neglecting the issues surrounding gifted identification, is a compounding problem. The anticipated contributions from the gifted and talented community of learners should reflect all demographics, not just the dominant racial or ethnic group.

This literature review served to strengthen the author’s awareness and understanding of issues related to the identification of giftedness in minority populations. The information gathered in the study will provide value to the localized academic community of Anne Arundel County Public Schools which employs the author. The Office of Advanced Studies and Programs in Anne Arundel County Public Schools will utilize the contents of this review as a foundation for a professional development series called *Growing Gifts*. This series intends to expand teachers’ understandings of common gifted identification practices and corresponding issues related to these practices.

**Organization**
This literature review has been divided into four sections, each supporting the claim of an underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted education. The first section provides a historical context to gifted identification policies and practices in the United States. The second focuses on method for identifying giftedness, including intelligence testing and teacher nominations. The third section focuses on cultural biases and its corresponding relationship to a deficit thinking mindset which may influence teacher perceptions of giftedness. Finally, the literature review will conclude by reviewing the noted causations for the continued disparity of CLD student representation in gifted education as well as advocacy arguments for mitigating these causations.

**History of Gifted Education**

Attention to giftedness among children began at the turn of the 20th century, when advancements in psychology brought both empirical and scientific credibility to the field of gifted education. This turning point in public understanding and support for gifted education was most notably marked in 1870 when a St. Louis, MO school system introduced the concept of acceleration for students who demonstrated advanced academic talent (Davis & Rimm, 2004). This practice was quickly adopted by other school systems as an early method for adequately meeting the needs of advanced learners. By 1920, approximately two-thirds of the school systems in large cities had instituted specialized programming for gifted students (Davis & Rimm, 2004).

While acceleration practices were being established in many large school districts, no theoretical construct or common instrument was used to determine giftedness or intelligence until Leta Hollingsworth and Lewis Terman established early empirical and scientific credibility to the field of gifted education. The work of these two pioneers, resulted in a common understanding of the
characteristics of gifted behavior, definitions of gifted behavior, and guidelines for school programming (Jolly, 2004; as cited by Jolly, 2009).

By the mid-20th century, attention to gifted education was noticeably intermittent; mirroring the “pendulum swing of society’s priorities” (Jolly, 2009, p.37). The launch of Sputnik in 1957 served to revitalize the public interest in identifying outstanding talents among American students (Passow, 1960) by drawing on national interest in global competitiveness. Sputnik’s launch signaled a momentary Cold War victory for Russia, thus rousing America’s pursuit of excellence (Davis & Rimm, 2004; Jolly, 2009). Consequently, the U.S. government passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in part to afford “better provisions for our talented youth” (Barbe, 1959; as cited by Jolly, 2009). The act authorized funding for U.S. education initiatives for four years, including the field of gifted education.

This period marked a time of intense federal involvement in gifted education policy which resulted in the establishment of organizations such as the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). Universal programming recommendations emerging from government and non-government organizations, such as the NAGC, included (National Association for Gifted Children, 1960):

- All schools should be required to make special provisions for the education of gifted, talented and creative students, using higher order thinking.
- State departments of education assume greater responsibility for gifted education.
- Teachers should acquire a better understanding of the nature and needs of gifted students.
- More sensitive means of identification should be developed, especially to find those students from diverse and underserved populations.

In 1972 the U.S. government drafted its first national survey of gifted education, referred to as the Marland Report of 1972. The crafting of this report served as a major milestone in gifted education,
marking the modern era of practice and policy (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, Selby, & Wittig, 2008). This report also provided the first federal definition for giftedness which catalyzed many state and special interest groups to accommodate for the individual differences in gifted and talented students. Public Law 93-380, boosted the credibility of gifted programming goals by recognizing the special needs of gifted and talented students, releasing additional federal funds to provision for the needs of this population (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, et.al, 2008).

The Marland Report of 1972 brought attention to a loss of America’s “best and brightest” talent. The report concluded that the identification of gifted and talented students was hampered by funding shortfalls for identification practices and hostility or apathy among teachers and school leaders. Attitudes and perceptions of elitism have long plagued gifted education, consequently stakeholders’ acceptance of the research on the specialized needs of gifted students is likely biased. A significant claim emerging from the report concluded that “many talented children perform far below their intellectual potential” (p.6) as a result of shortfalls in the identification process. The report further claims that gifted minority students are dually oppressed, both academically and socially, by these biases.

Due to a perceived loss of talent among minority students (U.S. Department of Education, 1993), the United States Congress drafted legislation specifically focused on identifying and serving the talents of minority and low socio-economic status students. This legislation, the Javits Act (1988), was passed as a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to support the development of talent in schools. Funding allocations were extended to research and initiatives specific to serving and supporting under-represented populations in gifted education.

The current state of gifted education continues to face growing concerns with the underrepresentation of CLD students. Educators are in agreement that gifted and talented students are
evident in all cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic strata (Kitano & Kirby, 1986, as cited by Elhoweris et al., 2005). Yet, Ford and Harris (1990) report less than 2% of the 4,000 articles discussing gifted and talented education were specific to culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students. This study was conducted again in 2000, with similar results.

**Defining Giftedness**

There are a range of terms used to describe superior aptitude or skills. Gagne (1985) describes gifted as an individual who demonstrates above-average aptitude in creative and intellectual abilities. While talented describes an individual with a skill which can be developed or refined. Clark (2013) claims giftedness indicates an advanced, highly integrated, and accelerated development of functions.

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) website defines gifted individuals as “those who demonstrate high levels of aptitude or competence in more than one domain” (NAGC, 2008). Similar definitions are provided by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a U.S. Department of Education reform policy. This policy states giftedness is demonstrated by students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, and leadership capacity or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided.

**Methods for Identifying Giftedness in Children**

Gifted identification methods vary widely from one state to another as well as one school district to another due to a lack of federal engagement in standardizing a policy for gifted identification. Historically, gifted identification procedures were based on psychometric measurements such as intelligence, academic aptitude, and academic achievement (Frasier, 1997). Even with accepted flaws in this method of identification, this standard has continued to guide and influence identification practices.
(Jenkins-Friedman, 1982; as cited by Frasier, 1997). Additionally, teacher referrals and nominations have been utilized for early talent detection. The following two sections will describe the impact of both intelligence testing and teacher referrals on the problem of practice identified in this literature review.

**Intelligence and Giftedness**

The epicenter of intelligence testing is found in France in the 1890’s. A researcher by the name of Alfred Binet (1857-1911) devised an instrument which intended to distinguish “dull” children from normal children (Davis & Rimm, 2004). The research of Binet was foundational in the development of a series of tests to measure cognitive abilities.

Ultimately the work of Binet would be incorporated into the research of Leta Hollingsworth (1886-1939) and Lewis Mason Terman (1877-1956) who both contributed widely to the field of intelligence. Hollingsworth was one of the first to use the Stanford- Binet Intelligence Test. Contrary to the intended use of the test on “dull” children, Hollingsworth applied the test to “bright children by way of contrast” (Silverman, 1992, p. 23) with astounding results. This was a monumental discovery of the time, resulting in assertions that intelligence and giftedness were wholly intertwined. Terman also believed intelligence testing was a critical component for identifying giftedness individuals. He posited that intelligence was an inherited trait, and should be identified in order to help people students reach their fullest potential. The work of Terman became highly influential in the early identification practices of gifted education.

Hollingsworth, being a contemporary of Terman, held some similar views on the measure of intelligence, but varied in her stance of the heredity influence of intelligence. She didn’t disagree with Terman’s views, but she held strong opinions that one’s environment and education influenced intelligence potential (Silverman, 1992). Hollingsworth’s interest in intelligence and giftedness led her
to be an early advocate for differentiated learning experiences as a way to meet the social and academic needs of gifted students. She was also an early advocate for developing the talents of highly capable children, championing for nurturing the intelligence potential of children. Ultimately, through her work as an early advocate of gifted students, she is recognized for coining the term “gifted”.

Additionally, Terman is recognized for providing two major contributions to the field; a longitudinal study of intelligence, which is still highly cited in contemporary research, and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. The longitudinal study was significant in the field of gifted education because it established precedence for identifying giftedness based on intelligence (IQ) scores.

Science has established that genes play an important role in intelligence, but environment also effects intelligence, as noted by Hollingsworth. Furthermore, some genes “express their traits only when provoked by environmental influences” (Sousa, 2009, p. 9). This fact has significant implications on studying giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students. As researchers have presented, different cultures have different conceptions of giftedness (Ford & Harris, 1990; Sternberg, 2004). The challenge with identifying giftedness in students of different ethnic backgrounds is that the norms associated with educators own culture is used to determine giftedness. Sternberg (2004) elaborates on the relationship between culture and intelligence by inferring, “intelligence cannot be meaningfully understood outside its cultural context” (p.325).

Although research has shown there is a strong correlation between cognitive ability and educational achievement (Deary, Strand, Smith, & Fernandes, 2006) the implications of early reliance on psychometric testing to identify giftedness is still widely contested. Researchers such as Sternberg (1995), Renzulli (1978), and Gardner (1983) present new perspectives on the identification of talent and giftedness among students which does not rely solely on the measure of IQ. These new perspectives or
views of intelligence resulted in a paradigm shift in the field of gifted education. Thus, the process for identifying giftedness began to look beyond achievement and IQ to search for potential (Baldwin, 2005). While this was not a new understanding, Hollingsworth championed for it at the turn of the century, but talent development models and approaches to gifted education reforms had not been widely practiced.

Following on the paradigm shift in the way intelligence and cognitive abilities were measured, researchers began to expand their theories. One such theorist, Robert Sternberg, theorized there are three types of intelligence: analytical, creative, and practical. The permutations among the three types of intelligence produce different patterns of giftedness. Robert Sternberg’s (1995) research proposed a Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, meaning there are multiple facets of intelligence. This model of identifying giftedness in different domains was unprecedented. Throughout much of the 20th century, intellectual giftedness had been defined as a uni-dimensional construct (Sternberg, 1995). Consequently, Sternberg’s theory of multiple loci of intellectual giftedness urged one to expand the lens by which giftedness is viewed or considered.

Howard Gardner also proposed a new model of intelligence. Gardner (1983) viewed intelligence as the ability to solve problems or create products that are valued within one’s culture. He also found theories related to a uni-dimensional view of intelligence singularly limiting, proposing eight distinct areas in which a student could be adept. Gardner’s experience with students demonstrating strength in one dimension and deficits in another led him to explore the concept of different aspects of cognition. In his theory of multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983) the eight types of intelligence her proposed are as follows: verbal-linguistic, mathematical-logical, visual-spatial, intrapersonal, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, and musical-rhythmic. Gardner’s conception of a pluralistic view of intelligence stands in opposition to a classic psychometric view which is determined by ability testing. His definition
for giftedness was based on an individual’s exceptional talent or competency in one or more of the domains of intelligence.

Joseph Renzulli (1978) argued the definition and description of giftedness should not be limited to a person’s intelligence. He claimed three characteristics or qualities are essential to demonstrate giftedness: above average intelligence, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. These three qualities, together, form the foundation of Renzulli’s model, the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness. Renzulli believed the intersection of these qualities are necessary to demonstrate giftedness.

Particularly significant to Renzulli’s research in the field of intelligence and gifted is his contribution to the continuum of defining giftedness. He believed giftedness is demonstrated in degrees of intensity based on the restrictions of the identification metrics or definition criteria (Renzulli, 2011). This is significant to the field of gifted education because of the current conundrum facing policy reforms. As districts seek to standardize definitions of gifted, decisions are raised about the scope of giftedness. For example, is eligibility for gifted programs limited to academics and intelligence or does it extend into cultural and performing arts or even leadership skills. The problems facing policy makers relate to the subjectivity of measurement criteria. Renzulli (2011) claims, “As the definitions of giftedness extend beyond those abilities clearly reflected in tests of intelligence, achievement, and academic aptitude, it becomes necessary to put less emphasis on the opinions of qualified human judges in making decisions about admission to special programs” (p.82).

**Teacher Referrals and Nominations**

Recognizing a broad or multi-dimensional approach for determining intelligence can be used to identify giftedness, some researchers proposed a multi-criteria approach for identification (Gardner, 1983; Renzulli, 1978, 2002; Sternberg, Ferrari, Clinkenbeard, & Grigorenko, 1996). A multi-criteria
policy provides teachers with a defensible, logical way to identify giftedness in students (Frasier, 1997). This method of identifying giftedness includes a broad variety of data points to inform the decision as opposed to a single score determination. The multi-criteria method may draw upon data presented by one of more of the following criteria: teacher observations, parent or student surveys, alternative assessments, student portfolios, juried performances, standardized test scores, and teacher referrals/recommendations.

A multi-criteria approach also presents significant benefits; it expands the lens by which giftedness is evaluated or judged. It is also beneficial to minority students and low socio-economic students who are often overlooked by gifted education programs which rely solely on the restrictive nature of intelligence test scores. But there is some controversy with using a multi-criteria approach. This method requires a reliance on human judgment and subjectivity. Teachers’ beliefs about CLD students may have an effect on their perception of giftedness in minority students (De Wit & Gubbins, 2011). A gap in educators’ professional knowledge of the field of gifted education compounds this issue. Additionally, a lack of specific training and knowledge in the area of gifted characteristics among minority students also leaves teachers at a disadvantage for recognizing talents among CLD students (Bonner, 2000).

The teacher referral process is a common step in the gifted identification process. A referral is considered a nomination to be evaluated for giftedness (McBee, 2006). The referral process requires the subjectivity of a teacher to determine if a student demonstrates the characteristics of giftedness.

Researchers (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) interested in the issue of teacher subjectivity conducted a quantitative meta-analysis to examine whether teachers expectations differed among ethnic minority students. Prior research in the field had presented differing results on this issue. Some studies found
teachers held higher expectations for Asian and European American students (Coates, 1972; Sbarra & Pianta, 2001; as cited by Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) while other studies determined there was no difference in teacher expectations among different ethnic groups (Kehl, Bramble, & Mason, 1974; Pigotti & Cowen, 2000; as cited by Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The results of the Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) study found teachers “maintain more positive expectations for European American (White) children than for other ethnic minority children” (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007, p.261).

The implications of this study are significant. The propensity of an educator to maintain higher expectations of Asian American and European American students than African American and Hispanic students may significantly impact the referral of minority students to be evaluated for giftedness. In addition, “teachers may have attitudes and expectations for CLD students which consequently result in these students being overlooked for gifted and talented programs” (Woods and Achey, 1990; as cited by Elhoweris, 2005, p.26).

Teacher bias can serve as a “gatekeeper” (McBee, 2006, p.103), for students to be evaluated for giftedness. School districts, requiring a teacher referral or nomination before students can be evaluated for giftedness, must consider the effect of teacher bias on the identification process. Keeping with the research that teachers’ biases effect the referral rate, the probability of nomination for CLD students is lower than white and Asian students (McBee, 2006).

**Mitigating Issues Related to Identifying Giftedness in Minority Students**

**Moderating Teacher Bias**

In order to moderate the referral issues related to teacher bias, teachers should be made aware of potential biases which may cause them to view African American children as a collective or group as opposed to individuals (Rhodes, 1992). Teachers subjectivity is based on their own cultural norms, if
students are out of “cultural sync” with their teachers their giftedness will likely go unnoticed (McBee, 2006). Gifted education specialists are trained to recognize the signs of giftedness in students, but classroom teachers are less likely to have this capability based on a lack of formal training in the area (Rhodes, 1992).

**Deficit Thinking**

Deficit thinking is also suggested to be a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2008). The roots of this research are based on the Jenkins (1936) study which found that despite high IQ scores, African American students were still not formally identified as gifted. According to Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) deficit thinking is “negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs about CLD groups that result in discriminatory policies and behaviors or actions” (p.292).

This theory is based on the belief that students are unsuccessful because of deficits or deficiencies in their lives. Culture, family, economic strata, and family are all considered to be causes of deficits or deficiencies. Research (Gould, 1981, 1995; Menchaca, 1997; as cited by Ford et al., 2002) shows that historical assumptions and beliefs about ethnic groups influence current deficit thinking models.

**Opportunities to Overcome Deficit Thinking**

Educators need experiences which increase their awareness of cultural differences among diverse students relative to learning styles, communication styles, and behavioral styles (Ford et al., 2002). A lack of multicultural educational experiences perpetuates the issue of deficit thinking among educators. Consequently, the misinterpretation of cultural differences may result in low teacher expectations of students. These misperceptions will continue to impact the identification of CLD students unless teacher
preparation programs include gifted education studies with a focus on diversity issues. In 2006, it was reported that only 3% of institutes of higher education provided gifted education courses (Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2008). A lack of teacher training to recognize and nurture the talents of CLD students propagates the problems associated with identification. Increase of opportunities for teacher training in gifted characteristics and identification techniques is an important step towards addressing the disparity concerns.

