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Community Advocate Perspectives on Addressing Equity Gaps in Florida's Gifted Programs

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2022

MA, University of South Florida, 2011

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The problem for this study addressed the lack of community advocate perspectives related to efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for minority students who were underserved by gifted programs in Florida. The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of community advocates about efforts to improve bureaucratic representation for students underserved by gifted programs in Florida. The study was conceptually framed around Kingsley's theory of representative bureaucracy. The research questions focused on community advocates' perceptions related to diversity in Florida's public school gifted programs and their current efforts to improve representation of minority students in gifted education programs. A basic qualitative design was used to capture the insights of 12 community advocates from Florida with experience advocating for underrepresented individuals through semistructured interviews; a purposeful sampling process was used to select the participants. Emergent themes were identified through open coding, and the findings were developed and checked for trustworthiness through member checking, rich descriptions, and researcher reflexivity. The findings revealed a need for improved advocacy for underserved students, shared knowledge and collaboration, and reflections on potential bureaucratic barriers hindering progress toward equity. Recommendations include future research involving community advocates and greater use of the theory of representative bureaucracy in public education. The study has implications for positive social change by shedding new light on equity gaps in gifted education programs and how to address those gaps for the benefit of all students.

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I would like to thank my daughter, Cadence, who is too young to fully understand her role in my drive to complete this program. I hope someday when she realizes what it means for Mommy to be a doctor that she will be proud of my perseverance and hard work. May she never give up on herself and may she always stand up for what she believes in.

While developing, conducting, and writing this study, I unfortunately lost both of my parents. I want to thank my parents, Donald and Marlene Duclos, for their endless support of everything I did while I was fortunate enough to have them with me. I know they would be proud of my perseverance through several exceptionally challenging years in my life and the result of my hard work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Throughout the United States, many public schools provide services to students who are identified as gifted. In tracking these programs, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) found that the programs differed in how they define giftedness and identify potentially gifted students (NAGC & The Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted, 2015; Rinn et al., 2022). The NAGC acknowledged that variances in identification efforts may be a result of districts attempting to address a representation gap. Scholars in the field of gifted education have emphasized this representation gap in more than 30 years of research suggesting that there is a need for gifted programs to more equitably represent the diversity of their respective schools and districts. Although researchers and practitioners agree on the need for equitable representation in U.S. gifted programs, they have taken varying approaches to addressing these representation (Hodges et al., 2018; Kettler et al., 2015; Peters, 2022; Peters et al., 2019). The continued efforts of leaders of schools and districts nationwide to address representation gaps suggests the need to consider new perspectives on addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs.

Efforts to address underrepresentation have occurred throughout the United States (Hodges et al., 2018; Lamb et al., 2019; Mun et al., 2021), but with varying policies related to gifted programs and variations in funding, outcomes differ at the state level. Some states provide more insight on the success of these efforts than others. One such state is Florida, where state funding for gifted programs is tied to exceptional education funding and there are state mandates in place that protect these programs for students.

Leaders of the State of Florida developed their plan for serving gifted students in public schools in the early 1970s (Florida State Department of Education, 1973), instituting their own definition of gifted students and including mandates requiring the identification of and service to gifted students in Florida public schools. Only allowing modifications to be made for increased identification of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) households that qualify for free or reduced priced lunch (Florida State Department of Education, 2002), Florida's gifted program has been criticized regarding underrepresentation of minority groups (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Eriksson, 2022; Hodges & Gentry, 2021; Maker, 1996). This criticism echoes the concern of researchers and practitioners alike that Florida and other states may simply not be doing enough to address underrepresentation in gifted programs by creating gifted programs that better reflect the diversity of the students and community members they are designed to serve.

When investigating gifted programs, researchers traditionally seek their data from a common set of public school stakeholders: educators, parents, and program administrators (Hodges et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Mun et al., 2020; Robbins, 2019). As a result of relying on the same traditional data sources, the current literature addressing diversity gaps in gifted programs provides little that is new to the discipline (Hodges et al., 2018; Hodges et al., 2022; Wilson, 2022). In this study, I looked outside of the traditional public school setting at the perspectives of advocates working in the public sector to improve representation for minority groups outside of public education. Adams and Kavanagh (2020) in their study on the sociology of sport supported the use of

outside stakeholders in research, supporting the belief that if participants had a common interest in an issue, their input provided a valuable, critical perspective on the topic. Additionally, the existing literature of studies that involve the perspectives of individuals outside of the sphere of public education are limited to program evaluation (Chen & Chen, 2020) or community involvement in service projects involving at-risk gifted students (Donnison & Marshman, 2018; Mayes et al., 2019). To address the gap in the empirical research knowledge as well as to improve efforts to address representation gaps in Florida gifted programs across the wide array of research-based minority groups, it is important to consider adding the perspectives of community members and leaders who serve or could serve as advocates and representatives for underserved potentially gifted students.

In Chapter 1, I address the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions (RQs), conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions pertaining to the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. In the Background section, I introduce the key literature related to this topic, including identification protocols for gifted education in Florida and studies about students from a variety of minority backgrounds, and lay the foundation for why this study should be conducted. In the Problem Statement section, I define the problem and support its relevance, identify a related gap in the literature of the discipline, and present an argument for the importance of the study. In the Purpose of the Study section, I identify the phenomenon that was explored and described in the study. In the Conceptual Framework section, I identify the structure of the study, which was rooted the

theory of representative bureaucracy. In the Nature of the Study section, I provide a rationale for the use of qualitative interviewing as the method for data collection and interpretive description as the main design for data analysis for the study. In the Scope and Delimitations section, I support the use of the state of Florida as the setting for the study as well as identify populations included and excluded in the study. Finally, in the Significance section, I reiterate the importance of the study and the potential benefits of the collected data and address how the study aligned with Walden University's mission for positive social change.

Background

Despite over 3 decades of research on the underrepresentation of minority groups in gifted programs, the topic remains prevalent in recent studies (Hodges et al., 2018; Peters, 2021; Yaluma & Tyner, 2021). In their metanalysis, Hodges et al. (2018) analyzed 54 studies on the topic of gifted identification and underrepresentation, concluding that although the efforts being made to utilize more inclusive identification practices were increasing the identification of underrepresented students, gaps in representation remain and more research on practice changes is necessary. Efforts toward meaningful improvements have been slow (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2015; Peters, 2022; Peters et al., 2019). Additionally, published studies in the field of gifted education related to underrepresented populations have content and methodological limitations. Typically, each study has focused on the causes and potential solutions for a single representation gap as it pertains to a specific population of underrepresented students, such as students who live in poverty (Hodges & Gentry, 2021), students from minority racial and ethnic

groups (Cohen, 2022; Garces-Bacsal & Elhoweris, 2022; Peters & Carter, 2021), and ELLs (Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Gubbins et al., 2020). Broad efforts to address representation for all the underserved groups are not present in the current body of literature. This has left districts and schools nationwide, including in Florida, with the continued struggle to mirror the diversity of their growing student populations within their gifted programs.

In their meta-analysis, Hodges et al. (2018) revealed that the current body of literature is primarily comprised of (a) quantitative studies that focused on measuring program objectives and outcomes in terms of increases in the percentages of demographic representation in gifted programs or (b) qualitative studies that focused on the perspectives of traditional stakeholders like gifted program leaders, administrators, and educators. As a result, there is a need for a study that describes the perspectives of community members and leaders who directly or indirectly serve as representatives or advocates for underserved gifted students through advocacy for underrepresented populations in other sectors of society. There is also a need to provide insights on practicable solutions that might lead to more equitable representation in gifted programs. Florida's history of underrepresentation (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Eriksson, 2022; Hodges & Gentry, 2021; Maker, 1996) and limited focus on only two groups (Florida State Department of Education, 2002) made it an ideal location to collect the data for this study.

One of the concerns expressed by Hodges et al. (2018) was that students who are not accurately identified as gifted are missing opportunities to develop their strengths and

be served properly within gifted programs. The concern that underrepresented students miss opportunities for growth due to delayed identification and services was also addressed in a prior synthesis by Coleman et al. (2015) of 25 years of studies related to the lived experiences of identified gifted students. The researchers found that early identification of gifted students often resulted in these individuals feeling more successful and happier in their adult lives both on a professional and a personal level. Individually and combined, the Hodges et al. and Coleman et al. meta-analyses showed a need to consider new paths to identifying students from all backgrounds. In this study, I explored how those new paths could potentially be inspired by the work of those currently advocating for individuals from these minority groups in other aspects of policy.

The broader body of literature related to gifted programs also supports the need for further study of the perspectives of community members who serve as advocates for underrepresented populations. Williams (2022) called for gifted researchers and practitioners to seek the voices of the communities they wish to serve when trying to improve underrepresentation in gifted programs. Underrepresentation is not just an issue in gifted programs (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2016) but, rather, is an issue reflected in many sectors of public policy nationwide (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). As such, individuals working as advocates in other sectors could provide insights for practicable solutions that might lead to more equitable representation in gifted programs; in doing so, they could shed new light on a decades-old problem. In their meta-review, Bishu and Kennedy (2020) described such “street level advocacy” (p. 16) as commonly applied to issues of race or gender in the form of representative bureaucracy (p. 18). However, such advocacy

can be applied to all demographics, particularly when being used to address educational goals. In fact, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as updated by the U.S. Department of Education (2005), specifically demands that U.S. public schools equitably meet the needs of all students. That being the case, the theory of representative bureaucracy (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968) would suggest that more equitable and active representation, formal or street level, for all underrepresented groups is necessary.

I conducted this study in Florida. Florida is one of only 26 states with a mandate for the identification and service of gifted students (NAGC, 2015; Rinn et al., 2022), suggesting that data collected from this state could be used to influence programs not only within Florida, but in other locales with similar student populations and diversity. In a recent review of selected state plans for gifted education programs, Florida was recognized as one of only 11 states meeting all the NAGC's state plan recommendations (Lockhart et al., 2022). Additionally, officials from Florida's Department of Education have a history of efforts to address underrepresentation with their Plan B addendum, but adherence to this addendum is not required and the addendum only focuses on two of the underrepresented groups addressed in the larger body of literature, resulting in continued representation gaps in Florida's gifted programs (Thompson, 2015). Although educators, administrators, and parents have been actively involved in advocacy for gifted students for decades (Roberts & Plucker, 2022; Robinson & Moon, 2003), it is plausible that community members and leaders who are working to increase representative bureaucracy in other organizations and in government may be able to offer insight that is currently missing from the research dialogue on underrepresentation in gifted programs. This

insight could be used to devise new pathways for identifying and serving gifted students from all backgrounds.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida. The particular focus was on active representation. Current research (Hodges et al., 2018; Matthews & Peters, 2018; Peters, 2021) and practicable efforts led by traditional stakeholders (Callahan et al., 2017; D'Orio, 2017; Lamb et al., 2022; Peters & Carter, 2022) have not addressed the vast array of minority groups who are underserved and underrepresented in U.S. gifted programs. Teachers and school leaders seeking to increase diversity in gifted programs often focus on only one or two underrepresented groups and offer solutions based solely on those respective groups, not on improving equitable representation for all potentially gifted students.

Because practitioners in gifted education programs look to the literature to build, maintain, and amend their practice, they may perpetuate underrepresentation due to the lack of cohesion and connection between studies. For example, upon reviewing the literature, I found that many underrepresented populations face the same or similar challenges, including classroom teacher gatekeepers with biases about underrepresented groups (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Grissom et al., 2017; Haller-Gryc, 2022; Lewis & Boswell, 2020; Novak & Jones, 2021), lack of cultural understanding related to the obstacles potentially gifted minority students face (Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Crawford et

al., 2020; McKenzie, 2019; Novak & Jones, 2021), concerns about testing procedures or testing bias (D'Orio, 2017; Joseph & Ford, 2006; Kaya et al., 2016; Matthews & Peters, 2018; Mollenkopf et al., 2021) and concerns about funding gaps (Azano et al., 2017; Jolly & Robins, 2016; Kettler et al., 2015; List & Dykeman, 2021; Matthews & Peters, 2018). Peters's (2021) breakdown of the roots of inequality in gifted programs, including societal inequities such as access and opportunity, further support the link between the various underrepresented groups identified in the literature. Additionally, with no fundamental changes made to identification procedures since the introduction of the Florida Plan B statute addendum in 1991 (Thompson, 2015), current representation for these students appears to be mainly the result of advocacy efforts focused on other programs that have benefitted gifted programs tangentially, limiting the potential benefits of more focused advocacy for underserved gifted students (see Bishu & Kennedy, 2020).

Just as most studies related to underrepresented populations have quantitatively (Hodges et al., 2018) addressed the content of traditional stakeholder perspectives (Coleman et al., 2015; Hodges et al., 2018), advocacy for gifted students in Florida has also been limited to the voices of traditional stakeholders like educators, administrators, and the parents of gifted children (Ezzani et al., 2021; Robinson & Moon, 2003). This gap between research and practice leaves traditional stakeholders unprepared to actively represent many children underserved by gifted programs. There is a need for a new perspective on this issue—one not from the traditional stakeholders working with gifted and potentially gifted students. Wilson (2022), a professor at the University of North Florida, stated in her reaction to Peters's (2021) study on the continued

underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs that researchers and practitioners must "go to the communities in which we wish to serve" (p. 135). Wilson also noted that researchers and practitioners need to forth the voices of those most affected by the inequity of gifted programs if they truly wish to have a full discourse and resolve the problem of underrepresentation in gifted programs. Additionally, because underrepresentation is an issue present not only in gifted programs (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2016), but also in noneducational programs and public policy (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020), community members and community leaders with experience advocating for minority groups in other sectors could shed light on more effective and efficient ways to address diversity gaps in Florida's gifted programs. Improving active advocacy could support administrators and teachers in districts and schools within the state and, potentially, nationwide in their efforts to represent the growing diversity of the student populations more equitably within district gifted programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. Improved representation through the voices of new advocates could have a positive influence on Florida's approach to more equitably representing the growing diversity of the student populations within their gifted programs (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Roberts & Plucker, 2022). These new perspectives of community members and leaders, both shared

by and contradictory of those held by traditional stakeholders, might assist stakeholders' in their efforts to increase equitable representation within gifted programs in the State of Florida (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). The findings from this study may counterbalance existing research, which has emphasized traditional perspectives, and offer insights on the potential benefits of advocate perspectives and representative bureaucracy. This knowledge may serve to guide the practicable identification efforts of practitioners toward more equitable representation in gifted programs. The community advocates–community leaders, nonprofit organizers, and local minority advocates–in this study all represented the interests of and advocated for the minority groups identified in the body of gifted underrepresentation research. They had unique perspectives on the current practicable efforts being implemented in non-school settings throughout the state that have potential applications to public education.

The phenomenon addressed in this study was a lack of perspectives from community advocates for underrepresented populations regarding the practicable efforts being made to address representation gaps in gifted programs in Florida public schools. Through these unique perspectives, researchers and practitioners can acquire a broader contextual understanding of the practicable efforts that are being implemented to address issues of underrepresentation outside of gifted programs and what supports are needed for these efforts. They can also learn how these efforts can potentially be replicated as a part of a more consistent and wider effort to address underrepresentation in gifted programs throughout Florida and, potentially, the United States as a whole.

Research Questions

I sought to answer one overarching question (RQ1) and one subquestion (RQ1a). The subquestion focused on the theory of representative bureaucracy as it relates to the phenomenon and conceptual framework for the study. The questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are community advocates' observations and perceptions related to practicable solutions for increasing diversity in public school gifted programs within the state of Florida?

RQ1a: In what ways do community advocates believe their current efforts to improve representation for minority groups could be practicably applied toward increasing the equity and active representation in Florida's gifted programs?

Conceptual Framework

The theory of representative bureaucracy (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968) was the conceptual framework for this study. Public education is often viewed as a bureaucracy because, although some leaders of schools and districts are elected, many are appointed or hired. Both the federal government of the United States and the individual state governments operate their public schools via their respective departments of education and their appointed staff. Even on a smaller level, individual school districts within each state are operated by both elected school board officials and appointed superintendents and their appointed staff members, resulting in bureaucratic operations that are influenced, but not controlled, by elected representatives. Elected school board members often make decisions at the behest of the appointed superintendent and their staff, meaning that most of the control and influence remains in the hands of these officials, not

the elected representatives. Although political measures like Florida's mandates related to gifted education were initially proposed and voted into policy by elected representatives, the practicable applications of these mandates are handled bureaucratically.

The theory of representative bureaucracy, first introduced by Kingsley (1944) and further developed by Mosher (1968), suggests that there are two types of representation at a bureaucratic level: active and passive. Active representation in a bureaucratic organization such as a school system is the result of a representative acting on behalf of those who the representative claims to represent. Active representation can also include matched demographic characteristics and shared experiences between those people represented and the representatives, allowing those representatives to better related to and advocate for their clients or constituents (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). In a school system, those clients would be the students, represented by leaders at all levels, including in their classrooms, administrative offices, district leadership positions, and state and federal departments of education.

Passive representation describes the situation in which a group of individuals potentially benefits from policies that were not initially designed with them in mind (Mosher, 1968). In the public education system, this often means that programming and support systems are designed with the majority population in mind, but through passive representation some of those programs and systems still benefit individuals from minority groups (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). For example, the state mandate requiring Florida public schools to identify and serve gifted students was designed in a way that provides special programming for highly intelligent students. Although the IQ assessments used

are criticized for bias against certain minority groups and IQ is a limiting way to perceive intelligence, minority students with high IQ scores still benefit from their acceptance into gifted programs. The theory of representative bureaucracy posits that organizations are most effective and efficient when active representation reflects the needs of the people being served (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Mosher, 1968). In other words, both the policies being created and the policy makers enacting them should be more reflective of the population being served. Additionally, the needs of the population being served should be reflected in the actions taking place at a policy level and the real-life application of those policies.

The theory of representative bureaucracy operates with some underlying assumptions about bureaucracies, including that they are not neutral and that bureaucrats are more likely to act for clients when they have a shared sense of identity and common goals (Meier, 2019). The theory proposes that representation in government and in policy should reflect the increasing diversity of the United States, but it often does not. The failure to adequately represent a diverse population at the leadership level results in a failed effort to consider the interests of all groups affected by policy when policies are developed and implemented (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011).

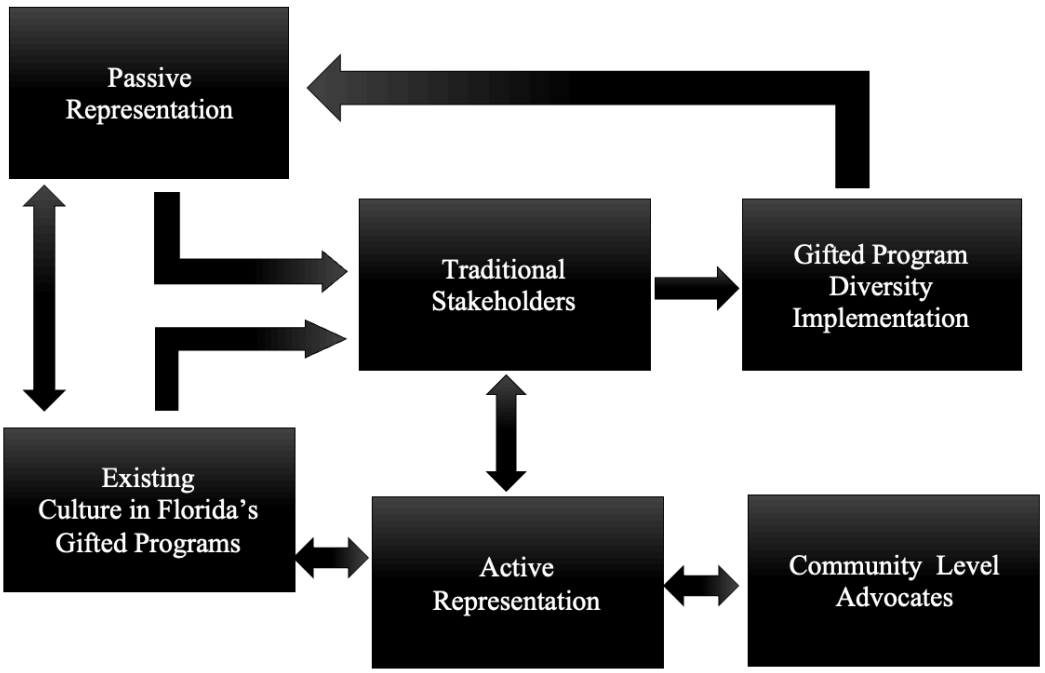
I used the theory of representative bureaucracy as a lens to consider how the community advocates who are currently representing and advocating for minority groups in the state of Florida perceive current efforts to address the representation gap generally and specifically in regard to the gifted education programs in the state of Florida. This study also served as an opportunity for these community advocates to share their

observations and perspectives and suggestions for practicable solutions for equitably representing the growing diversity of the student populations within Florida's gifted programs.

Figure 1 shows my original interpretation of how the implementation of practicable efforts to increase diversity in gifted programs is influenced by both the existing culture in gifted education programs and active representation. Passive representation remains a constant influence on the students currently being served in programs regardless of changes to active representation. This means these students will still be affected by any changes in policy but are likely to be more positively affected by active representation that better understands their culture and unique needs.

Figure 1

Passive and Active Representation in Florida Gifted Program Diversity Implementation



The arrow showing the relationship between the existing culture in Florida's gifted programs and traditional stakeholders demonstrates that this culture is influencing the actions of stakeholders and community advocates related to improving equity and diversity in gifted programs, a form of active representation, but not at the level necessary to enact lasting change (see Card & Giuliano, 2016; Maker, 1996). The existent body of literature highlights that although schools in the United States have become more diverse, diversity gaps remain prevalent in gifted programs. The NAGC (2010) and prominent researchers in the field of gifted education (e.g., see Boothe & Stanley, 2004) called for reforms related to increasing diversity in gifted programs to more equitably represent changing school populations, and researchers have tried to meet this goal through revisiting testing criteria and seeking parental support (D'Orio, 2017), modifying identification criteria (Hodges et al., 2018), and utilizing an advanced academics course with potentially gifted and non-gifted peers mixed heterogeneously Matthews & Peters, 2018). But despite these efforts to create gifted programs that reflect the current populations of public schools, progress has been inconsistent and slow (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2015; Peters, 2022), and more active representation remains a goal for researchers studying diversity in gifted programs (Johnsen, 2014; Matthews & Peters, 2018; Peters, 2021).

The current programs, stakeholders, and community advocates also influence passive representation, as this representation is aimed to meet the needs of the current population of gifted students but may indirectly benefit the minority students who are being included in small numbers in these programs. To meet the goal of closing the

representation gap and creating more equitable representation in gifted programs that has been addressed in the literature for over 30 years, more active representation led by traditional stakeholders and community advocates may be needed to advocate for these students. The conceptual framework is described with more detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

For the study, I used a basic qualitative approach featuring a qualitative interpretive description design. Interpretative description was appropriate for this study because, to qualitatively understand the perspectives of community members and leaders as representatives and advocates on the topic of equitable representation in gifted programs, it was crucial for me to identify common themes, practices, trends, and similarities, as well as identify elements that were uniquely different (see Patton, 2015). Kaya and Akgül (2022) used an interpretive design to explore the perspectives of parents of gifted students who received virtual gifted services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kaya and Akgül's determination to better understand not just the described experiences of the participants, but to understand the impacts and potential practicable solutions that could stem from their input, mirrors the driving force behind my own study. It does not serve the educational community to have multiple and repetitious traditional responses to addressing the lack of diversity in gifted programs, as that information already exists in the literature (Callahan et al., 2017; D'Orio, 2017; Makel, 2022; Peters, 2021; Peters et al., 2019). What is needed, instead, is to find practicable commonalities and potentially useful differences being applied outside of gifted education that could be translated into practice within gifted education. Additionally, interpretive description, a common

strategy associated with the basic qualitative approach (Thorne et al., 2004) was used to not only understand the perspectives of the participants, but also to interpret how those perspectives can lead to practicable strategies for increasing the diversity of gifted programs within the state of Florida. These insights may allow those programs to be more reflective of their school and district populations, adhering to the theory of representative bureaucracy. See Chapter 3 for a more thorough description of the study design.

For the study, I identified the target population as community members and leaders in the state of Florida currently working as advocates for equitable representation of identified minority groups. More specifically, I sought the perspectives of individuals currently working to increase equitable representation for groups identified as underrepresented in the literature, including students from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds (Crawford et al., 2020; D'Orio, 2017; Gillard, 2017), students who live in poverty (Hamilton et al., 2018; Hodges & Gentry, 2021), ELLs (Coronado & Lewis, 2017; D'Orio, 2017; Garces-Bacsal & Elhoweris, 2022; Gubbins et al., 2018), students from rural areas (Azano et al., 2017; Kettler et al., 2016; Hodges & Gentry, 2020; Jung et al., 2022b), and students with dual-exceptionalities (Gierczyk & Hornby, 2021; Lovett, 2013; Maddocks, 2020; Walrod, 2022).

Among the participants were community members, community leaders, nonprofit volunteers and leaders, government officials, and local individuals taking an active role in addressing the issue of representative bureaucracy on behalf of the minority groups identified in the literature. Through research and connections within the community that were made with the help of social workers and guidance counselors, I was able to

develop a sample frame of individuals who met the eligibility criteria, who had an interest in participating in the study, and who were willing to share their perspectives on advocating for underrepresented gifted students. Using the criteria described, I selected a purposeful sample of 12 participants who could provide the most insight into addressing underrepresentation from a standpoint of the theory of representative bureaucracy. I was also purposeful in selecting individuals who had experience advocating for different minority groups; I sought such individuals for the study to incorporate as much applicable data as possible.

I conducted open-ended interviews with the participants to explore their perspectives as community advocates on the phenomenon of a lack of practicable solutions for addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs in the state of Florida. I employed a semistructured interview procedure to collect participant responses related to underrepresentation, efforts to address underrepresentation, and the ability to replicate potential solutions in the field of gifted education. Interview questions were based on the study problem, purpose, overarching RQ, and the current body of literature; see Chapter 3 for the full interview protocol.

To analyze data collected from the interviews, I used first- and second-cycle coding techniques. I employed multiple coding techniques, based on Saldaña (2015), to explore relationships between content, theory, and agency to achieve a type of analytic methodological triangulation. This analysis is described in greater detail in Chapter 3. To reach the stated purpose of the study, I looked for data in the interview responses that

described the perspectives of these community advocates on practicable solutions for more equitably addressing representation gaps in Florida's gifted programs.

Definitions

For qualitative research, Creswell (2013) stressed the importance of including definitions that will aid the reader in understanding the terms used by the researcher. I have defined the following terms relevant to this study:

Community advocate: A community member who is currently serving as an advocate for underrepresented or minority groups within a sector of society, likely as a volunteer or as an employee of a community-based organization. Some research exists on community advocates who work to improve a sector different than the one in which they work, such as community advocates from a nonprofit organization who partner with a business or government agency. However, the existing research is predominantly in the fields of psychology and health care (Wallerstein, 2011). For instance, Ramirez (2021) focused on community advocates who boosted college enrollment rates among underrepresented students. The advocates came from community-based organizations.

Gifted program: Any educational program specifically designed to serve the needs of students who have been identified as gifted in their respective school district. The definition of giftedness may vary from one program to another based upon local identification procedures. The federal definition, as outlined in Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is "students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not

ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities" (United States Department of Education, 2005, p. 107).

Gifted program coordinator: Professional individuals who work in positions of leadership, typically at the district level, overseeing the gifted programs offered in schools throughout their respective district. In their study on establishing moral frameworks for gifted program leaders, Brown and Rinko-Gay (2017) emphasized that gifted coordinators serve as advocates for gifted students, who possesses above-average ability but often face social and emotional challenges different from those of their peers. This requires that gifted program leaders have experience not only with carrying out state mandates through identification protocols and service models, but that they also understand the unique needs of the population they are advocating for.

Identification: The methods used to determine whether a student meets qualifications for a gifted program. The NAGC (2008) supported the use of multiple methods to identify students from diverse groups who are often underrepresented in gifted programs. In their position statement *The Role of Assessments in the Identification of Gifted Students*, the NAGC stated that assessments used to identify students for gifted programs should be in line both with the goals of the gifted program and the needs of the population of gifted learners in that program.

Practicable solutions: Efforts to increase diversity in gifted programs that are being effectively used in a school district. There are examples of practical solutions in the existing body of literature, such as suggestions from existing studies (D'Orio, 2017; Gentry, et al., 2015; Luria et al., 2016) or recommendations from the NAGC (2011). To

be considered practicable, the solution must be reasonably able to be replicated in another district in the United States so that research on the effort can be used by other practitioners in the field of gifted education.

Representation: As used in the theory of representative bureaucracy, the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone else, such as how an elected official is chosen for office with the goal that they will advocate for policies and laws that best reflect the needs of those they were elected to speak and act on the behalf of (Meier, 2019). Typically, representation in terms of representative bureaucracy focuses on the groups not being current represented in the bureaucracy, resulting in policy and action that only reflects the majority and ignores minority groups. Additionally, representation includes both a literal person advocating on the behalf of others and the ideology that the beliefs, needs, and culture of all groups are being represented at a higher level by members of the leadership (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Meier, 2019). These modern views of representation are based upon the original theory of representative bureaucracy as first developed by Kingsley (1944) and later expanded by Mosher (1968).

Stakeholder: An individual or group with an interest in the success of an organization's goals and missions (RMC Research Corporation, 2009)—in this case, the issue of underrepresentation and representative bureaucracy in Florida. Stakeholders in education traditionally include educators, administrators, and parents, but, in this study, I sought the unique perspectives of those currently working in advocacy for underrepresented populations who may have knowledge that could be practically applied to addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs. When referring to these specific

stakeholders involved in public school gifted programs, I may use the term *traditional stakeholders* to emphasize the difference between these individuals and the participants in this study, who are community advocates from other sectors of society.

Underrepresented populations: Any population of students not currently represented with equity in a gifted program. The gifted program serving a school should reflect similar demographics to the overall school population. For example, if a school has a student population that is 60% White, 30% Hispanic, 15% African American, and 5% Other, the gifted program's demographics should align closely with these percentages. If 75% of students at a school qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch, the gifted program's demographics should align with that same percentage. Although this will not always work out to exact numbers, the representation should be relatively reflective of the overall school population. The state of Florida only formally recognizes two underrepresented populations via the Plan B statute, which allows for modification of identification criteria: students who qualify for free and reduced priced lunch and students who are currently enrolled in ELL programs (Florida State Department of Education, 2002).

Assumptions

Simon (2011) stated that assumptions in research are the things which are assumed to be true without evidence. For this study, one of the underlying assumptions was that those working as street-level advocates who were selected as participants for this study believe that there is value to diverse and equitably represented populations, including within gifted programs. It was also assumed that those who were selected as

participants were well-positioned to provide input that addresses the RQs. Participants in my study were assumed to have a shared goal of creating more equitable representation for minorities but may seek to do so in different fields or for different groups. There was an assumption that study participants were honest in their responses to interview questions. By providing honest responses, they were able contribute to meaningful data that was interpreted.

There was an underlying assumption that educators, researchers, and leaders in gifted education desire to move from consuming redundant research about how to increase diversity in programs into actively serving those diverse learners within the local programs. The NAGC released its position on diversity in gifted programs nearly 12 years ago (NAGC, 2011), and current research continues to focus on both the need for identifying underrepresented gifted students and methods for approaching that goal. Still, the lack of shift in research implies that the diversity gap is not being efficiently addressed or efficiently researched and reported. By researching a way to address representation gaps more effectively and consistently in Florida's gifted programs through a new perspective, this study serves as an action model for Florida public schools and public schools nationwide.

Other states and districts facing similar challenges with similar demographic populations can consider the perspectives of these community advocates and the practicable solutions these participants had, and research could potentially move in a new direction, one that I assume will be supported in lieu of repetitive studies on the same topic. Finally, there were assumptions related to my constructivist worldview and beliefs

about knowledge and reality. It is my belief that the purpose of research associated with this study is to improve the field the study examines, and that individuals working within that field will construct mental models reflecting a desire to consider changes when presented with new data and facts and will then enact those changes for the betterment of the field. It is also my belief that while a single study cannot provide all the answers to a given problem, it can provide solutions worth trying and promote further research until a problem is fully addressed and we can move on to the next problem to solve.

Scope and Delimitations

The problem this study addressed is the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. However, to keep data collection, costs, and time manageable, this study only included participants from the state of Florida and the data focused on Florida's gifted programs. As mentioned before, Florida was an ideal location for this study due to the state's existing mandates protecting gifted education programs and statewide efforts to address underrepresentation via the Plan B addendum. Additionally, Florida is a diverse state with a large population, and this means that the findings of this study may be pertinent to other states with similar demographics and problems. This study was limited in its scope, focusing only on Florida public school gifted programs, specifically large districts in central Florida, and the perspectives of a small group of community members and leaders with advocacy experience in Florida.

To provide meaningful data related to the RQs, I recruited participants who represented one or more underrepresented minority groups in Florida's gifted programs. The participant pool for this study was comprised of community members and leaders with advocacy experience. Community advocates included nonprofit organizers, local social workers, and community developers whose work focuses on increasing representation for minority groups. The focus on community advocates with specific experiences related to increasing diversity enabled me to collect perspectives from those most directly involved in advocacy for these underrepresented and underserved groups. By including perspectives from community advocates representing different minority groups reflected within our society and public schools, I expected to encounter more useful commonalities as well as unique differences in the data, leading to a more meaningful analysis of how to achieve more equitable representation in gifted programs statewide. Attempting to find the most universal perspective on how to address diversity gaps in gifted programs enhanced the prospect of transferability. Data collected from this study could be transferable to programs not included in the study sample that have similar structures and characteristics, such as demographics, overall student enrollment, state and district funding, and locations (rural, suburban, urban). However, this transferability was moderately impacted by access to community advocates with similar backgrounds, experience, and involvement in representation advocacy.

Thorne (2016) stated that the key to a successful study using interpretive description is a thorough understanding of the data collected and the limitations of that data. This study was not able to answer all the questions surrounding over 3 decades

worth of research on underrepresented students in gifted programs throughout the United States, but I am hopeful the community of gifted leaders and professionals with a desire for change will find the findings interesting and potentially useful to their work in improving representation in gifted programs. This study was viewed through the lens of representative bureaucracy because the theory focuses on the issue of underrepresentation and the benefits of more equitable representation across multiple fields, not only public education.

While other approaches, such as multiple intelligence theory, may also aid in increasing representation in Florida's gifted programs, they do not lend themselves to useful data from the perspectives of those outside the field of education. Additionally, this study only offered insight into what practicable solutions to the issue of underrepresentation may be applicable to underrepresentation in gifted programs, shedding new light on how to address a problem that plagues the classroom and the literature. There is no guarantee those solutions will be applied by local districts, that the solutions will work, or that they will be more efficient or effective than solutions that may come from future research in the field of gifted education or social fields focused on addressing underrepresentation in other sectors of U.S. society. While the goal of this study was to find new ways to address an existing problem, it is impossible to know if the data collected in this study will accomplish that goal long term.

To eliminate my own bias from this study, I had the study participants review the data they provided as well as my interpretation of it. This data review was meant to critique my analyses and create transparency to ensure that the data I reported is

reflective of the data I collected, not my personal beliefs on the topic. Additionally, all data and interpretations were reviewed by my dissertation chair throughout the research process.

Limitations

With any study, there are limitations to both data collection and the implications of that data once analyzed. As a doctoral study, one of the limitations was time and resources. This study was unfunded and conducted as part of a doctoral program, resulting in limited resources for both collecting and analyzing data and limited time in which to conduct the study. To address this limitation, I conducted the study within my home state of Florida and utilized as many openly available resources as possible to help me limit costs and time spent conducting the study and analyzing the data.

Additionally, there were limitations to the interview sample. While the ideal sample included community members and leaders who represent the interests of each minority group identified in the literature related to underrepresentation in gifted programs, participation was based on interest and commitment to the data collection process, so this variety of perspectives was not fully attainable. There were potential participants invited to participate that chose not to. Furthermore, interviewees were individuals with their own experiences, and while I aimed through this study to better understand their perspectives as they applied to the study problem, perspectives are influenced by the culture of our society and the groups we belong to. Interviewees may have biases that limited transferability of their ideas to implementation of practicable solutions in gifted programs. Additionally, since these individuals were doing work

outside of education, they may not have understood how the culture and bureaucracy of schools impacts change within schools, potentially offering solutions that could hit dead ends in the public education environment without major cultural shifts. To address these limitations, I made every effort to invite a diverse group of community advocates to participate in the study, inviting more than my goal sample size of 12-15 participants, so that I could choose the best participants for the study.

Another limitation of this study is related to the open-ended nature of the basic qualitative design. Because participants had different interests in the field of advocacy and minority representation, their perspectives were diverse given the differences between minority groups and the unique challenges each minority group faces. A lack of commonalities would have made it more difficult to determine if practicable solutions would be feasible in gifted education programs or for gifted students. My plan for mitigating this potential limitation was to examine the practicable solutions offered by these participants for potential commonalities and for transferability between the groups, which I believe benefitted my findings. For example, if a participant found that mentorship by leaders in the community with similar backgrounds has been beneficial in addressing diversity gaps, that could be applied across the minority groups by seeking out mentors or former gifted youth that represent each underrepresented population.

To consciously address my own bias, I had to first acknowledge my worldview and its relation to this study. As a career educator in public education who has spent the last 8 years working with gifted students, this study was driven by my personal desire to see more equitable representation of students served in gifted programs. As an educator

in Florida, I was personally bothered by the state's decision to address only SES and ELL status via mandate, as I believe this ignores many of the underrepresented groups outlined in the body of extant literature. While this study was motivated by my personal goal to improve gifted education, I felt encouraged to seek outside perspectives on the topic when my research led me to the theory of representative bureaucracy and the efforts being made in other aspects of society to address underrepresentation and the potential for those efforts to be applied to public education and gifted programs. Finding that the literature lacked these unique perspectives validated the need for this study outside of my own personal beliefs and desires. When collecting and analyzing the data for this study, I focused on the RQs and the conceptual framework, ignoring my own instincts and beliefs and allowing the data to guide all conclusions.

I also intentionally excluded from the study anyone I personally know. I have experience working with some local advocacy groups because of my personal and professional interests in equitable representation across bureaucratic organizations, in government, and in policy. I sought participants with interest and experience in addressing underrepresentation that I had not personally interacted with prior to this study. Data collected from these individuals enabled me to benefit from a local perspective without the bias of working with a participant I may know or have influence over. I also sought out participants from outside of my locale and other areas of the state to increase the diversity in perspectives and avoid any personal bias by working with individuals I had not previously met or worked with.

Significance

Improved understanding of the perspectives of street-level advocates about practicable efforts for increasing active representation for minority groups and how those perspectives can be applied to more equitably serving minority gifted students provides other leaders in the field of gifted education with feedback that can help them better determine how to improve advocacy for their students and make meaningful changes to processes, including identification practices, when working to increase diversity in their respective gifted programs. One issue that should be addressed when considering improvements to any public education program is funding. The only federally funded program for gifted and talented education is embedded in the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, which primarily funds research in the field of gifted education and varies based on the annual federal budget (Jolly & Robins, 2016). This program is frequently scrutinized in the federal budget and was at risk of being eliminated in the proposed federal budget for 2021 (NAGC, 2020). Limited and potentially at-risk funding forces gifted programs to work with limited budgets often carved out by their individual states, and funding is typically reserved for serving students already identified as gifted. Finding more efficient and effective ways to address diversity gaps in gifted programs could increase gifted program enrollment, increasing funding at the district and school level, improving cost efficiency for the individual states (Kettler et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2019).

Longitudinal research related to the overall individual personal success of gifted individuals who were served within gifted programs suggested that early identification

and services played a crucial role in students' future achievements as an adult. This includes attaining meaningful and inspiring work and the individual's perceived happiness in their lives (Coleman et al., 2015; Jung et al., 2022a; Peterson et al., 2012). Because the existing research (Azano et al., 2017; Callahan et al., 2017; Hamilton, et al., 2018; Peters, 2021; Rasheed, 2020) suggested some students are being identified later, or not at all, as a result of first language, socioeconomic status, community barriers, race, or other exceptionalities, the research implied that these students are not getting the full benefit of the differentiated instruction offered by gifted programs. Educators are missing opportunities to aid in the long-term success of these students. Failure to accurately identify and serve gifted students can play a negative role in the gifted individual's overall success both their academic achievement, career success, and in their future life an adult (Peterson et al., 2012; Pollet & Schnell, 2017; Worrell & Dixson, 2022).

Wolpert-Gawron (2011) surveyed 300 people about the perceived purpose of public education and found that responses centered on preparing students to contribute productively to a functioning society, with an emphasis on passion and service toward others. In linking the well-being and happiness of students with their own happiness and sense of success as adults, study participants demonstrated an awareness of the negative consequences of stress and the struggles of students transitioning from the academic world into the working world (Wolpert-Gawron, 2011). When practitioners exclude potentially gifted students from gifted programs, they limit potential student opportunities and fail to meet the goals of both public and gifted education programs (Coleman et al., 2015; Peters, 2022; Peterson et al., 2012; Worrell & Dixson, 2022).

With this study, I believe I am contributing to the overall body of research by aiming to augment the focus of gifted research away from merely identifying the gaps in diversity toward studying methods being used to close those gaps. There are numerous studies about the gaps that exist in both the identification of minority students for gifted programs (D'Orio, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2018; Peters, 2021) and the diversity of students currently being served in gifted programs such as ELLs and students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Costello, 2017; Gubbins et al., 2020), students from rural backgrounds (Kettler et al., 2015; Hodges & Gentry, 2021) and twice-exceptional (2E) students (King, 2022; Lovett, 2013; Walrod, 2022), but there is limited current research regarding a theory-based approach to increasing active representation for these students and addressing these gaps through methods currently being utilized in other fields plagued by similar issues of underrepresentation. By addressing the topic of community member and leader perspectives on increasing active representation for minority groups and developing programs that more equitably include underrepresented and underserved individuals and students, we can utilize the research to make changes and guide future research toward those changes rather than continuing to investigate gaps we have accepted exist.

Finally, this research study contributes to positive social change by adding the perspectives on community members and leaders with experience in advocating for underrepresented populations to the dialogue about underrepresentation in gifted programs, potentially allowing practicable efforts being made in advocacy outside of public education in support of minority groups and active representation to influence

efforts to increase diversity and equitable representation within gifted programs. Individuals interested in improving representation in gifted programs can use this study to offer a jumping-off point for, potentially, allowing schools nationwide to modify their own approach to advocacy and efforts to address underrepresentation gaps. By studying the perspectives of street-level advocates on efforts to increase active representation and more equitable serve diverse groups in gifted programs, gifted programs elsewhere might be inspired enabled to make new changes based on efforts outside of public education, which could potentially lead to more accurate representations of school and local populations, more engagement of gifted learners from different backgrounds, and increased equality in the fields of public and gifted education. The individual students benefit from earlier identification and services, allowing them to develop skills and challenge their academic abilities in ways they may not be able to if not included in specialized gifted programs. Because the research has shown early identification of gifted students and early academic intervention for these students benefits them throughout their lives (Peterson et al., 2012; Pollet & Schnell, 2017; Worrell & Dixson, 2022), educators promote creativity and innovation in the real world by encouraging these students to become leaders in their areas of interest and ability. This study may be able to serve as a new model for increasing equity in gifted programs by looking outside of traditional stakeholder perspective and pulling away from models that focus only on increasing representation for a few groups of underrepresented students.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced this study of the perspectives of community members and leaders with advocacy experience regarding the practicable efforts being made to address representation gaps in gifted programs in the state of Florida. The inspiration for this study was my realization after reading the extant literature that despite nearly 3 decades of research in the field of gifted education related to underrepresentation of minority groups in gifted programs, little meaningful progress has been made to address the gaps and shift the research focus to serving these populations rather than simply identifying them. Through the findings of this study, I contributed to the current body of scholarly literature in the field of gifted education and could also be of importance to anyone with an interest in representative bureaucracy, active representation, and advocacy for minority groups. New understanding of the perspectives of community members and leaders currently working in advocacy for underrepresented and underserved minority groups also added a new voice to the body of literature that has been previously left out of the research. Since this study included perspectives from individuals working with an assortment of underrepresented groups currently seeking equitable representation throughout multiple areas of government and policy, the implications of the data were more wide-reaching than some of the published research that was limited to one school, district, or state.

The methodology used for this study was qualitative with an interpretive description approach. I used broad, open-ended interview questions to collect data for this study. Interviews were transcribed and then coded using multiple coding methods,

including a focus on commonalities and differences between the viewpoints of participants.

In Chapter 2 of this study, I included a review of the literature that focuses on defining giftedness and concerns regarding the underrepresentation of certain minority groups in gifted programs. In the upcoming chapter I also expanded on the conceptual framework and the theory of representative bureaucracy, including current applications in the literature in education and beyond.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. To address the research problem, I interviewed community advocates in the state to elicit their perspectives on these efforts. I sought to identify practicable solutions to addressing underrepresentation in Florida's gifted programs. The study may demonstrate the need for research that addresses serving diverse populations rather than simply including them in gifted programs.

The current literature on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs focuses primarily on identification practices and efforts to improve equity in gifted programs (Boothe & Stanley, 2004; Callahan et al., 2017; Johnsen, 2014; Maker, 1996; Mun et al., 2020; Peters, 2021). Existing studies focus on no more than a few identified groups in a single study. The trend over the last 30 years indicates that despite research and suggestions for improvement, increasing diversity in gifted programs has been a slow process (Coleman & Shah-Coltraine, 2015; Hodges, 2018; Peters, 2021, 2022; Peters et al., 2019). Florida has seen significant growth in minority populations over the last 30 years, changing the demographics statewide (McBee et al., 2012; Eriksson, 2022). Gifted programs should mirror this trend but do not (McBee et al., 2012; Eriksson, 2022). Statewide efforts to increase diversity in gifted programs focus on Plan B, a statute addendum to the mandates for gifted identification and services from the

Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 1996; see also Eriksson, 2022; McBee et al., 2012).

In addition to exploring literature related to underrepresentation in gifted programs, I also explored the theory of representative bureaucracy as it relates to society, education, and public policy (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968). Research related to representative bureaucracy has suggested that inefficiency may be a result of a lack of advocacy, possibly the reason Florida's mandates for gifted education and identification have not been updated since the 1990s despite an increasingly diverse population (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). To represent potentially gifted students more equitably from these minority groups, researchers and leaders in the field of gifted education working to address the diversity gap may need to look to efforts being made to increase representation outside of public education and include the perspectives of community members and leaders with advocacy experience in the dialogue. Current research related to representative bureaucracy is discussed in the Conceptual Framework section of this chapter.

In this chapter, I explore the history of diversity within gifted education in the United States. I also discuss gifted identification measures currently being utilized in the United States and specific populations who are underrepresented in both practice and research, and I reflect upon the current efforts being made to address representation gaps. Additionally, I explore the literature supporting the potential benefits of looking to community members and leaders with advocacy experience when seeking possible answers to decades-long research problems in public gifted education programs. The

literature related to gifted identification includes literature related to the definition of giftedness, the use of intelligence assessments in gifted education, the use of standardized and norm-referenced assessments in gifted education, and alternative assessment tools for gifted identification. The literature related to underrepresented populations includes issues of race and giftedness, students from low socioeconomic families, students from rural communities, ELLs, and 2E students. To make connections between my conceptual framework and the theory of representative bureaucracy, I have also included discussion of the available literature that applies this theory to gifted education. The chapter begins with an overview of the literature search strategy and ends with a section with a reflective summary and conclusions based on the literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

To find literature related to the study topic and RQ, I first searched for published dissertations written by Walden University alumni with similar topics to my research via the ScholarWorks website. I also reviewed work that featured the theory of representative bureaucracy to identify relevant keywords. My primary search tool for locating peer-reviewed articles was the Walden University online library. Via the Library's website, I primarily accessed articles available in the following databases: ERIC, EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, and SAGE Premier.

To identify keywords for my database searches, I reviewed the prior work of other researchers in the field of gifted education and the work of researchers interested in the theory of representative bureaucracy, The keywords that I used were *education*, *gifted*, *giftedness*, *gifted definition*, *gifted education*, *gifted education programs*, *gifted education*

services, *gifted service models*, *gifted identification*, *gifted IQ*, *gifted creativity*, *gifted assessment*, *underrepresentation and gifted programs*, *minorities and gifted programs*, *demographics and gifted programs*, *representation in schools*, *representation and gifted programs*, *race and gifted education*, *dual exceptionalities*, *twice exceptional*, *disability and gifted*, *rural gifted students*, *gender and gifted education*, *bias and gifted identification*, *English Language Learners and gifted*, *ELLs and gifted programs*, *language acquisition and gifted*, *longitudinal and gifted*, *gifted happiness*, *gifted success*, *representative bureaucracy*, *theory of representative bureaucracy*, *representative bureaucracy and education*, *representative bureaucracy and advocacy*, *representative bureaucracy and gifted*, *gifted advocacy*, *stakeholder advocacy*, *community advocacy*, *community leadership advocacy*, and *street-level advocacy.* These keywords yielded numerous articles that I reviewed to best inform my research process and ensure that my RQ had not already been addressed by the existing body of literature. Upon completion of my data collection and analysis, I revisited the literature review and added new relevant literature, focusing on studies that are from 2019 and newer.

The goal of my search was to focus on the concepts that I found to be the most relevant to my study without accidentally narrowing my search to a point where I left out relevant literature. To ensure that my perceived gaps in educator knowledge and in the literature were not simply a result of missed search terms or failing to find existing literature that filled those gaps, I reached out to the Walden University librarians for help with the search terms. Through their guidance, I was able to add search terms, such as linking advocacy to representative bureaucracy, to find literature on community members

and leaders as advocates in research. I also sought the input of trusted colleagues and mentors, several of whom are career experts in the field of gifted education. It is through these fine-tuned searches that I determined my problem statement and study purpose.

Conceptual Framework

The phenomenon that this study addressed was an apparent lack of perspectives from community members and leaders with experience in advocacy regarding the practicable efforts being made to address representation gaps in gifted programs in Florida public schools. The theory of representative bureaucracy suggests that organizations are run most effectively and efficiently when they fairly represent those they are meant to serve (Mosher, 1968). For Florida's gifted programs, this could mean more equitable gifted programs and the ability to serve all potentially gifted students regardless of minority status. This representation can be literally demographic, such as minority gifted students being represented by individuals who are minorities and gifted themselves, or more abstractly, where the representative may not be a part of the group but is someone who understands the needs of the group and advocates for those needs to be met (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968). With policies related to the growing diversity in Florida's gifted education programs, there is an apparent lack of efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the goal of more equitable gifted programs. As a result, there may be value in outside perspectives regarding practicable efforts to address representation gaps.

The theory of representative bureaucracy was first introduced by Kingsley (1944) and further developed by Mosher (1968). In his early work, Kingsley criticized the

bureaucratic weaknesses of British society and government, specifically the British Civil Service. He stated that most positions of power were held by members of the upper middle class and that although those positions were often appointed officials chosen to represent the needs of all citizens, they typically used their power only to further the interests of others like themselves. He cautioned that this system would be doomed to fail without changes made to reflect representation of all British citizens.