**Summation**

In this chapter, an overview of literature regarding the history of gifted identification practices and protocols was presented. Within this literature review, specific research related to the problem of practice identified in this study was examined. The following areas of research were included: barriers to identifying giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students, teacher bias related to gifted identification among underrepresented populations, and teacher expectations and referral rates related to gifted education programs for minority students. What follows is a thesis statement which has captured the significance of the problem of practice and a thesis analysis which serves as a summation of the chapter.

**Thesis Statement**

Culturally and linguistically diverse students are underrepresented in gifted education programs. Multi-criteria identification methods, evaluated for cultural bias, must be incorporated into gifted identification processes in order to overcome the inequity.

**Thesis Analysis**

Extensive research has shown discrimination in gifted education programs does exist (Bonner, 2000; McBee, Shaunessy, & Matthews, 2012; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). African American, Hispanic,
and American Indian students are being overlooked in the gifted identification process. The federal definition of giftedness clearly recognizes “outstanding talents are present in children from all cultural groups” (U.S. Department of Education, 1993), but an inequitable representation of cultural groups persists. The pervasiveness of this issue is also being mirrored in advanced placement courses (Ford & Harris, 1990).

Identification protocols which heavily rely on standardized scores are found to be ineffective in identifying giftedness among culturally diverse populations. Bonner (2000) reports the design of most standardized tests are influenced by the language, culture, and experiences of the individual’s constructing the test. Leaving a reliance on culturally biased measurements to place CLD students at a great disadvantage.

Classroom teachers need assistance with the nomination process included in many gifted identification procedures. In order for culturally diverse students to gain access to gifted programs, they must pass through the gateway of the teacher referral and nomination process. As McBee (2006) presented, educators may be serving as a “gatekeeper” instead of a gateway for CLD students. Teachers’ perceptions of giftedness are of critical concern during the teacher nomination process. The view of giftedness can be considered very subjective due to broad field of descriptors and definitions for giftedness. Teacher training specifically focused on the characteristics of giftedness from different cultural perspectives is essential in order to overcome the issues related to underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2008; Moon & Brighton, 2008). A gap in educators’ professional knowledge of the field of gifted education reduces the likelihood of teachers to recognize the talents of minority students (Bonner, 2000).
It is unfortunate that educators may interpret differences as deficits, dysfunctions, or disadvantages (Ford, et al., 2002), but it is a reality which is impacting CLD representation in gifted programs. The persistent dilemma of deficit thinking towards culturally diverse learners is perpetuated by the limiting factors identified in this literature review: reliance on standardized measurements, indecisive descriptors for giftedness, and culturally biased identification protocols.

The factors related to the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted educator appear to be equally significant in their impact on the problem. It is difficult to determine which factor has the greatest magnitude, placing it as a priority to be addressed.

This literature review confirmed the pervasiveness of the problem is not diminishing. Although there is an abundance of research related to the problem, it appears to be stagnant. Over the last two decades, new ideas and perspectives do not appear to be emerging. In order to make progress and eliminate the disparity between CLD students and White or Asian students in gifted education programs, new approaches or gaps in the literature must be identified.

The following chapter will describe the methodology, research questions, research design used to develop the case study.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of the proposed research question was to gain insight into teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students and how those perceptions may have been influenced by using an early talent development program in the classroom.

Central Research Question:
How has the MSDE PTD program influenced your perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students?

The goal of this research question was to delve into participant’s experiences with the MSDE PTD program. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) share, asking about interviewee’s experiences with the research topic provides a broad entry to the topic. The question was designed to provide opportunities for participants to share in-depth thoughts and perceptions related to the characteristics of giftedness.

Research Design

Research design establishes a framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Creswell, 2012). The design of the study defines the type; for example, descriptive or experimental. Case study research is one of several forms of social science research. Case study, an important type of ethnography, is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this section is to describe the basic overview, philosophy, and approach to data collection and analysis of a case study research design. Additionally, this section will describe the alignment of case study method to the unit of analysis, sampling strategies, and research questions selected for the thesis.
**Research Tradition**

Case studies are intensive analyses and descriptions of a system bounded by time and or space (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The need for case study research rises out of a necessity to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2014). As such, it is used to contribute to the knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, and political phenomena. Merriam (2009) claims the case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent.

There are differing schools of thought about the purpose for selecting a case study as a means of research. Stake (1995) suggests that the case is a unit of study to be examined when “it is something we do not sufficiently understand” (p.133). As a result, Stake views case study not as a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. Simons (2009) further substantiates the views of Stake (1995), positing case study should not be seen solely as a method but as a design frame that may incorporate a number of methods. Contrasting opinions to this view are presented by Yin (2014). Yin views case study as a research process to employ when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Yin also suggests a case study is a preferred method when the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon.

Emerging from these philosophical stances on case study are three distinct criteria to be used in comparing case study to other methodological approaches. The first, the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions. The second, the researcher has no control over behavioral events. The third, the focus the study is a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

A qualitative case study is generally an approach to research which enables to researcher to explore a phenomenon within a specific context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This method ensures that the central idea of the study is explored through multiple lenses, allowing
different facets of the phenomenon to be revealed. The foundation for this approach is based on a constructivist paradigm, also referred to as interpretivism. Rules or practices of this paradigm dictate the researcher is to construct or build their own reality based on the data. As such, approaching the problem of practice through the conceptual framework of a constructivist establishes the expectation of involvement and engagement between the researcher and respondent; engagement between the researcher and respondent provide a valuable opportunity to construct meaning from the study (Ponterotto, 2005). While the goal of a constructivist researcher is to make sense of the study, the researcher is not evaluative of the results or findings. The constructivist researcher accepts that knowledge gathered from the research may take on different meaning depending on positionality and biases; it is subjective and contextualized.

There are critics who dismiss case study as an instrument of serious inquiry due its interpretivist nature. This leaves some researchers questioning the legitimacy and validity of the findings, thus leaving case study as a perceived second rate method. Thomas (2010) claims these critiques are founded on the notion there is an inability to generalize the findings emerging from case studies. As Thomas (2010) notes, “Generalization is at the core of natural scientific method” (p. 576). Thomas elaborates on this statement claiming, generalizability is significant to replication and from generalizability comes induction. Yet, Thomas (2010) claims case study remains a powerful means of research.

Macklin and Whiteford (2012) expand on this critique, citing interpretive qualitative research does not withstand scrutiny upon comparison to standard conceptions of scientific reason; scientific reason being exemplified as a “neutral, impartial, universal, and generalizable approach to knowledge generation” (p. 87). Macklin and Whiteford (2012) ultimately counter these claim sharing their belief that case study should not be subjected to comparison of standard conceptions of scientific reason. They
posit the trustworthiness of qualitative research is established through an active engagement and involvement between the researcher and research process.

Constructivists approach the case study inquiry process with a priori knowledge. As one’s epistemology guides and frames the nature of one’s reality it ultimately influences data interpretation. Consequently, case study is richly descriptive and is generally more exploratory than confirmatory; researchers typically seeking to identify themes and categories as opposed to proving relationships or testing hypotheses (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

Researchers weighing in on the uncertainty of case study research suggest the particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic nature of the model makes it a good design for studies focused on revealing knowledge which may not otherwise be accessible (Merriam, 2009). As Merriam shares, the product of a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a case or bounded system. This intense, holistic description or narrative is richly influenced by the phronesis of the inquirer.

Kinsella and Pittman (2012) claim the juxtaposition of phronesis in scientific inquiry implies a powerful form of interpretation which may supersede the need for generalizability to justify legitimacy. As Thomas (2010) claims, exemplary knowledge gained through phronesis rather than theory in the study of cases should be the goal. The practice of enacting phronesis is informed by the following four processes: phenomenological reflection, cognitive reflection, tacit reflection, critical reflexivity (Kinsella & Pittman, 2012). This idea of phronesis, practical wisdom or professional knowledge, as a means of validating case study findings is founded on the idea that “intellectual virtue implies ethics” (Kinsella & Pittman, 2012, p.3).

While case study does not imply a specific type of evidence, the results should present focused narratives organized around substantive topics of the case study (Yin, 1981). Merriam (2009) also shares
that a case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis, but there are some commonly recommended methods of analysis. These include categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, drawing patterns, and naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1995; as cited by Merriam, 2009).

**Alignment of Case Study to Research Questions**

In seeking to understand the influence of the MSDE PTD program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, I employed a qualitative study. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry aimed at gaining insight into the lived experiences of individuals. Within this qualitative design, a case study methodology was the primary tool used to study the complex phenomenon of teacher perceptions of giftedness. A case study strategy was an appropriate selection for this study as it focuses on an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). The bounded system in this study, referred to as the MSDE PTD program, is a state sponsored program which intends to build teacher capacities in the identification of gifted and talented students from underrepresented populations. According to Yin (2003), a case study is an appropriate design when the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why”. As such, the inquiry into how the talent development program has influenced teacher perceptions aligned itself with the selected methodology.

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources (Yin, 2003; as cited by Baxter & Jack, 2008). Potential data sources for this study may include semi-structured interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts. Semi-structured interviews are an instrument which provides an opportunity for interaction between the researcher and participant. Since the problem of practice was developed around the awareness of under-representation among certain cultural groups in gifted education programs, interview questions were designed to draw out teacher perceptions and
understandings of giftedness, talent, and potential. Teacher recommendations are historically a component of gifted identification processes. Misperceptions of gifted characteristics or cultural stereotyping occurring emerged through an exchange of dialog between the researcher and participant.

**Participants**

The goal of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students and how those perceptions were influenced through the implementation of the *Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Development Program* (2009). Participants of the study included classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through second grade. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling so as to intentionally select a group of people which best informed the researcher about the proposed research topic (Creswell, 2013). Criteria for selecting teachers included teachers who were currently teaching in grades K-2 and teachers who had implemented the program modules. Additional criteria included teachers at schools which represented a diversity of racial, cultural, and socio-economic demographics.

Targeted recruitment for participants took place via a Call for Participants email sent to targeted schools throughout the county. The targeted schools were selected in order to capture a diverse sampling of demographics both of teachers and school populations. The Call for Participants stated the criteria for participation, explanation of the study, compensation, and contact information. Additionally, the Call for Participants announcement included the following statement: “Selection for the study is not guaranteed and will be based on screening questions. This brief screening will occur via a 5-10 minute phone call.” This method of recruitment ensured equal access and participation to the study and eliminated issues of coercion to participate.
A total of 9 teachers comprised the population of the study. The participants were selected so as to represent a diverse population of schools both socio-economically and racially. Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews which resembled a guided conversation rather than a structured inquiry (Yin, 2014). This method offered participants the opportunity to extend their reflective responses to the interview questions. As Yin (2014) explains, this source of data collection provides the researcher the opportunity to capture an interviewee’s own sense of reality.

Vulnerable Population

The vulnerable population in this study included teachers of primary grades (K-2). This population was selected because of their relevant experience with the MSDE PTD program. They were considered a vulnerable population because they were required to implement this program and the program, by design, intended to impact their perceptions of giftedness among CLD students. Since the program was explicitly designed to influence teachers’ perceptions, they may have hesitated with their candor. Additionally, for a number of years I was responsible for the professional development series related to the MSDE PTD program. Teachers from specific regional clusters within my school district were very familiar with me and this may have had an impact on the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

Creswell (2013) warns a study conducted in one’s own workplace may “introduce a power imbalance” between the parties of the study. I believed structured and specific interviewing protocols protected the interviewees from negative consequences. These protocols included clearly established methods of securing the data and protecting the identity of the participants.

Data Collection
Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted virtually so as to offer flexibility of time and location for the participants. The data from the semi-structured interviews was collected with a digital voice recorder device. As described, the setting for data collection occurred virtually at a time designated by the participant. The interviews were designed to last 60-90 minutes.

Confidentiality of participants was secured by affixing a pseudonym to each participant during the recorded interview session. This pseudonym was reflected in the transcripts. No identifiable information was associated with any interview information.

Security of all data files was maintained through encryption and password protection software. Storage of the printed transcripts was maintained in a locked file cabinet drawer. These methods were in support of appropriate data security measures suggested Creswell (2013). Once the data was collected it was stored in an encrypted computer file and/ or locked file storage bin. Transcripts of the interviews were made available to the participants upon written request.

Data Analysis

Saldana (2013) describes coding as the act of symbolic assignation to data which both summative, salient, and essence capturing (p.3). This is significant as coding is not intended to reduce data into simple categories, but distilled into purposeful categories from which meaning can be captured. Richards and More (2007; as cited by Saldana, 2013) describe coding as “not just labeling, but linking” (p. 8).

Categorical aggregation of data was used within this study to establish themes and patterns among the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2013). This method began with the organization of data into reasonable, meaningful units which were coded by short phrases that denoted a category. The coded
data was then be summarized in a manner to reflect its essence or theme. Finally, the data was interpreted and synthesized to identify patterns or relationships.

**Trustworthiness**

Merriam (2009) describes the role of a qualitative researcher as having an interest in understanding how people interpret and make sense of their lived experiences. Qualitative inquiry or research is rooted in the social sciences where the emphasis lies in observing and documenting individual accounts of specific phenomenon. The nature of this type of inquiry lends itself to easy critique for its measures of trustworthiness, validation, and verification of results.

The process a researcher undertakes when entrenching themselves into the lived experiences of participants requires the researcher to construct a protocol which ensures a reliability of the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985; as cited by Creswell, 2013) suggest a set of terms to standardized and align the language of validation within a qualitative study and those corresponding terms in a quantitative study. They are as follows: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability. To demonstrate credibility, Eisner (1991; as cited by Creswell, 2013) recommends credibility to a persuasive weight of evidence confirmed by peer reviews or “competent others” (p.246).

Validation of the study was achieved through a prolonged engagement with the participants. Prolonged engagement allowed the researcher to account for a rich, detailed description of the participants’ experiences with the MSDE PTD Program. Additionally, the researchers’ personal history with the MSDE PTD program added value and accuracy to the study as suggested by Creswell (2013).
Chapter 4

Findings

This study examined teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students and how those perceptions were influenced through exposure to the Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Development Program (2009). This study sought to answer the following central research question:

1. How has the MSDE PTD program influenced teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students?

The answers to this question were discovered through semi-structured interviews of teachers with experience teaching the MSDE PTD Early Talent Development Program (2009). Interviews were transcribed at which time coding of interview data was completed. Categorical aggregation of the data was used to establish themes and patterns among the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2013). This method began with the organization of data into reasonable, meaningful units which were coded by short phrases that denoted a category. The coded data was then summarized in a manner to reflect its essence or theme. The process of constant comparison pushed the researcher to refine codes and look at the overarching ideas presented in the data. Lastly, the data was interpreted and synthesized to identify patterns and relationships. A total of four conceptually distinct categories emerged from the coding which provided answers to the research question: Experiences Which Shaped Participant Understandings, Recognizing Potential, Equity and Access, Stakeholder Buy-In.

A brief overview the study participants’ is provided, followed by an outline of the findings and the case description. The researcher intended to allow the voice of the participants to be clearly represented in this chapter. The themes presented frame different lenses through which the central
research question was examined. These lenses were applied through a series of interview questions which centered around the tenets of critical race theory and its significance on gifted and talented identification. A description of the context of this case study was provided in Chapter 1 and the setting explained in Chapter 3.

**Study Participants**

*A Call for Participants* (Appendix C) was distributed via email to 148 teachers in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD. A total of nine teachers participated in the study. Eight participants were women and one male. All of the participants had three or more years of experience implementing the MSDE PTD modules. Six of the participants partook in at least one professional development seminar on the philosophy and foundation of the program while three had no formal training to support their understanding of the program prior to implementing the lessons. Of the nine participants, no one attended university, state department or district professional development courses on the characteristics of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. All participants in the study self-identify as Caucasian. The participants of the study will be referred to by the following pseudonyms: Michael, Maya, Norah, Bonnie, Carol, Jade, Sara, Anna, Diane. A summary of the participants’ teaching experience and professional knowledge relative to gifted and talented education is described within the responses as it is significant to the participant responses. What follows the case description is a first person response of the nine participants.

**Findings**

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed and synthesized into four categories: Experiences Which Shaped Participant Understandings, Recognizing Potential, Equity and Access, Stakeholder Buy-In.
Case Description

A description of the context of this case study was provided in Chapter 1 and the setting explained in Chapter 3. What follows the case description is a first person response of the nine participants. The central research question sought to describe the influence of the MSDE PTD program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. The influence of the program centered around four categories: ‘Experiences Which Shaped Participants Understandings’, ‘Recognizing Potential’, ‘Stakeholder Buy-In’, ‘Equity and Access’. The first category, ‘Experiences Which Shaped Participants’ Understandings’, is defined by teachers’ descriptions of their experiences with the MSDE PTD program. There are two properties identified in this category: Perceived Purpose and Perceived Benefits. The second category, ‘Recognizing Potential’, is defined by teachers’ perceptions of the influence they exude over developing student talent and potential. There are two properties associated with this category: ‘Identifying Gifted and Talented Characteristics’, ‘Teacher Capacity’. The third category, Equity and Access is described as teacher bias relative to the program goals of access and equity for all students to have opportunities to demonstrate advanced learning behaviors, including children from groups underrepresented in gifted education programs. There are two properties associated with this category: Cultural Bias and Learner Profiling. The fourth and final category, ‘Stakeholder Buy-In’, is defined by teachers’ perceptions of how the program has influenced their awareness of talent identification and development. There are two properties associated with this category: Organizational Engagement and Professional Development.

There are three goals of the MSDE PTD (MSDE, 2009, p.5) program which will serve a framework through which the participant responses are described. The three goals are:
• Provide opportunities for all children to develop and demonstrate advanced learning behaviors, including children from groups underrepresented in advanced programs.

• Build a profile of student strengths over time, PreK-second grade, which can be used to document the need for differentiated instruction and gifted and talented education.

• Provide models of the Essential Strategies of analyzing attributes, questioning, and creative problem solving scaffolded across the early learning years which are transferrable to new learning situations.

**Michael**

The conversation with *Michael* began with an overview of his teaching experience. He has taught kindergarten for nine years in a Title I school, but has recently been working as an Instructional Coach. *Michael* also shared he has received no formal training in the characteristics of giftedness nor has he participated in district professional development courses on the implementation of the MSDE PTD program. *Michael* reported he has received support from the Advanced Learner Programs Office which monitors and supports classroom teachers with the implementation of the program. *Michael* indicated the support he received was in the form of instructional coaching, modelling of lesson delivery, and artifact coding. *Michael’s* level of professional knowledge in gifted characteristics is significant to the study as teachers are expected to identify, document, and nurture potential in students as these potentials may be early indicators of talent and giftedness in students. At the time of the interview, *Michael* had been promoted to a new position which does not include teaching responsibilities. His responses reflect his years of service as a teacher, but at times these responses noted a change in his status as a classroom teacher. This change in position afforded *Michael* professional learning
opportunities which established new understandings of the role of talent development in the AACPS Gifted Identification Process.

*Michael* began by sharing his experience with teaching the MSDE PTD lesson modules as a part of the AACPS curriculum and reflections on his level of preparedness to teach the modules. The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with *Michael.* So ever since the MSDE PTD program was implemented...and I don’t remember when that was...I implemented both modules in kindergarten. One [module] was predominately about shapes and the other one was about wind. When asked the reasons he felt he was being asked to implement the program Michael claimed:

*As a classroom teacher, I honestly just thought it was a requirement. I thought it was just something I had to do, something I had to gather artifacts for to turn in and just something I had to do. As a resource teacher I now understand that it is to identify gifted; it is a component to identifying gifted and talented students.*

When the participant was asked if he attended any professional development courses he said he did not recall attending any courses. The participant was prompted further, being asked if they recall receiving any information about the reasons for implementing the program or information related to the district Gifted and Talented Identification process. *The first year I did ask for assistance and someone did come out and pretty much did the lessons for me and I observed, but I do not recall if I heard what the information was going to be used for.*

When *Michael* was asked which of his experiences with the program, if any, had an impact on his teaching practice his response was framed through standards or achievement measures *So, a lot of the things I’ve noticed I was able to tie into standards, Common Core. For example, if we were doing 2-D and 3-D shapes in kindergarten I was able to tie in the attributes that was required in the modules.* So
I was able to kill two birds with one stone so to speak. This perspective is significant, a function of the MSDE PTD programs is to document capabilities relative to learning behaviors and not necessarily achievement of learning standards. This notion of competing goals, capabilities or potential versus achievement, is reflected in this exchange:

I was in a Title I school and I think that stereotypically Title I schools students have a difficult time with concepts more than others and I did notice that I thought it was hard for my students. But there were a couple of kids that did really well; they did stand out to me because they did better than their peers by far.

When Michael was encouraged to elaborate on the term “they did better”, he shared:

I think that one was the Attribute Train. I don’t think that many of my students were able to identify one or to change one attribute on the next train. So the ones that did, I would continue the train and they were able to keep going.

Michael’s response indicated his expectations of students were influenced by observing responses to MSDE PTD activities. When asked about his expectations of students he stated, Oh yeah, if I noticed the students, I knew they needed to be pushed a little more I did give them harder tasks especially if we were doing shapes.

As noted in this exchange, the participant candidly conveyed biases towards student potential among students of low socio-economic status. In order to delve more deeply into Michael’s perceptions, he was asked if he had any ELL students in his kindergarten classes. He confirmed there were ELL students in his classroom each year. When asked how reading fluency might mask giftedness he shared:
I think of one in particular, she was fresh from another country. We only had one ELL teacher, so I don’t feel she was able to get as much help as she needed. For her in the program, I think she got an “R” the whole time because she just didn’t understand it.

As the identification of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students can be complicated by teacher views and bias, Michael’s comment may insinuate language may prohibit talent spotting.

Seeking clarification, Michael was asked if he found oral language directions were prohibitive or if they impeded a students’ ability to complete the task. He asserted:

\begin{quote}
I think of the All About Attribute Train because it is one that comes to mind or the Gatekeeper Game, they would manipulate the shapes and sort shapes. They got that concept, but understanding the direction of finding similar attributes or finding one different attribute, they were unable to do that.
\end{quote}

Performance tasks and the corresponding student artifacts from the modules provide data to support screening for gifted and talented education programs. Michael was asked if he believed the MSDE PTD program influenced his awareness of giftedness.

\begin{quote}
As a classroom teacher I knew that other grades were implementing the program, but I didn’t know what they were implementing. Creativity, I now know, is one of the behaviors to look for and now knowing that, if I were still teaching kindergarten, if I saw that in one of my students I would be able to take that to another grade level; to use that in their portfolio. I wouldn’t have done that before because it wasn’t one of my behaviors to look for. As a resource teacher, yes; in my role I now know the importance of the PTD program. I think the Growing Gifts campaign is
\end{quote}
really beneficial. Once teachers, me included, fully understand the importance, even beyond K-2, it will be a strong component.

In order to seek clarification, Michael was asked to describe how his perceptions as a resource teacher changed from that of a classroom teacher. This was framed by inquiring if he thought resource teachers had a broader awareness which ultimately changed perceptions. He agreed sharing that as a classroom teacher, I only looked at a small piece. While this response tangentially provides clues into how the program influenced the participant’s awareness of giftedness, it revealed the perceived benefits of professional learning relative to the program. When prompted further, being asked to define giftedness he replied:

I don’t think I had a definition of giftedness. I hate to be stereotypical, but I feel like in a Title I school we don’t hear giftedness very often. So the students that...differentiated instruction wise...my students F&P level is supposed to be at a level D at the end of kindergarten. I felt that I was fortunate if I had kids who were at the end of E. So, giftedness wise I felt my kids were where they needed to be. I didn’t really have anyone above grade level.

Michael’s response further exposes the complications when identifying giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students resulting from teacher bias. Slocumb and Payne (2000) assert students from middle class families are often afforded the opportunity for enriching learning experiences that enable their capacity for learning to reach optimal levels. These researchers expound on this notion, claiming children are not afforded enrichment opportunities because of the challenges of poverty. Trying to extrapolate more information relative to Michael’s expectations of Title I students, he was asked if he believed a deficit mindset was pervasive in a Title I school causing teachers to work in remediation mode as opposed to enrichment. While this question is layered with
generalizations, it attempts to unveil the nuances of Michael’s bias which may have affected his perceptions of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students. Michael’s response:

Definitely there is something about the remediation in kindergarten. In my kindergarten class I felt that over half the kids that came to me were not prepared for kindergarten. Such as, not understanding how to hold pencils, some kids did not know their ABC’s. Things like that, things I would have expected kindergarteners to know when they entered. Now as a resource teacher, I feel like there is a match now. I see who has qualified as GT and advanced. So at my school there may have only been one or two in the whole school who may have actually been identified. There was always one or two students who would stand out, both academically, socially, but it wasn’t something that I would say we didn’t take a lot of time to pin-point it, it wasn’t our focus. The focus was the majority were low.

To capitalize on his experience as a resource teacher Michael was asked if thought more professional development on the MSDE PTD program would influence the awareness of giftedness in a Title I school. He had strong opinions on the benefits of professional development:

Oh absolutely, like I said, I think the Growing Gifts. I think if a staff watches the Growing Gifts, it would open up their understanding of what each staff member can do in order to be a part of the process. I would have never considered a cultural arts teacher to be a part of the process until now.

These comments are noteworthy as they still reflect bias even though he lauds the benefits of professional development related to recognizing gifted characteristics. It was during this thread of
conversation Michael suggested student’s portfolios would benefit from artifacts collected outside the classroom. He suggested artifacts from cultural arts teachers would build a better portfolio.

Michael taught a diverse population of students both in race, socio-economic status, and language. When asked if he believed cultural norms influence perceptions of giftedness his initial response focused solely on socio-economic status, implying socio-economics was more of a contributing factor to stereotypes than culture or race.

I don’t think so. I think it was socio-economics. The families from the school where I was at were either claiming disability or just didn’t want to work and I think that is where the stereotypes lie, where the assumptions come from.

Research has shown that teacher beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse students may also have an effect on perceptions of giftedness in minority students (De Wit & Gubbins, 2011). Michael’s reaction can be added to the growing body of evidence that teacher beliefs do in fact have an effect on their perceptions of giftedness. When was asked if he believed the lessons provided children language to express themselves in a way that may show advanced talent or advanced potential he shared:

I do think that for my population it was too hard for a lot of the kids and because of the difficulty we weren’t able to really go beyond the lessons. I will say their favorite game was Gatekeeper. We played that over and over and over again and most of them grasped what was expected from that lesson. But it took more than one time. So, part of the module you introduce it, then you do it, then you write down your observations of things. So, based on those observations, at that time, no one or not many of them exceeded the expectations. Now on the tenth time playing the game they definitely did.
This response resonates with insinuations that outstanding abilities do not exist without clear verbal expression. While research has shown “deep thinking and powerful reasoning do not always correlate with clear verbal expression”. (Chapin, O’Connor, and Anderson, 2003, p. 13)

**Maya**

*Maya* has been a teacher for 17 years. *Maya*’s professional experience includes teaching in multiple state institutions and parochial schools. At the time of the interview, *Maya* had been teaching first grade for two years, but indicated she had MSDE PTD experience with kindergarten in addition to her first grade experience. *Maya*’s experience with the MSDE PTD program is very unique. She teaches in a school in which 90% of the students are from military families. Most students are not enrolled at her school for more than two years. As such, the longitudinal goals of the program, collecting artifacts over four years, may be perceived differently by *Maya*. *Maya* disclosed she has received no formal training in the characteristics of giftedness nor has she participated in district professional development courses on the implementation of the MSDE PTD program.

The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with *Maya* She began the conversation by reflecting on opportunities afforded to her as an observer or kid watcher during the lessons:

*I have used it [the MSDE PTD program] for four years now. The two lessons we use with first graders are Design Dilemma and Bubble-ology. I like those lessons and I think those lessons are very thought out. I particularly like the Design Dilemma because it lets me see things that I would not normally see in the classroom setting. I don’t normally teach hands on kinds of things like a building activity. And so I see how the children are thinking as they are putting together their house. For example, I see that some children are very detail oriented. I don’t normally see*
this in their normal classroom routines. I see a lot of children are able to think through multiple steps. Just looking at their general behavior and demeanor in the classroom, you don’t normally see that.

A desired outcome of the MSDE PTD program is kid watching for advanced thinking behaviors during instruction of the lesson modules and other subject areas. Maya was asked if her interactions or expectations changed as a result of what she observed in her students. She pondered over the notion of responding to talent or potential. Her response reveals a shift in her awareness of her expectations based on observed behaviors:

I don’t think I do anything. [pausing] I guess it is a lot of how my interactions are with the children and then what I begin expecting from them. I see that they’ve done this in this setting, so then in other settings I’m expecting to see that from them. [pausing again] I push them to see that.

Maya was asked to clarify her statement on student expectations and if those expectations changed as a result of her observations. She shared, “It is like I see something I didn’t before. I would have never thought this child could do this before, but now I see it and now I want it all the time.”

Maya’s experience with the program seemed to have a transformative effect on her expectations of students. In order to further examine the transformative effective of the program, she was asked describe the ways in which the program influenced her practice:

I’ve been more open to seeing a lot of the behaviors in other settings; where initially I was strictly focusing on those two lessons. Now that I am more comfortable with those focus lessons and what I am looking for I see those behaviors in a lot of places. So, I don’t feel so married to those lessons if you will. I feel like I can see it elsewhere too. Now I am not afraid to say, ‘hey, that was a very creative idea or that was a very perceptive comment’.
When asked how the program has supported her understanding of giftedness, Maya’s comments again revealed the transformative effect of the program on her perceptions of student potential and talent. She shared:

*I guess I had come through my teacher training as a young teacher with certain ideas of what giftedness was. Really I think what I was looking at as giftedness was well behaved. Now I see giftedness in a lot of different areas and sometimes they are not very well behaved [laughing]. I guess it is a combination of everything. I have three children of my own and I’m able to see their strengths and their weaknesses as a parent and as a teacher I look at my own children. But also my years of experience where I’m looking at the children who don’t necessarily conform to the student who sits quietly. I’m not so quick to say, ‘well that child is not very bright’. I’m more quickly able to say, ‘you know, I see their communicative behavior’. I am able to recognize they are very bright. I’m not going to label the child who sits quietly and follows every one of my directions as gifted. Whereas maybe 15 or 20 years ago I would have.

As the conversation moved on the exploring the perceived impact of language on gifted identification, Maya reiterated her limited experience with English language learners, but offered her opinions. Maya was asked to consider if the design of the lessons offer English language learners an equal opportunity to demonstrate talent. Maya speculated:

*I would like to think so. As long as they can understand what they are doing. I do think that a lot of times when student’s language is limited, they do show a lot of adaptable skills; skills that you don’t or wouldn’t normally see from someone who is a native English speaker. You know, I guess it would depend on how little language they have at that point. I think that would be the tricky part. For example, just today I did Bubbles, What Will Make it Pop. I think that once we start
doing it they could catch on, but maybe at first depending on their proficiency in English they might not have been quite on board. I think after a few trials they would have caught on pretty quickly.

When asked if she had given any thought to how cultural norms might influence the identification of giftedness, Maya stated she had given some thought to this topic. Her response revealed an awareness of biases which influence teaching. Maya felt she represented a more dominant culture. She shared that she felt classrooms were designed for certain types of learners with learning styles based on the teacher’s preferred or dominant style. Maya paused for several moments during this point of the conversation, perhaps to organize her thoughts. She ventured on to share:

My culture is so pervasive I am not necessarily even aware of other cultures, which makes it very difficult to understand other cultures. I try to be cognizant of it. I try to be aware of it, but there is so much that goes on probably under my radar that I just don’t know. I know there are cultural things going on in other families, but I can’t quite put my finger on it. I feel like it is something just underneath the waves. [chuckled]

Ultimately, Maya communicated the program has influenced her perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students by expanding her view on giftedness.

As the conversation concluded, Maya was offered the opportunity to speak openly about the MSDE PTD program. She gave voice to her concern with the behavioral coding system referred to as REPI Coding. In her opinion the coding system is very subjective. This opinion is reflected in the following comments:

I am very cognizant of the fact that a lot of times you slip into a mode when you are grading and scoring. You see a name. You know that name normally does really well. So I think I score it that
way. I see a name that comes across the pile and I know this is not a kiddo who does well and I score it that way. No matter how hard I try, I feel that sometimes I do probably favor a kiddo because I know this kiddo knows how to do this. I’m positive and I know that’s not really quite fair. I like the program we’re teaching because it does help us to see there is more than one way of being a sharp cookie, but in terms of finding true giftedness. I don’t know about that.

**Diane**

*Diane* has been teaching for 17 years. The entirety of her teaching experience has been in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. She has taught several grade levels including kindergarten, third, and fifth grade. *Diane* was a former Talent Development teacher in the county. Her experience as a Talent Development teacher is significant to the study as the MSDE PTD modules were piloted by Talent Development teachers prior to a formal adoption of the program by the Board of Education. Talent Development teachers were the recipients of professional development targeting gifted characteristics, kid watching, and talent development strategies. As a result, Talent Development teachers implemented MSDE PTD lessons and supported teachers at pilot schools with the logistics of MSDE PTD portfolio management. At the time of the interview, *Diane* was no longer a Talent Development teacher nor was she primary teacher responsible for implementing the modules; her responses reflect her years of experience with the program.