Mosher (1968) expanded Kingsley's views into a theory that could be applied not just in British government, but within any bureaucratic institution, and ultimately created the theory of representative bureaucracy as it is used in the literature today. Mosher's development of the theory split representation into two forms: passive representation and active representation. In *passive* representation, members of underserved groups benefit indirectly from decisions made by representatives who are not directly considering that group's needs. In *active* representation, members of those underserved groups are directly represented by leaders who have the direct needs and interests of underserved individuals in mind when making decisions. Although both types of representation are beneficial, active representation accomplishes more in terms of specifically addressing the needs of the underserved group. The theory of representative bureaucracy recognizes a link between representation and bureaucratic decisions that affect members of underserved groups (Mosher, 1968).

Key definitions related to the framework of representative bureaucracy include both passive and active representation, which is useful, but to understand the context of passive and active representation, it is important to consider what a bureaucracy is. Pitts

(2007) stated that bureaucracies are organizations or government institutions led by appointed officials, not elected ones, and that it is especially important for bureaucratic representatives to reflect the populations they represent because the people did not democratically provide them with the power they yield. From department leaders to judges, bureaucratic leadership can be seen in every facet of governance at the federal, state, and local levels, including public school systems. Public school systems are governed by bureaucratic leaders from appointed state officials to superintendents to district leaders, principals, and hired teachers.

In their meta-review of studies related to representative bureaucracy, Bishu and Kennedy (2020) found that most studies were quantitative and in the fields of public policy, political science, and economics. That being the case, the researchers focused their review on studies related to public policy as those studies seemed the most closely related to the original uses of the theory. The authors found that despite multiple studies where the theory of representative bureaucracy was used as a lens to view the effects of representation on outcomes that benefit minority groups, the existing literature lacked an in-depth analysis and application of the theory. Additionally, the authors noted that throughout the current body of literature, including the seminal work supporting most of the relevant literature, the minority groups included in the research were predominantly women and people of color, two of many demographic qualities considered when thinking about the needs of minority groups overall. The authors called for the framework to be extended past the current barriers of public policy, geographic locations, and demographic identities. This call for the expanded use of the theory is echoed by Meier

(2019) and Vinopal (2020), who applied the theory to public administration and government management, two areas relevant to the operations of school districts and schools.

Within the field of public policy, there are studies that focus on specific types of policy, such as law enforcement, emergency services, education, welfare, and health care (e.g., Bishu & Kennedy, 2020; Meier, 2019; Vinopal, 2020). For the purposes of this study, it was important to review literature related to how the theory of representative bureaucracy has been applied to educational policy and educational programs. Most of the literature exploring the link between representative bureaucracy and public education focuses on the potential impacts of teachers who demographically represent their students. Grissom et al. (2015) reviewed existing literature involving representative bureaucracy and education, finding that the studies included issues of student discipline, access to special education services including gifted programs, and student achievement outcomes. Many of these studies focus on racial minority groups, particularly Black and Hispanic students. Meier and England (1984) and Meier and Stewart (1992) found that in school districts where school boards included Black leaders, there was less race-related educational discrimination within the schools and policies influencing school operations, and bureaucratic decision can influence budgets, spending, the welfare of students, disciplinary policies within schools, and educational outcomes. Headley et al. (2021) considered the limits of symbolic representation and passive representation, including in terms of parental participation in their child's education. Roch et al. (2010) further examined disciplinary policies within public schools, finding that schools with more

diverse teachers and administrators that better represented the diversity of the student body they served implemented policies that were more learning-oriented than punitive. The researchers also noted that this representation was especially influential at the ground level with the teachers that were more directly serving the students. This finding was important to my study because, although not community advocates, teachers in that setting do reflect street-level bureaucracy and the power that role can play on outcomes related to minority students. Extending the conversation to include the potential benefits of minority representatives that may not directly reflect specific minority groups, Rocha and Hawes (2009) explored the impact of Hispanic representatives on Black students and Black representatives on Hispanic students. The researchers found that increasing minority representation benefitted minority students from multiple ethnic groups, not just the group that each representative was directly associated with. This implication also served this study, which focused on applying representative bureaucracy to better serve students from underserved populations in gifted programs that encompass more than just race.

More recent studies linking representative bureaucracy and education explore concepts like those already mentioned, predominantly focused on minority racial groups: school disciplinary policies and representative bureaucracy (Roch et al., 2018; Roch & Edwards, 2017), representative bureaucracy, absenteeism, and suspension (Holt & Gershenson, 2019), and representative bureaucracy and hiring practices in schools (Goff et al., 2018). Studies related to gender representation and representative bureaucracy also exist in the literature, but are very limited in terms of educational policy in the United

States: While women and girls are considered to be a marginalized group in U.S. society, many teachers are female resulting in school-level representation generally being more equitable (Di Cesare, 2014), but concerns remain that at the secondary and postsecondary levels, few female teachers in math and science results in less science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program participation for female students (Stearns et al, 2016). Additionally, Zhang (2019) found that the presence of female male teachers significantly increases the math scores of female students, supporting the theory that equitable representation can improve outcomes. Both gender and racial representation have been researched in the higher education setting, with Fay et al. (2021) finding that in three out of four race/ethnic/sex combinations, students perform better in the presence of faculty who match them interactionally.

A few studies exist that link the theory of representative bureaucracy to gifted programs. Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2016) explored a potential link between race congruence and gifted referrals, suggesting that a teacher's positive views towards students of the same racial background as themself may contribute to an increased likelihood to refer the student for gifted services. Grissom et al. (2017) went a step further, looking not only at the racial demographics of teachers but also of administrators, yielding similar findings to that of Nicholson-Crotty et al., but including Hispanic students in the racial minority groups explored in the study. These studies reflected the concerns outlined in earlier studies linked to underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2008; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Joseph & Ford, 2006; McBee, 2006; Renzulli, 2005; Rocha & Hawes, 2009) and are over-identified in

special education programs designed for struggling students (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Meier, 1993; Skiba et al., 2008).

The existing literature analyzing public education policies through the lens of representative bureaucracy sets a foundation upon which this study can build. While much of the available literature linking representative bureaucracy to public education focuses on racial minorities, through this study, I aimed to more equitably address underrepresentation of underserved groups that include race, low socioeconomic status, students from rural communities, ELLs, 2E students, and gender. The current body of literature related to representative bureaucracy and the current body of literature related to underrepresented gifted students tend to focus on one or two minority groups at a time, failing to identify strategies that could benefit all underrepresented groups. By looking at community advocate perspectives outside the formal walls of public education and connecting them to the views of those stakeholders currently working to serve diverse populations of gifted students, I can use this study to add a unique dialogue to the conversation about increasing active representation of minority students in gifted programs. It is possible that through more meaningful active representation for these underrepresented students, we can more effectively and efficiently address the current systems in place that may be perpetuating these gaps.

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between the existing culture in Florida's gifted programs and the role representative bureaucracy plays in perpetuating current issues and potentially improving them. The existing culture in Florida's gifted programs sits at the bottom of the diagram, influenced by and influencing both passive and active

representation. When district- and state-level bureaucrats make decisions that passively benefit all gifted students, including underrepresented students, this relationship is at work. An example of this would be the state's decision to mandate gifted programming. The mandate benefitted all students perceived to be gifted and was driven by the existing culture and advocacy of traditional stakeholders, seen both influencing and influenced by current efforts towards active representation. The identified need for increased program diversity in the current culture of Florida's gifted programs drove the need for more active representation and efforts to implement measures to increase diversity, like the Plan B statute addendums allowing districts to address gaps more directly in gifted programs for ELLs and students from low SES families. While this has positively improved programs and prompted an increase in passive representation through more widely focused screening procedures that benefit not only ELL students and low-income family students but all potentially gifted students, it has not been enough to close the gaps evident in diversity implementation. While groups like ELLs and low-income students are being actively represented in some districts through Plan B, the other underrepresented groups are only being addressed through passive representation. By researching ways to increase active representation from the perspective of community advocates who represent the impacted groups in other sectors of society, we can more effectively improve program diversity for all groups and not just the two included in the Plan B statute addendum (Florida State Department of Education, 2002).

My goal in operationalizing this theory as part of the conceptual framework is to look for new ideas to improve active representation for all underserved groups in

Florida's gifted programs, not just the two groups included in the Plan B statute. These ideas may well be rooted in the perspectives and experiences of community members and leaders currently involved in representative work for these underserved populations in other aspects of our society. It is my understanding, supported by the research on representative bureaucracy (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020; Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Grissom et al., 2015; Rocha & Hawes, 2009), that by improving active representation and inclusion efforts that benefit more than just two underserved groups, more districts will implement methods to address diversity gaps and the state of Florida could serve as a model to other states attempting to address the same diversity gaps in their own gifted programs.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

A gap in the literature exists as there are few studies about underrepresentation in gifted programs that focus on more than a single underrepresented group thereby failing to look at solutions that could benefit all the groups who are underrepresented as defined by the research. I was unable to find any literature that included the perspectives both of traditional stakeholders and community advocates when seeking solutions to addressing underrepresentation of students in academic programs, including gifted programs. Additionally, the existing literature related to addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs only contained the perspectives of traditional stakeholders, such as program coordinators, school and district administrators, teachers, and parents and recent studies related to community advocate perspectives were limited in terms of public education (e.g. Ramirez, 2021) but largely present in other fields such as psychology (Wallerstein,

2011) and medicine (Cooke et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2021). Finally, the use of the theory of representative bureaucracy is most commonly applied to public policy studies and quantitative analysis, not qualitative research in the field of education; as a result, Bishu and Kennedy (2020) have called for more application of the framework to qualitative studies.

The following subsections explore the existing literature that has informed this study and the RQs. The sections are organized to show how a study into gaps in gifted identification practices leads to the decision to consider the perspectives of community advocates to address over 30 years of apparently unproductive research on underrepresentation in gifted programs (Hodges et al., 2018; Peters, 2021). The section begins with an overview of gifted education in the United States because it is important to understand a brief history of gifted programming to understand how research in the field of gifted education has evolved to focus on improving equity for underrepresented students and which elements of early gifted education history still influence gifted programs today. This leads to a discussion on gifted identification practices, and how things have and have not changed from the early roots focused on early understandings of intelligence and ability. Because these identification practices directly influence who is served in gifted programs, the subsequent subsection addresses the existing literature related to underserved and underrepresented groups in gifted programs with a specific focus on each of the groups highlighted in decades of research on this topic. I categorized these underserved groups based on those recognized by the State of Florida—students from families with low SES and students who are ELLs—followed by groups that are

dominant in the existing body of literature. My focus in the study is on efforts to address underrepresentation in gifted programs, so I touch briefly on the current efforts taking place in Florida and nationwide that are included in the literature and the results of those efforts, including the subsequent struggles practitioners have faced in their attempts to close equity gaps (Yaluma & Tyner, 2021). In my final sections, I address the role of stakeholder perspectives in the literature surrounding public education, defending the decision to pursue the input of community advocates in addressing issues of active and passive representation to improve equitable access to gifted programs.

Gifted Education in the United States

The concept described in this section is the history of gifted education in the United States. This concept is important to the study because an understanding of the goals of gifted programs and the public policy decisions that influence them plays a key role in how those programs identify and serve gifted students nationwide and the outcomes of those programs. Ford (2012) provided an excellent analysis of the history of gifted education in her work focused on identifying issues in gifted programs as those programs were developed over time. According to Ford, early interest in gifted education in the United States was stirred by research in educational psychology and intelligence in the early 1900s, as U.S. researcher Henry Goddard adapted the Binet-Simon intelligence assessments from France for use in the United States. Lewis Terman, considered the father of the gifted education movement, developed the Standford-Binet IQ assessment and conducted the longest longitudinal study of gifted children in 1921. IQ testing remains a common tool for determining eligibility for gifted programs. Interest in

academic ability and talent grew in the 1950s as the United States started examining science and mathematical programs to develop talent for positions focused on new technology and space exploration. In 1954, the NAGC was developed. Over the last 65 years, gifted education has evolved to fit into a changing educational climate, as public policy, the expansion of public school funding, and the growing number of post-secondary institutions have impacted the need for states, districts, and schools to provide programming to their gifted and talented students.

One important element in understanding gifted education programs in the United States is the variety of definitions of giftedness throughout the United States. Carman (2013) analyzed definitions of giftedness utilized in the research literature for the past 15 years. She concluded that a lack of consistency in defining giftedness versus non-giftedness resulted in an inability for most researchers to make connections between studies in the field of gifted education. Although the federal government defined giftedness in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and has since updated the definition in revisions of Title IX wording (United States Department of Education, 2005), independent states function by their own definitions. Additionally, the NAGC (2018), which includes a significant portion of gifted research in their publications, provides its own definition emphasizing that giftedness is about being intellectually, creatively, artistically, communicatively, or academically above the statistical or locally accepted norm for a child's age. Unfortunately, for the sake of a common understanding of giftedness, the norm is often relative to the practices of each identifying district. The autonomy provided to states through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(United States Department of Education, 2005, p. 107) to define giftedness is at the root of varied definitions in both research and practice. A lack of agreement about what it means to be gifted is a factor in addressing diversity gaps in gifted programs; practitioners may not be looking for the same traits or criteria. In their recent study, Jung et al. (2022a) called for a review of the definitions of giftedness, especially as they pertain to underachieving gifted students. These differences in defining giftedness can lead to a difference in identification practices and protocols, resulting in students qualifying for program services in one locale but potentially not in a different locale. Gifted identification practices are addressed in the next section, leading to the discussion of representation gaps in gifted programs.

Gifted Identification Practices

The concept of gifted identification practices is important to the current study because these practices determine how potentially gifted students are selected to receive program services. Efforts to address representation gaps in gifted programs have historically been addressed through modifications to identification practices, including in the state of Florida. Since the beginning of gifted education in the United States, the process of identifying potentially gifted students to receive special services has varied nationwide, sometimes even from district to district within the same state (Peters et al., 2021). How students are identified for gifted programs throughout the United States is a direct result of local and state policies regarding gifted education. Oftentimes, these policies may be a result of limited funding and therefore limited space in programs for gifted students (Matthews & Peters, 2018). Identification methods can include

assessments (IQ, norm-referenced, or standardized), referrals and nominations, and classroom performance data.

Each state's policies for identifying gifted students differ, which has a notable impact on the identification of underserved populations in gifted programs. The NAGC (2015) reported that 32 of 40 responding states in their State of the States report have mandates that require districts and schools to identify and serve gifted students. Still, only 26 of those reporting states also have mandates that require concentrated efforts to identify students from underrepresented populations. An earlier but similar study to the NAGC's report analyzed data from state to state focusing solely on identification practices (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). In both studies, researchers concluded that gifted program populations were not fully representative of the schools and districts they operated in, emphasizing a diversity gap that has been reported in gifted research for over 3 decades (Hodges et al., 2018; Peters, 2021). Additionally, a recent meta-analysis that reviewed identification practices highlighted a need for more inclusive identification practices to increase equity in gifted education programs and address concerns about underrepresented groups of gifted students (Hodges et al., 2018). The researchers analyzed 54 separate studies on the topic, concluding that while the efforts being made to utilize more inclusive identification practices were increasing the identification of underrepresented students, gaps in representation remain and more research on practice changes is necessary. Hodges et al. (2022) recently called for nuance in identification practices, finding that while efforts have been made to close equity gaps since their

analysis of the literature, the progress is inefficient, and practitioners may be continuing to miss underrepresented students in their gifted programs.

While changes to identification practices have been at the forefront of efforts to address the continued existence of underserved populations in gifted programs, these gaps persist among the varied groups identified in the literature as underrepresented (Hodges et al., 2018; NAGC, 2015; Peters, 2021). The following sections discuss the current literature related to each group currently identified as underserved in gifted programs, starting with the two groups the state of Florida recognizes through their Plan B statute addendum, students from low-socioeconomic families and students who are ELLs (Florida State Department of Education, 2002). By better understanding the literature specifically related to these groups, we can then shift the discussion to focus on the current efforts to address these diversity gaps in gifted programs.

Underrepresented Populations in Gifted Education

The variables addressed in this section are the underrepresented or underserved populations in public school gifted programs nationwide. In the Marland report to congress (Education of the Gifted and Talented: Report to the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1972), it was emphasized that as the US population became more diverse, gifted programs should have equitably reflected this diversity, including increases in total student population and subgroups. Despite efforts to address diversity gaps in gifted programs, many populations remain underrepresented and underserved in gifted programs. These groups typically include students who are from low socioeconomic households, ELLs racial and ethnic minorities, students who live in

rural communities, and students who have a disability even if they display other traits of giftedness. The underrepresentation of girls in gifted programs is also discussed in the existing literature. The following subsections focus on each of the groups discussed in the literature and what the current literature on their underrepresentation in gifted programs implies. These specific populations are key to this study because I believe this study provides insight that can be applied more universally to approaches to address underserved populations in gifted programs and increase equitable access to gifted programs for all potentially gifted students.

Students from Low Socioeconomic Families

One of the groups recognized by the state of Florida and in much of the existing literature as underrepresented in gifted programs is comprised of students from low socioeconomic families. Hamilton et al. (2018) identified three main reasons students who live in poverty may be underrepresented in gifted programs: a biased referral-based system that may unintentionally favor higher-income students, fewer opportunities to learn due to limited resources and less access to early learning programs and academically oriented activities, and documented gaps in academic performance both in the classroom and on IQ assessments. Furthermore, this situation is exacerbated by financial struggles in districts in schools, leading to further disparities in access to gifted programs for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds if their district or school is also underfunded.

Card and Giuliano (2016) found that many students living in poverty are underrepresented not only for the three major reasons identified by Hamilton et al.

(2018), but also due to the acceptance of outside evaluations for acceptance into gifted programs. In districts that allow these outside evaluations, students who cannot afford to pay an outside psychologist for an evaluation wait for evaluations to be conducted by understaffed district offices, while students from families who can afford those outside evaluations get evaluated by those outside professionals and placed in programs at a faster rate. The struggle to efficiently evaluate students could also result in fewer referrals for the programs, with the teachers that refer students frustrated by the amount of time it may take to get a potentially gifted student the services they believe they deserve. McBee (2006), the only study of its nature that I could locate, found that students who could afford to pay for their lunch were 4 times more likely to be referred for gifted program evaluation than their peers receiving free or reduced-priced lunch due to low socioeconomic status.

The Florida State Department of Education (2002) includes students who are from a family of low SES in its Plan B statute addendum, allowing public school districts in the state to modify identification criteria for these students. Many districts modify accepted IQ score levels and standardized testing scores for these students, attempting to address achievement gaps related to poverty that are supported by the literature. McKenzie (2019) outlined many of the challenges faced by students in poverty that impact academic achievement, including chronic stressors, social and emotional challenges, cognitive struggles due to both altered brain structure from trauma exposure in impoverished communities and lack of resources at home. These issues still impact students even after being identified for the gifted program. Kaya et al. (2016) found that

gifted students from poverty scored significantly lower on verbal IQ batteries than their peers who do not live in poverty. Hodges et al. (2021) found that limited access to resources due to financial strain could impact the likelihood that a student living in poverty qualified for gifted services. Finally, Hamilton et al. (2018) found that even when schools attempt to control for issues like poor prior math and reading achievement related to poverty, these students remain underrepresented in gifted programs, suggesting universal screening programs may help close this gap. The call for universal screenings to help address the gap is echoed by Morgan (2020) in her study on the underrepresentation of students of color and students in poverty.

English Language Learners

The second group that the Florida State Department of Education (2002) has considered an underrepresented group in gifted programs that is also included in the existing body of literature is ELLs The decision to include this group in the Plan B statute addendum could be due to the high population of non-English speakers living in the state of Florida; there is no apparent published rationale available. The U.S. Census Bureau (2018) reported that 29.7% of Florida residents were non-English speakers, with over 22% of these people speaking Spanish as their first language.

While ELL populations in our schools are plentiful, they are underserved in gifted programs. There are several theories on why ELLs remain underrepresented in gifted programs. According to Coronado and Lewis (2017), these theories center on inappropriate identification procedures that ignore cultural and linguistic differences between these students and the original assessment population used to determine a norm;

prejudice and bias in both the assessment and referral process; a deficit mindset applied to minority students; and the lack of a clear, federal definition of giftedness that includes guidance for identification. Additionally, the researchers found that despite their study state (Texas) having policies in place to fund gifted programs and identification efforts, it has not been enough. Only 6 of the 20 regions of the state included in the study were meeting their target percentage for identification and inclusion of ELL students in gifted and talented programs.

The concern about a deficit mindset is echoed by Costello (2017) and Haller-Gryc (2022). As school leaders and educators focus their efforts on addressing linguistic and cognitive needs of ELLs, they often fail to see potential giftedness among students in this population as educators tend to focus more on remedying language barriers. Additionally, many ELLs are also members of households of low SES, increasing the likelihood they will remain unidentified for programs due to reasons discussed in that section. Another obstacle in identifying ELLs is the varied languages spoken among these students. The Florida Department of Education (2021) reported more than 300 languages spoken among ELL students statewide, with varying levels of proficiency. It is likely not feasible for schools and districts in the state to develop identification procedures, such as the use of bilingual psychologists administering assessments in the student's native language, with so much language variety (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). Costello also pointed out that both state policies and local policies for identifying potentially gifted ELL students were limited to just technical assistance papers (policy guidance communications) and vague district policies, leaving many school-level employees to

believe that the state was much more focused on raising students' academic achievement test scores than considering them for gifted programming.

Kettler and Laird (2020) expressed further concerns about the underrepresentation of ELL students in gifted programs, finding that states with policy mandates focused on increasing the identification of ELL students did not yield increased representation over states that do not have mandated policies. The researchers believe that mandated policies likely have a nuanced influence, as many states without policies may be implementing similar strategies to address diversity gaps based on research and independent district and school initiatives. As determined in previous studies (Barkan & Bernal, 1991; Castellano & ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012), Ketter and Laird found that as the number of ELLs in schools increases, the number of ELL students represented in gifted programs fails to keep up. Like the researchers before them, Kettler and Laird found that ELL students likely remain underrepresented due to implicit bias against non-English speakers and lowered expectations for these students, inappropriate identification methods, and a deficit mindset focused on acquiring English rather than enhancing existing strengths and talents.

In their exploratory study on the identification of ELLs in gifted programs, Gubbins et al. (2018) found that there were four prevailing themes in schools where ELL students were being more equitably represented in gifted programs: adoption of universal screening procedures, creating alternative pathways to identification, establishing a web of communication, and viewing professional development as a lever for change. The

researchers recommended an implementation of all four themes to improve the equitable service to ELL students in gifted programs.

Gubbins et al. (2020) found that adopting universal screening procedures, creating alternative pathways to identification, improving communication, and professional development were all beneficial to increasing ELL representation in gifted programs. Alternative pathways toward identification were also supported by Mun et al. (2020), who found that efforts such as observation of problem-solving tasks could highlight the strengths of potentially gifted ELL students. Garces-Bacsal and Elhoweris (2022) suggested that practitioners and researchers consider culturally responsive practices to better understand all minority students, including ELLs, in an effort to step outside perceived norms related to gifted abilities and see the strengths that these students possess.

While Florida does attempt to address this gap through the Plan B statute addendum, they do not specifically outline best practices in addressing underserved populations, including ELLs (Florida State Department of Education, 2002). This leaves districts and schools to implement procedures, following the suggestion by Gubbins et al. (2018) that a multi-faceted approach with all four themes is best practice. Lacking clear guidance, it is possible Florida districts are not doing enough to increase ELL representation in their gifted programs.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Gifted Programs

Concern about underrepresentation of non-White racial and ethnic groups in gifted programs, particularly potentially gifted Black and Hispanic students, has long

been a part of the research on underrepresented populations (Cohen, 2022; Crawford et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2008; Garces-Bacsal & Elhoweris, 2022; Gray & Gentry, 2023; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Joseph & Ford, 2006; McBee, 2006; Novak & Jones, 2021; Renzulli, 2005; Rocha & Hawes, 2009). In their metanalysis, Hodges et al. (2018) reported that Asian and White students are proportionately over-represented in gifted programs, although Black, Hispanic, and Native American students were all identified at lower rates compared to their White peers. The researchers believed there were multiple factors contributing to these representation gaps, from identification practices to nomination procedures and a lack of early identification programs that would allow these gaps to be addressed early in school to help prevent learning gaps due to lack of sufficient programming for potentially gifted students.

Grissom and Redding (2016), Grissom et al. (2017), and Novak and Jones (2021) echoed the idea that teachers and administrators act as gatekeepers to gifted programs. Grissom and Redding found that Black students in classrooms with non-Black teachers were less likely to be referred for gifted identification and receive gifted services, an issue of representative bureaucracy previously noted in the works of Meier and England (1984). Grissom and Redding (2016) believed this was not just a result of potential racial bias or lack of culturally responsive teacher training in the referral process, but also the likelihood that potentially gifted students of color feel more comfortable with and are more likely to demonstrate their abilities when in the classroom of a teacher who looks like them. Additionally, parents of color may be more likely to reach out to a teacher of their same racial or ethnic background to discuss potential gifted opportunities for their

child. Grissom et al. (2017) found that this increase in the identification of Black gifted students when taught by Black teachers was also prevalent when those students attended schools with Black principals and administrators, and that Hispanic students were also more equitably represented in gifted programs when taught by Hispanic or Black teachers or when the schools were led by Black or Hispanic principals. It is implied in these findings that racial and ethnic minority potentially gifted students are more likely to be identified and served as gifted when they are taught or led by adults who are also members of a racial or ethnic minority group. Novak and Jones (2021) studied the decision of a Black principal and a White gifted teacher to train classroom teachers on how to recognize gifted students of color and improve their cultural proficiency. Since identification of gifted students at the school level relied on classroom teacher referrals, the principal in the study was driven to action after being faced with resistance from classroom teachers to refer racially diverse students for gifted screenings based on both the belief that preparing for state standardized testing was a large priority and due to expressed bias toward non-White racial groups by those gatekeeping teachers.

Crawford et al. (2020) viewed the obstacles faced by gifted students from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds through a unique lens; Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. The researchers explored how a deficit mindset related to racial and ethnical assumptions by classroom teachers acting as gatekeepers may not only result in the under identification of potentially gifted students of color, but these biases also impact the social-emotional and psychological health of these students, potentially resulting in underachievement for these students. The researchers also found that

potentially gifted students from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage with the testing used to help identify gifted students. Furthermore, the explorations of Crawford et al.'s study explored the lack of diversity of both teachers and counselors in schools serving diverse populations of students, the implications of cultural differences resulting in parents of racial and ethnic minority students not always knowing how to best advocate for potentially gifted child, and the policy factors such as funding that all play a role in these students remaining underrepresented and underserved in gifted programs nationwide.

Studies on racial and ethnic gaps in gifted programs remain prevalent in the literature, including Cohen's (2022) study where she called for more holistic practices that do not focus on IQ assessments or teacher referral, as both have been found in previous studies to have biases against students of color. Like Garces-Bacsal and Elhoweris (2022), Cohen believes there should be an emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy and professional development for both teachers and gifted program leaders. Cohen also calls for recruiting more gifted educators of color, reflecting the theory of representative bureaucracy and the benefits of diverse students being exposed to educators that better represent them. Gray and Gentry (2023) echo this call for the recruitment of diverse educators and representation but for potentially gifted Hispanic and Latinx youth.

Students from Rural Communities

Another group identified as underrepresented in gifted programs nationwide is students from rural communities. Rasheed (2020) conducted a literature review of studies

involving underserved potentially gifted rural students, focusing on identification practices, curriculum, and the successes and challenges of this particular group of students within gifted programs. The literature emphasized that many of these potentially gifted rural students remain underserved not because of their own abilities, but because of the unique context of rural schooling. Often, these schools are small and serve remote communities, many of which are impoverished. This results in a lack of funding, leading to gifted programming being a lesser priority in rural schools. The concern about funding and rural school resources is reiterated by Kettler et al. (2015), who also found that many enrichment programs were instead offered outside of the school day, further limiting the ability for potentially gifted students in some rural communities to attend, as the home life for these students is different from that of suburban peers with many rural students expected to help around the home, in family businesses, or on farms.

Potentially gifted students from rural communities also suffer from the deficit mentality that constrains other underserved groups. Azano et al. (2017) found that rural students often fall victims to stereotypes regarding intelligence and achievement, ideas perpetuated by comparative achievement gaps when looking at students from suburban and urban schools. The authors emphasized that this is again rooted in a lack of resources and funding, as well as distance from resources and programs that benefit potentially gifted students in areas with easier access to universities, museums, and other educational opportunities outside of school like field trips. Rural students are less likely to be invited to participate in academic competitions simply because small, underfunded districts may not see the value in these experiences for students. A lack of traditional school

experiences leads to the stereotype that rural students lack culture or knowledge, and many of these students fail to see their own potential as a result. Azano et al. (2017) implemented a grant-funded program called Promoting PLACE to improve self-efficacy and address stereotype threat, finding that by showing potentially gifted rural students and their teachers the value of academic enrichment, students may be more frequently considered for enrichment programming and those programs may expand to meet the needs of potentially gifted students from rural communities.

Despite efforts to improve access to gifted programs and the representation of rural students within existing gifted programs, Yaluma and Tyner (2021) found in their analysis of data related to elementary and middle school gifted programs between 2012-2016 that there was both a decline in available programs for potentially gifted rural students and fewer rural students being identified for existing gifted programs compared to their suburban peers. Lewis and Boswell (2020) found in their study on gifted programs in rural Texas that many of the issues plaguing potentially gifted students from racial and ethnic minority groups were also impacting students from rural communities, including preconceived notions and biases about students from the teachers acting as gatekeepers to gifted programs. Additionally, gifted programs flourished in areas where school-level administration and district leadership were supportive of the gifted programs and had strong connections with the local community and families. The similarity of these concerns echoed in the research when looking at two different underrepresented group supports the need to look at practices that could benefit all underrepresented populations in gifted programs.

Jung et al. (2022b) conducted a current review of the literature related to rural gifted education, including peer-reviewed articles published between 2000-2020. Some of the trends they discovered in the 103 articles they reviewed included a need for self-efficacy among potentially gifted rural students, further professional development related to the characteristics of rural gifted students and their learning and socioemotional/affective needs, advocacy for gifted education by key stakeholders including parents, and increased funding allocations for gifted programs in rural communities. The authors also called for more research related to gifted education in rural schools and the identification of rural gifted students, finding that gaps remained in the research that still need to be explored to help establish clear patterns of evidence that can be used to improve practices.

Twice-Exceptional Students

In the literature, 2E students are defined as students who have a special need or disability and are also identified as gifted (Geirczyk & Hornby, 2021). These students can be difficult to identify and serve in gifted programs because educators and parents are often focused on supporting a student's struggles, distracting these educators and parents from recognizing areas of talent. Additionally, 2E students are often broken into two groups in the literature (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2013): students who are both gifted and learning disabled, and students who are both gifted and diagnosed with one of four disabilities considered behavioral (autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorders, other health impairments, or emotional disturbances). Despite these groups being separated, the literature agrees that these students often remain underrepresented in gifted

programs due to struggles finding appropriate identification tools for both their gifted strengths and disability weaknesses, masking (each trait masking the other or only making one trait apparent), lack of teacher training on seeing past disability deficits, and limited research intersecting 2E students with other groups that are underrepresented in gifted programs (see Foley-Nicpon et al, 2013; Geirczyk & Hornby 2021; Maddocks, 2020).

Lovett (2013) found that one of the other caveats in identifying these students for inclusion in gifted programs is that identification criteria can be vague, and having a child identified as both gifted and learning disabled has become somewhat elite, creating more social inequality. The author argued that educators and gifted program leaders working toward identifying 2E students must use concrete definitions of both the criteria for the student's disability and for their gifted abilities to ensure that students are being properly identified and properly served (e.g., not simply labeled and served in ways they do not really benefit from). Maddocks (2020) further developed this idea, focusing on the cognitive and achievement characteristics of 2E learners to better differentiate these students from non-disabled gifted and average ability peers. Maddocks assessed 2E learners in multiple areas, from IQ to memory and problem-solving skills, defending the importance of varied assessments in the identification process to identify both the strengths and needs of potentially 2E students more concretely. Maddocks noticed a trend that potentially gifted students with learning disabilities seemed to be more likely to struggle with processing information and performing academic fluency tasks, so de-emphasizing timed academic tasks could be beneficial in identifying these students.

Additionally, there are concerns that students with both a disability and gifted abilities may be underrepresented in gifted programs due to the two traits masking each other. Foley-Nicpon et al. (2013) and Gierczyk & Hornby (2021) found that 2E students may mask the struggles related to their disabilities by compensating with their gifted talents. This makes identifying these students even more challenging, as they may not be adequately identified and served for their disability nor their gifted strengths. The relationship can also work in reverse, where a student's struggles related to their disability, such as a learning disability that impacts their ability to comprehend text or an autism spectrum disorder that results in behavioral challenges, may become the focus of their educational experiences, masking their strengths in other areas.

Research on 2E students is limited, but it is further restricted when considering the intersection of 2E abilities and other underserved populations, such as Black students. Mayes and Moore (2016) found that there is very little research on 2E gifted Black students, despite the existence of one-dimensional studies (see for example Ahram et al., 2011 and Bianco, 2005). This limitation to the research is relevant to my study because I have found few studies in the literature that looked simultaneously at more than one underrepresented group in gifted education, making it difficult for practitioners to find and utilize strategies that benefit more than one group at a time. Mayes and Moore (2016) emphasized that African American students are statistically more likely to be referred for special education services than gifted services. This results in Black students with disabilities who are also potentially gifted being identified even less, increasing the likelihood that these students will struggle academically and experience negative school

outcomes, such as lower grade point averages (GPA) and higher rates of failure and drop-outs (Mayes & Moore, 2016).

Maddocks (2020), Foley-Nicpon et al. (2013), and King (2022) emphasize the need for improved professional development and teacher knowledge in increasing the representation of 2E students in gifted programs. The researchers found that teachers of gifted students were not necessarily knowledgeable about both the student's disability and potential gifted characteristics to help identify them for program services, as most teachers are not trained in both disabilities and gifted characteristics. Additionally, teachers of gifted students that are trained in identifying 2E learners often struggle to identify and serve these students because general education teachers are not likely to refer these students for gifted screenings due to a lack of training for those professionals in identifying 2E learners. This is relevant to this study because my purpose is to describe the perspectives of community members associated with representation advocacy to seek practicable solutions that could aid in identifying and serving potentially gifted students from multiple underrepresented groups, and these considerations for knowledge-building for educators and administrators could be a factor considered by interview participants.

Reis and Renzulli (2021) found that the deficit mindset approach towards 2E students illustrates a struggle for both schools and parents to reconcile a student's gifts and talents with the struggles they face due to disability. The authors suggest a strengths and interests based approach to working with gifted learners from all backgrounds, especially those who are 2E. Walrod (2022) also highlighted the role parents play in ensuring quality educational outcomes for 2E learners, including in the identification

process. Walrod supports the use of parental input in the identification process because of the role that input has played in helping to identify 2E gifted students.

Gender Gaps in Gifted Programs

Research related to the underrepresentation of girls in gifted programs dates back to early studies of giftedness in the 1950s, when researchers examined the behavioral and academic differences of girls and boys in general education and gifted classrooms (Roeper, 2003). In these early studies, young girls were often not considered for gifted programs because the societal emphasis for women was on motherhood and homemaking, rather than educational pursuits and the workforce. As society shifted, more girls were included in gifted programs, but program goals remain centered around male ideals, with little connection to the personalities and interests of young girls. This often led to gifted girls struggling to feel like they fit in (Roeper, 2003). These concerns about feeling like they are a welcome and integral part of gifted programs remain prevalent in the research on gender gaps in gifted programs today and are a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of girls in gifted programs (Boston & Cimpian, 2018; Roeper, 2003; Stearns et al., 2016).

Researchers have suggested that the association between stereotypes and underrepresentation is a result of a patterns that have shaped the beliefs women and girls have about their intellectual abilities, causing them not to seek opportunities that they are qualified for (Bian et al., 2018). Chestnut et al. (2021) stated that the belief that girls are not as naturally skilled in certain areas as boys is a damaging stereotype that can harm women and girls in their academic performance and career outcomes. In their study, the

authors found that simply trying to dispel these stereotypes with statements like “girls as good as boys at” are ineffective, and that there must be an emphasis on equal syntactic footing in claims we may to girls and women in order for there to be more gender equality in society.

Since many modern gifted programs emphasize the development of STEM skills, gifted girls with strengths or interests in other areas can feel out of place. Additionally, because STEM programs and careers have been predominantly male-dominated fields, even girls interested in these pursuits can feel out of place when pursuing these fields (Boston & Cimpian, 2018). Difficulties encouraging girls to participate in STEM programs and courses are further underpinned by stereotypes about girls and women that pursue STEM educational programs and careers, labeling them as “nerdy” or “loners,” which risks undermining the confidence of gifted girls interested in these pursuits. The lack of gifted girls in STEM programs is even higher when considering the racial demographics of those girls. For example, Black girls are underrepresented by almost 40% in gifted education, with less than 10% of Black gifted girls enrolled in STEM programs at the high school or collegiate levels (Collins et al., 2020). The authors found that, like other girls in gifted and STEM programs, these girls struggled with academic self-concept and did not feel like they belonged in gifted or STEM programs, impacting their achievement and motivation. Stearns et al. (2016) found that increased representation of female teachers in STEM courses can help to increase both interest and success for girls in STEM courses, showing a relationship between this program gap and the positive role of improved representative bureaucracy.

Studies have revealed that often, girls identified as gifted underachieve in their programs (Collins et al., 2020; Desmet et al., 2020; Guthrie, 2020). Desmet et al. (2020) conducted a case study with four adolescent gifted girls and found that the girls struggled to remained motivated in their academic pursuits. When the girls did not have a specific goal to work toward that felt easily attainable for them, they often procrastinated or sometimes turned to cheating. Several of the participants also struggled with transitioning from one school level (middle school) to the next (high school), struggling with self-concept and self-esteem, further hindering their achievement and their ability to connect with peers and teachers. Some of these struggles may also be explained by the pressure gifted girls feel to achieve in school. Guthrie (2020) found that adolescent gifted girls were faced with a pressure to please the adults in their lives such as parents and teachers, a wavering sense of self, and feeling lonely in their achievements and successes as gifted learners.

In addition to issues of self-concept hindering gifted girls' interest, motivation, and performance constraining their inclusion in gifted programs, gifted girls may also be underrepresented due to gender bias (Bianco et al., 2011). Since classroom teachers often play a key role in the referral of students for screenings for gifted identification, it is possible that these teachers may be under-referring potentially gifted girls. In their study, Bianco et al. (2011) found that when participants were provided with one of two profiles describing a gifted student (one male, one female), teachers were less willing to refer a female student than the male student, despite the characteristics described being identical. Furthermore, these teachers showed gender bias when describing their reasons for

referring the students as well. The authors expressed concerns that these biases are driving underrepresentation of gifted girls in gifted programs and called for better teacher training on a multidimensional view of giftedness and an intentional focus on the needs of gifted girls.

Addressing Underrepresentation

It is clear from the existing body of literature that underrepresentation exists in public school gifted programs. In their call for action, Callahan et al. (2017) found that districts are not typically guided by clear program goals that enable them to consistently identify and serve gifted students, and this is especially apparent in efforts to address underrepresentation in gifted programs, where the authors found minimal progress had been made despite decades of research on the topic. The researchers suggested reformed policies at the state and district levels focused on clear identification standards, clear expectations for instructional delivery and methods, and research-based practices to address underrepresented populations in gifted programs. Some districts and schools are stepping up to these challenges, and some efforts to address underrepresentation are addressed in the literature (see for example, Callahan et al., 2017; D'Orio, 2017; Garces-Bacsal & Elhoweris, 2022; Gentry et al., 2015; Hodges et al., 2018; and Peters, 2021).

Coleman and Shah-Coltrane (2015) found that the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program, the only federally funded program for gifted education, has been beneficial to addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs. Through this program, districts and schools have been able to attain grant funding for research related to practicable efforts to increase diversity in gifted programs. But the

authors argue that the Javits program alone is not enough, that advocacy for adequate resources to address underrepresentation and meet the needs of diverse students in gifted programs is necessary, and schools must expand their efforts to explore educational approaches based on student strengths, not just on achievement needs.

There is some discussion in the literature on what these educational practices should look like. Johnsen (2014) suggested improved identification measures that are more culturally responsive than relying on IQ, professional development designed to improve educational beliefs and inform classroom teachers about the characteristics of gifted students, and improved curriculum and service model options designed explicitly for the needs of gifted learners. Joseph and Ford (2006) focused on the importance of improved identification methods in their study on nondiscriminatory assessments. The researchers suggested the use of multiple assessments in the identification process, as well as supporting diverse students in the testing situation such as with interpreters for ELLs or the utilization of assessments written in their first language. The researchers also suggested that schools and districts examine their own demographics when determining the types of assessments they utilize and how the results of those assessments are interpreted contextually. Luria et al. (2016) included measures of creativity as a part of gifted identification methods to apply a more wholistic view of intelligence and gifted ability. Matthews and Peters (2018) suggested alternatives to IQ testing and the use of tools such as standardized testing. These suggestions included the use of student grades, student products and portfolios, structured observation protocols in the identification process, and modifications to existing tools like using localized norms rather than

national norms with new cut-off scores and multiple forms of assessment. Renzulli (2021) suggested the inclusion of interest, instructional preference styles, preferred modes of expression, and executive functioning skills in assessments for potential giftedness in an effort to more holistically consider the diverse traits of gifted learners from all backgrounds. McBee et al (2012) analyzed how underrepresented populations of gifted students in the state of Florida benefited from modified identification practices under the state's Plan B Statute Addendum, finding that while ELL students, students from poverty, and some racial minorities that are also members of the first two groups, benefitted from the modified identification practices, the practices vary from district to district and there is limited data available on the benefit to other underrepresented populations in Florida's gifted programs. Some districts have opted to utilize universal screening practices to improve the identification of all potentially gifted students, including those who are presently underrepresented in gifted programs. Universal screening practices involve screening entire groups of children, such as the entire second grade population at a school, rather than only screening students that have been referred as potentially gifted. These practices often involve standardized or norm-referenced assessments provided to all students in a primary grade level. Morgan (2020) found that universal screening practices, while potentially costly, are beneficial in more equitably addressing representation gaps across multiple groups of underrepresented gifted students but especially students from low-income families. Morgan did emphasize the importance of implementing universal screenings properly, requiring programs to include a low cutoff and high nomination validity. Yaluma and Tyner (2021) analyzed efforts to close

representation gaps over a 4-year period (2012-2016), expressing concerns in their findings that there were declines in gifted program access for schools in rural, urban, and town areas, with only suburban schools seeing increases in gifted programming and higher enrollment in these programs. The researchers also found disparities between schools serving low-poverty communities and schools serving high-poverty communities, which saw about half the increase in gifted program enrollment compared to those in the higher income communities (p. 47). Yaluma and Tyner supported efforts like universal screening, local norming, and improving the representation of teachers of color to close the equity gaps more effectively in gifted programs, and supported future research related to the effectiveness of those efforts and any potential shifts in academic standards and peer effects related to those efforts.

Professional development focused on addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs is another suggestion from the research that some schools and districts nationwide have tried (Jung et al., 2022a; Johnsen, 2014; Novak et al., 2020). Brown and Rinko-Gay (2017) researched the potential benefits of establishing frameworks for gifted program leaders. The researchers found that it was important for gifted leaders to consider the moral implications of creating equitable gifted programs for all potentially gifted students, adapting to changes in program services and modalities, and making decisions about how to lead educators and students in a changing and increasingly diverse world. As educators and gifted program leaders adapt how they view giftedness to be more wholistic and inclusive, it is important for program leaders and educators to learn about what those concepts look like in practice. The concern that teacher

perceptions of students' potential giftedness impact the likelihood students would be referred for gifted program evaluations is prevalent in the literature (Allen, 2017; Bianco, 2011; Coronado and Lewis, 2017; Haller-Gryc, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2018; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2016). Allen (2017) found that classroom teachers who were made aware of these potential biases were more willing to seek professional development courses or help from gifted teachers and gifted program leaders to address the role classroom teachers may be playing in perpetuating representation gaps, and this led to increases in referrals of potentially gifted students from underrepresented groups.

It is important to note, in the context of this study, that most of the research regarding practicable efforts for addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs focus on only one or two of the groups identified in the literature, like D'Orio's (2017) study on increasing representation for ELL students. D'Orio emphasized the importance of programs focused on mirroring the diversity of a school within its gifted programs. In his article, he discussed Project ELEVATE in Seminole County Public Schools in Florida, which included instructional strategies focused on STEM, parent workshops, and teacher training to help increase the identification of ELL students. Project ELEVATE (English Language Learner Excellence Evolving through Advanced Teacher Education) was a grant-funded collaboration between the Seminole County School District and the University of Central Florida focused on 12 schools from 2015-2020 (University of Central Florida, 2020). D'Orio reported that early findings in the program were promising, with an 113% increase in ELL identification for gifted programs as well as increases in the representation of Black and Hispanic students. While the study showed

promising results, the narrow approach to addressing underrepresentation one group at a time could be limiting researchers from identifying practices that are more universally beneficial toward meeting the goal of equitable representation in gifted programs. Additionally, Hodges et al. (2022) argued that there is a need for nuance in the racial and ethnic categories, socioeconomic status, and geography being considered when researchers and practitioners explore solutions to underrepresentation in gifted programs. The authors express concern that ignoring the economic, cultural, and capital variances between different subgroups and lumping the groups together could result in continued representation gaps in gifted programs. Garces-Bacsal and Elhoweris (2022) called for "a more expansive mind-set, intellectual courage, social justice, and a deep commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy" (p. 122) when addressing the continued problem of underrepresentation in gifted programs. In my study, I looked for similarities in the approaches to addressing underrepresentation in hopes that those working in the field of gifted education can address this issue more effectively and efficiently moving forward.

Stakeholder Advocacy

Traditional stakeholders, such as school staff, gifted program leaders, teachers, and parents, have advocated for gifted education programs since gifted education programs first started appearing in public schools in the 1950s (DeLeon & VandenBos, 1985). Robinson and Moon (2003) found in their research on advocacy efforts nationwide, that stakeholders at the state and local levels fought for everything from short-term efforts to improve gifted programming in single schools to large scale efforts to increase services and develop policies at the district and state levels. In all these

situations, the researchers found that the stakeholders who were the most effective in their advocacy efforts were persistent, knowledgeable, and willing to collaborate with others. Traditional stakeholders like parents (Grantham et al., 2005; Matthews et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2021), guidance counselors and school psychologists (Bessman et al., 2013; Mayes et al, 2019), and administrators (Robinson, 2021) have also advocated for improvements to gifted programs, including efforts to address underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Recently, VanTassel-Baska and Brown (2022) conducted a study where traditional stakeholders from 12 gifted programs, including parents, students, teachers, and administrators, evaluated the effectiveness of the gifted programs in their respective districts, showcasing how these individual stakeholders can hold different perspectives on the same experiences and how those perspectives can be powerful in helping to improve gifted programs. Despite the advocacy of these traditional stakeholders, progress in addressing representation gaps and improving policy at state and federal levels has been slow-moving (Boothe and Stanley, 2004; Callahan et al, 2017; Roberts & Plucker, 2022; Robinson & Moon, 2003). The lack of efficiency in addressing representation gaps is potentially paving the way for new perspectives and new potential advocates to have a voice in strategically creating more equitable representation in gifted programs.

Nontraditional Stakeholders

The community advocates participating in this study could be considered nontraditional stakeholders, as they have an interest in addressing underrepresentation for minority and underserved populations, but they are not actively doing so for gifted

programs. Gifted education research involving the perspectives of nontraditional stakeholders, or anyone with an untapped interest in supporting potentially gifted or gifted children in public schools, is incredibly limited. The only study I was able to find involving nontraditional stakeholders and gifted programs was Donnison and Marshman's (2018) study on empowering gifted and talented youth in Australia. In their study, gifted teens worked with some traditional stakeholders (their teachers), and nontraditional stakeholders (community council members and a university professor), to design and create a Youth Activity Precinct as a safe recreational option for other children and teenagers in their community. The students of the study benefitted from having these nontraditional stakeholders serving as mentors and supporters for their community project, demonstrating the value that these "outsiders" could have on improving the gifted education programs.

Because research in the field of gifted education involving nontraditional stakeholders is so limited, it is important to look at research from outside of gifted education to illustrate the value of nontraditional stakeholder perspectives. In a study conducted by Mainardes et al. (2014), the researchers discussed the potential benefits of looking to nontraditional stakeholders for fundraising efforts for public universities. In this research study, traditional stakeholders included university clients like parents and students, staff members including teachers and administrative staff, competitors, donors, local communities involved with the university, and government entities involved with the university and university finances. Nontraditional stakeholders included local employers who often employed university graduates, expanding into the local community

and partnering with community stakeholders such as companies, businesses, and local programs not previously involved with the university, secondary and high schools that produced future students for the university, commercial and business associations, international students, and former students. These nontraditional stakeholders were viewed as untapped resources that could step forward to create a relationship with the university that did not already exist.

Adams and Kavanagh (2020) included stakeholders from outside academia in their study on the sociology of sport, finding that as long as participants had a common interest in the issue, in this case sociology of sport research, their input promoted a valuable, critical perspective on the topic. Interestingly, the researchers also found that despite differences among participants and their connection to the topic, they all spoke of a need for collaboration between potential outside stakeholders like themselves and those working within academia and research related to the sociology of sport. The participants believed that while full academic research on the topic was important, so was clear and open communication outside the realm of academia. While Adams and Kavanagh's study is from the fields of sociology and athletics, it illustrates an important perspective that those outside the realm of traditional stakeholders may have a desire to get involved but may not feel their views are valued and accepted by those on the "inside."

Assouline (2021) recently wrote about the importance of partnership and collaboration in higher education to inspire excellence, a concept relevant to this study and the role community advocates can play in improving educational outcomes for diverse gifted students. Assouline found that a focus on a common mission and ideology

can help to engender positive change. These relationships can foster growth not only in our school level programs, but within our partner organizations. The ability to listen and learn is crucial to improving advocacy.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I reflected on the body of literature related to underrepresentation of diverse students within gifted programs nationwide. Major themes in the current literature on underrepresentation in gifted programs focus on potential solutions for underrepresentation, including identification methods, professional development, and implicit and explicit bias. Concerns among researchers echoed throughout the literature emphasize a need for more inclusive identification practices that are culturally responsive and focus on a broader definition of giftedness. Additionally, since teachers often refer students for gifted screenings and services, much of the literature emphasizes a need for more professional development on the characteristics of potentially gifted students in an effort to combat both the implicit and explicit bias that may be resulting in underserved students not being referred for gifted services. Interestingly, these themes were consistent regardless of which underrepresented group a particular study focused on, perhaps suggesting that solutions to underrepresentation in gifted programs may apply to more than one underrepresented group.