The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with *Diane*. She began the conversation by sharing her experience with teaching the MSDE PTD lesson modules as a part of the AACPS pilot program.

*I was introduced into the program seven years ago. It was being used by classroom teachers’ kindergarten up to second grade as a match for a kind of gifted identification. As a teacher*
implementing the program I collected the data and saw the impact and sort of responses I was getting. From the lessons I saw what kind of strengths students had as well and how I could bring out the responses in other situations as well.

When asked to elaborate on her understanding of the lesson modules and program goals she shared:

*It is being used to purposefully illicit responses from students so they are showing certain thinking behaviors. We want to students to use these behaviors...and we want to make sure that we are providing opportunities for students to demonstrate that and as teachers we want to be able to identify that. Because we know that not every student comes to school with the same background information and knowledge and skill set as everyone else. We want to make sure that we providing equal opportunity for all students to demonstrate these behaviors because we know that are indicative of possibly being advanced or gifted. So, we want to make sure that we are kind of commanding these types of responses. We also want to use these lessons as a way to shape the students. The vocabularies that we’re using that are inquisitive and being persistent then they can transfer these behaviors to other content areas as well. And as a classroom teacher I can also be looking for those behaviors in the classroom as well.*

Emerging from Diane’s recollection was the notion of collecting data and transferring this data beyond the lesson modules. This is significant as it reveals knowledge of the program goals; building a profile of student strengths over time as a tool for recommending differentiated instruction and gifted and talented education. When further recounting her experiences with data collection and student observations she shared:

*As the students are doing the actual module I’m looking for a particular behavior from all the students. I might be doing an activity and I’m looking for how specific they are with completing
this particular activity. I will possibly collect an artifact. This can be a piece of paper that the students have completed or I may be scribing to the things students are saying or watching the things that students are doing and recording those. When recording an antidotal note I code those and then I place them in a portfolio. It is my goal when I’m teaching other content areas to have a certain type of behavior in mind so that if I see that a student demonstrating a certain behavior I try to record that as well.

Diane’s response revealed a shift in her thinking as a result of implementing the MSDE PTD lessons. In order to more clearly understand the influence of the program on her perceptions and pedagogy, she was encouraged to elaborate on which experiences had the most impact on her teaching practice. It appears the most significant shift reflects the perceived value of thinking behaviors and potential over achievement.

*I think that when I look at students doing any kind of activity they really are demonstrating some of these behaviors, but it is difficult to always be aware as their classroom teacher. I’m constantly looking for a grade or mastery of content or mastery of a particular skill. And so sometimes it is difficult to see beyond and see behaviors. And so I have to be really very deliberate when planning an activity to think about different behaviors the students might demonstrate. So yes, I try to keep that in the back of my mind. I want to make sure that during these primary years that I’m providing equal opportunity for all students to be able to engage in these types of behaviors. They are coming in and they might have very different skill set based on their home environment.*

As the conversation moved on, Diane was asked to describe and define giftedness.
I think there are several different kinds of giftedness so it’s very difficult to give one definition of giftedness because people can be athletically and they may have the ability to be very sport oriented. Students might be gifted musically. Where music comes more naturally - carry music and know music in their head. And then there are those academic gifted students where they have a natural curiosity for things. They want to investigate things on their own. They sort of have an intrinsic motivation to sort of look beyond what is being done in the classroom; they ask a lot of questions. They might have a really sophisticated sense of humor. So, giftedness is a very broad area to describe over a variety of different children and different skill sets. Sometimes people overlook students who might be particularly creative or imaginative as being gifted because they don’t see that as necessarily an achievement or an academic achievement.

During the conversation, Diane appeared to grapple with defining giftedness. This may have occurred because she felt a specific definition was expected. In order to scaffold the inquiry, Diane was asked how a student’s reading fluency might mask giftedness. Following this question, she was also asked how limited language proficiency might create a boundary for identifying giftedness. Her responses are very revealing as they seem to espouse a commitment of the program goals.

So, there may be students who are reading very fluently and may not necessarily be gifted because they have that rote memorization ability, they know the words and they can read fluently. People think they might be “gifted” because they are strong readers. Then you might have others who are able to think outside of the box. Who are creative thinkers but they don’t have that rote memorization of words. And so I think that sometimes that blocks giftedness because we think that somehow if they can’t read, then they can’t necessarily be gifted. That is
one of the reasons why this program is important because we are looking beyond those academic skill sets. That’s a challenging question because teachers are very focused on language. If a child is unable to communicate with us, how are we able to establish whether or not they are gifted? I think a lot of that comes with the interactions that they have with other students. A very difficult role for teachers is to really observe the students in ways they there are interacting with other students. So, I think it becomes a teacher’s job to really be an observer of behaviors rather than academic skills.

Throughout the conversation, Diane referenced behaviors and thinking skills, when asked the significance of these behaviors, she described them as innate in all students.

All students have...all persons are born with a sense of curiosity and wonderment. And, just because you might not have a particular academic skill set does not necessarily mean you might not be creative or might not wonder about a lot of things. So these behaviors, these seven behaving behaviors, are indicative of what potentially could be giftedness. We want to make sure that we are looking for them and developing them. I think it is important for all teachers to foster these behaviors in their students and to encourage them as well as all academics skill sets as well.

Diane’s responses for many of the questions revealed an assimilation of the principles of talent development and kid watching. Teachers are encouraged during the MSDE PTD lessons to become keen kid watchers, documenting traits of perceptive thinkers, creative thinkers, resourceful thinkers and others as opposed to focusing on attainment and mastery of content. Trying to identify the motivation for her commitment, she was asked about the benefits of professional development. Specifically she was asked if she would understand the vision of the program modules without having attended some form of
professional development. Her response indicates the importance of professional development in her buy-in for the program.

*I think even with having the professional development it still took me time to buy into the program and actually understand how things worked. I attended the professional development and was not so sure about this program. I didn’t necessarily see the purpose of the artifact collection. The first time I ever did this program, I didn’t even collect artifacts. I was just using the lesson because I thought ‘oh, this is kind of a fun lesson’. Not really understanding the purpose behind everything. And you know I had professional development on it. It was not until I looked at it again and tried to do it again and had conversations with people. Then I had additional professional development on it and understood it more. Still at that point I’m still saying ‘okay now I can see a little more bit of the value here of the portfolio’. And then it still took a little bit longer for me to understand ‘oh okay, I understand the meaning here’. So I think without professional development it’s just an extra lesson that doesn’t necessarily have a purpose to it. Other than ‘okay, I have to do this and I’m not really sure why I have to do this’.

But as long as you take the professional development... it is very important and not just having it once but hearing it and seeing it multiple times.

In addition, *Diane* explained her commitment to the program was not solidified until the student data collected from the modules was included in the AACPS Gifted and Talented Identification Process. Interestingly, her response revealed a departure from her previously espoused commitment to thinking behaviors as indicators of talent and giftedness.

*Well, the buy in was...I think that we are constantly being asked to do many different things and it is always one more thing. Until this particular program was tied to the gifted identification
process I saw it as ‘okay this is fine, I can sit here, I can code these artifacts and I can pretend these words are important in other content areas’. But until I could I say ‘okay this is really about helping to identify students’ I didn’t buy into the program. Lots of children are not coming into to school with that strong educational background. They are really coming into school not knowing very much because they have not had the support at home. I learned that it is my job as a classroom teacher to try to foster all of this for all students. So, I think that my ahh-ha moment really wasn’t until I recognized that there was a purpose for doing this. The purpose for doing this was tied to something that made more sense, and then I saw the value in it. And then once I saw the value - I could then extend it to other places and other content areas.

It appeared from Diane’s response she believed some groups of students enter school at a deficit. Meaning, they enter school deficient of pre-requisite skills. It is unknown from her responses if this bias was specifically directed towards culturally and linguistically diverse students, but the comment does yield additional insight into teacher biases which may impact the recruitment and identification of minority students. When was asked if her expectations of students changed as a result of seeing children engaged in the MSDE PTD lessons she shared:

Yeah, I mean it sort of did. Because I realized that if they could do this then may then maybe I wasn’t giving them enough challenge. Maybe they needed an activity to really engage them in demonstrating those skills and so if I saw that a student was doing something well then I would want to foster that.

Before concluding the conversation, Diane as asked how she felt the MSDE PTD program influenced her perceptions of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students. Her
response revealed her own experiences with a gifted identification process which presumably influenced her perceptions:

Well, I grew up in an affluent community where giftedness was given to a person based on one data point and it was harsh and it was very traumatizing to certain students. I can say on a personal level that it was very traumatizing to me as well. I think this program provides an opportunity for teachers to look at students in a different way versus achievement. It gives the students an opportunity to show they have the ability to ask questions and show creativity and do things outside of just the being able to read and do my math homework. I think it could help. I do think though that it is a learning process. I don’t think that the first couple of years that I had students…I am not necessarily sure that I gave all my students the benefit of the doubt you know. So, I think that it is a learning curve and I think that all teachers should have professional development on it and have professional development more than once. I do think that it does help and I think it helps the students fit into that giftedness definition by thinking skills not just academic skills.

Sara

Sara has a broad set of teaching experiences accumulated over 30 years. She began her career teaching in remote villages in Africa for several years before returning to the United States to teach in several different Montessori schools. She also worked for several years in an Expeditionary Learning school. The diverse experiences Sara has accumulated lend themselves to a macro view of educational policies and programs which provide a unique perspective to her reflections. A noticeable characteristic of her responses is the apparent desire or need to speak for the collective voice of her colleagues as opposed to just her opinions. This broad and seemingly inclusive voice was compelling and uniquely
different than other conversations with participants. Sara also used the opportunity to offer criticism of the program and its roll out in the county. This feedback and information targets the importance of professional learning around the goals and philosophy of the MSDE PTD program.

The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with Sara. She began the conversation by sharing her experience with teaching the MSDE PTD lesson modules as a first grade teacher:

Well, I began the program in its first year for first grade. I would say over the course of the three years that I have taught it, each year I became obviously more familiar with it. So each year I also learned the nuances of what I needed to bring to it as a classroom teacher that were not a part of the actual program in order to meet my students needs and the outcomes of the program. So, I think the initial experience was bumpy. The training I received was weak to fully implement the program. But I would say overall, over the course of the years, I learned how to really meet the goals of the program.

A significant part of the conversation with Sara focused on professional learning. At several points in the conversation she alluded to gaps in her understanding which needed to be addressed in order to implement the program. When asked if these gaps were about the philosophy or the management of the program she responded:

It wasn’t really the philosophy; it was about the actual implementation of the program as to when we were asked to do it. I think in the beginning it was very vague. It was very unclear and teachers were told ‘here’s the program, here’s the training for it’. It was a two hour training and they said they would come out in January or February to look at our results. So we weren’t really given a lot of details of how to go about it; it was just ‘here’s your binder and have a go’.
So the implementation was at a time when we were already being asked to do so many more additional things in the classroom that it was tough to find the time in which to do it because it wasn’t explicitly in the curriculum. It was just vaguely stated you have some time here in November you might want to try to implement the program during that time. So that was a tough roadblock right there with implementing the program the first year. The other tough area was materials. I’ve got to bring up materials. I think that it is assumed that people can just gather all of these materials and things quite easily and yeah I taught in a community where I didn’t have a problem getting materials but I am also familiar with other teaching communities where that was difficult. And then that added that stress of not have materials is piled on the teachers. So I think the initial implementation didn’t feel as if it was well thought out in terms of the realities of what a classroom teacher is being asked to do. I mean it kept us from doing, I think, a purposeful and meaningful job with the program.

When asked to elaborate on the idea of a meaningful implementation, Sara shared:

That would mean you really, fully understand the purpose of the program and why. In all fairness, I have to be honest, I came into it already understanding and having a full grasp of the ideas of the thinking in terms of posing divergent questions to the children and having that open questioning model. You know...my Montessori background...my Expeditionary Learning background already afforded me with that mindset and so my classroom was already geared towards that and many of the lessons I did already reflected that, but when I took my training I was surrounded with teachers who this was something new and so the implementation of a program like this was very awkward and difficult for them to do. So then the fact that it wasn’t a cohesive part of our curriculum threw teachers even more. As a team leader I would be asked to
support my team to implement this program, but I actually felt I had to even teach them how to
speak this way, how to approach these materials and see the purpose behind them. So that’s
when I say about the initial implementation it was really teacher capacity. It wasn’t necessarily
for myself, but I was charged with leading.

The fidelity of the MSDE PTD program is based a systematic implementation in each grade, Pre-
K through second grade. Stakeholder buy-in is achieved through a collective understanding of the
program goals and it is a key to the success of a systematic implementation. Of the three program goals,
building a profile of student strengths perhaps requires the greatest shift in teachers thinking. Teachers
are asked to observe behaviors associated with potential and advanced capabilities outside of academic
grades. Sara’s comments point to the difficulty some teachers may experience when asked to kid watch
for potential versus measure for achievement:

I think that the culture is...we are so scripted and I think that there was a culture within my team
of teachers that was ‘if it is not in the manual I don’t know how to do it’. There is an openness
that my colleagues were uncomfortable with that if there was a child who didn’t understand what
they were being asked....they struggled to find alternative ways to present it. I’m thinking of the
Design Dilemma unit, which I actually love, but they didn’t understand why would I read this
book? Why would I do this....they didn’t see the connection necessarily. Partly what stood in the
way, I think, just this attitude of ‘I don’t understand the importance of this’ or ‘this is not a real
measure’ or ‘how is this a real measure’. I think there was an attitude of a paper, pencil as a
summative assessment. So I think the strength of the PTD program is how formative it is, but I
know that it is my unique background that has allowed me to adapt and to see it and to say ‘oh,
now I can go here with the program’ or ‘now I can step back and help this child understand’ or
‘I can step back and ask this question this way’. But I do know that my colleagues for the most part struggled to even understand the assessment piece, what we were even looking for and that these are ways of measuring creativity, and resourcefulness, and persistence. What does it even mean to persevere? What does it mean to be resourceful? They didn’t really understand the significance of it. That’s where my background helped me because I just have such a strong developmental background that I was able to see the importance. I really do feel if you don’t see the importance you’re not going to implement it well.

Building on the idea of stakeholder buy-in, Sara was asked to describe the “big idea” or purpose for the MSDE PTD modules. She shared:

I would describe them as being a vehicle in which you can observe the children in a different manner. The goal being there are these basic behaviors, basic learning sort of traits and behaviors which are innate in every single child. We don’t always give children the opportunity to be resourceful in the classroom. We feel we have to give them all the materials, it’s sort of like every child gets a trophy. We don’t want them to struggle, but there’s such a thing as productive failure. So I look at these lessons as a time for you to make mistakes and figure out what are you going to do when you make that mistake. How are you going to fix it? Are you going to perceive it in a new way? With every lesson that is the mindset that I was going into it with it. I think that again, I think the goals are good when you really read the program, the goals are stated, but it comes down to ....and it is a separate issue...it is time management, teachers having that background and understanding of what it is.

When the conversation shifted to defining giftedness, Sara felt the program affirmed her belief that giftedness is not just achievement based.
I draw a very strong line between achievement and giftedness. I think giftedness takes the form of many, many ways. I think too often we say ‘this child is a compliant child, they make A’s’.

Making an “A” doesn’t mean you are gifted. So, I do love the program for that regard, it shows that piece of what giftedness is. The sad part is I doubt that many teachers, in my experience, buy into that.

Addressing the notion that giftedness is not just an achievement measure, Sara was asked to share her thoughts on how reading fluency may influence the identification of giftedness.

Well, you could have a child who is an emerging reader. I’m thinking of some children who I had a few years ago. They were considered very low, emerging readers. They were a year to two years below grade level, so they were certainly emerging readers. But if you engaged them in an open ended conversation or presented them with an ethical dilemma and allowed them to speak about it you would see that they were able to make many connections. This child was able to bring much to the conversation. That was giftedness, in my mind. That is a great example of a child who may not be able to respond on paper, but he was able to orally express what was going on…making fairly strong connections to what he had happen in his own life, things that he had seen in the community. So, I think that is a great example of how we need to not dismiss that element because on paper that student may not achieve. That is why I think you need to be open to seeing other areas. They may be a problem solver or passionate or collaborative. They may not be able to get the answer in whole group, but they may be a leader when getting everyone to work together. So I think those are all elements of giftedness and yet if we only look at achievement or you only look at the F&P score or the unit assessment or a math topic. I think that is where the Design Dilemma or the Bubble-ology units, where you have concrete materials
to work with or when you are using a lot of pictures and signals...it allows students to use something concrete to build. So I think the non-verbal aspect of some of the activities and materials is where the talent might shine through. I think that if you take the time and really try to engage and make that form of communication whether it be through hand signals or through pictures you can get an understanding of what they are thinking. I think watching and observing the child is so key. I think of a little girl who had no language skills, but once she figured out what was being tasked, it was light watching a light bulb go off. Suddenly it was this flurry of activity. Watching that, and had I not been attuned to watching for that, I would have missed that. Here she was demonstrating what she could do, demonstrating that she did have many of those traits. I saw resourcefulness, a high level of creativity and persistence. So I think that when your non-English speaking children or your children with limited English proficiency are similar to those who are from low socio-economic families, they have many elements that are lacking. It’s the same type of thing, you’re going to give them the concrete then you’re going to see some of those traits.