It is clear from the extant literature that a need to address underrepresentation in gifted programs remains, despite over 3 decades of research on the topic. Underserved populations in gifted programs include students who are from low socioeconomic households, ELLs, racial and ethnic minorities, students who live in rural communities,

2E students, and gifted girls. While the literature shows practicable efforts to address representation gaps are being implemented in many states, including Florida, these efforts are limited in their scope and ability to increase representation for all of the underserved groups identified in the literature. Additionally, current literature fails to include the perspectives of nontraditional stakeholders such as community advocates, focusing only on traditional stakeholders including gifted coordinators, school administrators, gifted teachers, and parents already advocating for changes in gifted education. The theory of representative bureaucracy could serve as a lens in which the perspectives of community advocates could offer insight into practicable efforts to improve representation in gifted programs in ways that the current stakeholders have not yet considered. In this study, I address the apparent lack of bureaucratic representation for underserved gifted populations in Florida by exploring the experiences and perspectives of community advocates for these populations outside of public education. More details on the methods used to collect and analyze this data are addressed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. Additionally, I sought to analyze the potential benefits of community advocate perspectives and representative bureaucracy to guide the practicable identification efforts of practitioners toward more equitable representation in gifted programs. In conducting this study, I wanted to shed light on the issue of underrepresentation in gifted programs with the focus on the viewpoints of these community advocates who are representing the interests of and advocating for the minority groups identified in the body of gifted underrepresentation research. These community advocates may have unique perspectives on the current practicable efforts being implemented in non-school settings throughout Florida that have potential applications to public education.

This chapter includes four major sections and a summary. This chapter starts with a section on the research design and rationale, where I describe the study's RQs, define the central phenomenon, identify the research tradition, and provide a rationale for that tradition. In the next section, focused on the role of the researcher, I describe my role in the study from data collection to analysis, reveal any relationship with the participants, address potential research biases, and discuss ethical issues applicable to the study. In the largest section of this chapter, on the methodology, I provide a detailed description of how the study was conducted, including data collection and instrumentation, data

sources, and the research supporting the instrument. The discussion of methodology also includes the plan for data analysis and coding. The next section focuses on issues trustworthiness, including internal validity, external validity, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. The chapter ends with a summary, focusing on main points, and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The overarching question (RQ1) for this study was, What are community advocates' observations and perceptions related to practicable solutions for increasing diversity in public school gifted programs within the state of Florida? The subquestion (RQ1a) focused on the theory of representative bureaucracy as it relates to the phenomenon and conceptual framework for the study. The subquestion was, In what ways do community advocates believe their current efforts to improve representation for minority groups could be practicably applied toward increasing the equity and active representation in Florida's gifted programs?

The phenomenon that was addressed in this study was a lack of practicable solutions for addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs from the perspective of community advocates. Through the unique perspectives of community advocates with experience advocating for more active representation of marginalized groups, researchers and practitioners may be able to acquire new and larger context for the practicable efforts that are being implemented to address issues of underrepresentation outside of gifted programs. These perspectives may also include what supports are needed for these efforts and how these efforts can be replicated throughout gifted programs in the state as a part

of a more consistent and wider effort to address underrepresentation in gifted programs throughout Florida.

When developing a research study, there are numerous research designs to consider. The main categories of research designs are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Typically, qualitative research designs emphasize words and quantitative research designs, numbers; and mixed-methods approaches feature a combination of qualitative and quantitative designs (Creswell, 2013). Because quantitative research requires a statistical approach, the RQs are normally something that can be clearly measured and interpreted. Qualitative approaches rely on exploring and understanding individual experiences in a search for new meaning. Upon review of the literature and the determination of the research gap, I opted for open-ended RQs focused on exploring and understanding the experiences of community advocates in their work to support underrepresented populations and how that can be applied to an educational setting. This led me to determine the best qualitative approach for collecting data to answer the RQs and improve my understanding of the research problem.

Qualitative research designs include action research, case studies, ethnography, evaluation research, grounded theory, narrative research, and phenomenology. Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe these designs in their book on qualitative research methods. Action research is an approach focused on finding solutions to problems people find in their everyday lives. Case study research focuses on the understanding of a specific case or group of cases of real-life events. Ethnography involves participant observation or fieldwork related to the topic of interest. Evaluation research includes an effort to judge

or improve systematic processes through inquiry. Grounded theory research involves developing theoretical ideas through the exploration of a phenomenon and has a structured approach. Narrative research resembles storytelling about the participants and their experiences related to the topic of interest. Phenomenology tends to focus on the lived experiences of participants related to a phenomenon or event and often also includes the observations of the researcher. I felt that none of these designs fully encompassed what I was trying to accomplish with this study. This led me to a basic qualitative approach with a focus on the way the data would be analyzed, as I wanted to look at participant responses through the lens of the conceptual framework, rooted in a theory relevant to underrepresentation but rarely applied to educational research, and for their application to a problem in gifted education that participants were likely to be unaware of. This unique separation of the participants from the problem I was trying to address resulted in none of the structured methods being a good fit for this study.

In this study, I used a qualitative approach and interpretive description design. Interpretative description was chosen for this study because, to qualitatively understand the perspectives of these community advocates on the topic of equitable representation in gifted programs, it was important to not only try understanding the perspectives of the participants, but also to interpret how those perspectives can lead to practicable strategies for increasing the diversity of gifted programs within the state of Florida. Through this study, I aimed to add new insight to the existing research focused on addressing representation gaps in gifted programs (see Callahan et al., 2017; D'Orio, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lack of community advocate

perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. The argument and rationale for this study was to address the purpose of the study through the exploration of perspectives from community advocates. The findings from this study could help stakeholders to improve practice related to addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs and also propel research on gifted education forward into new emerging areas rather than continuing to focus on the representation gap.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this research study was as an observer. I conducted interviews with the participants using an interview protocol described in the Instrumentation section of this chapter. To avoid the ethical concern of holding a position of power over participants, I only recruited participants whom I do not personally know or professionally work with. Although I used my connections to gifted education in Florida and to advocacy groups in the state to seek potential participants for my study, I only interviewed participants outside of my sphere of influence as a coordinator for gifted student programs or previous roles in the gifted education. Additionally, I used snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) in addition to criterion-based sampling by asking participants to share my contact information with anyone outside of their organization whom they recommend as a potential participant for my study. Finally, I had the study participants review the data they provided as well as my interpretation of it. This data review was meant to critique

my analyses and create transparency, ensuring that the data I reported were reflective of the data I collected and not my personal beliefs on the topic.

To address my personal biases and any ethical concerns related to my study, I had to first acknowledge my worldview. I am a career educator in kindergarten through Grade 12 public education who has spent the last 8 years working with gifted students. As such, I acknowledge that this study is driven by my personal desire to see more equitable representation of students served in gifted programs in my locale and beyond. As an educator in Florida, I know that I am personally perturbed by the state's decision to address only SES and ELL status via mandate, as I believe this ignores many of the underrepresented groups outlined in the body of extant literature over the last 3 decades as well as the growing diversity within the state. My decision to conduct this study through the lens of the theory of representative bureaucracy and from the perspectives of individuals making efforts to address underrepresentation was rooted in my desire to address gaps in the literature and to improve equity in gifted education programs for students in Florida and beyond. My constructivist perspective also guided this study, as I believe that with new perspectives, researchers and practitioners in the field of gifted education could learn and develop new understanding on how to more effectively and efficiently address underrepresentation in gifted programs. I was motivated by the idea that the work I put into collecting and analyzing the data in this study could make an impact in the world of gifted education, impacting not only other educators working in this field like myself, but benefiting the students I fear are missing out on learning opportunities that could positively impact their future. It was important for me to

remember, as someone with my worldview, that I did not control what data came from my study, what the conclusions were, or what others in the field of education do with the findings I share.

When collecting and analyzing the data for this study, I focused on the RQs and the conceptual framework, staying critically aware of my experiences and beliefs and their potential influence to guide my conclusions about the data. To maintain objectivity, I operationalized reflexivity by maintaining a reflexive journal during the during the entire capstone project and especially during my activities related to preparing for data collection, the data collection process, and the data analysis process, noting my thoughts and feelings on the data and how those thoughts and feelings related to my worldview might influence my perception of the data and conclusions from my study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target population for developing the sample for the study was community advocates in the state of Florida currently working to increase equitable representation for minority groups identified from the literature in Chapter 1 and discussed in Chapter 2. The participant pool for my study included community leaders, nonprofit volunteers and leaders, government officials, and local individuals who are currently taking an active role to improve equitable policy practices throughout local bureaucracies. To help me identify and locate accessible individuals who comprise the target population, I used the input of social workers and guidance counselors from public schools, who were more familiar with organizations, community leaders, and volunteers working toward these

shared goals than I was within the confines of gifted education. Additionally, I identified and recruited potential participants through researching connections within the community. Using these strategies, I compiled a list of potential participants. I then reached out to these potential participants using available contact information, such as organization phone numbers and email addresses. Using an initial recruitment email template (see Appendix A), I sent emails to introduce myself to potential participants, share some information about my study, and invite potential participants to engage in the study.

From the group of potential participants making up the potential participant pool, I created a stratified criterion-based purposeful sample (see Appendix B). Although stratified sampling is typically associated with quantitative analysis, it can be used in interview-based qualitative studies when the researcher has a theoretical need to be more strategic about the participants (Robinson, 2014). This was the case in this study because the participants had to be serving as representatives of the groups identified as underrepresented in the literature on gifted programs. The criteria for participation included

- a willingness to participate,
- Florida residency,
- experience advocating for equitable representation of at least one group identified as underrepresented in gifted programs in the literature, and
- no current engagement working directly with a gifted student program within the state of Florida.

Participants invited via snowball sampling also needed to meet the same criteria as the other participants. To ensure that the potential participants meet these criteria, I emailed the criteria within the consent form to potential participants in a follow-up to our initial contact. I relied upon participant integrity in having participants self-identify their qualifications.

Using the criteria described, I selected a study sample of 12 community advocates who can potentially provide the most insight into addressing underrepresentation from a standpoint of the theory of representative bureaucracy, the conceptual framework, and the specific data needs of the study. By using both stratified criterion-based sampling and snowball sampling, I strove for data saturation by carefully monitoring the type and quality of the data obtained by selecting participants who, as a group, had experience advocating for the equitable representation of all six underrepresented populations being addressed in my study.

The relationship between the sample size and saturation lies in the robust nature of the data collected. While the sample for this study was not large, the rigorous interview protocol that combines RQs, interview questions specifically supported by the literature, clearly identified data characteristics, and supplementary probes to enhance data collection as necessary helps to create data saturation. Additionally, participants were selected who best represent the diversity of the underrepresented populations identified in the literature.

Instrumentation

I employed a semistructured interview procedure to collect participant responses. I used a comprehensive interview protocol (see Appendix C) and an interview guide (see Appendix D) to support data collection. The interview protocol was designed to connect to the RQ, supporting literature, data type and characteristics, and potential probes to each interview question. I build the protocol from left to right, starting with the foundational RQ so that the link between what I was asking the participant and what I was aiming to understand through my study were clear. The interview protocol contains five interview questions. All questions are open-ended. Rubin and Rubin (2004) emphasize the use of open-ended questions and probes when seeking detailed, rich responses from participants. Since my RQs are supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, a note about that literature connection is provided for each interview question in the protocol. To help me in the data analysis process, I also listed the type of data I expected to collect from each question and any relevant key terms I was anticipating for the participant's response. Finally, the last section of the protocol had suggested probes based on expectations about what a participant might say, questions they may have, or ways to get them to provide a more robust response to the original interview question. In addition to the interview protocol, I also used an interview guide (see Appendix D) to ensure that I conducted all interviews in a similar manner, to take notes about the responses the participants provided, and to note anything about the interview that I wanted to remember that might not be obvious in the recording.

Procedures for Recruitment and Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from community advocates via individual interviews. Upon selecting my participants, I reached out to them via email to schedule a one-on-one interview in a setting that was most comfortable to them. Interviews were held in quiet public areas without distraction, such as a public library study room. If the participant preferred not to meet in-person due to COVID-19 or other concerns, I held the interview via a recorded digital conference using Zoom videoconference software. Throughout our communications, participants were reminded that their participation was entirely voluntarily, and that they had the right to choose to end their participation at any time for any reason without explanation.

I recorded the in-person interviews using an iPhone's recording function accompanied by a backup handheld recorder. For the Zoom videoconference interviews, I used the platform's built-in recording feature along with my phone for backup recording. I stored and secured the recordings in an encrypted file on my laptop that is backed up to my password-secured iCloud account.

Each participant was interviewed one time only. These interviews took approximately 40–60 min per participant; although the focus was on seeking specific data from the participants, they were be encouraged to share as much detail as they felt comfortable sharing. I set aside an hour and a half to allow for participants to not feel rushed in sharing their responses.

Participants were debriefed at the end of their respective interview. I thanked them for their time, offered to share the recording of the interview with the participant,

provided my contact information should the participant have further questions or need more information, and let the participant know that I will share a completed version of Chapters 4 and 5 with all participants so they are aware of how the data collected were used in connection with the finished study. Member checks such as providing these final chapters to my participants improve the validity of a study by ensuring that I understood the participant responses as they intended (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were also invited to provide my contact information to any other potential participants for the study as a part of the snowball sampling method.

Data Analysis Plan

In this study I used protocol specific interview data collected from community advocate participants. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) included a row for each of the five interview questions, connecting the question to the specific RQ for the study. Additionally, each row included a section where the expected data collected from the RQ was characterized based again on the goal of addressing each RQ with robust participant responses. This protocol helped to set the stage for data analysis as I used the categories of data, expected key terms, and links to the RQ to aid me in coding my data and describing any trends I saw during that analysis.

I manually transcribed each data collection event as soon as possible after the data is collected. While manual transcription is time consuming, it provided a unique opportunity for me to mentally process and familiarize myself with the data by listening to it and writing it out while avoiding errors from transcription software. Additionally,

manual transcription provided me with the opportunity to utilize reflective and reflexive journaling during my initial engagement with the data.

Data collected from the interviews was analyzed using first- and second-cycle coding techniques (see Saldaña, 2015). I employed multiple coding methods, as described by Saldaña, to seek relationships between content, theory, and agency to achieve a type of analytic methodological triangulation. The first-cycle coding began with use of the descriptive coding method, which is appropriate for individual interview data (see Saldaña, 2015). Additionally, descriptive coding was a good fit for this study as I sought to interpret the perceptions of each individual participant as they might seek to describe the potential practicable solutions that they suggest could be applied to the field of gifted education.

I continued first-cycle coding with the initial coding method which was also appropriate for this study because it allowed me to tie the theory of representative bureaucracy to my coding strategies. The conceptual framework was used to guide the codes developed during the initial coding process. During initial coding, I examined and interpreted the data for connections to the working theory through the participant discussions of terms related to advocacy, active representation, passive representation, and the outcomes of representation efforts. Additionally, I used the collected data to help develop a profile of each participant that can be compared, contrasted, and discussed in Chapter 4.

Recognizing the large amount of data that was generated from multiple interviews and from multiple first-cycle analysis methods plus a composite second-cycle analysis

method, I utilized the interview coding software MAXQDA to more easily code and analyze data from the interview transcriptions. Coding software like MAXQDA enabled me to organize the collected data, search more effectively and efficiently for key words in the transcripts, summarize the content, and visualize connects between themes and ideas in the coding. I addressed discrepant cases during the data collection by utilizing the discrepant responses as probes to dig deeper into that participant's perspective to better understand the context of the discrepant data. I also discuss any possible interpretations of the discrepancies in Chapters 4 and 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To address the credibility and internal validity of my proposed study, I triangulated the data methodologically, utilized reflexive and reflective journals, and achieved saturation through my participant sampling strategies and my data collection (interview) protocol. The use of stratified criterion-based sampling and snowball sampling with the participant group helped to ensure rich, thick, detailed data that is relevant to my study's RQs, as well as augmenting the prospect of data saturation. I operationalized reflexivity by keeping a reflexive and reflective journal during the entire capstone project and especially during my activities related to preparing for data collection, the data collection process, and the data analysis process. The reflexive journal focused on my evolving perceptions, the day-to-day procedures of my data collection and analysis, and notes about any personal thoughts or introspections I had related to my research and analysis. The reflective journal focused on my field note

observations from the data collection process and during data analysis, as well as my reflections on those observations.

To address transferability, I relied largely on the application of a criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy to enhance practical diversity in participant selection. After determining potential participants, I used my personal knowledge of my topic and understanding of the data needs of my study to select participants who had experience advocating for the needs at least one of the six groups identified nationwide as underrepresented in gifted programs by the extant body of literature. Data collected from this study could be useful to programs that have similar structures and characteristics, such as demographics, overall student enrollment, state and district funding, and locations (i.e., rural, suburban, urban).

To address dependability, I utilized a interview protocol. This protocol justified the specific interview questions and probes as well as focuses data collection specifically on the RQs. I documented any naturally occurring changes related to my study in my reflexive and reflective journal during the entire capstone project. Finally, the alignment of my study enhanced the dependability. This study's problem, purpose, RQs, and methodology were aligned around the conceptual framework described in Chapters 1 and 2.

Use of the interview protocol enriched the confirmability of the study. My reflexive and reflective journals also addressed confirmability of the data. I actively addressed my own biases and carefully considered field observations throughout the capstone process and especially when collecting and analyzing the data for the study and

thinking about, considering, reviewing, creating hunches, and contemplating possible alternatives for what I see and hear regarding the experiences of others throughout my study.

Ethical Procedures

Because I did not partner with another institution for this study, I only needed approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to continue with the study. Upon committee and URR acceptance of my proposal, I submitted an application to Walden's IRB to ensure that the research methods for the investigation would not violate the rights and welfare of any of the study participants. I addressed ethical procedures during the recruitment process and throughout the course of the study. During recruitment, I made sure not to choose any participants with whom I have a personal relationship. I ensured that participants were aware at all points of the recruitment process and throughout the study they were participating on a fully informed voluntary basis and were permitted to exit the study at any time. This was addressed in the initial recruitment email template (see Appendix A), consent form, and interview protocol (see Appendix C). To provide time to consider their participation, all potential participants were given 1 week to provide their consent form to participate in the study. All private information regarding participants, such as names and contact information, was kept confidential. Participant identities were masked using a numbering system, and any identifying information about their location within the state of Florida or specificities about their workplace also remained confidential. Data collection did not begin until after IRB approval (no. 10-17-22-0386681) was obtained. Data collected for the study is stored

in a password protected digital file. The data will be deleted 5 years after the publication of this study.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I described how the study was carried out. This included the rationale for a qualitative interpretive description research design focused on exploring the lack of perspectives from community advocates regarding the practicable efforts being made to address representation gaps in gifted programs in Florida public schools and the study's conceptual framework tied to the theory of representative bureaucracy. I then described the role of the researcher, including how I addressed my inherent biases, including my personal beliefs in the value of improving diversity in Florida's gifted programs, related to the study throughout the data collection process and during the analysis of the data once collected. In the main section of this chapter, I focused on the methodology of the proposed study. This included the participant selection logic, where I described the research-backed approach to determining the best potential participants for my study. In the instrumentation section I described in detail the structure and rationale for both the collection of data via individual interviews and the focus group. In the data analysis plan I explained the coding strategies for analyzing the data from the individual interviews. Finally, I concluded Chapter 3 with a section focused on issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. In Chapter 4, I will provide the results interpreted from the analysis of the collected data; the chapter will describe the study as it was conducted, re-addressing

areas from Chapter 3 based on data collected and the experiences conducting the study post-proposal.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. I addressed the purpose for this study by answer an overarching RQ: What are community advocates' observations and perceptions related to practicable solutions for increasing diversity in public school gifted programs within the state of Florida? I also sought to answer a single supporting subquestion (RQ1a) that was focused on the theory of representative bureaucracy as it relates to the phenomenon and conceptual framework for the study: In what ways do community advocates believe their current efforts to improve representation for minority groups could be practicably applied toward increasing the equity and active representation in Florida's gifted programs? In this chapter, I discuss the data collection and analysis process and how those data inform my findings related to the study's purpose and RQs.

In this chapter, I begin with a description of the study's setting, including any conditions that influenced the interpretation of the study results, and a description of the demographics of the participants that are relevant to the study. Next, I present the data collection process in detail, creating a foundation for further analysis of the data including the specific codes, categories, and themes that I derived from the data along with any discrepant cases. Following the description of the data collection and analysis processes, I revisit issues of trustworthiness and the evidence from the data collection and

analysis that support my earlier plans for addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Having determined a credible and trustworthy foundation for applying the collected data to the RQs, I present the results of the study by describing and supporting my findings. Finally, I conclude Chapter 4 with a summary of the answers to the RQs and a transition to the final chapter of this dissertation.

Setting

I conducted this study in the state of Florida. The state was a good location for the study because it is one of only 26 states with mandates protecting programs for students identified as gifted (NAGC, 2015), and has made legislative efforts to promote districts exploring ways to address underrepresentation in gifted programs through the Plan B statute addendum (Florida Department of Education, 1996). Additionally, Florida is a diverse state. I selected participants from throughout the state to address its different locales and regions more equitably. Additionally, I am a longtime resident and educator in Florida, so the use of Florida as a location for the study was also cost-effective as there was no outside funding for this research.

To protect the identities of my participants, no personal names or organization names are included in the study. I sought participants who had experience advocating for and supporting the unique needs of underserved and minority populations. These participants worked for or with community-based organizations and nonprofits in the state of Florida, and many of these programs are grant funded or funded by donations. Many of these programs are underfunded and/or understaffed (Gibson et al., 2007). These

issues could have influenced the experiences that participants shared with me during their interviews.

At the time data were collected, many participants had become aware of political educational decisions taking place in the state related to a new law, effective July 1, 2022, the Parents' Bill of Rights (2022). Although most of the participants were not actively involved in the public education sector, those with connections to public schools in the state through their own personal lives (e.g. children attending public schools or family members who worked in schools), or through collaborative efforts between their advocacy work and the local school system, may have been influenced by this change in legislation both in their work and in relation to their responses to interview questions. Policy changes in public education affect district programs throughout the state, so it was important to note this new law as it is relevant for the data analysis in this chapter and could have influenced data collection.

Demographics

Each participant in this study served as a representative for an underserved population identified in the extant body of literature on underrepresentation in gifted programs. These identified populations include individuals from low SES households, ELLs, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals from rural communities, 2E learners, and girls and women who may have experienced gender discrimination. For the purposes of my study, I did not collect any other demographic information about my participants because I was interested in protecting their identities so they would feel comfortable openly sharing their experiences and ideas within our interviews.

Following data collection, I did observe some unplanned demographics emerging that are relevant to the study. For example, most of my participants were between the ages of 30 and 55 and had at least 10 years of experience working with underserved populations, even if not in their current role. Additionally, participants were often members of the underserved populations they were serving or had deep connections to those populations motivating their work such as a disabled child. These participant characteristics are relevant to share because the theory of representative bureaucracy implies that a representative for a group could be both a member of that group themselves or someone who understands the unique needs of that group and is willing to represent those needs just as a member of the group would do (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). In the case of my participants, there was a mix of both types of potential representation; participants sometimes identified as members of the groups they were serving, and other times identified as members of other minority groups but had understanding and interest in serving a different population. Table 1 shows which groups each participant advocated for as well as the groups they personally identified with.

Table 1

Participant Demographics Related to Underrepresented Groups

Participant	Group(s) advocated for by participant	Group(s) of which participants is a member
001	2E	Minority racial/ethnic groups
002	2E, low SES, minority racial/ethnic groups	Girls and women, 2E
003	Girls and women, low SES	Girls and women, minority racial groups
004	2E	Girls and women, 2E, minority racial/ethnic groups
005	2E, girls and women	Girls and women
006	Low SES, 2E	Girls and women
007	Low SES, minority racial/ethnic groups	Girls and women, minority racial/ethnic groups
008	Low SES, minority racial/ethnic groups	Girls and women
009	Rural, ELLs, minority racial/ethnic groups, low SES	Rural, ELLs, minority racial/ethnic groups, low SES
010	Girls and women	Girls and women
011	ELLs, minority racial/ethnic groups, low SES	Minority racial/ethnic groups
012	Low SES, rural	Girls and women, minority racial groups

Note. 2E = twice exceptional; SES = socioeconomic status; ELL = English language learner.

Data Collection

I received IRB approval to collect data on October 17, 2022, which prompted me to compile my list of potential participants. Following the plan described in Chapter 3, I first compiled my own list of potential participants with community advocacy experience based on my background knowledge and research. I augmented that list by seeking additional suggestions from school counselors and school psychologists I had an existing relationship with. These efforts resulted in me creating a list of 23 potential participants who had connections to community organizations throughout Florida. It was important to me to seek potential participants in varying locales due to the diversity within the state of Florida and the differences in experiences a participant may have in relation to the communities they serve.

In Table 2, I present the timeline of this study. Data collection took place over the course of 8 weeks. In the table, I present the weeks that my research for this study was active, including my initial efforts to reach out to potential participants, the interviews that were scheduled because of that initial contact, and the number of individual interviews conducted each week. The bottom row includes totals for each column. Because I did not want to come across as coercive, I only contacted potential participants once unless they responded to me and demonstrated an interest in participating in my study. While maintaining a business-like manner suggesting the importance of my study, I also wanted to appear approachable to leave opportunities to work with these individuals in the future should they choose to. The table also shows that I tried to schedule interviews early in my data collection process as there were some limitations to

participant availability and my own over the winter holiday period that fell during the data collection period.

Table 2

Study Timeline

Week no.	Dates	No. of initial invitations sent	No. of interviews scheduled	No. of interviews held
1	10/17-10/23/22	17	2	0
2	10/24-10/30/22	3	2	3
3	10/31-11/6/22	2	2	2
4	11/7-11/13/22	0	3	3
5	11/14-11/20/22	1	2	3
6	11/21-11/27/22	0	1	0
7	11/28-12/4/22	0	0	0
8	12/5-12/11/22	0	0	1
Total	8 weeks	23	12	12

On October 21, 2022, I began reaching out to potential participants via email using my initial recruitment email template (see Appendix A). In all, I reached out to 23 potential participants, heard back from 17 of those participants, and selected 10 participants based on the criteria outlined in Appendix B. My remaining participants were selected as a part of the snowball sampling effort where a participant recommended participation in my study to another community member outside of their organization. Two of those referrals reached out to me, and both were a good fit for participation. For all participants, I emailed a copy of the consent form and, as a means of consent,

participants emailed me back to schedule a time to conduct the interview. Participants who were not selected were thanked for their interest and informed why they were not selected (e.g., I already had several participants representative of the group they had advocacy experience for, the participant expressed concerns about organizational conflicts) to avoid any potential feelings of exclusion or discrimination.