At the conclusion of the conversation, Sara was asked how the program influenced her perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. She reiterated several of the points she made earlier in the conversation, but the following comments revealed perceived benefits of the MSDE PTD program:

_I think in some cases an innate talent does shine through and then in other cases the program nurtures and offers children an avenue that maybe they would not already have. It gives the teachers the window to see that child differently. In some cases there were children that I knew were brighter than their performance in the classroom and I was struggling to find that vehicle_
in which I could tap into their talent. I’m thinking of a specific boy right now and I know the Design Dilemma lessons did that for him. That allowed me to change everything about how I approached the child. It gave me that window into this child, but I think for many of the children it was the latter. It gave them this sort of inquiry, open ended opportunity that they just didn’t have too many times elsewhere despite my best efforts in the classroom. I still had to teach the curriculum.

Sara’s response indicates the lessons within the MSDE PTD may be considered static, isolated experiences as opposed to a dynamic platform of open-ended experiences to blend into the district’s curricula. As such, she was prompted to consider the possible implications of bridging the experiences and strategies from the program into her instruction. In the early years of the MSDE PTD adoption the modules were taught in isolation, as of 2015-2016 the lessons were explicitly scripted within the district’s integrated curriculum. Sara’s response reveals her struggle to reconcile stakeholder buy-in:

Suddenly it comes back to a lack of understanding. I still strongly feel there are colleagues of mine who don’t understand the importance of what it is. Where now the implementation of it is easier, now that you have ease of implementation, now you have the opportunity to build the understanding of why it is important. To me, as a classroom teacher, having it inserted [into the district integrated curriculum] really offered me the opportunity to believe it in a more natural way or organic way. Before it was very isolated; the children looked at it as ‘wow, we have these fun days, we get to use all this fun stuff’ but they didn’t really see it as a part of learning. Parents didn’t understand it, it is now legitimate it a little.
Carol

Carol has been teaching for 15 years at the same school in Anne Arundel County. She has taught first, third, and fifth grade and has earned her National Board Certification. She also serves as the STEM liaison for her school. Carol has attended several professional development courses on the MSDE PTD program, but has not taken any university level courses specific to gifted education. Carol describes herself as supporter of the MSDE PTD program and sought opportunities to transfer her understanding of the program to her regular classroom routines. As a self-identified supporter of the program goals her responses offer a different perspective than other participants. At many points during the conversation, she shared anecdotal details about ways she had applied her understanding beyond the program. For example, she spoke directly to the power of a portfolio when including multiple artifacts from the modules as well as artifacts beyond the modules. She also spoke about opportunities she has taken to document the thinking behaviors observed throughout the school day.

The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with Carol. She began the conversation by sharing her experience with teaching the MSDE PTD lesson modules as a first grade teacher:

I’ve taught the first grade units. I’ve used the Bubble-ology lessons and the Three Little Pigs lessons. I think this is my third or fourth year teaching the lessons. We have the standard artifact collection. So, I’ve taken a lot of pictures. One thing I always do is have the student create a graphic organizer and I score it as soon as possible. Now that the program is infused in the curriculum, sometimes like when a kid will say something that is amazing, it is easier to collect. Then it will go in their portfolio.
The conversation with Carol immediately launched into her newly acquired awareness of student thinking skills resulting from the implementation of the MSDE PTD lessons.

So, this year in fact when we were starting with base-ten blocks in math and I would give the kids time to explore and this one girl was balancing it like a see-saw. She noticed that the wooden base ten one’s were heavier that the foam base ten one’s. I just thought that was pretty perceptive because that certainly wasn’t anything I had taught them yet. While most kids were just playing with them, she was really exploring with the materials. So, that was something I felt was very perceptive.

When asked if she had ever given thought to these thinking behaviors prior to being introduced to the MSDE PTD program, she shared:

Not really. Kids would say something really creative or perceptive, but I didn’t really associate a word with it. I would say ‘oh, wow, that was really creative or perceptive’ but I didn’t really think of it beyond that. It was like saying ‘oh, wow, that is very smart’. I didn’t use the right vocabulary for it. What I have noticed as I am teaching the lessons is there are kids who are book smart were not always the best at those activities such as being perceptive or being resourceful. It’s not typically those kids. So, that has been really interesting. And then to actually document that so I can see those kid who are really book smart are not always labelled as GT.

After Carol introduced the idea of labelling for gifted and talented, she was asked to describe or define giftedness. By her own admission she struggled to articulate her ideas on what constitutes giftedness. When encouraged to attempt a definition in her own words, her thoughts were centered on describing a specific learner versus universal characteristics.
Well, gifted and talented...well, I've taught first grade, third grade, and fifth grade. In the older grades it is strictly the kids that want it the most. They are the kids that try the hardest or they just really want it the most. But...I don’t know...in the younger grades, like especially that student last year, he just...I don’t know. When I pulled up gifted and talented, he hit every single indicator. He was just...um, he thought outside of the box. He didn’t care about math because he wanted to learn how to build a rocket. That’s what he cared about. He didn’t care about science and butterflies. He wanted to learn about engineering and how could he build, you know, a bomb [chuckling].

Related to the topic of identifying giftedness, Carol was questioned as to how she believed language and cultural norms might mask the identification of giftedness.

Well, I have that in my class right now. I have a little girl who is non-English speaking. She doesn’t speak any English at all. So, every time when we were doing reading she would just cry and cry and cry because she doesn’t know the language. But I started noticing in math, when words weren’t needed, she could figure it out. She was performing very well in math. Then we finally got her tapped into writing in Spanish and her writing is phenomenal, but she could have easily been dismissed. It would have been easy to think she doesn’t care because she doesn’t do anything. [paused]

Hmm, well, I think that cultural norms would impact it because...well, I grew up in Severna Park schools. I think a lot of those kids are identified as gifted and talented more than they are in a needier school because those kids follow the rules, they sit and they do what they are supposed to do. So I think they are more easily identified than kids who don’t have much support at home.
You know, their parents are probably pushing as much for their kids to be identified like they do at a Meade school.

When asked how the program influenced her expectations of students, Carol shared:

It has really made me respect that kids are different, every single kid is different. Even if they are not the traditional ‘book smart’ they may be really good at building, they may be really good at being creative. That is something that I have been able to focus on in the classroom. When kids get frustrated and say they can’t do this I point out how some people are strong in other areas. I think it allows everyone to share their own successes even though they are different. I had a student last year who really is a genius, but he doesn’t apply himself at all. I guess from what I hear this year it is even worse. But his scores were always through the roof because he really is very resourceful, he is very perceptive. He is very...everything, all of the behaviors. We would talk about how he was scoring because he was always showing all of those attributes. Now he has an IEP, but he is extremely bright. But if you looked at his grades you wouldn’t see that.

At the conclusion of the conversation, Carol asked if she could share some further thoughts on the topic of gifted identification. She stated there is a need to begin vertical team conversations about advanced students.

We have Collaborative Decision Making teams that we talk about kids we are worried about, but very often we do not have conversations about kids when we’ve noticed something exceptional. We just have conversations when there is a problem.

These statements are significant as they depict perceived value of the data collected on students during the lesson modules. Her statement conveys a desire to transfer her awareness of students’ strengths and talents across grade levels. This may signify buy-in for the MSDE PTD program goals.
Bonnie describes herself as a veteran teacher. She has been teaching in Anne Arundel County for more than 20 years and has been asked to serve as a mentor teacher for “many years”. Bonnie claims to have recently taken professional development courses on the MSDE PTD program. The focus of the professional development course was extending the program goals beyond the lesson modules. The majority of Bonnie’s teaching experience has been in the same school. Her school reflects the changing demographics of the community over the last decade, transitioning to from a suburban to an urban school. Bonnie describes her school population has diverse both in race and socio-economic status.

The following narrative is a first person response of a conversation with Bonnie. She began the conversation by sharing her experience with teaching the MSDE PTD modules and the perceived benefits of the program:

*I have taught the first grade modules several times. So I have taught the building of the fourth little pig house and the bubbles unit. I’ve probably taught the units eight or nine times; quite a few. What I like about the program is the products the kids are able to come up with. My favorite one is the fourth little pig house just because I feel like I get to see a whole lot more sides to the kids. With that one I get to see creativity. I get to see if they are persistent. What do they want to do with their houses? I also get to see some of their perceptive ideas too; describing what a house looks like. Watching them figure out how to make their product look like a house. They also get to take into account how they are going to make the house stand up with the materials they have. I think I get a lot of things out of the fourth little pig unit. That one is my favorite.*

To achieve the goal of making thinking behaviors habitual, teachers are encouraged to adopt the MSDE PTD model strategies into their pedagogy. These strategies support students in the development
of a thinking toolbox, as described in the MSDE PTD program, which can be transferred to new learning situations. This transformation of teacher pedagogy is, perhaps, best achieved through on-going professional development. Bonnie indicated in her response that, indeed, professional development course transformed her understanding of the program benefits and goals.

_Last summer, at the end of school, I did take one of those professional development classes offered by the PTD Office on…[pause]…it was like a beyond the modules class. It was really good. I really think children have an opportunity to shine in a lot of different places. While I like the little pig house, if you are not into the little pig story or you are not really into that house I might not see everything a student has to offer. It’s nice to look for those things in other areas which are very hard. I had hoped it would be a lot easier this year, but the new curriculum has just been horrendous and there is so much focus on the curriculum that I really haven’t had as much time. I notice the behaviors, but what I don’t have is good, quick capture of it. What is missing is an easily accessible piece of paper or something that can be used to write down what I see. When I see a child who has done something that is very communicative or creative or has great leadership…so those are not in the part of the modules that I teach, but you do get an opportunity to see that. I think you have to look at…I think it is important to look at things that are beyond or not required of the unit you are teaching because you really want to get a clear picture of that child’s capabilities in all areas. When I went to that beyond the modules class they had a little form. Then the new curriculum took over my life. I had all the papers and I intended to do it, but it just didn’t work out. I really would like to give that a shot next year. I think that is important. The other thing that I think would be really nice…and I don’t know how you could get everyone to buy into that…but, it would be nice if cultural arts teachers picked up
on some of these kinds of behaviors. I think if you have a kid who is really into sports you might see a lot of these qualities come out in PE. We don’t get any kind of capture from them at all.

The MSDE PTD program guide encourages teachers to look for the seven thinking behaviors beyond the program modules. A theme which emerged from Bonnie’s response was awareness the program afforded an opportunity to observe students engaged in a performance task which captured thinking skills which benefit student achievement. It appears Bonnie’s expectations of students may have changed as a result of documenting student responses to the lesson modules. This shift in her expectations is revealed in the following statement:

*I think that you get a lot of information from watching a student tackle a problem. I think that getting the right answer isn’t just the whole thing. You want them to get the right answer, but if it is a difficult math problem you want them to persevere through the problem. You want to see if they will try different strategies. I think you can see their perceptive behaviors too when they try something and it is almost right and they may be able to stretch and go in a different direction. Eventually, even if they may have gone in the wrong direction, eventually they may be able to get back to the right answer. You don’t get that through a test. Through a test all you are going to get is information on whether they got the right answer or not, but someone could have a ton of strategies. So they could be a better math student than you think if you watched how they tested or worked through the problems. I think when I see a student who is tackling things in a different way I pay more attention so I may focus in more on the things they are doing. Because I might not...especially in math...in first grade math is where we do a lot grouping. I may have a student who may not excel as far as grades are concerned, but I may see that student do a lot of things as they are trying to tackle a problem which may make me put them in a different group. If I notice*
they are doing a lot of strategy use or a lot of self-talk or paying a lot of attention to those math messages that we are looking at, I may move them to a different group. Maybe it is because they...maybe is could be they don’t have enough quick recall of facts, but they have good strategies for solving a problem. So, yes, I do. I do a lot of kid watching.

Artifacts collected during the MSDE PTD program provide data to support screening for gifted and talented education programming. When asked to define giftedness, Bonnie seemed to have trouble articulating her thoughts.

*It is really hard to define giftedness. I think a gifted kid, I guess, perseveres. They tackle things that are difficult. They don’t give up when things are hard. They don’t get discouraged when they don’t know the answer. I mean, sometimes the right answer isn’t what we are looking for anyway. They are good a being a leader, but they’re also good at being a listener. They have to give it that all around try, but I like to see kids who work in groups more so than independent. There must be a space for kids to work independently too, but branch them out and have them work with other people. In real life you are not going to work in a bubble. I don’t know...defining giftedness is hard.*

When asked how the identification of giftedness may be masked by language acquisition skills or cultural norms, indications were she had not given the issue much consideration. While her response may indicate limited awareness of the influence cultural norms plays on the identification of giftedness, it is apparent she recognizes the benefits of a multi-criteria approach to identifying giftedness.

*That is tough. I have an ELL student this year. It is hard, you have to do it through kid-watching. You can’t do it through language and you can’t do it through writing because they don’t have that skill. You really have to watch the things that they do. You have to model to make sure they*
can follow the instructions, but then you have to watch what they do afterwards. It is really hard. I don’t know. I guess because I have never looked at cultural norms that way. Yeah, I never really looked at it that way. I guess I do have a student who is a middle-eastern girl, but I hadn’t really noticed…I hadn’t really notice. So I guess I haven’t run into that issue.

This complex issue is noticeably presented in the comment ‘you can’t do it through writing because they don’t have the skill’. Which presumes competency rests solely on a students’ capacity to represent their thinking in English. One of the fundamental reasons a multi-criteria approach to identifying giftedness is necessary is because of the many dimensions of bias which may be introduced to an identification process.

A goal of the MSDE PTD program is to build a profile of student strengths over time which can be used to document the need for differentiated instruction and gifted and talented education. When Bonnie was asked if the program expanded her understanding of giftedness she spoke to her progression of learning and the influence of ongoing professional development related to gifted and talented education.

*I can honestly say that in the beginning ‘no’. Because in the beginning, at first, it was just a matter of ‘get it done’. Here is your module, here are your steps, teach it. Here are your options for artifacts, code them. When finished, pack it away and be done with it. When I first started working with them all I did was the lessons and never anything else. One year I had a class where some of my students were really phenomenal kinds of students. They had different ways of looking at things. They never scored well on tests. It didn’t really seem fair to me. I thought, ‘There has to be another way of looking at or letting them show others what skills they do have.’*
That is when I began to pay more attention and take more offerings that the PTD had. But in the beginning, the modules didn’t do a whole lot for me.

When asked to describe the reasons for her positive response to the program goals, Bonnie identified professional development as the galvanizing factor.

*I think it was more the professional development and having that group of kids that you thought had more going on than the lessons were showing. When I had those kids, I really started looking for how else to get something in their portfolio to show how well they are really doing.*

In order to reveal more details on the perceived benefits of professional development, Bonnie was asked if she felt ongoing professional development was needed to advance the vision of the modules. Her response tangentially describes the perceived benefits as they relate to pre-service teachers.

*I think that because I work with a lot of young teachers. There are four people on my team and they are all young, they have just a few years of experience, I do think that for a lot of young teachers they come to this [referring to the MSDE PTD lessons] as a rote process. They teach these units, these lessons, and they never take it any further than that. They never look at anything different. They just do what they are expected to do. They do not understand why they do it or how it is important. They never go beyond doing it. Maybe that doesn’t get communicated very well, to new teachers. Maybe it takes doing something a little more than just handing them a manual and telling them to teach the lessons. At least it used to be a binder and now it is online stuff. Even the online stuff is not any different to me than what was in the binder. When I became the person in charge at my school, someone handed me this binder and said ‘hey, do this’ and that was really the end of training. For me it has been a lot of growth especially over the last nine years.*
Norah has been a kindergarten for eight years. Norah’s teaching experience has been with a population of students who are predominately Caucasian and whose socio-economic status is considered high. Norah has received no formal training in the characteristics of giftedness, but she has participated in district professional development courses on the implementation of the MSDE PTD program.

The following narrative is a first person response of a conversation with Norah. She began the conversations by sharing her experience with teaching the MSDE PTD modules and the perceived benefits of the program.

I have been implementing it in Kindergarten since it started in the county; so, a couple of years now. The first couple of years I went through the lessons as they were laid out. I did one in the fall and one in the springtime. This year since we have a new curriculum and the lessons are in the curriculum I have been doing the lessons as they come up in the curriculum. In the fall I collected a couple of the extra artifacts. On our science and social studies lessons it will say ‘consider using this artifact’ for whatever you are looking for that day. I did a couple of those in the fall. This time around I just did the bare minimum because I wanted to make sure all my stuff was entered into the computer.

One of the goals of the MSDE PTD program is to build a profile of student strengths over time which can be used to document the need for differentiated instruction. Norah was asked if she refers to the portfolios or the artifacts when planning for differentiated instruction.

I usually try to code the artifacts right as I do them so I don’t forget. I only look back at them when I am filling out the little report card [referencing the Cumulative Behavioral Summary
Sheet] that goes in the portfolio. So, I don’t really look back at it. I think the lessons are interesting, but I think they flow better this year now they are in our curriculum. Before I would kind of step out of what I was teaching to implement the lessons. It felt kind of random.

Delving a little deeper, Norah was asked if student responses ever change her expectations. When she responded no, she was asked why her expectations were not influenced by what she observed. Sometimes I feel like they are kind of subjective. We don’t use those lessons for our report cards or anything. To me it is just kind of something extra. So I don’t really put a lot of my focus on that. To be honest, it is really taught in isolation for me. Again, because it is not part of our report cards or anything and then I found that the kids who I thought were already showing up as gifted and talented in reading or math achieved higher scores on the task and REPI scale.

Norah’s responses suggest her experiences with the MSDE PTD program have had very little effect on her pedagogy. It appears the techniques and strategies embedded in the MSDE PTD program are not transferred beyond the modules. This is explicitly conveyed when she was asked if any of the experiences gained from the program have affected her teaching practice and she responded, ‘No, I don’t think so’. Attempting to discover the reasons for such a dismissal, Norah was asked to elaborate. She stated, ‘So, I do find myself, if the lesson lends itself to, looking for a behavior, to a point I look for it, but I don’t go out of my way to look for it. When asked what conditions might change her perceptions of the program, Norah responded:

I think because we don’t see it followed through at all. We do it, first grade does it, then second grade does it and it’s done. We don’t see the whole process. We just do our portfolio and then send it along to the next grade. I think it might if I see...if I could see the students that I had identified and see how they were passed on to grade three. Or even if there are other students
that I had not identified but could be identified it would be nice to see an outcome of all the work you had put into it.

When asked to define gifted in her own words Norah began sharing, ‘I don’t know if this is right. I think of gifted as someone who is achieving above grade level or someone who needs enrichment.’

When asked to consider the identification of giftedness among English Language Learners, she stated, ‘If they are a fluent reader they are more likely to be identified as gifted, but it is not just about the fluency it is also about the comprehension piece.’

Anna

Anna has been teaching for 20 years, but did not originally plan to be a teacher. She studied political science before earning her teaching certificate through a graduate education program. Her experience ranges from teaching multiple grade levels in Anne Arundel County to being a Math Interventionist. Anna’s experience with the MSDE PTD program includes teaching the kindergarten and first grade modules. Her responses are unique to the study as she challenges the legitimacy of gifted identification protocols.

The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with Anna. She began the conversation by sharing her reflections on the perceived purpose of the program:

This program gives an expanded profile of a student over time which is a lovely thing because it is capturing talent. It is used to capture behaviors and not just content knowledge. It definitely, in my belief, is a key to eliminating the achievement gap. I think that some of the lessons are better than others. I think there could definitely be some revision of some of the lessons so that it can better provide a platform for students to showcase their talents. I think as far as being in a classroom and seeing the impact on students, I have seen it work really well when there are two
people in the classroom. When there is me and another teacher or an assistant, one of us can deliver the lesson and one of us can walk around the room and collect anecdotal notes. I feel that works more effectively. I think that this program, as great as I honestly think it is, is definitely difficult for teacher to capture everything I am responsible for and everything I am capable of.

Building on the notion of capturing talent, Anna was asked how the program influenced her expectations or awareness of students’ strengths or talent.

*I think I had a new awareness. It allowed me to actually to see a new response because I exposed a student to something new.* [pause] *I have always said to parents, ‘you never know what your kids are capable unless you expose it to them.’ You may think that it is higher level but you never know how their brain works and what they are thinking. The connections they are making with their thinking and those definite ‘ah-ha moments’. [participant paused] But there are so many time constraints for teachers. That is why the power of the program is really truly now being that is it K-2, because that is where a teacher can really see that it is not just one teacher who sees something in a student. It gives me the chance to notice and say, ‘Wow, I never thought that kid would do that.’ It may have been during the doodles or maybe it was a poster. As a teacher, I get to see what kids are capable of doing because of the lessons that are in the units. I, in fact, feel it is effective. And it allows the parents to see what else the kids know because we are asking kids to think about things in a different way. I’ve been blown away by the student responses to the activity there they had to think about what would happen in ten years if there were no longer trees. What they actually came up with, I was like “wow. That is definitely higher level thinking”. First off, they needed to have a little more background knowledge that I would have thought they had. But most of all, when the students just had the time to be creative they surprised me. It could
be the activity that they needed to find another use for something, they get to go wild with their imagination in a good way. It gives the student so much confidence because they are valued for their thinking that they were never able to do before. It may not be that one kid that gets all their sight words correct. There is that moment when you see that child that you did not think was so bright, then you now see has something else going on. Now I know they are super creative, which I wouldn’t have known to look for before.

In order to distill some of the ideas presented, Anna was asked if her experiences with the program changed her expectations of students.

Yes, and it makes me a better teacher. It makes me realize I may have limited this child in my classroom because I didn’t think he was as bright as the other kids.

In a very frank manner, Anna’s candid response reveals the limitations imposed on students when relying solely on achievement measures to identify talent or potential. As a follow on to this comment, Anna was asked if the program supported or expanded her understanding of gifted characteristics.

I have had some experience with gifted education, but it wasn’t until I started talking to other teachers and delving into the philosophy of the program that I started to think about giftedness not just as academic achievement. Task commitment can be gifted. The ability to be a quick thinker can too. I believe creativity can be taught in the classroom where I didn’t think so before.

I think there will always be...there will be gifted students...Here is what I think hasn’t changed. I don’t know if this is the truth, but from what I have read there is a reason why I talked about eliminating the achievement gap before. Yes, there are going to be students you find in under-represented groups, low SES, or by race, or whatever. Yes, they are going to be there and yes this program can lift them up and give them a chance. However, for most gifted individuals it is
mostly genes. There is a lot with that, you know, geniuses breed geniuses. Now they don’t need to be geniuses exactly, it is not the right term to use, but that is true; whether or not it is experiences that have been nurtured at home or it is just downright genetics. So that part of giftedness I don’t think anybody is really going to...I think that has been a stay-all, but now I do see giftedness, you know, I am looking for giftedness in every student. I am trying to find it in every student instead of just limiting it. I think that would be the best way to say how it has changed my perspective. What do you think of that?

When Anna was asked how a students’ reading fluency may influence the identification of giftedness, she shared:

I’ve always felt very strongly that...I’ve always fought for those kids may they be hearing impaired, Autistic kids, or ED kids. I’ve always fought for those kids and tried to lift them up and look for ways in which to help them succeed. I have always felt I have seen more in them. What I feel the MSDE PTD program has helped me do is look for those students who might be from under-represented groups or they just might be kids that don’t pay attention or those kids I don’t think are smart so to speak. That is where the MSDE PTD program has influenced me, but not with ELL students.

Following this response, Anna as asked how cultural norms might affect the identification of giftedness.

I have to be honest; I have a hard time with that. I do [believing cultural norms effect identification]. Sometimes I agree it does and sometimes I don’t. It is kind of hard because...and I don’t want to sound wishy washy. Sometimes I feel like our job is to look for students who are from underrepresented groups and try to push them towards advanced programs because they are from under-represented groups. Then that helps with the statistics of the county because they
are able to say ‘now AAC has however many Hispanics in Advanced Studies and Programs’. Then if you have all these students from under-represented groups in these advanced programs that really wouldn’t have made it if they weren’t form that group. I go back and forth on it because then I am thinking is that the age old ‘watering the system down’ as you are trying to get students in with their academic peers which research shows that students who work with their academic peers perform better. So, are we taking away from that top echelon because we are trying to get more students from underrepresented groups in those programs? Sometimes I really go back and forth because I love the MSDE PTD lessons, they are finding some students who are recognized for different things and all those data points that support it to open up the doors, but when you really get to that top echelon, when you are talking about gifted and talented, I can see a lot of those students being advanced but maybe we really need to focus on more than just differentiation for the GT kids.

This response frames the conflicted nature of her feelings towards the identification process. It appears she feels pressure to prioritize equity over absolute data guidelines. The impression of absolute versus relative norms in gifted identification may have influenced Anna’s belief in the legitimacy of the MSDE PTD program. To further expound on Anna’s impressions, she is asked if a high REPI code correlates to success or achievement.

[participant paused] Hmm, a student that demonstrates great leadership can be an awesome project manager, but may not be able to do the project itself. When you go to college it is about reading and math scores. So that overall grade point average doesn’t mean anything for that kid that is running service projects galore or being a leader of different groups. They are still limited
to what college they get into even though they might be the next millionaire or maybe would have gone to a better school because of their ability but not their achievement.

**Jade**

*Jade* has been teaching for 14 years in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. She has a long history with the county as she was enrolled in the public school system from kindergarten through graduation. She has experience teaching multiple grade levels in the same school for the entirety of her career. *Jade’s* experience with the MSDE PTD program includes teaching the first grade modules.

The following narrative is a first person response of the conversation with *Jade*. She began the conversation by sharing her experience and professional growth resulting from program implementation.

*I think this is my third year using the program in first grade. Some of the units we have covered are the Bubble-ology unit and we also had this unit where the children had to construct a house and we had this lesson where we read this story called The Little's. The students had to create something that the Little’s might use to show resourceful behaviors. When constructing the house for the fourth little pig they had to show resourcefulness too. And with the Bubble-ology unit, which we actually just wrapped up today, they had to show signs of perseverance and perceptiveness. It is interesting. The one thing I will have to say is this has not forced me, but has opened my eyes to looking at those possibilities in children where I might not have before. So, yes, through teaching these lessons I found that now this is my third year, I wouldn’t say that I am an expert, but I would say that I am more experienced. I feel more comfortable finding other methods to capture a behavior and including them in the portfolio. I feel that I am better at pinpointing and recording a student’s talent that I didn’t notice before. I find myself looking for those talents that I had never thought of before.*
Kid watching and talent spotting is a departure from the typical methods teachers employ to document student achievement, but the MSDE PTD program encourages teachers to embrace these methods. When Jade was asked if the MSDE PTD program revealed a new awareness of student talent, her response seems to be juxtaposed. While describing the requirements of program management as somewhat cumbersome or constraining she also reveals the perceived benefits of embracing methods of kid watching for potential.

*I feel pressured to make sure that I capture it for the portfolio, that part I do not enjoy. Making sure that I dot my I’s and cross my T’s, making sure that I have what is in there what is needed, but on the other hand I have looked at the children differently. And, yes, I think that I have noticed I have children who are very creative in my class this year. So, I try to incorporate more lessons that lend themselves to the opportunity to be creative. I had one little guy in particular this year that...actually doing the first module...where they had to take the ice cream cone, I will call it, and make something with it. He created a circus, he cut it up and he made a circus. I was just amazed because I had never seen anything like this from his before and I never expected it from him. So, that really surprised me and I was glad that I had done that lesson and that they had encouraged us to do that lesson. Basically what I am saying is that it has opened my eyes up and I try to incorporate more...and I will say with the new curriculum it was hard to really take the time and try to add more of those lessons. I tried to add more of those creative lessons because my class seemed to be...[pause]...my children seemed to be demonstrating the creativity behavior, but because of the new curriculum I was trying to learn the curriculum, I didn’t have as much time to spend time on the types of lessons I would like to have done.*
A function of the MSDE PTD program is to document compile, and analyze observational and performance data throughout a student’s experience. The REPI Continuum provides a rubric for coding and scoring student responses. This rubric also provides descriptors for the frequency, intensity, and complexity of thinking and learning behaviors. The language included in this rubric may influence a teacher’s ability to recognize advanced talent. As such, Jade was asked if her expectations of students changed as a result of her observations.

*Oh...um...does it change my expectations? You know, in a way I guess it has. There were times we did lessons that allowed him to be creative and I wouldn’t just say there were certain lessons. I tried to infuse lots of lessons that allowed my students to be creative. I think that I always looked to this one little guy in particular; I mean there were others, but I was expecting him to always be very creative. Now if there was a time when he wasn’t as creative as I thought he might be I was...I don’t know...disappointed isn’t the word, but...yeah, I guess I started to look at him with that expectation that he was always going to produce in that way.*

When asked to describe giftedness in her own words, Jade responded:

*Someone who is gifted shows extraordinary talent in one area or multiple areas, but someone who rises up above the others and really stands out. Does something like that little boy did. When he was creating something or in that project when I said, ‘ah, look at him.’ I didn’t know that he was doing that before and I hadn’t even thought of that as a teacher. I don’t think it is necessarily someone who can do fifth grade math and a first grade level. It is not someone who can read at a ninth grade level in first grade. It is someone who has an extraordinary, special, or unique talent you wouldn’t expect that child to have at that particular grade level. For me, I am looking at giftedness much more differently than before starting these modules. I never thought*
giftedness was just someone who was great in math or great in reading like I said before, but it really has opened my eyes to see beyond that. Like really what is giftedness? When you asked me the definition I would have liked more time to think about that. I don’t think I had enough time to really capture what it is that I think of it. Um, but I don’t feel that reading fluency necessarily, for me, I can’t speak for other people, for some others it may skew their perception of whether a child is gifted. I think it quite possibly could, but for me, that is not the case because I have seen kids like that little guy I mentioned earlier. He is an OK reader, but somewhat struggles. He just surprised me that he was so creative and I had never seen that before. I understand that you cannot show that particular trait through reading. So, for me I don’t think that reading fluency or the ability to calculate or things like that defines a student as gifted or not gifted. I think we should get parents more involved. Particularly at my school, parents think giftedness is solely based on how a child performs academically. A lot of parents perceive it as that. If a parent sees their child performing at a certain level they don’t see why the child doesn’t qualify for gifted and talented programming. I think it is very important to have a conversation and educate parents about what it truly means, especially for the county.

The MSDE PTD program is intended to be dynamic and transformational. The program provides models of strategies deemed essential as they are designed to develop students’ analytical, creative, and practical intelligences. These strategies, once embraced by teachers and students, can be transferred to new learning situations. When Jade contemplated the influence of the program, she described the program as complementary to her style of teaching.

In my approach to teaching and my philosophy and my style I am not by the book. I like to be creative. I like to think outside the box. I like to build on my children’s interests. I guess in some
ways it has opened my eyes to look at some students more often or to take time to capture and document in a portfolio, which I didn’t do before. So, yes, a little but I think my style of teaching has always allowed students to show their creativity or their perceptiveness or their perseverance and so forth.

As the conversation concluded, Jade asked if she could speak freely to the topic of the MSDE PTD program.