Data were collected via semistructured individual interviews held either in private settings of public locations (e.g., a public library private study room), or via Zoom videoconferencing software while in private personal settings (e.g., home offices). All interviews were recorded using two devices. For in person-interviews, I used my iPhone's voice recording app and a backup digital recorder. For interviews held over Zoom, I used Zoom's recording feature and a backup digital recorder. I was fortunate and did not need to utilize any of my backup recordings. Interviews lasted 45–60 min. Each participant participated in only one individual interview session. During each session, I used my interview protocol (see Appendix C) as a reference guide for my questions and my interview guide (see Appendix D) as a place to record my notes and other observations.

After each interview, I manually transcribed the data from each interview into Microsoft Word documents that I could then import into the MAXQDA coding software I utilized for data analysis. Manual transcription was time-consuming, but worth the experience to get to slow myself down, listen to the interview recordings more than once, and to notice anything participants may have said that I did not take note of during our session. All data were stored in a password-protected iCloud account I can access from

my phone or computer. Upon completion of the interviews, I once again thanked participants for their time via email and sent them a five-dollar Amazon gift card as a small token of my appreciation. After transcribing the data, I reached out to each participant to offer them a copy of the transcription so that they could review it for accuracy. I also let each participant know that they would receive a copy of my final dissertation upon receiving university approvals at the completion of my work. I made note of these interactions in both my reflective and reflexive journals. In my reflective journal, I made notes about any reactions to the transcripts, nothing that most participants did not express any concerns with the data collected and that participants were willing to meet again should I have more questions for them. Only one participant, Participant 11, noted that they wanted to add something to one of their responses based on what they had said in the interview transcript, and I made note of that additional thought in both of my journals and added their thoughts to a separate document that I imported into MAXQDA for analysis.

Throughout the data collection process, I utilized reflexive and reflective journaling. My reflexive journal focused on the day-to-day procedures of my data collection including analysis and comments about any personal thoughts or introspections I had related to my research and analysis. The reflective journal focused on my field note observations during the data collection process and during data analysis.

There was one unique circumstance I faced while collecting data that did result in a slight change to my data collection plan described in Chapter 3. One of my participants, who was speaking about their experiences advocating for individuals who are deaf or

hard of hearing—a potential dual exceptionality—was also a member of the deaf community. As such, when I conducted our interview via Zoom, I also used a call-in audio feature that allowed a sign language interpreter to be present in our interview and better accommodate the needs of the participant. To make the process easier on the interpreter, I also simplified the wording of some of my questions and utilized more specific probes with this participant to ensure I was still encouraging the same robust and detailed responses about their insight and experiences without creating barriers due to their disability.

Data Analysis

My first step in the data analysis process was to import my raw transcripts, which I had typed in Microsoft Word, into the MAXQDA coding software. Additionally, I scanned and uploaded the notes from my interview guides for each individual interview and my reflective journal entries into the program, knowing that I would want access to my reflections from the interview process when coding my data. While I did not code any of the data from my journals, I continued to refer to my reflexive and reflective journals throughout the data analysis process, making notes about my thoughts and observations as needed. Additionally, the notes in my journals helped to inform my thematic analysis later in the data analysis process. I also reflected on my own struggles with the coding process, and my uncertainties leading to me coding larger chunks of data with more simple codes out of fear of over-analyzing and potentially bullying my data into saying something it did not say, as this played an influential role in my interactions with the data early in my analysis and led to me seeking support with my data analysis.

After importing the raw data into MAXQDA, I proceeded with data analysis using first- and second-cycle coding techniques. I began with descriptive coding. Descriptive coding is appropriate for individual interview data and was a good fit for this study as I sought to interpret how each participant perceived and put into words their experiences and how those experiences could be applied as practicable solutions toward addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs (see Saldaña, 2015). It was not enough for me to merely collect responses about experiences, I wanted to be able to hear, feel, and understand those experiences and draw connections between those experiences and the body of literature surrounding underrepresentation in gifted programs. I realized as I analyzed the data further, though, that this practice was only deductive in nature and not inductive, and that it was equally important to analyze my data to see what it was telling me outside of my preconceived notions and knowledge from the literature I had read while developing this study. This inductive analysis was much deeper than simply looking for the connections between participants' experiences and the existing literature, it focused on uncovering what new knowledge could be gained from their insights that could add to the body literature itself.

I wanted my coding efforts to be both deductive and inductive, with deductive coding focusing on codes based on the literature guiding my study and inductive codes that emerged from my interaction with the data throughout the coding process. For these reasons, I reread my literature review prior to beginning the coding process and wrote down some potential deductive codes related to the literature that would be useful for

systematically examining and categorizing the data. I focused on using words and short phrases to encompass the main idea of a specific chunks of data.

To provide examples of my deductive descriptive coding process, Participant 6 provided the following response to the interview question "What is your name, your role, and what interested you in participating in this study?":

> I have many titles. Director, founder, teacher, whatever, whatever title here at [redacted]. What interested me in participating in this study? I want to give back to the community. When I was a kid, my mom kind of raised me to just always want to give back to the community and help others. I do that through my work here and enjoy opportunities to talk about that work and help others continue that work.

I broadly coded this excerpt with the terms "participant background" and "desire to participate." Another example, this one focused on the knowledge I gained from the existing literature that had also driven the development of my interview protocol, was Participant 5's response to the interview question "What ideas do you have that could help those working in the field of gifted education apply the work you've done to that setting?":

> There needs to be way more out there for parents to educate themselves. As a parent of a child with a disability, I am constantly learning and then trying to teach others what I have learned. We become a community ourselves, in a way, and use tools like social media, especially Facebook groups, to educate and

> connect with one another. Parents don't want to feel alone and they want support and resources in doing what is best for their kid.

I had deductively coded this excerpt with the phrase "solutions and suggestions." Table 3 shows my first set of deductive codes in the left column. I came up with 18 broad deductive descriptive codes for my data based on the literature and my interview protocol (see Appendix C).

After completing a deductive descriptive coding cycle with one transcript of data, I revisited the transcript and started to analyze the statements I had coded with these broad set of original codes and I realized there were nuances to the perspectives of my participants that needed their own unique codes. I did this with each transcript of data, creating additional inductive codes for each participant's data set. Many of these inductive codes became key to the patterns that I noticed among the participants during my second cycle of coding and analysis. While the first set of deductive codes helped me to understand what my participants were saying on a surface level linked to the literature, it was digging deeper into their statements and questioning what they meant and how it was relevant to my research and the field of gifted education that helped to better inform the development of my categories, themes and, eventually, my findings.

I revisited the transcripts and added inductive descriptive codes. I added this code to the following response from Participant 6:

> I have many titles. Director, founder, teacher, whatever, whatever title here at [redacted]. What interested me in participating in this study? I want to give back to the community. When I was a kid, my mom kind of raised me to just always

> want to give back to the community and help others. I do that through my work here and enjoy opportunities to talk about that work and help others continue that work.

I received additional inductive codes including “giving back,” “early influences,” and “help others contribute.” I originally Participant 5’s response below with “solutions and suggestions,” and also received these additional codes from my inductive analysis: “parents need to be informed,” “utilization of social media,” “sharing of knowledge,” “sharing of experiences,” and “support and resources.”

> There needs to be way more out there for parents to educate themselves. As a parent of a child with a disability, I am constantly learning and then trying to teach others what I have learned. We become a community ourselves, in a way, and use tools like social media, especially Facebook groups, to educate and connect with one another. Parents don’t want to feel alone and they want support and resources in doing what is best for their kid.

The key codes from my descriptive coding during the first cycle are listed in Table 3, including the key inductive codes that were generated after digging deeper inductively in the same transcript excerpts that had been broadly coded deductively. Some codes were repeated with different contexts, as illustrated in the example of Participant 5’s excerpts.

Table 3

First-Cycle Descriptive Codes

Deductive code	Associated inductive code
Participant background	Giving back, early influences, parent influence toward service, help others contribute, community, informed decision-making, creating opportunities, motivated by success of those served, personal connection with those served, member of community served.
Desire to participate	Help a student, further the research, improve practice, draw attention to need for change, highlight work being done, enjoy interviews, enjoy sharing experiences.
Gifted education experiences	Gifted peers, special classes, child in gifted program, child assessed for gifted program, mental health needs of gifted children.
Knowledge of gifted programs	Testing, knowledge of state requirements, knowledge of Plan B, school psychologists, exclusivity, intelligence, traits of gifted children, experience as former educator, experience as gifted child, experience as a parent of gifted child, advanced courses.
Personal school experiences	Mentorship from educators, access to opportunities, gaps in curriculum, negative experiences with educators, positive experiences with educators, demographics of school, location of school, educated outside Florida, educated within Florida.
Personal beliefs about education	Importance of education, importance of educators, constant change, should be equitable, should meet individual student needs, should prepare students for life, should prepare students for college, needs improvement, should incorporate changing needs of society.
Personal school experiences related to being a minority	Language barriers, lack of connection to home, cultural biases in curriculum, couldn't afford extracurriculars, couldn't afford tutoring, attention on issues at home, distracted in class, pressure from family to succeed, family not always understanding of school programs, family had to advocate for needs, feeling dumb.
Personal school experiences related to being a gifted minority	Feeling of alienation, exclusivity, need to be challenged, desire to include others, pressure to perform, seemed less important over time, lonely, lacking social connection with peers.
Public schools	Perceptions of working with schools and districts, barriers of working with districts, impact of school-level leadership, impact of district-level leadership.

Deductive code	Associated inductive code
Overcoming barriers	Challenge of politics (changing what we do, merging alliances, compromises), language barriers, lack of resources.
Needs of diverse populations	Challenge of language, communication, addressing basic needs, community outreach, transportation challenges, challenges of poverty, rural access to resources, challenges of immigration, cultural understanding and acceptance.
Deficit mindset	Disability more important than ability, focus on language barriers, racial bias, disability bias, compensating for challenges, prejudice impacting educational experiences, need for inclusive practices.
Discrimination	Impacts of discrimination (negative school experiences, bullying, lack of opportunity), link to deficit mindset, racial bias, disability bias, bias against language learners, bias against family.
Representation	Advocates, members of minority group, understanding of group, political representation, organizational representation, diversity in programs, reach out efforts, willingness to listen, willingness to organize, connecting with people in power, small victories, modeling resilience.
Parents as advocates	Concerns of minority parents, parents know children best, parents need to be informed, parents need to be included, communication should be equitable, parents are educational partners, parents with disabilities, parents may be focused on basic needs.
Support and resources	Addressing basic needs, lack of resources, providing accessible information, sharing knowledge with community.
Nonprofit work and funding	Grant writing challenges, funding challenges, budget challenges, asking for donations, providing free services, collaborating with other organizations, event participation, reliance on volunteers, struggle attracting top talent, takes years to develop programs, program growth challenges, scope of funding opportunities.
Solutions and suggestions	Practice, increasing diversity, recommendations, utilization of social media, hopes, further research, further collaboration, sharing of knowledge, sharing of experiences.

After completing this first round of descriptive coding for each participant's transcript, I made notes in my journals about the coding process. I noted some of the messages I seemed to be hearing from my participants about the role parents play in the advocacy process for children, the various understandings of the requirements for gifted programs statewide, and the barriers that these individuals face in their work for non-profit organizations and community organizations in terms of both discrimination and efforts to collaborate with other organizations and particularly school districts. An example of one of these notes is related to Participant 2's experiences with traditional public schools and districts and smaller independently run schools like private schools and charter schools. In response to her statement that "In private schools and even a couple of charter schools, we (clinical psychologists) are invited in with open arms" and "You know, some of the schools are funded part by the state, that they just have different criteria or something, and they're not technically public schools and some of them are full private schools, but they collaborate much better," I noted that Participant 2 "felt like a more welcome team member with a respective point of view in the independently run schools."

Next, I shifted my focus to using the initial coding method (see Saldaña, 2015). During initial coding, my focus was on linking the data to my conceptual framework focused on the theory of representative bureaucracy. It was my intention for the theory of representative bureaucracy to be a lens through which I could view the unique perspectives and descriptions provided by my participants. Once again, I began this process deductively, reviewing the literature related to the theory of representative

bureaucracy and pre-selecting five codes based on that literature: advocacy, passive, active, bureaucratic support, and bureaucratic barriers. These codes are also listed in the left column of Table 4. These broad codes served as a starting point for me to consider the data from the lens of representative bureaucracy. I reread each participant's transcript, adding these broad codes to excerpts that related to these topics. My goal with this process was to seek common definitions of these terms among participants so that I could then use these chunks of data to inductively explore the individual experiences of each participant related to the theory. I especially wanted to understand how elements of this theory played out in the experiences of each participant, and what could be learned from those experiences in terms of improving representation for potential gifted minority students. An example of a coded excerpt from this part of my process is Participant 11's response to the first interview question where she introduced herself, her work, and her interest in my study:

> I work for an organization that is dedicated to serving people from rural, low-income communities. Their needs tend to be ignored on a legislative level because they're not the majority, and there aren't typically people in power that have had their unique experiences. There can also be a lack of resources in rural communities, leading to people not really knowing where to seek help even if they want to better advocate for their own needs.

While this quote had previously been coded during my descriptive coding process with codes like "participant background," "giving back," "community," and "support and resources," I added the broad code "advocacy" during this first cycle of initial coding.

After generating these broad deductive codes and applying them to each transcript, I knew there was a need for me to dig deeper into my data once again, allowing the statements from my participants related to representative bureaucracy to aid me in developing the necessary inductive codes as a part of my initial coding cycle. I looked at each set of data that I coded with one of my broad initial codes and asked myself what my participants were saying about issues of advocacy, passive representation, active representation, and support and barriers related to bureaucratic institutions like school districts. Participant 11 had stated,

> I work for an organization that is dedicated to serving people from rural, low-income communities. Their needs tend to be ignored on a legislative level because they're not the majority, and there aren't typically people in power that have had their unique experiences. There can also be a lack of resources in rural communities, leading to people not really knowing where to seek help even if they want to better advocate for their own needs.

Some examples of the additional inductive initial codes I added to this excerpt were "multi-group advocacy," "advocacy experience," "rural advocacy," "advocacy for low-income communities," "characteristics of those in need," and "political support." Revisiting the transcripts and analyzing what my participants were saying inductively resulted in me generating dozens of new inductive initial codes seen in the right column of Table 4.

Table 4

First-Cycle Initial Codes

Deductive code	Associated inductive code
Advocacy	Role of the advocate, multi-group advocacy, advocacy experience, advocacy for women, structure of advocacy, volunteer nature of advocacy, issues of advocacy, advocacy for low-income communities, characteristics of those in need, lack of resources, racial advocacy, rural advocacy, advocacy for immigrants, advocacy for people with disabilities, advocacy for language learners, advocacy for students, advocacy for families, advocacy for children, advocacy for homeless, advocacy for adults, training for advocacy, collaborative advocacy, advocate organizations
Passive	Passive benefits, passive limitations, minor benefits, exclusivity of programs, federal funding access, grant access, considered a starting point, reliance on other advocates, can be foundation for collaboration
Active	Active benefits, active limitations, squeaky wheel mentality, build a platform, requirements of grant programs, demonstration of active work, attract volunteers, build a nonprofit
Bureaucratic support	Interorganizational support, independently run schools, community collaboration, larger organizations supporting start-ups, word-of-mouth, offering free services, political support, collaboration with government entities, grant writing and funding
Bureaucratic barriers	Interorganizational barriers, traditionally run schools, hesitance to take free help, paperwork trails, personal bias from within bureaucracies

When wrapping up my initial coding cycle, I once again returned to my journals. I made notes about the experience from an objective point of view, including that this cycle had resulted in me using codes for much larger chunks of data related to the theory of representative bureaucracy that were broader and more encompassing than with my descriptive coding cycle. I also noted that I was again seeing trends and themes emerging among my data, particularly in terms of what advocacy looked like for these participants and whether they believed in the benefits of potential passive advocacy, supporting the

theory as it is presented in the existing literature. Participant 1 described positive experiences he has had advocating for the population he serves:

> Whenever I go and speak to schools, different crowds, people, I've never run into any negativity whatsoever. The people that are there want to be there and they want to listen and they want to improve, and they want to get better and they want to ask me how they can change to do better themselves. It's been a learning experience on their part from listening to the experience that I have and that has been a great thing.

I noted that "audiences are seeking learning and change" and the questioning note "more open to learning about disabilities?" because these seemed like important thoughts stemming from his response that may have helped to illustrate the difference between his positive experiences working with schools and districts from the barriers that some other participants were describing.

My second-cycle coding effort focused on thematic analysis and creating categories for my codes, allowing me to identify potential themes in the data. My goal during this part of my data analysis was also to stop looking at my data as individual interview transcripts and start looking at the larger picture of the data set. When doing my first cycle of coding, I coded each interview transcript and interview guide in isolation. I did this because I wanted to really spend time focusing on what each individual participant was saying during my first cycle of coding. It was only during my inductive coding efforts in the first cycle that I started reflecting on some of the things that were appearing as patterns in the data, which I noted in my reflective journal knowing that I

wanted to focus this second cycle of coding specifically on patterns and categories associated with the key codes listed in Table 3 and Table 4 that concluded the first-cycle coding phase.

The process of moving from codes to categories to themes was a challenging and lengthy one that took much reflection and revision. I initially made the mistake of trying to move straight from my codes to my themes during second-cycle coding, a process that lacked cohesion and was not supported by the evidence in the data. It was only after diving back into my data analysis and reviewing my transcripts, codes, notes, interview guides, and journal entries that I fully recognized the need to revisit my codes, develop categories based on the patterns in the coded data, and to reflect upon what those patterns were trying to tell me that I was able to develop the themes that would inform my findings.

During this cycle, I started looking at how codes were repeated among the different transcripts and started annotating similarities and differences between what my participants were saying in their interviews. This allowed me to see patterns as they emerged and to group my refined codes into categories. These categories, and the first-cycle codes I grouped to help form them, are seen in Table 5. I noticed while working toward my categories that some excerpts of my transcripts that were coded with the same codes fell into different categories. I included these duplicate codes and categories in the table located in Appendix E.

I inductively developed 13 categories from the coded data I reviewed, reflected upon, and re-analyzed during my second-cycle analysis. These categories reflected some

of the key patterns I noticed in the data. The categories are: demographic data, how experiences drive action, understanding of personal and professional motivators in advocacy, parental lack of resources/knowledge can impair them as advocates, discrimination serves as deterrent for many families, need for improved, equitable resources for families, concerns that public schools lack knowledge and resources to address needs, nonprofits and community organizations function with limited funding, community organizations can benefit from collaborative efforts serving multiple populations, community advocates view passive representation as limited in benefits, active representation and directed advocacy efforts produce more tangible benefits for community served, rigidity of bureaucratic organizations can create barriers to collaboration and breed distrust, and systematic processes and regulations impacted collaboration with traditional schools and districts. In Table 5, I include excerpts from the data to support each category.

Table 5

Empirical Evidence Supporting Categorical Analysis

Category	Example quote
The demographic data of participants.	Participant 2: "My name is [redacted]. I'm a psychologist currently. At the moment I work in the community, in a group practice and I also work in the largest community mental health facility in [redacted]. I've spent, prior to this, spent 12 years with the sexual assault department as an advocate. I've spent 15 years working on the sexual trafficking task force here in the area. And my job and my focus and my volunteer work has been working with underserved and underprivileged children and trying to access them into their homes and communities here."
	Participant 7: "[Name redacted] and I'm the director of education support. What interested me is I know the perseverance and struggle of getting a doctorate, and I always want to support others, especially educators in their field of research and study in learning and growing, it's important. Um, and also because I believe it'll help inform decision making as it comes to like being positive with children and helping children."
Experiences drive action.	Participant 4: "Seeing other deaf people and blind people be successful can help the parents of disabled children and disabled children see their potential. I know my role in the community as a deaf person helps them see what they are capable of. She's deaf and she's educated. She is doing work that matters. She's deaf and she can speak for herself and others. It helps them see who they can be. They see someone blind and deaf with a PhD, someone raised in another country who has fought adversity, and they feel inspired."
	Participant 6: "I have many titles. Director, founder, teacher, whatever, whatever title here at [redacted]. What interested me in participating in this study? I want to give back to the community. When I was a kid, my mom kind of raised me to just always want to give back to the community and help others. I do that through my work here and enjoy opportunities to talk about that work and help others continue that work."
	Participant 12: "I grew up in a rural community in poverty, so I think my experiences as a member of this community played a role in this becoming part of my career. I was one of the first graduates of a school run by the organization, so I'm deeply rooted in the values of the work we do."
Participants express their personal and professional motivators in advocacy.	Participant 10: "Over the years I've supported many efforts both on a state level and national level to further equality for women. [Redacted] has been around for several decades at the state level and longer at the national level, so a lot of those efforts have been steered by the organization. The organization is very focused on feminist ideals and the need for women to be equitably treated in all facets of society. We want to see change on a national and global level, with women and girls having access to all the same opportunities as men and boys. [Redacted]

Category	Example quote
	has local chapters at the county level, some broken down even further than that like Pinellas having a county-wide chapter and a western Pinellas chapter, same with Volusia. These groups are run entirely by volunteers. We have been funded entirely by donations and an occasional grant. We developed our own nonprofit fund in 2007 that we used to help fund our advocacy work, but again, this group is very grassroots and run by volunteers. The Fund priorities include a focus on educating women and empowering them to fight for their rights, dealing with the limitations on reproductive rights we are seeing at the state and national level, and dealing with issues of discrimination, particularly in the higher ed setting or the workplace. We also do a lot of work with human trafficking."
	Participant 11: "I work for an organization that is dedicated to serving people from rural, low-income communities. Their needs tend to be ignored on a legislative level because they're not the majority, and there aren't typically people in power that have had their unique experiences. There can also be a lack of resources in rural communities, leading to people not really knowing where to seek help even if they want to better advocate for their own needs."
A lack of resources or knowledge can impair parents' ability to serve as advocates.	Participant 1: "The parents don't know how to reach out for help, and so if they have someone that maybe looks like them or talks like them on the board of directors, they may feel more comfortable to get involved with that organization"
	Participant 4: "There are many deaf parents with deaf children. If the deaf parent doesn't have a good education, they have no idea how they can advocate for their child. We have to educate the parents to enable them as advocates."
Discrimination serves as deterrent for many families.	Participant 9: "Because [redacted] focuses on families and children, we do get grant funding from the state and federal programs, but the adults migrant workers are often discriminated against. There's not as much available to them, so we have to find ways to help their children and families that can tangentially benefit them."
	Participant 12: "In this area especially, many of the members of this rural community are also immigrants. Some may even be undocumented; that's not something we track. But often there are language barriers. There are cultural differences. All of these families just want a better life for themselves, for their children. But I think they quickly get labeled because so many work on the local farms and people assume they're dumb, incapable, illegal, and don't treat them like people. Some of them feel ashamed and don't want to seek help. They tend to build communities relying on one another."
There is a need for improved, equitable resources for families.	Participant 1: That was another reason why I wrote a book as well is because we didn't know what to do at the beginning when we were pregnant, and we did not want other people to go through what we went through. So, on our website we provide a list of resources from doctors

Category	Example quote
	and schools and things that people can kind of get our advice from our own experience to reach out to."
	Participant 5: "There needs to be way more out there for parents to educate themselves. As a parent of a child with a disability, I am constantly learning and then trying to teach others what I have learned. We become a community ourselves, in a way, and use tools like social media, especially Facebook groups, to educate and connect with one another. Parents don't want to feel alone and they want support and resources in doing what is best for their kid."
Public schools may lack knowledge and resources to address needs.	Participant 2: "A barrier is an abject misunderstanding of trauma within the school system. It's a generalization, but that kind of statistically speaking, disadvantaged populations and therefore disadvantaged children from within those populations have experienced trauma. In a child below the age of 10 to 12, the presentation of trauma when their personality is not developed is behavior disruption. So what a school sees is a misbehaving child, right? They don't recognize the role of trauma, so the school system is trying to treat what's seen and what's not underneath the surface. They're not going to look beyond that and see a kid that can't sit still in class that can't pay attention that is desperately trying to clown around, you're not going to notice that they're really clever- you're going to notice that they're very disruptive."
	Participant 3: "It's a big need when it comes to our young ladies, you know, just in general, like the education system is not how it used to be when, you know, when we were growing up. I myself, my personal opinion, I feel it sets them up for failure, you know, because it's not preparing them for life skills like real-life things. You're not going to be at the cash register doing five circles with two dots in it, right? You're not, you know what I mean, right?" and "You have a lot of intelligent kids that are in those populations, but you'll never see it because their worry is something totally different right now."
	Participant 4: "Some teachers and some parents are only looking at the limitations the student experiences, not their abilities. They need to challenge them."
Nonprofits and community organizations function with limited funding.	Participant 2: "You've got a whole funding barrier that comes in there too. And it's funding on every level, even funding from research down to functional programs. If you look at the programs that are funded for children, for example here in Hillsborough County, I think that's something like 346 of them- not one of them crosses over outside of its very specific myopic focus. The problem is that children aren't myopic they're macro right. My experience is the parameters of funding are so tight that it doesn't work right. It doesn't work like if there's a program that's looking for African American girls- it wouldn't matter if I had a biracial client. They don't fit."
	Participant 6: "It was slow to start this community support. Support was slow to start. You know, a lot of grants and things. They want you to be

Category	Example quote
	established and show financial history and things like that, which we had none, right. Now we have established that and received a few grants. After we paid for the AC, we got a grant to reimburse us for the AC. We got a grant for the space. [redacted] funded one of our summer camps, this past year and the year before."
Community organizations can benefit from collaborative efforts serving multiple populations.	Participant 9: "The majority of our funding comes from state and federal grants, so we do a lot of advocacy work on a political level. This requires a lot of partnerships with other community-based organizations, and our own board of directors includes community members as well as members of the population we aim to serve."
	Participant 6: "Community collaboration, be open to working with the community. Be inclusive, be willing to educate yourself about unique needs."
Community advocates view passive representation as limited in benefits.	Participant 9: "Because [redacted] focuses on families and children, we do get grant funding from the state and federal programs, but the adults migrant workers are often discriminated against. There's not as much available to them, so we have to find ways to help their children and families that can tangentially benefit them. So I'm not really convinced that that indirect advocacy works as well as people may think. I think programs like ours that directly benefit these groups are the ones making the most progress."
	Participant 10: "I think when it comes to equality for women, the efforts that benefit us the most are active. I think that other minority groups that women may belong to may tangentially benefit from barriers being removed for women, but I don't think it necessarily happens the other way around. I'm old, so a good example of this is that Black men had the right to vote before women did. Sometimes even when dealing with issues like racism, sexism is the bigger hurdle to jump over."
Active representation and directed advocacy efforts produce more tangible benefits for the community served.	Participant 9: "When it comes to minority populations, active efforts are the most beneficial. Often times these groups struggle to advocate for themselves. Many migrants are undocumented, resulting in them having legitimate fears about drawing attention to themselves or their children. It can be hard for them to benefit from programs designed for low-income households because they often aren't eligible for services due to their undocumented status. It's a misconception that undocumented families are mooching the system- despite the fact that they are working and contributing to our economy, they aren't eligible to fully participate in many services that they would benefit from. This is why that active representation is so important."
	Participant 10: "I think active advocacy is especially critical for women and girls. Despite being the majority of people in this country, our voice is often the last considered. We have to be loud about our needs and rights. I think the best active advocacy comes when multiple organizations with the same values and missions work together."