*I think teachers could use more support with the program. I feel that teachers are pressured to have a certain portfolio and certain documentation. That is hard for a teacher like me because I do not like things to be so rigid. I wish that some of the lessons were better for capturing the behavior we are looking for. I don’t think they are always lend themselves to capturing the behavior we are asked to look for. I think that makes it hard for teachers to collect that data when some of the lessons don’t work. I just think that outside of the lessons, those behaviors can be captured, but we are forced to do those lessons. I do think more professional development would help us with the program. I don’t think we [teachers] are given a lot of time to master something, process something, or observe how it’s done in a real life situation. Not just to see it on a video or document camera, but to go into a classroom and see a teacher capture some of these behaviors. I think that would make teachers feel more comfortable. Teachers would feel what they were doing was more meaningful. I do think professional development is important and we should do more of it, but I think we should make it relevant. We shouldn’t go and hear how good it is being preached at us, but really make it meaningful. I don’t have all the answers on how to do that, but have people come together and figure out how to make it powerful and meaningful and teachers will buy into it and make it something that will make a difference.*
Conclusions

The participants of this study shared a first person account of experiences with an early talent development program. Themes identified across their narratives include: experiences which shaped teacher understandings of an early talent development program, teacher capacity for recognizing potential, teacher awareness of biases which effect the identification of talent among culturally and linguistically diverse students, and the role of professional development in promoting the philosophy of talent development. The next chapter presents the following conclusions based on the findings: teachers perceive talent and potential as either latent or developed, implicit bias is a contributing factor to deficit thinking which lowers teacher expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students, teacher expectations are transformed as a result of observing for potential, ongoing and differentiated professional development is vital for the assimilation of MSDE PTD program goals. Lastly, the next chapter offers recommendations for practice and further research.
Chapter 5

Analysis

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this case study was to examine the influence of the *Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Development Program* (2009) on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. Critical race theory was used as a theoretical lens to review the literature and frame the research study. This study sought to answer the following central research question:

1. How has the MSDE PTD program influenced teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students?

This case study utilized interviews to reveal the influence of the MSDE PTD program on kindergarten, first and second grade teachers in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD. The answers to the research question were discovered through semi-structured interviews of teachers with experience teaching the MSDE PTD program. Interviews were transcribed at which time coding of interview data was completed. Categorical aggregation of the data was used to establish themes and patterns among the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2013). This method began with the organization of data into reasonable, meaningful units which were coded by short phrases that denoted a category. The coded data was then summarized in a manner to reflect its essence or theme. The process of constant comparison pushed the researcher to refine codes and look at the overarching ideas presented in the data. Lastly, the data was interpreted and synthesized to identify patterns and relationships. A total of four conceptually distinct categories emerged from the coding which provided answers to the research question. The findings led to four conclusions and several implications for practice which are presented in this chapter.
It is important that the findings lead to conclusions and suggestions for educator practice as this research was conducted as a part of a Doctorate of Education program with a focus on scholar practitioners. This chapter concludes with recommendations for additional research and closing thoughts.

Conclusions

The findings presented in the previous chapter led to four conclusions which explain the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students:

1. Teachers perceived talent as latent versus developing.
2. Teacher expectations were transformed as a result of observing for potential.
3. Implicit bias was a contributing factor to deficit thinking which lowered teacher expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students.
4. Ongoing and differentiated professional development was vital for teacher assimilation of the MSDE PTD program goals.

It is hoped that these conclusions and subsequent recommendations for practice will increase the identification of historically underrepresented students in gifted and talented programs. These increases will result from a better understanding of talent identification among culturally and linguistically diverse students as well as the significance of developing talent among these student groups.

Conclusion 1: Teachers perceived talent as latent versus developing.

The first conclusion, teachers perceive talent as latent versus developing addresses the barriers in augmenting teacher beliefs about the dynamic nature of talent. An intended goal of the MSDE PTD program is to “build a profile of student strengths over time, Pre-K-second grade, which can be used to document the need for differentiated instruction and gifted and talented education.” (MSDE, 2009, p.5)
Participant responses revealed the programs’ influence over teacher awareness of a need to build a profile of strengths beyond academic measures. Throughout the conversations, participant responses reflected the spirit of kid watching; recognizing the perceived value of certain learning behaviors that manifest themselves in interactive experiences. Both Sara and Diane mimicked claims relative to perceived value, “One of the reasons why this program is important; we are looking beyond those academic skill sets.”

While all nine of the participants spoke in some form about the seven learning behaviors described in the MSDE PTD program as indicators of potential, the participants did not appear to examine an association between the behaviors and achievement outcomes. The MSDE PTD methodology is based on the premise that student achievement may not be solely related to standardized tests, but also conceptual thinking, problem solving skills, divergent thinking, and creative learning (MSDE PTD, 2009). When participants were asked if they found it difficult to shift their thinking from measuring achievement to observing for talent and potential, findings indicate they recognized the value of observing for talent, but they perceive the documentation process as bureaucratic. Language supporting this finding revolved around documentation. For example, participants referred to the portfolio and artifact compilation process as capturing, recording, documenting, and identifying. Missing from the descriptions was language associated with nurturing, cultivating, or fostering of the behaviors associated with potential.

It appears during the administration of the program teachers perceive themselves as talent evaluators and not talent developers. The language and statements made by many of the participants indicate the lessons are administered as temporary insertions in the curriculum. Teachers seem to identify the lessons as a bounded unit of experiences which do not transmute their pedagogy. This is
significant as there seems to be no permanent change in teacher capacity to augment the potential of students who may not be demonstrating a behavior at a high degree or intensity.

These findings further substantiate the research on teacher recommendations serving as a gatekeeper for gifted identification among culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teacher recommendations have traditionally been used as an early indicator for initial screening, but research indicates the subjective nature of screening tools may result in minority students being overlooked in screening for gifted identification. (DeWitt & Gubbins, 2011). If teachers view themselves as surveyors of talent opposed to developers of talent they may document potential and talent as a binary process; it was observed or not observed. Students who may have limited exposure to academic or formal language may fail to initially demonstrate advanced responses.

The perception of talent development as a static process as opposed to a dynamic interaction between what is observed and a teachers’ responsiveness appears to be a missed opportunity in the implementation or the program for many of the participants. It is possible teachers perceive the program in a linear manner; once a lesson is completed the teacher is no longer attuned to observing for the targeted behaviors. This may be due to a lack of options for transferring potential into a measurable outcome of achievement. Further investigation into these reasons would benefit opportunities for addressing these issues through professional development.

Conclusion 2: Teacher expectations were transformed as a result of observing for potential.

The second conclusion, teacher expectations are transformed as a result of observing for potential. The K-2 Primary Talent Development portfolio is an important component of the MSDE PTD program. The portfolio provides tangible evidence of the work of primary teachers as facilitators of talent development and advanced capabilities. While talent development is overlooked, there seems to
be an acceptance of the implementation expectations within the module delivery. The portfolio documents students’ varied behavioral responses when engaged in thinking and learning experiences. Portfolios are expected to exist for every student K-2. The portfolios are dynamic, artifacts are compiled over time. Portfolios can and should contain artifacts beyond the modules to create a profile of student strengths.

Findings indicated a limited capacity for transferring the experiences of the program beyond the program modules. Participants indicated their approach to the program was static or fixed; the models and strategies were not transferred to new situations. For example, when Carol was asked if she was open to looking for the behaviors beyond the modules, she stated, “I captured it and put it in the portfolio.” Another participant, Michael, also stated, “I knew it was a requirement so I just threw the lessons in just to get it done and over with.” This indicated the participants were not open to the program influencing instruction. Norah also shared a similar response, “We don’t use the lessons for the report card or anything.”

The MSDE PTD lessons are designed to support the development of thinking skills while exploring the natural and physical world. While engaged in the lessons, students learn how to ask questions, experiment, draw conclusions, and communicate their ideas. What was noticeable about the participant responses was a disregard and challenge directed at the legitimacy of the program. The caveat to this being artifact coding was perceived as subjective; REPI coding seeming to conflict with standards based grade assignment. Perhaps an unintended consequence resulting from the formalization of a talent development portfolio is the portfolio becomes a checklist prepared for audit as opposed to an organic and expanding collection documenting student talent. Although participants contested the worth of artifact collection, all participants described how expectations of students were changed as a result of
observing for the seven thinking behaviors. It should be noted, the scope of this study did not include an analysis of factors legitimizing the fidelity of the program to participants.

Throughout the conversations, participants remarked on their impressions of student expectations relative to task performance. The findings indicate participants became aware their interactions with students were influenced by preconceived ideas of ability as a result of engagement with the early talent development program. Teachers acknowledged they may have imposed limitations on opportunities for students because of what they perceived as students capabilities prior to observing for potential. The following response encapsulates this notion, “I would never have thought this child could do this before. This has opened my eyes to those possibilities in children where I might not have before”. The majority of participants shared these perceptions. As a result, it was concluded teacher expectations are transformed by observing students for potential versus achievement.

Findings also indicate teachers maintain the impression of “bright students” as a descriptor for a successful student. This language qualifier was repeated by several participants in the context of student expectation. For example, when Bonnie was asked if her expectations of students changed as a result of observing for potential she responded, “Yes, and it makes me a better teacher. It makes me realize I may have limited this child in my classroom because I didn’t think he was as bright as the other kids.”

These findings are significant to research on talent identification among historically underrepresented groups as research shows,

“Children whose potential talent is unconventional, that is, different from the abilities measured by school grades and IQ tests, may not be identified as gifted and not given the opportunities that might help them develop their potential talent. They may be systematically excluded and not
provided with special education experiences that could enhance their potential talent and prevent it from being lost.” Hong and Milgram (2008, p.8)

The ways in which teachers portray “smart” or “bright” is significant to studies on gifted identification. Students who merit these descriptors present academic achievements coalesced around grades or test scores in one of two domains, verbal-linguistic or mathematical-logical. These measures prohibit the acknowledgement of multiple intelligences as defined by Gardner (1983). As described in Chapter 2, Gardner’s conception of a pluralistic view of intelligence deemed giftedness and exceptional talent to be presented in domains beyond reading and math such as visual-spatial, intrapersonal, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, or musical-rhythmic. When teachers apply terms of “smart” and “bright” to students they may unwittingly disqualify talents which manifest themselves in domains beyond verbal-linguistic or mathematical-logical.

This assertion could be applied to other theorists and researchers who examine the relationship between intelligence and giftedness such as Sternberg (1995) and Renzulli (1978). Both of these individuals posit gifted identification metrics should not overemphasize intelligence testing. When considering these claims through the context of the findings, one could concede access to high quality and gifted programs may be limited by an educator’s perception of how “smart” and “bright” are demonstrated by students. If the attributes of smart and bright do not encompass behaviors such as high levels of creativity or task commitment educators may overlook student potential. This claim is affirmed by responses gathered throughout the study; repeatedly teachers acknowledged the restrictions they may have placed on student access to advanced curriculum because of their limited view of what constitutes smart.
Conclusion 3: Implicit bias was a contributing factor to deficit thinking which lowered teacher expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The third conclusion, implicit bias is a contributing factor to deficit thinking which lowers teacher expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students. An intended goal of the program is to provide opportunities for all children to develop and demonstrate advanced learning behaviors, including children from underrepresented groups. It was apparent from the findings, opportunities for promoting advanced learning may be diluted by deficit thinking. Evidence of a deficit mindset was presented through comments which noted preconceived ideas of who may or may not be considered gifted and talented. As a result, students may or may not receive equitable opportunities to demonstrate their strongest talents and advanced capabilities.

An example of this mindset is reflected in a participant response, “Yes, it made me really respect that kids are different, every single kid is different. Even if they are not the traditional book smart they may be good at building. They may be really creative.” While it appeared the participant was attempting to speak to the perceived benefits of the program, their response revealed the implicit bias teachers bring to expectations of student ability levels. This mindset was unveiled by the seeming paradoxical thinking that a student is either book smart or not, but may still be talented. Furthermore, in the noted response, the teacher qualifies ability by eluding book smart has a historically recognized definition.

When examining the findings through the theoretical framework of Critical Race, the propensity of educators to maintain higher expectations of Caucasian students than African American or Hispanic students is significant. Research states teachers maintain higher expectations of students from one race over another (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Furthermore, CRT is based on the belief that students are unsuccessful because of deficits or deficiencies in their lives. Culture, family, economic strata are all
considered to be causes of deficits or deficiencies (Could, 981, 995; Menchaca, 997; as cited by Ford et al., 2002).

This study revealed educators either seemed unaware of biases which may influence their perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse students or uncomfortable addressing biases which may influence their interactions with diverse populations of students; colorblindness and racial neutrality being a benign response to overlook White privilege. As research indicates, teachers who maintain a colorblind dogma, fail to recognize how racism can prevent culturally and linguistically diverse students from succeeding in the classroom (Milner & Self, 2012). Ford (2010) explains that color blindness is another barrier to underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education programs. This is substantiated by Milner and Self (2012) who claim, when teachers deliberately avoid deep considerations about race, they are creating a prohibitive culture which under-serves culturally and linguistically diverse students. The implications of this research are noteworthy to this study, as participants avoided or deflected questions about race and language barriers which may mask or hide student talent. Perhaps teachers are misguided in they feel maintaining colorblindness somehow eliminates inequalities experienced by racially and ethnically diverse students. Instead, believing race or ethnic background of the teacher does not significantly influence the academic experience of CLD students.

Bias of social class was also revealed by participants in the study. As Michael shared, “In a Title I school we don’t hear giftedness very often.” Title I is a federal program that provides funds to schools and districts that serve high numbers of economically disadvantaged students. This designation is not based on academic and achievement merits of a school, yet teachers perceived there were fewer gifted
students because it is a Title I school. Carol also revealed the influence of socio-economic bias on teacher perceptions of gifted identification,

“I grew up in Severna Park schools [high social-economic status school]. I think a lot of those kids are identified as gifted and talented more than they are in needier schools because those kids follow the rules, they sit and they do what they are supposed to do. So I think they are more easily identified than kids who don’t have much support at home. You know, their parents are probably not pushing as much as much for their kids to be identified at a Meade school [low social-economic status].”

Teachers in the study perceived the higher economic status is seemingly related to a higher percentage of high potential and capability.

The work of Jean Anyon (1980) drives home the need to consider the influence of bias towards social class in the disproportionate representation of minority students in gifted programs. Anyon’s work concluded that students of different economic backgrounds are prepared to occupy particular rungs on a social ladder thus leaving knowledge and skills leading to social power inaccessible to students of lower social-economic class. Anyon posits a “hidden curriculum” is stratifying schools by limiting access to advanced academic programs or classes. Reffel and Reffel (2004) have contributed to these findings adding studies have found a negative relationship between the percentage of students in gifted and talented programs and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Additionally, noteworthy studies on urban school populations have also found the performance of students and ultimately their future success is able to be identified by zip code. While socio-economic demographics are themselves a challenge for school systems, they speak to the broader social and economic inequities facing vulnerable populations of gifted minority students. As observed in the participant’s responses, the
educators suggested they may have unconsciously varied their curricular and pedagogical approaches based on economic strata.

**Conclusion 4: Ongoing and differentiated professional development is vital for teacher assimilation of the MSDE PTD program goals.**

The fourth conclusion, ongoing and differentiated professional development is vital for teacher assimilation of the MSDE PTD program goals. Professional development is a significant factor in developing a culture of talent development among educators. The findings indicate without professional development, teachers fail to see an alignment of the program goals and module implementation. The overall opinion shared by participants is without professional development, the program is perceived as additional work teaching auxiliary lessons with no alignment to teaching and learning.

Several of the participants commented on the need for collaborative conversations and vertical teaming to expand talent identification efforts. It was apparent the participants felt strongly that talent development should be a collective responsibility of all teachers who interact with a child; the classroom teacher or homeroom teacher should not be the sole identifier of potential and talent. Participants cited the limitations of the program were the result of a lack of cross grade level collaborative efforts to develop the student portfolio. The findings indicate teachers feel there is no forum for discussing talented students or students with high potential.

Researchers have found that teachers who have received no formal training in the identification of gifted characteristics were more likely to nominate well-behaved students with good grades as opposed to students with high potential but who may not demonstrate other positively perceived traits (Gear, 1978). It is estimated that as many as 90% of children world-wide who were nominated as gifted by untrained teachers were more likely to have been high-achieving conformists instead of academically
gifted (Betts & Neihart, 1988). These statistics are significant to critical race studies as it reinforces the notion that dominant ideologies influence educational placement decisions.

**Implications for Practice**

The underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education programs is of great concern. While an early talent development program is intended to increase access for historically underrepresented groups to gifted education programs, this study finds teachers are unaware of the rewards of talent development in gifted and talented identification. Based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, implications and recommendations for practice are proposed.

1. Educators should participate in culturally responsive teaching practices which eradicate a colorblind ideology from the classroom. For example, if educators are unaware of the characteristics of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students they are unknowingly prohibiting access to advanced opportunities for these students. Additionally, if teachers overlook the aptitude of English language learners solely on communication ability these students are disadvantaged. Restricting access to cognitively challenging experiences based on language capacity and the notion ELL students “just don’t get it” because they are unable to communicate is a contributing factor to their underrepresentation in gifted programs. Additionally, teachers should participate in professional development which focuses on the intersection of cultural proficiency and socio-economic bias. Teachers may be unaware of the influence of perceptions based on social and economic class, thus imposing a stratification system which impedes student access to advanced academic programs.

2. Educators need to guidance to engage in language describing students beyond “smart” and “bright”. Teachers may engage in conversations about student which unknowingly perpetuate
discrimination of CLD students. Assuming language such as “smart” or “bright” stratifies students by unqualifiable characteristics. Participants of this study introduced these terms as a mechanism of profiling students; they were surprised by the students’ performance during talent development lessons because they may not have known how “bright” the students were based on standards-based achievement measures. This leaves students overlooked and marginalized if not deemed “smart” or “bright”. The application of thinking behaviors as a means of identifying talent and potential begins to chip away at this issue, but this study finds teachers question the need to document thinking behaviors as they are deemed as non-transferable in standards-based achievement measures.