Category	Example quote
The rigidity of bureaucratic organizations can create barriers to collaboration and breed distrust.	Participant 6: "If there are organizations that are highly bureaucratic, highly structured in a way- rigid, we can't do that mindset because that's not the way we do things right. And we are about the people and sometimes those barriers don't allow us to fully serve in the way that we want. So how can we then truly partner and have the maximum positive impact when they're become more barriers than there are open doors to helping people? Our mission, I think, and reputation in the area, things like the partnership school where it's our building work. It started as a charter school and that didn't work. Having this partnership, we were able to bridge a gap that. We have managed to make it work. When we look outside of what's considered our possession to how can we do more? Because right now we're in a do more season, right? Like there is more desperate need. We've got more people knocking on our doors. We want to get to them before they knock. How can we do more? By looking for partners that have the flexibility to do more. It becomes challenging when you're dealing with big bureaucratic organizations."
	Participant 12: "We are fortunate that over the years we have established strong roots in the community that have benefited us when advocating at a higher level. But it wasn't always that way. It can be challenging to work with large organizations, especially things like local and state government, or better yet federal government. Programs exist, resources exist, but you're almost pitted against one another vying for them. Things are a bit better now that we have been established for decades, but we have the resources to have a team that focuses solely on political advocacy and lobbying. Most nonprofits don't have that. It's an uphill climb."
Systematic processes and regulations affect collaboration with traditional schools and districts.	Participant 6: "It's weird, because you'll try to collaborate with a large organization like a school district and they look at you like you're crazy for wanting to work with them for free."
	Participant 9: "We have definitely run into barriers when trying to collaborate with larger organizations, which is part of why [redacted] decided to open two charter schools. We still collaborate with local school districts, but we are able to do more through our own walls than we were ever able to accomplish trying to work within the confines of districts."

Note. AC = air conditioning

The development of the 13 categories and deeper analysis of the data helped me to describe six unique themes connected to the data and experiences shared by the study participants. The six themes are broad representations of what I believe my participants

were trying to share about their experiences in improving representation for underserved populations in the communities they served based on the coded data. Just as I noticed when moving from codes to categories, some categories and the data associated with those categories supported more than one theme. I included these duplicate categories in Table 6. These themes are described more in detail and supported with empirical evidence from the data in the Results section of this chapter, where I also discuss how these themes helped to inform my findings.

Table 6

Key Themes Supported by Categorized Data

Theme	Category supporting theme
Advocates feel obligated to speak for the needs of the populations they serve, whether they identify as a member of that population or not.	The demographic data of participants. Experiences drive action. Participants express their personal and professional motivators in advocacy.
Parents, despite playing a key role as potential advocates for their children, may face their own barriers or discrimination against them that can limit their effectiveness as advocates or deter them from advocating for their children.	A lack of resources or knowledge can impair parents' ability to serve as advocates. Discrimination serves as deterrent for many families. There is need for improved, equitable resources for families
While a needs-first approach should remain a priority in schools, school leaders must be cautious of a deficit mindset when working with children facing hardships as it can lead to under-identification and missed educational opportunities.	There is a need for improved, equitable resources for families. Public schools lack knowledge and resources to address needs.
Community based organizations thrive on collaboration with other organizations and better serve their intended populations when there are fewer barriers to that collaboration.	Nonprofits and community organizations function with limited funding. Community organizations can benefit from collaborative efforts serving multiple populations.
Community advocates do not see much benefit in passive representation, they feel active representation is necessary to make meaningful impacts.	Community advocates view passive representation as limited in benefits. Active representation and directed advocacy efforts produce more tangible benefits for community served.
Traditional schools and their districts are frequently perceived as rigid and difficult to work with from an advocate perspective, individual schools and independently run schools can be easier to collaborate with and produce positive change within.	Rigidity of bureaucratic organizations can create barriers to collaboration and breed distrust. Systematic processes and regulations affect collaboration with traditional schools and districts.

Discrepant Cases

Creswell (2013) described discrepant cases as cases that do not fit within a theme in the data or that were significantly different from the accounts of other participants. While each interview was unique and each participant provided insights and experiences that did not match those of any other participant, none of these discrepant viewpoints would be considered discrepant cases. All the data collected fit within the themes and coding structures used in the data analysis process and the differences in experiences and viewpoints among the participants instead helped me to consider new perspectives related to the overarching and sub-RQs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To address the credibility of my study, I triangulated the data methodologically, utilized reflexive and reflective journals, and achieved saturation through my participant sampling strategies and my data collection (interview) protocol (see Appendix C). I also used stratified criterion-based sampling and snowball sampling with the participant group to help ensure rich, thick, detailed data that was relevant to my study's RQs, as well as augmenting the prospect of data saturation. Additionally, I utilized an interview guide (see Appendix D) that helped me to structure my interviews in a way that allowed my interactions with my participants to remain neutral, allowing participants to feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences with me. Participants were reminded several times that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they

may choose to no longer participate at any time and all identifying details were concealed to protect participant identities.

Transferability

To address transferability of my study, I have included a detailed description of each step of the study, allowing it to be replicated by a future researcher if desired. I relied largely on the application of a criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy to enhance practical diversity in participant selection. After determining potential participants, I used my personal knowledge of my topic and understanding of the data needs of my study to select participants who had experience advocating for the needs at least one of the six groups identified nationwide as underrepresented in gifted programs by the extant body of literature. I was fortunate that all my participants had experience advocating for more than one underrepresented population. Since one of my goals in conducting this study is to see how the insights of my participants might inform the body of research related to underrepresentation in gifted education, it was important for me to describe my participants' relevant demographics, include quotes from my interviews that support my findings, and include my interview questions so that fellow researchers and practitioners can potentially apply the results of my study to their settings pertaining to addressing underrepresented populations of potentially gifted learners.

Dependability

The use of an interview protocol (see Appendix C) helped me to be consistent during the data collection process. This protocol included the specific interview questions and probes that were needed to address the RQs. Additionally, I documented any

naturally occurring changes related to my study in my reflexive and reflective journal during the entire capstone project. This study's problem, purpose, RQs, and methodology were aligned around the conceptual framework described in Chapters 1 and 2, also aiding in the dependability of my study.

Confirmability

Throughout the course of data collection and analysis, I worked to remain a thoughtful and objective observer. This process was aided using my interview protocol (see Appendix C). All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and participants were offered an opportunity to review transcriptions for accuracy. I utilized My interpretations of the findings are clearly derived from the data and can be confirmed by fellow researchers.

Results

The goal in conducting any quality study is to attempt to answer the RQs in a way that adds to the body of knowledge and serves as a resource for other researchers and practitioners alike. The RQs I aimed to answer in this study were "What are community advocates' observations and perceptions related to practicable solutions for increasing diversity in public school gifted programs within the state of Florida?" and "In what ways do community advocates believe their current efforts to improve representation for minority groups could be practicably applied toward increasing the equity and active representation in Florida's gifted programs?" From the analysis of my data, I described 6 themes related to the codes, patterns, and categories I decoded about my participants experiences, thoughts, and ideas related to these RQs. I have organized this section by

each of those 6 themes, culminating in a discussion of how those themes informed my findings.

Theme 1: Advocate Desire to Serve

The first theme I determined in my analysis was that advocates feel obligated to speak for the needs of the populations they serve, whether they identify as a member of that population or not. In Table 1, I noted how each participant represented the six underrepresented populations identified in the literature. Each participant represented at least one of the six groups but also belonged to one or more of the six groups. While participants often described some kind of connection to the population(s) they served in their interview responses, they did not necessarily identify as a member of the population(s). My very first participant was the parent of a disabled child who had formed a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocacy for children with disabilities, but he himself was not disabled. While he was not a member of the group he was advocating for, he described an experience as where he served as a racial representative for a group he did belong to, furthering his outreach efforts. He described his experience as a Black man advocating for individuals with disabilities,

> From what I have seen, there are not many African American males that are in the role that I'm in in the Down syndrome community. From my experience in business, I know that you should always build your staff based on the demographic of your customers. Someone might not want to deal with me, but they may want to deal with my colleague because she looks like the customer or speaks the same language as the customer, putting them at ease and making them

> feel welcome. I've tried to make sure that our Board of Directors has been diverse as well. Sometimes when you have children born with special needs, the parents don't know how to reach out for help, and so if they have someone that maybe looks like them or talks like them on the board of directors, they may feel more comfortable to get involved with that organization. I once had a guy reach out to me thanking me for my book and the resources on our website, and he mentioned that he felt less alone seeing a dad who looked like him dealing with similar things with his child.

Passion for the work they were doing in their communities was abundant among all the participants. They spoke openly and excitedly about the work they were doing, the programs they were a part of, and successes they had experienced personally or seen the people they were serving experience. Participant 3 talked about how her experiences as a teen mother inspired her to create an organization focused on teaching life skills to young girls and women:

> I was a Teen Mom. And how it started off where I wanted to give back to teen girls because you don't have to be wild to become a teen mom. You know, things just happen, and I just wanted to always give back and then just educate them on life skills. Because by us, you know, life comes through us.

Participant 11 described the success of the English as a Second Language program she helped grow, stating:

> I know the schools also have programs for kids who are language learners, but I'm not entirely impressed by the quality, so our organization tries to bridge that

> gap by providing English as a Second Language courses not only for adults but for children as well. Many families attend as a unit. The program started with maybe four or five families in attendance, but it grew to over 25 families in a matter of months as other members of the community started to see the success of their friends and felt more comfortable taking that step. The program now serves over 100 families in a single week.

While each participant's experiences were unique, their interest in continuing their work, serving the populations they were serving, and trying to positively impact more lives was consistent among their responses, despite some of the challenges they may have experienced and described in our interview.

Theme 2: Parents as Advocates

The next theme that emerged from my data analysis was that parents, despite playing a key role as potential advocates for their children, may face their own barriers or discrimination against them that can limit their effectiveness as advocates or deter them from advocating for their children. One of the questions in my interview script was "What ideas do you have that could help those working in the field of gifted education apply the work you've done to that setting?" Every participant took time to include a suggestion related to educating and involving parents in their response to this question. Participants were not aiming to pin blame on parents for not adequately advocating for their children, instead emphasizing the need for practitioners in the field of gifted education, such as administrators or teachers, to take the time to inform parents about how to best support their child and to provide all available resources toward that means.

Participant 2, who was also the only participant to have experience directly related to gifted education as a licensed clinical psychologist who had conducted private evaluations for gifted eligibility requirements, stated:

> There's like usually on average one school psychologist for two or three schools, right. And then you create a financial barrier because you're going to have parents who can afford to pay out of pocket for an outside evaluation, and then you're going to have parents that don't get the services they need for their child because it's not being done by the school and they can't afford to pay for a private evaluation. And then for the underserved populations, you have the issue where when you try to advocate for them, for example, if I'm advocating for a client who is undocumented, their parents do not want to put their heads above pulpits. They do not want to be identified. They do not want to draw attention to themselves because there's a legitimate risk to their safety and well-being.

Participant 4, an advocate for the deaf and hard of hearing community and a member of that community herself, emphasized that "There are many deaf parents with deaf children. If the deaf parent doesn't have a good education, they have no idea how they can advocate for their child. We have to educate the parents to enable them as advocates."

Participants consistently recommended collaboration with parents and treating parents as partners in serving the unique needs of their children. Participant 6 talked about her experiences learning about the children she was serving through her dance studio. She said,

> I wasn't aware of how great the need was for affordable programs for children in foster care until we started offering one and could barely meet the demand. The more inclusive we became, the more I learned about serving children with trauma, with ABA [applied behavior analysis] therapists, with disabilities of all types. The parents educated me and made me want to do more to educate myself.

This experience illustrates how this collaboration can be a mutually beneficial experience for both parents hoping to serve as better advocates for their children and for the community advocates looking to improve their advocacy efforts and better serve the communities they represent.

Theme 3: Avoidance of a Deficit Mindset

The third theme emerging from my analysis was that while a needs-first approach should remain a priority in schools, school leaders must be cautious of a deficit mindset when working with children facing hardships as it can lead to under-identification and missed educational opportunities. This theme was especially prevalent among responses from participants who worked with individuals with disabilities and individuals who lived in poverty. Participant 1 spoke about wanting educators and anyone working with his son or other children with disabilities "to treat them like anyone else, hold them to the same expectations and provide the resources for them to meet those expectations." Participant 4 described a situation where a local school had labeled a child incorrectly, failing to meet their needs, sharing that "the school didn't understand the IEP [individualized education plan]. He was placed in an inclusive classroom with a teacher that didn't know sign language. He was struggling and started acting out, so they labeled

the behavior. They thought he was Autistic. But when they updated the IEP and realized he needed access to an interpreter, the behavior stopped. He was not autistic but struggling to express his needs and frustrations. He was able to learn again when he got what he needed."

Participants 2, 6 and 7 all emphasized the importance of prioritizing basic needs prior to focusing on educational enrichment but cautioned against only addressing those needs and not continuing to look at the whole child. Participant 2 stated,

> There are bigger issues at play, right? So like it's a prioritization. So I would argue that there's a moderating factor. For example homelessness, loss of parents, sickness and disability if it's medical, we're in Maslow's where their biggest priority is the lower end of that triangle, not the top end, so what I've seen is sometimes it's not so much a desire not to follow through on services for a potentially gifted child, it's what the most important priority. The problem is that once the basic needs are addressed we don't always come back to looking at the other needs.

Participant 6, when describing their experiences serving those in poverty, stated that "Community based organizations and schools can collaborate to do a wraparound effort to support families and their needs. Once the basic needs are addressed, we can get a better idea of what other needs are uncovered." Participant 7 echoed this sentiment, stating that "schools do more than educate, we know that, they are kind of the pinnacles of our society, and in order for them to remain that way they have to address unique needs as they are seen not when it's convenient."

Theme 4: Collaboration in Advocacy

The fourth theme I developed based upon the data was that community-based organizations thrive on collaboration with other organizations and better serve their intended populations when there are fewer barriers to that collaboration. Many of my participants had either started their own nonprofit organizations dedicated to serving their communities or worked for already established programs. This led to them speaking about the benefits they had found in partnering with other organizations that had similar goals as well as describing how barriers to collaboration often negatively impacted the outcomes they were working toward. Participant 8 shared an example of how their organization was easily able to collaborate and share a resource with another local organization:

> Sometimes there are organizations that are craving and in such dire need of the services that we provide. An example is we have a Spanish speaking child advocate who is able to give our baby safety classes, our emotion coaching, our circle of security classes in Spanish. There is a need for the Spanish speaking community to have this resource, right? So now we've translated our classes into Spanish. We're expanding and we're translating to Portuguese and Arabic. Also, we already have Haitian Creole courses as well. So our Spanish-speaking instructor, she contacted [redacted] and she said, you know, this is what we have if you're interested. And they're like "Oh my gosh, thank you so much." So that was an easy, easy collaboration.

Participant 5 described how the needs of community organizations serving different populations often cross over:

> So [redacted] is a local organization that serves low-income individuals and people at risk of homelessness, especially women and children. They have a shelter for women and children, they also have a food bank. So, I've partnered with them and helped involve other organizations as well to provide resources to their food bank because often times food banks don't have appropriate food for people with food allergies, literally giving them the option of starving or risking an allergic reaction. This partnership helps to fill a gap for a group that transcends the disability side and the low-income side.

These participants also described barriers that sometimes prevent them from working effectively with other organizations toward a common goal. Participant 6 described mixed experiences collaborating with the community, stating,

> There have been times it's been easy, like volunteering to help with the Great American Teach In or participating in community events with other organizations that are led by agencies like the local Chamber of Commerce. But then there have been times where I've worked really hard to partner with an organization, only for it to fall apart. They question why we would want to provide a free service, and sometimes we accomplish something, and the partnership doesn't last long term the way I'd hoped it would.

Participant 3 described an experience she had where she tried to bring her nonprofit program into a school for free, only to be turned away:

> So I tried to even- my last group of girls is now in college. I tried to get into the school. I had the submit a proposal. I was going in for free as a volunteer. No. We have a budget. We want to pay you. So I did the proposal. I gave them the slideshow well, and I gave them the budget. It was too much. I said OK. I was willing to do it for free. Whatever you guys will pay me, you know? I'll take that because again, that's just for snacks. Well, a teacher who wanted to be a part of it started doing it on her own in the schools. after they got all that information.

Participant 2, a clinical psychologist serving her community, described some of the barriers to advocate for her clients, stating that large organizations, especially school districts, can refuse to work with outside professionals: "The school system doesn't recognize third party providers as part of like a treatment team. So I come from a world treatment teams. I work daily with doctors, medical doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, case managers for the care of my clients. But when it comes to education and advocation there, there's no recognition for my role. I do not have what's called legal standing. So it's really hard from a community perspective where I've worked trying to advocate or pick up the phone and trying to push things forward because fundamentally, legally I cannot do that. They don't recognize me." While the experiences varied, the participant responses echoed a theme of the benefits of overcoming barriers to collaborate and serve a large population or multiple populations in their communities.

Theme 5: Active Representation Over Passive Representation

The fifth theme I determined, linking back to the study's conceptual framework and the theory of representative bureaucracy, was that community advocates do not see

much benefit in passive representation, they feel active representation is necessary to make meaningful impacts. When asked "Please share with me if your actions toward improving representation have benefitted the groups you are advocating for in a more indirect or passive way, or a more direct and active way?", participants emphasized that active advocacy reaped the most rewards for the populations they serve. Participant 10, who works in advocacy for women's equality, stated,

> I think when it comes to equality for women, the efforts that benefit us the most are active. I think that other minority groups that women may belong to may tangentially benefit from barriers being removed for women, but I don't think it necessarily happens the other way around. I'm old, so a good example of this is that black men had the right to vote before women did. Sometimes even when dealing with issues like racism, sexism is the bigger hurdle to jump over.

Participant 12 also shared this sentiment, making the statement that "In a world with so many issues to address, you kind of have to actively fight for your group or your cause and your needs. You can't solve problems by waiting."

Participants also described access to funding for their initiatives as being limited in ways that made it impossible for them to benefit passively. Participant 2 described funding opportunities as "sniper rifles, not scatter guns", emphasizing that funding opportunities can often be limited to programs with specific guidelines serving specific demographics,

> My experience of that with my time is the parameters of funding is so tight that passive advocacy doesn't work. Kind of my experience as a pure cold face from

> the community trying to get into that system and advocate, it doesn't work like if there's a program that's looking for, say, African American girls as their targets, right? It wouldn't matter if I had a biracial client. They don't fit. The parameters for that funding can be very limited.

Participants 3 and 6 both described their struggles obtaining grant funding, finding that "So I'm trying grants, which I'm not good in grants at all. So I just, you know, I've been denied I think like two grants recently because again just not knowing that part." (P3) and that "It took practice getting grants to get better at applying for them and increase our chances of getting that funding." (P6). From the perspective of the participants, they often had to be active in their efforts and specific in the resources they sought to get the most potential benefits for the populations they were representing and serving.

Theme 6: Bureaucratic Barriers to Positive Change

The final theme emerging from my analysis of the data was that traditional schools and their districts are frequently perceived as rigid and difficult to work with from an advocate perspective, individual schools and independently run schools can be easier to collaborate with and produce positive change within. Participant 6, a former public school administrator, found that even with her experience in schools that barriers remained difficult to work through:

> Large districts like the ones we have here in Florida can feel impossible to work with. But work with an independently run school that just has a handful of leaders

> or board members to convince of the benefits of the collaboration and that's a different experience. An easier, more productive experience.

Participant 2 had a similar experience, feeling shut out by traditional schools and districts as an outside provider with a shared interest in a client attending a school in that district, claiming that "They don't recognize me" as a legal member of their team trying to support the student's needs. She described that in terms of collaborating with private schools, her and her team are "called in at the first point to evaluate children. We have contracts with private schools. There is not a kid that doesn't get evaluated now," making the process more seamless and collaborative.

Participant 1, though he had had more success collaborating with a larger district and traditional schools than the other participants, stated that his experience may have been enhanced by connections to the community he already had and still saw room for growth:

> My wife is an educator, and she currently oversees work being done for students with special needs in a charter network. Her connections have aided me in working with not only the network she is a part of, but the local district my son attends school in. But even with the success I've had, there's so much room for improvement. So much more we could do if we worked together more collaboratively. I feel like the work is never done.

Participant 1's final statement here, that he feels the work is never done, and that there is always room for improvement seems to be a shared perspective among the participants in terms of their desire to overcome barriers and continue working toward positive change.

Findings

Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) addressed the challenges in identifying the findings of qualitative research, stating that while quantitative researchers have widely accepted means for communicating the results of their research, qualitative researchers do not. Central to the understanding of findings in a qualitative study is accurately portraying the experiences and perspective of the participants in a way that can be readily understood by researchers and practitioners alike. The participants in this study, though all unique, all identified as advocates for underserved populations. They had a shared interest in improving outcomes for these underserved populations, in public education and beyond. They were aware of the RQs for the study and my purpose in interviewing them to collect and analyze their responses to the interview questions developed based upon the existing literature, the gaps in that literature, and the RQs developed to help fill that gap. Keeping these purposes and these people at the forefront of my mind, I determined three key findings from this study.

The first finding is that there is a need for well-organized, active representation and advocacy for each underserved population identified in gifted programs, and that parents may be the best human resource associated with this need. Something that became evident in the responses from the participants was that they felt their work as advocates and representatives of underrepresented populations was both valuable and necessary. They were motivated by small wins and success and wanted to continue working toward equity and quality lives for the communities they served. They also seemed hungry for opportunities to collaborate with like-minded organizations and

individuals toward common goals. They believed that the parents of students from underrepresented groups deserved opportunities to serve as advocates for their children, and that doing so required shared knowledge, shared opportunities, and improved resources. This also requires a consideration for the vulnerabilities of these populations, and the fact that parents may be at a disadvantage when it comes to serving as an advocate for their children due to factors like disability, language and cultural gaps, bias, or discrimination. In efforts to collaborate with parents, practitioners must keep these factors in mind and make necessary attempts to help families feel comfortable being partners in their child's educational experiences.

The second finding is that shared knowledge and collaboration are needed to not only effectively advocate for underrepresented populations, but to properly understand and address the needs of those unique populations. One of the ideas reiterated by my participants was understanding the needs of underrepresented populations. In some ways, this meant addressing basic needs like food, clothing, and access to health care. For language learners, it meant addressing communication barriers by communicating in a native language or helping the individuals learn English. For individuals with disabilities, it often meant addressing the needs associated with their disability before considering what other needs they may have. For all the underrepresented groups, it meant considering their perspectives and any cultural differences that may be impacting them in their present environment, whether due to social or systemic struggles as a minority. Working to bridge these gaps and fight bias and a deficit mindset could be an important

consideration for addressing underrepresentation in programs and making sure that the unique needs of all individuals are being met.

The third, and arguably the most important finding from this study, is that rigid bureaucratic organizations, potentially including traditional public school districts and schools within those districts, may be putting underrepresented students at a disadvantage by creating barriers that limit the potential positive impacts of advocacy work in the community. As mentioned, advocates thrived on collaboration with other groups and individuals toward common goals. Many of these participants described barriers to being able to collaborate meaningfully with their local school districts and schools, feeling that their motives were questioned, that there was sometimes too much "red tape" in the way of collaborative efforts, or being able to make a connection but not one that seemed to grow and benefit more people the way the advocates hoped for. This finding feels important to me because since this study views the issue of underrepresentation from the perspectives not previously considered in the research on underrepresentation in gifted classrooms, knowing that these individuals have found it challenging to work with our districts and schools and therefore the traditional stakeholders within them is eye-opening. It appears that there are two different groups with common goals unable to collaborate toward those goals, an important consideration for researchers and practitioners alike.