3. Educators should receive professional development targeting student advocacy and developing student potential among culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. A lack of professional development specific to giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students perpetuates the issue of deficit thinking among educators. For example, the characteristics of giftedness may present itself differently in rural, disadvantaged children and urban, low socio-economic, minority children than middle class white children or affluent minority children. Consequently, the misinterpretation of cultural differences may result in low teacher expectations of students. These misperceptions will continue to impact the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students unless teachers participate in professional development which includes gifted education studies with a focus on diversity issues, student advocacy, and development of student potential.
Recommendations for Future Research

The United States population has become increasingly diverse over the last three decades; with massive migrations changing the ways national identities and cultural belongings are identified (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Shifts in demographic patterns by race are reflected in schools, with White populations decreasing and minority populations increasing. Conversely, the educational field remains overwhelmingly populated by White, European descent educators with no projections of significant changes (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Mep, & Tahan, 2011).

In 2011, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) releases a report examining the educational progress and ensuring challenges facing U.S. students. This report depicting the anticipated status and trends in racial/ethnic composition of the United States, showed a significant decrease of White populations and corresponding increase in the Hispanic populations (Aud et al., 2011). Between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of public school enrollment comprised of white students experienced a decline from 61% of the total populations of 56% of the total population. During this same period of time, corresponding increases were documented within Hispanic populations with enrollment increasing 17% to 21%. Black populations did not exhibit a significant change in student enrollment, maintaining 17% of the school enrollment population in public schools, but the shift in White enrollment resulted in a reduction of the differences between White enrollment and the Black minority race enrollment. The report also asserted that localized statistical norms may reflect higher percentages that national norms which potentially increase the significance for the impacted school districts. Furthermore, the report projected continued increases in minority student enrollment in public schools in the upcoming decade.

As demographic patterns change, attention to achievement and performance indicators of students by race has become the standard. The racial shift from minority populations to majority
populations projected in schools demand attention to be given to current conditions and disadvantages which minority students experience which may be serving as roadblocks to advanced learning opportunities. Examples of this are living arrangements, socio-economic status, and educational accomplishments of parents. Statistics within the report indicate 56% of Black children live with a female parent and no spouse, 34% of Black and 27% of Hispanic children under the age of 18 live in poverty, and five percent of children under the age of 18 were born outside the country (Auld et al., 2011). These statistics isolated as discrete data points do not convey the significant implications of poverty, immigration, language acquisition, homelessness, and marital status of parents bring to the psychological, social and emotional health of children in school. Compounding issues facing minority children relate to teacher efficacy and biases which influence teacher efficacy as it is perceived to ultimately impact student achievement (Elhoweris, 2008). As a result, the statistical data suggesting minority population expansion and corresponding reductions in White student enrollment encourages deep consideration of all factors and influences which impact student potential and achievement, including the identification of giftedness.

This study explored the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students. The findings lead to conclusions and suggestions for teacher and system practices in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD. Race continues to be a salient issue in gifted education both at local education associations and nationally. It is my recommendation that new areas of research should include teacher efficacy and its influence on talent development and gifted identification.

Teacher efficacy is founded on the beliefs and perceptions teachers hold about their ability to promote student learning (Tschanned-Moan, Hoy, Hoy, 1998). Teacher nominations for gifted
identification are based on the premise that a teacher recognizes or has knowledge of a student’s ability and potential. If teachers’ perceptions of giftedness and potential are influenced by poorly a perceived sense of efficacy, it is possible for gifted minority children to never be noticed for their potential, let alone make good use of their potential. Nationally, 85% of the teaching workforce in K-12 settings works with a student population that is almost 50% racially and culturally different (Auld et al., 2011). This statistic established the necessity for stakeholders to be aware of the dynamics of race and its impact on the educational experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. It also serves as a warrant to investigate the relationship between teacher efficacy and gifted identification. Ultimately, a teacher’s sense of efficacy is relative to their generalized expectancy of student achievement, which includes acceleration and advanced of potential. Continued research in the field may further confirm the influence of perceived efficacy as well as cross over potential for this new area of research.

Critics argue gifted programs emphasize opportunity gaps due to problems such as teacher bias against race and socio-economic class. This results in a pervading sense of elitist ethos towards gifted programs. As such, gifted and talented programs may be deemed controversial because they represent the embodiment of educational inequality. The continued disparity of access, identification, and service of CLD students in gifted programs requires an examination of all factors associated with gifted education policy development. Is it possible the problem perpetuates because, arguably, the term “gifted” has been claimed to be a social construct (Boreland, 1997).

The goal of early talent development programs, such as the MSDE PTD program, aim to expand the perspectives of early childhood educators towards gifted and talented identification. The implications of this study are that teacher perceptions of potential were changed as a result of their experience with the program, but to no consequence. It seemed teachers were not emboldened to
respond to student potential as a result of their new awareness or more concerning, teachers maintained a traditional misconception of giftedness; gifted students will succeed regardless. A teacher’s response to identifying and serving gifted students will depend on their knowledge, skills, and experience. According to Gagné (2009), gifted and talented are interrelated but also different; the process of developing talent requires both the people and learning environment around them. There is much work to be done. Careful examination of how teacher’s views of giftedness influence their teaching practice will provide additional insight into the many ways in which early talent development programs address the disproportionate representation of underrepresented groups in gifted programs.

The linchpin for reducing the disproportionate ratio of gifted identification among culturally and linguistically diverse students is to develop identification practices which counterbalance the subjectivity of teacher perceptions. The MSDE PTD program is one such mechanism, but disjointed definitions of giftedness may propagate the notion of gifted as an exclusive paradigm. Teachers have different philosophies and beliefs which are reflected in their pedagogical approach. Consequently, teacher’s perceptions about giftedness influence the learning experiences availed to gifted and talented students (Wong, 2015).

In conclusion, this study examined the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness among CLD students as a means of gaining insight into the reasons minority students continue to be underrepresented in gifted programs. The findings of this study will be used to develop more inclusive gifted and talented identification practices within Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD. Additionally, the findings will contribute valuable insight into the field of talent development and the ways in which educators respond and develop student potential.
Appendix A

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Corrine Perrella
Title: Exploring the Influence of an Early Talent development Program on Teacher Perceptions of Giftedness in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study

I am asking you [name] to take part in a research study. The research collected will be small group interviews. Every interview will be audio recorded using an audio recording device (SONY ICD PX333 Digital Voice Recorder). The use of a recording device is justified in this study because the details of thought and language used by the participants are critical to data analysis.

You are responsible to transcribe the audio-tapes to ensure accurate reporting of the information provided. You will not discuss any item on the tape with anyone other than the researcher. No one’s name will be asked or revealed during individual interviews. The audio-tapes will be stored in locked files before and after being transcribed. Tapes will be destroyed within 2 weeks of completing the transcriptions.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

Corrine Perrella, Student Researcher, Northeastern University perrella.c@husky.neu.edu
732 Pearson Point Place Annapolis, MD 21401 443-254-6584

Krystal Moore Clemons, PhD(Principal Investigator), Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115 k.clemons@neu.edu 773-396-6499

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid or my participation?

Transcription fees are negotiable.
I agree to take part in this research

____________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                  Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix B

March 29, 2016

Corrine Perrella
Advanced Learner Program AACPS
cperrella@aacps.org

Re: Research Application

Dear Ms. Perrella:

Thank you for your interest in conducting the study Exploring the Influence of an Early Talent Development Program on Teacher Perceptions of Giftedness in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. We have had an opportunity to review your request.

All requests to conduct research in Anne Arundel County Public Schools are reviewed in regard to three major criteria. First, does the research have a potential positive contribution towards improving the delivery of instruction to students attending Anne Arundel County Public Schools? Second, does the research have procedures and processes in place to insure the confidentiality of all participants in the study? Third, does the research obtain its data in such a way that it will have a minimal impact upon the instructional time of students and/or staff?

The proposed study will address important areas of education research and at this time we are approving your application to conduct research in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Please note that Board policy regarding the conduct of research in Anne Arundel County Public Schools reserves the final approval of all research requests in the hands of the building principals. As such, this letter as well as, copies of study documents should be made available to the building principals to the school building that you choose to utilize.

In closing, I would like to ask that you consider this letter as formal approval of your request to conduct your research project in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Please insure that all school, teacher or student identifying information is removed from any prepared documents, either paper or electronic, that may be a part of any final drafts of documents relating to your study.

On behalf of the Research Office, I wish you success in the conduct of your study, and require, at its conclusion, that your results be shared with all interested staff as part of the school system’s ongoing effort to improve student performance in Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Christopher M. Grandieri
Senior Manager of Research
Instructional Data Division

cc: Mr. Jason A. Dykstra
Appendix C

Call for Participants

Dear Colleague,

As a K-2 teacher who has experience implementing the Maryland State Department of Education Primary Talent Development Early Learning Program (MSDE PTD) I would like to invite you to participate in the following study.

I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University, conducting a study to gain insight into the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In order to participate, you must have experience implementing the MSDE PTD program modules in grades kindergarten, first, or second grade. Participants of the study are expected to be employed by Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD. Years of service will not be a condition or criteria for selection. All qualified individuals are encouraged to apply, regardless of race, class, religion, (dis)ability, or national origin.

The study consists of a 90 minute individual interview conducted in the setting of your choice focused on your understandings of giftedness. Confidentiality is guaranteed, and participants’ names will not be shared with others or used in the published results.

If you or someone you know would like to participate in this study or learn more, please email cperrella@aacps.org or call 443-254-6584. Selection for the study is not guaranteed, but will be determined during a brief 5-10 minute intake call.

Regards,
Corrine Perrella
Appendix D

Consent Form

Northeastern University, Department of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Krystal Moore Clemons (Principal Investigator), Corrine Perrella (Student Researcher)

Title of Project: Exploring the Influence of an Early Talent Development Program on Teacher Perceptions of Giftedness in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Request to Participate in Research

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which the Maryland State Department of Education Early Learning Primary Talent Development Program (2009).

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study will take place at a location of your choice. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you participate in a 90 minute interview (conducted by Corrine Perrella) about your experiences related to identifying highly talented and or gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. However, if for any reason you wish to stop the interview you may do so at any time.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms, and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Corrine Perrella (Tel: 443-254-6584, Email: perrella.c@husky.neu.edu), the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Krystal Clemons (Northeastern University, Boston, MA, Email: k.clemons@neu.edu), the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.
Corrine Perrella
Appendix E

Interview Protocol Form

Institution:  Northeastern University; 360 Huntington Avenue; Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Interviewee:  

Interviewer: Corrine Perrella  

Date:  

Location of Interview:  

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Intake Call

Thank you for calling and expressing interest in this study. My name is Corrine Perrella, and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. This research is being conducted as my doctoral thesis project. The goal of the study is to explore the influence of an early talent development program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students. There are a few personal reasons I’m interested in this particular topic: First, I work as a Primary Talent Development Resource Teacher with Anne Arundel County Public Schools, and I’m very passionate about gifted education. The second reason I’ve chosen this topic is because there have been limited studies related to the influence of the Maryland State Department of Education Early Learning Talent Development Program on teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students.

As the Student Researcher, I am also the person who will be conducting the interviews as well as the intake calls, like the one we are doing right now.

Today, I’d like to ask you just a few criteria-based questions, to determine if you qualify as a participant, and if so, I’ll give you a more detailed explanation as to the scope of this project. At that point, if you’re interested in proceeding, we can talk about setting up the interview time. Sound good?

- Could you please state your age?
- Are you a currently employed as an Anne Arundel County Public School teacher?
  - Do you currently teach in grades Kindergarten, first, or second?
  - Where are you employed as a teacher (school name)?
- This study calls for participants who have at experience implementing the Maryland State Department of Education Early Learning Talent Development Program.
  - Can you tell me how you qualify in regards to this?
  - Have you attended or participated any professional development seminars related to the Maryland State Department of Education Early Learning Talent Development Program? When did you attend the professional development seminars?
Thank you. I’m happy to say that you meet all of the criteria in regards to participation in this study. Now I would like to tell you a bit more about the scope of this project.

This is a case study. The main question being asked is: “How has the Maryland State Department of Education Early Learning Talent Development Program (MSDE PTD) influenced your perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students?” The reason I chose to focus on this program is because Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD adopted the MSDE PTD program in response to Code of Maryland Regulation 13A.04.07 which requires multiple indicators or potential and achievement for a gifted and talented identification pool. As of 2015, all kindergarten, first, and second grade students are expected to participate in the talent development modules. Teachers in response are required to document student potentials through a cumulative portfolio.

The process includes a 90 minute individual interview. In the interview, I’ll collect some basic background information; ask questions that focus on your experiences with the MSDE PTD program, and then inquire more specifically about the identifying giftedness in students who are culturally and or linguistically diverse. All responses will be kept anonymous—identifying information would never be published.

That is a very brief overview of the study. Do you have any questions in regards to the research itself?

With that said, are you interesting in proceeding as a participant in this study? The interview will take place at a location and time of your choosing.

Thank you. I will also email an electronic copy of the Consent Form, which tells you a bit more about the study and answers some common questions people often have in regards to research. I ask that you please read it over before the first interview. If you have any questions or concerns, you are of course free to contact me. We will go over the Consent Form together at the beginning of the next call, giving you another chance to ask any questions. If you then decide to continue with the interview, you will just have to give verbal consent at that time. Do you have any questions? Would you like to recommend someone to participate in this study? Please give them my contact information should they wish to participate.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Interview #1

Part 1: Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has experience with the Maryland State Department of Education Early Learning Talent Development Program (MSDE PTD). You also have experience teaching children are culturally and linguistically diverse.
This research project focuses on the experience of teachers related to identifying giftedness among culturally and linguistically diverse students. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how an early talent development program influences teacher perceptions of giftedness.

Hopefully this study will allow us to better understand and support the identification of giftedness in students from diverse backgrounds. There are many stakeholders who play important roles in the gifted identification process, but possibly none are more important than teachers. Each and every day teachers are observing student talents. Hence probing teacher understandings will provide insightful information both locally and nationally.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. Only I and possibly a professional transcriptionist will be privy to the audio files. If a transcriptionist is used, that person will have signed a confidentiality statement, and will also only be provided with the recording labeled by pseudonym, meaning they will never even know your name, to maintain confidentiality. The audio files will be destroyed within two weeks after they are transcribed. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only pseudonyms will be used when quoting from the transcripts. Only your pseudonym will be attached to the transcript.

I would like to begin recording this session now, please acknowledge verbally? OK, the audio recording has begun.

To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, participants have to read and verbally agree to the Consent Form that I sent you. I’d like to go over this form with you now. The Consent Form for this study, titled ‘Exploring the Influence of an Early Talent Development Program on Teacher Perceptions of Giftedness in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students,’ states that all participants must be employed by Anne Arundel County Public Schools. You are being asked to participate in an interview focused around your experiences with culturally and linguistically diverse students who may or may not be identified as gifted. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms, and will not identify you or any other participant as being part of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should you have any other questions about your rights in this research (and you can call that person confidentially, if you wish).

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the interview process or this form? Do you give your verbal consent? Great, thank you.
We have planned for this interview to last between 60-90 minutes. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part 2: Interview

Central Research Question
How has the MSDE PTD program influenced teacher perceptions of giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse students?

Sub Questions:
What has been your experience with the MSDE PTD program?
Which of these experiences from the implementation of the MSDE PTD program has had the most impact on your teaching practice?
How has this program supported or expanded your understanding of gifted characteristics?
How might a student’s reading fluency mask his or her giftedness? Have you been introduced to strategies for identifying and documenting potential giftedness in students beyond academic or standardized measures?
How might giftedness be determined among students with limited English language proficiency?
How might cultural norms influence the identification of giftedness?
To what extent has the MSDE PTD program impacted your interactions with possible gifted students and/or students with high academic potential?

Part 3: Wrap-up

Thank you, this concludes the interview questions.

If I need to ask any follow-up questions, may I contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts and my initial interpretations of the interview. If you chose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Please confirm your email address.

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your participation in this study.
Appendix F

NIH Human Subject Training Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Corrine Perrella successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 06/12/2014

Certification Number: 1487391
Appendix G

Interview Questions:

1. What has been your experience with the MSDE PTD program?
2. Which of these experiences has had the most impact on your teaching practice?
3. How has this program supported or expanded your understanding of gifted characteristics?
4. How might a students’ reading fluency mask his or her giftedness? Have you been introduced to strategies for identifying and documenting potential giftedness in students beyond academic or standardized measures?
5. How might giftedness be determined among students with limited English language proficiency?
6. How may cultural norms influence the identification of giftedness?
7. To what extent has the MSDE PTD program impacted your interactions with possible gifted students and/or students with high academic potential?
References


Zhao, Y. (2012). World class learners: Educating creative and entrepreneurial students. SAGE.