Summary

Perhaps one of the strengths of qualitative research is that you do not get simple, direct answers to the questions you have asked, but instead get rich, robust, and complex

responses that often lead to new questions. The community advocates interviewed for this study shared their observations and perceptions related to practicable solutions for increasing diversity in public school gifted programs within the state of Florida, leading to new understandings and insights about how these individuals serve the communities they represent, how they collaborate with stakeholders and with other community based organizations, and the challenges they face when attempting to enact change and serve at-risk communities in setting with bureaucratic rigidity. To answer the second RQ, these advocates made suggestions about how those serving potentially gifted students from underserved populations can not only navigate around bureaucratic barriers but make efforts to lower those barriers altogether. They emphasized that some of the power of those working in gifted education may lie on being within the bureaucratic institutions, and not outside of them like these advocates are. They shared practical approaches focused on shared knowledge, collaboration, parental involvement, and their experiences working toward improved policy for minority groups could be applied to an educational setting. While these insights do not hold all the answers to addressing the continued challenge of underrepresentation in Florida's gifted programs, they do provide a new perspective not previously considered and approaches that practitioners and researchers can explore together toward a common goal of meeting the needs of all learners in our classrooms.

In Chapter 5, I will conclude the study by first reflecting upon the purpose and nature of the study and why it was conducted. I will then discuss my interpretations of the study's findings as they related to both the literature and the conceptual framework. I will

discuss the limitations of the study and any efforts to address those limitations. I will make recommendations for further research grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study, and discuss the implications of the findings, including the study's contributions to positive social change, a keystone of Walden University's PhD programs.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lack of community advocate perspectives related to the practicable efforts being made to improve bureaucratic representation for many groups of students potentially underserved by gifted programs in Florida, particularly in terms of active representation. I used a qualitative interpretive description design to qualitatively understand the perspectives of community members and leaders in Florida regarding the issue of addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs statewide. The target population was community members and leaders in the state of Florida currently working as advocates for equitable representation of identified minority groups, specifically the six groups identified in the body of literature described in Chapter 2. To address the research problem, I conducted semistructured interviews to answer the overarching and sub-RQs. RQ1 was, What are community advocates' observations and perceptions related to practicable solutions for increasing diversity in public school gifted programs within the state of Florida?. RQ1a, the subquestion, was, In what ways do community advocates believe their current efforts to improve representation for minority groups could be practicably applied toward increasing the equity and active representation in Florida's gifted programs? First- and second-cycle coding techniques were used to analyze participant responses.

There are three key findings for this study that I will reflect upon in this chapter. The first finding is that there is a need for well-organized, active representation and advocacy for each underserved population identified in gifted programs, and that parents may be the best human resource associated with this need. The second finding is that

shared knowledge and collaboration are needed to not only effectively advocate for underrepresented populations, but to properly understand and address the needs of those unique populations. The third finding is that rigid bureaucratic organizations, potentially including traditional public school districts and schools within those districts, may be putting underrepresented students at a disadvantage by creating barriers that limit the potential positive impacts of advocacy work in the community.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I describe how the three key findings of this study confirm, disconfirm, or extend the knowledge in the discipline by comparing them with what has been found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. I will also analyze and interpret the findings in the context of the conceptual framework, rooted in the theory of representative bureaucracy. I will begin with how the findings relate to the literature.

The Findings and the Literature

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the current and pertinent literature related to this study. This included literature related to gifted education in the United States, gifted identification practices, underrepresented populations in gifted education, addressing underrepresentation, and stakeholder advocacy. The first two sections focused on providing background about what gifted education looks like in the United States and in Florida, as well as how students are selected to participate in gifted programs. This led to a discussion of which students are not equitably represented in these programs and what is currently being done to address that underrepresentation. Because the participants in this study were individuals working outside of the field of public education, I was not

sure whether their experiences and perspectives would relate back to the things I read in the literature. But having now collected and analyzed the data, I do believe there are meaningful connections between prior studies and the findings of this study.

The first finding calls for more active advocacy for underrepresented populations in gifted programs and emphasizes the potential resource practitioners and advocates have in the parents of these children. Robinson and Moon (2003), in their national study of local and state advocacy in gifted education, highlighted the effectiveness of parents who adopted a collaborative and nonadversarial approach to lobbying for the needs of their gifted students (p. 20). Grissom and Redding (2016), in their study on racial bias in the gifted referral process, found that parents were more likely to advocate for their child if the teacher was a member of their same racial or ethnic group. This statement was echoed by Participant 1, who described the decision to diversify the board of his nonprofit organization to better represent the population they were trying to serve, helping community members feel like they would be understood by at least one member of the board. Crawford et al. (2020) also explored the role that a lack of diversity of faculty played in underrepresentation and the implications of cultural gaps resulting in parents not always knowing how to best advocate for their children, a concern that was shared by the participants in this study who made statements about how parents may be dealing with disabilities, language barriers, or life stressors related to poverty that create barriers to them feeling knowledgeable about the opportunities available for their children. Additionally, concerns about a deficit mindset that were present in participants' responses were also part of the literature. Although Geirczyk and Hornby (2021) focused

on how teachers can improve outcomes for 2E learners, they emphasized a need for a strengths-based rather than a deficit-based approach to working with gifted students who are also disabled. Grantham et al. (2005) found that parents as advocates improved teachers' understanding of the needs of diverse students and the consistency of expectations of all students, helping to create a more complete understanding of gifted behaviors in all children, regardless of cultural differences. VanTassel-Baska and Brown (2022) included parents in their study focused on gifted program evaluation because parents are important stakeholders involved in the success of their gifted and potentially gifted children. They also found that many of the parents included in their study were "uninformed about the identification process and therefore did not offer perceptions about its efficacy" (p. 167), which this finding suggests could be a factor in why parents of minority students are not equipped to act as better advocates for their potentially gifted children.

The second finding focuses on the importance of shared knowledge and collaboration when addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs. This finding directly aligns with Robinson and Moon's (2003) statement that "chance favors the prepared advocate" (p. 23) and their suggestion in their findings that advocates consider collaboration with state and local leaders to gain support for their cause (p. 20). Grantham et al. (2005) stated that "effective collaborating within diverse communities stresses utilization of resources within and beyond the community of culturally diverse students to strengthen their schools, families, and student learning" (p.143), further supporting the need for collaboration between community-based organizations, schools, and families to

better address underrepresentation in gifted programs. Additionally, Grantham et al. suggested that diverse families must be knowledgeable and informed about the underrepresentation of culturally diverse gifted students, patterns of underachievement, and the core attributes of giftedness for them to be the best potential advocates for their children. In the limited research on the impact of outside or nontraditional stakeholders in education, Adams and Kavanagh (2020) found that their participants also called for more collaboration between outside stakeholders and those working in academia, a belief echoed by the participants in this study that longed for more opportunities to share resources and support students within public schools. There is even evidence of the benefits of collaboration between districts and outside organizations directly related to addressing underrepresentation in the literature with D'Orio's (2017) study, which included research on Project ELEVATE, a collaborative effort between the University of Central Florida and the Seminole County School District. This grant-funded program reported a 113% increase in ELL identification for gifted programs as well as increases in the representation of Black and Hispanic students.

Although the first two findings of this study were easily confirmed by the literature, the third finding stands alone. I don't think I would have discovered the finding related to concerns that school districts and traditional schools may be putting underrepresented students at a disadvantage because of how rigid and bureaucratic their structures are if I had not chosen to look at a perspective that was not being considered in the current body of literature. By stepping outside of the views of traditional stakeholders, I was able to hear the concerns from outside advocates that the progress

toward improving representation may be slowed by the way that districts and schools operate. Traditional stakeholders, who have long been the focus of research on underrepresentation in gifted programs, are often welcome members of schools and districts. They include district- and school-level administrators, gifted program leaders, gifted teachers, gifted students, and the parents of gifted students. Outside stakeholders have not typically been a part of the conversation in the literature, and, based on the findings from this study, those stakeholders may be struggling to be a part of the conversation in schools and districts as well, despite having insight and resources that could benefit underrepresented populations not just in terms of gifted programs, but in terms of their educational experiences as a whole.

The Findings and the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy

In Chapter 2, I also described the conceptual framework that served as a lens for this study, rooted in the theory of representative bureaucracy. This theory, introduced by Kingsley (1944) and further developed toward the modern context by Mosher (1968), emphasizes that organizations are most effective and efficient at meeting their goals when program leadership representation reflects the group being represented (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011). This theory has often been explored in research related to public policy but is not typically applied to the educational setting even though educational institutions such as federal and state departments of education, districts, and even schools are often bureaucratic in nature. As stated in Chapter 2, it is my understanding, supported by the research on representative bureaucracy (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020; Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Grissom, 2015; Rocha & Hawes, 2009), that by improving active representation

and inclusion efforts that benefit more than just two underserved groups, more districts will implement methods to address diversity gaps and the state of Florida could serve as a model to other states attempting to address the same diversity gaps in their own gifted programs. I believe the findings of this study support this understanding and the theory of representative bureaucracy as a whole.

The first finding, highlighting the need for active advocacy for unrepresented groups and the role parents play as advocates, echoes the call for active representation or "street level advocacy" by Bishu and Kennedy (2020). The participants in this study also believed that there were minimal benefits to passive representation, finding that they were able to best serve the needs of the population they were working with when they took a direct approach to seeking resources, support, and policy change. They expressed concerns about how programs, especially grant funding programs, often left little room for passive benefits. This supports the idea that improved representation through the voices of new advocates could provide a positive influence on Florida's approach to more equitably representing the growing diversity of the student populations within their gifted programs (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011).

The second finding, focused on a belief that shared knowledge and collaboration are needed to not only effectively advocate for underrepresented populations, is a key foundational element of the theory of representative bureaucracy. To truly represent any group, you must understand the experiences and needs of that group. This often means that a representative is either a member of that group themselves or they have taken the time necessary to work with members of that group to a level where they have developed

a deep understanding an empathy for their unique needs, allowing them to be a vocal advocate for those needs. One of the themes in the data from this study that informed this particular finding was that advocates felt a moral obligation to represent the groups they were serving to the best of their ability. Every participant interviewed in this study was passionate about their work to serve underrepresented populations, and many of them were not a member of that population themselves.

The third finding for this study focuses on the barriers to quality advocacy and positive social change that exist in rigidly bureaucratic institutions. Participants expressed concerns that deeply bureaucratic institutions such as local school districts and the traditional schools operated within them may be putting underrepresented students at a disadvantage by creating barriers that limit the potential positive impacts of advocacy work in the community. These barriers included being unwilling to work with outside resources, creating too much "red tape" that made it difficult collaborate with the district or traditional schools, and a mentality that collaboration with outside organizations would be less beneficial than keeping ideas and resources within the districts and schools and doing things on their own.

Finally, I think it is important to note that this study was designed to use the theory of representative bureaucracy as a lens through which I considered the perspectives and experiences of my participants. I included Table 1 in Chapter 4 because I felt it was important for the reader to know that I intentionally sought out participants who had experience advocating for at least one of the six groups identified as underrepresented in the literature, and I found it interesting how in some cases the

advocate was a member of that group and in some cases they were not. Since the theory of representative bureaucracy claims that representatives must either be a member of the group or have a deep understanding of the needs and connection to the group, it was interesting to find that all my participants met those criteria. I also intentionally focused the initial coding cycle of my data analysis on codes that related to the conceptual framework. This kept these concepts close at heart as I reflected upon what my participants were saying about their experiences as advocates in the community and how their insights and suggestions for solutions to addressing underrepresentation could be beneficial to gifted programs.

Limitations of the Study

Prior to conducting the study, I reflected upon the study's potential limitations in my proposal. These limitations included time and resources, participant sample, limitations rooted in the commonalities of the participants' experiences, and my own bias as a researcher. I created a plan, described in Chapter 1, to help address these limitations, but despite those efforts, there are still limitations to trustworthiness that arose from the execution of the study.

While I attempted to address the limitation of time and resources by conducting the study within my home state of Florida and utilizing as many openly available resources as possible to help me limit costs and time spent conducting the study and analyzing the data, my efforts were imperfect. My data analysis required more trial-and-error than I anticipated and took a greater amount of time than I had anticipated. I also chose to pay to use MAXQDA as a part of my coding process to help me better organize

my codes and data and to improve the efficiency of analysis, which I am certain would have taken longer had I stuck to my plan of using only openly available or University-provided resources. However, I was a novice in using MAXQDA for coding analysis and had to spend time educating myself on how to best use the program and may have benefitted from the use of other programs had I had the access to them or funding to try multiple program options.

While I worked hard to establish a quality sample of participants for this study, the study was still voluntary in nature and my initial list of potential participants stemmed from a combination of my own research on community-based organizations working with underrepresented groups and suggestions from colleagues with experience working alongside these groups (social workers, guidance counselors, etc.). Had I had more knowledge of community organizations throughout Florida, I may have reached out to even more potential participants and included perspectives not currently included in the study.

Throughout the study, I worked to consciously address my own bias. While this study was motivated by my personal goal to improve gifted education and my experiences as a professional in the field of gifted education, I felt encouraged to seek outside perspectives on the topic when my research led me to the theory of representative bureaucracy and the efforts being made in other aspects of society to address underrepresentation and the potential for those efforts to be applied to public education and gifted programs. I utilized a reflective journal to keep track of any personal thoughts and beliefs that came up while collecting and analyzing data for this study so that I could

both acknowledge and redirect my thoughts to the evidence in my data and not my personal beliefs about what the data were saying.

Recommendations

It was never going to be possible for a single study to address the decades of calls for improved representation and equity in gifted programs. While I believe this study makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge related to the problem of underrepresentation in gifted programs and the potential practicable solutions for that problem, there remains room for further research to both address the gaps I identified in the literature and the continued representation gaps that gifted program coordinators, administrators, and gifted teachers are seeing in practice. A strength of this study is that it considers the perspectives of community advocates who are working to address underrepresentation in society and to meet the needs of diverse populations in their communities. I believe there is more need for this work, especially related to gifted education. Dr. Wilson, a professor at the University of North Florida, made a call for practitioners to "go to the communities in which we wish to serve" (p. 135) in her 2022 reaction to Peters' (2021) study on the continued diversity gaps in public school gifted programs nationwide. This study is limited in its scope because the perspectives shared only represent 12 community advocates from around the state of Florida. Underrepresentation in gifted programs is not an issue limited to Florida but is instead an issue in gifted programs nationwide (Hodges et al., 2018; Yaluma & Tyner, 2021). Researchers should be asking advocates and representatives from underrepresented groups in their communities about their thoughts on how to address representation gaps,

and further how to best serve these diverse communities in a way that honors their cultural differences and unique needs. Since there is such diversity in the United States, a study such as this one conducted in another state could yield different results that would add to the knowledge base, benefitting researchers and practitioners alike.

Another recommendation for further research is to conduct more studies that look at multiple underserved groups identified in the literature. One of the research gaps I described in this study was that I noticed that vast majority of literature related to underrepresentation focuses on only one or two of the underrepresented populations. I noticed that this focus on only one or two groups was also prevalent in the community-based organizations that this study's participants worked with. There seems to be minimal consideration for the shared cultures, experiences, and needs that bridge gaps between underrepresented groups in our society and in our schools. Perhaps one of the most important suggestions from one of my participants was that of Participant 2, who stated that programs often have a "myopic focus and the problem is that children aren't myopic- they're macro." This participant was describing the limitations to the mentality of trying to fit students into one group, when every individual can identify in multiple ways, and most do. Even among the participants, their work as advocates rarely only impacted one underrepresented population because it is possible for a person needing support to belong to more than one population. When researchers and practitioners look at practicable solutions to underrepresentation like Florida's Plan B addendum (Florida State Department of Education, 2002) which only considers modified identification criteria for members of two of the underrepresented populations in gifted programs, they

are ignoring that some members of the other groups are at an advantage because they also identify with a group being recognized. A student who is an ELL may also be Hispanic and female, and a student who is receiving free or reduced lunch because of their household's income level may also be a 2E learner. Only focusing on whether a child fits into one of two groups ignores that it may not be their membership in that particular group that created the need for them to be identified under different criteria. Professionals seeking to improve representation in gifted programs may be missing students who would otherwise benefit from those modifications in identification procedures that do not fit into one of the two groups and are therefore not considered under programs like Plan B. By expanding research and practice to be broader and more inclusive of the unique needs of more minority groups, professionals in the field of gifted education may be able to better understand those needs and better address them in identification procedures and gifted program services.

My final recommendation for research stems from Hodges et al.'s (2022) concern that there is a need for nuance in the racial and ethnic categories, socioeconomic status, and geography being considered when researchers and practitioners explore solutions to underrepresentation in gifted programs and the impact ignoring the differences between subgroups could be having on underrepresentation. I believe that people do not fit neatly into categories, and they often identify with multiple groups and have a blend of cultural beliefs and experiences unique to themselves. While I identified 6 underrepresented populations from the body of extant literature, I do not believe these 6 groups are the only groups that are underrepresented in our gifted programs. Just as I believe there are

nuances and subgroups within these 6 groups, I also believe one underrepresented population is missing from the literature almost entirely. As an employee of Florida's statewide virtual school, I have had the experience of working with military families to continue gifted eligibility services for students who have lived in other states and countries as a part of their parent's military service. The literature on the experience of gifted dependents of military servicemembers is incredibly limited; I was able to find only one recent study by Bugaj (2013) on what gifted services look like under the Department of Defense Education Activity, which operates schools for military dependents living on military establishments abroad. Because identification procedures for gifted students vary widely nationwide (Boothe & Stanley, 2004; Callahan et al., 2017; Hodges et al., 2018; Peters, 2021) these students can be subject to denial of gifted services and/or re-evaluation of their gifted abilities depending on where their family is moved by the U.S. military. Since the research suggests that gifted services often have long-term benefits for identified students (Peterson et al., 2012), it may be time for researchers and practitioners to consider military dependents as an underserved group in gifted programs with unique needs and considerations.

Implications

Positive Social Change Implications

This study contributes to positive social change in several ways. First, through this study I have added the perspectives on community members and leaders with experience in advocating for underrepresented populations to the dialogue about underrepresentation in gifted programs, potentially allowing practicable efforts being

made in advocacy outside of public education in support of minority groups and active representation to influence efforts to increase diversity and equitable representation within gifted programs. The addition of these perspectives is important because these advocates are doing meaningful work for the populations they serve, the very same populations the literature shows are underrepresented in gifted programs nationwide. The findings of this study can be applied to aid those studying gifted education programs and working within them in addressing representation gaps both in Florida and in states with similar demographics and challenges. This study may be able to serve as a new model for researchers in the field of gifted education by looking outside of traditional stakeholder perspectives and pulling away from models that focus only on increasing representation for a few groups of underrepresented students.

Improving representation in gifted programs through the implementation of practices suggested in the findings of this study could potentially lead to more accurate representations of school and local populations, more engagement of gifted learners from different backgrounds, and increased equality in the fields of public and gifted education. The individual students benefit from earlier identification and services, allowing them to develop skills and challenge their academic abilities in ways they may not be able to if not included in specialized gifted programs (Peterson et al., 2012; Pollet & Schnell, 2017). Providing appropriate and equitable educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their background, is one of the many reasons researchers continue to conduct research on underrepresentation in educational programs like gifted programs.

Perhaps the most beneficial potential for social change highlighted in this study lies in a need for continued efforts toward more equitable treatment of minority groups not just in public education, but on a societal level. All the participants in this study emphasized a need for more collaboration among advocacy groups and institutions such as schools and districts, as well as a need for more collaboration with other advocacy groups toward a common good. When researchers and practitioners can revisit the bureaucratic barriers that may be impairing out abilities to make lasting positive social change, it may be possible to move forward in that effort across the fields and throughout our communities.

Methodological Implications

As described in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, this study was qualitative in nature and utilized an interpretive description design that employed the use of semistructured interviews to collect data from individual participants on their experiences as community-level advocates as those experiences related to underrepresented populations and improving representation for those populations. At the time this study was conducted, I was unable to find a published study that sought these unique perspectives on the issue of underrepresentation in gifted programs. In fact, it was rare to find studies that incorporated the perspectives of any nontraditional stakeholders, including community advocates, in published educational research. To me as a researcher, this presented a gap in the literature that I wanted to explore.

The findings from this study support that these community advocates possess experiences and perspectives that could make them powerful partners in improving issues

of underrepresentation in public school programs, including gifted programs. Since my study is limited in its scope to only Florida's gifted programs and community advocates with experiences working with underrepresented populations in Florida, this study can serve as a jumping-off point to fellow researchers to explore the perspectives of community advocates in their locales. This study could easily be replicated with the use of new participants, potentially yielding new results and adding more to the body of literature that all researchers and practitioners in the field of gifted education can benefit from.

Additionally, in the early stages of designing my study, I considered the addition of a focus group to the methodology. While I chose to eliminate this aspect from the current study at the recommendation of my committee members due to constraints on time and resources, I do believe that adding a focus group to this study's methodology if replicated could provide significant benefits. In my early proposal, the focus group was designed to be held café-style based on the work of Brown and Issacs (2005). Their format rejects negativism and promotes robust data collection through positive-oriented conversations among participants to connect diverse perspectives, such as those of nontraditional stakeholders and traditional stakeholders. Brown and Issacs support the sharing of diverse perspectives and discussions that lead toward collective solutions shared among study participants. I believe the data collected from this collaboration, especially considering the call for collaboration expressed by the participants in my study, could be especially informative and add to the body of research.

Theoretical Implications

In addition to attempting to address a gap in the literature through the participants sample I chose to seek for this study, I also saw a need to explore a conceptual framework that utilized a theory directly related to serving underrepresented populations but not commonly applied to research in the field of public education. I believe there is more room in the field of education to consider the theory of representative bureaucracy as a lens in which to examine study data. Educational systems are often bureaucratic in nature, and state and federal policies directly impact educational outcomes at every level of public education, from administrators down to students. Some of the research I reviewed in Chapter 2 raised concerns about minority students being subjected to biases and gatekeepers that kept them from being identified in gifted programs but may have led to them being overidentified for exceptional student education programs focused on their needs rather than their strengths (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Meier, 1993; Nicholson-Crotty at al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2008). If researchers and practitioners view this issue through the lens of representative bureaucracy, they may see more support for addressing deficit mindsets, implicit and explicit bias, and the barriers to identification in gifted programs that result from these areas. I believe that as long as policy continues to influence educational outcomes, researchers should consider theories and practices from the policy sector when conducting future studies. Additionally, Bishu and Kennedy (2020) pointed out that most studies incorporating the theory of representative bureaucracy are quantitative, so there is also a call for more qualitative research using this theory across the fields.

Empirical Implications

The participants in this study displayed a willingness and interest in sharing their experiences, perspectives, and ideas for the betterment of educational outcomes for underrepresented students, just as their work in the communities they live in aims to support those populations outside of the classroom. The participants described their motivations toward helping disadvantaged children and adults, the pride they take in the successes of that work, and their belief that the work never feels complete. Based on my own personal experiences as an educator and the emphasis on addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs highlighted in over 30 years of research, it seems clear to me that those working to address underrepresentation in gifted programs also see value in their work and believe that the work is far from done. This commonality is a foundation for the potential benefits that could come from collaboration with community-level advocates toward the advancement of minority groups and the equitable representation of students from underserved groups in gifted programs. Not only can the suggestions from the participants in my study be considered as a pathway toward improved practice, but it can serve as a starting point toward considering the benefits of community collaboration on public education on a broad scale. Perhaps if the researchers and educators aiming to improve representation in gifted programs listen to what these experiences have shown and the findings of this study, they can tear down the walls that may be in the way to health community relationships and shared resources that benefit all students in our public schools, regardless of their race, income level, first language, gender, where they live, or any potential disabilities.

Recommendations for Practice

As an educator, I struggled early on in developing this study because it was natural for me to focus on issues in practice, rather than gaps in the literature, a key component of a PhD dissertation. While PhD studies aim to address gaps in the research, the findings for this study do lend themselves to recommendations for practitioners in the field of gifted education. Based on the findings of this study, individuals and groups trying to address underrepresentation in gifted programs may benefit from active advocacy efforts, aiding parents in serving as advocates for their potentially gifted children, collaboration between community based organizations serving minority groups and public school gifted programs, and considerations for the bureaucratic barriers that may be in the way to making meaningful advances in addressing underrepresentation in gifted programs and the district and school levels. Rather than acting as gatekeepers to gifted programs, teachers can learn about the cultural differences that may result in a potentially gifted child not meeting their standard views of giftedness, looking at every student with a strength-based growth mindset, and not a deficit mindset. Administrators, gifted program leaders, and gifted teachers can work to educate and inform stakeholders including parents about the opportunities available to all students, giving every stakeholder the tool to be a potential advocate for a child. Districts can consider if their policies are stifling collaboration and sharing of resources that would benefit students from all backgrounds and help to bridge the gap between educational services and community services. Together educators and researchers can ensure that there is not

another dissertation written on this topic 30 years from now by putting research into practice in our districts and schools.

Conclusion

As an educator working with gifted students, I was disheartened by the lack of progress I was seeing toward more equitable gifted programs in Florida and beyond as evidenced not only by personal experiences working in gifted programs but with decades worth of published literature. In this study, I aimed to look at this issue of underrepresentation in public school gifted programs, particularly in Florida where I live and work, from a new perspective. By seeking the perspectives of community advocates serving the needs of underrepresented populations in other sectors of society and analyzing their interview responses through the lens of a theory almost exclusively applied to public policy research, I feel I have been able to shed new light and insights on a decades-old issue in public education gifted programs. Working with community advocates helped me to see what was working in our society to get minority individuals the support they need to access equitable services in their communities. Listening to these advocates also allowed me to reflect upon how their work could be replicated in an educational setting. Considering the benefits of active representation and advocacy through the lens of the conceptual framework for this study helped me to understand the missed opportunity gifted program leaders and educators have in not better educating and informing advocates for potentially gifted minority students, including the role their parents could plan if better prepared to advocate for their children. While no study will ever be able to practically address every scenario or every underserved group in public

education gifted programs, I believe the findings of this study are relevant and important. I believe the implications and recommendations for further research presented in this study's final chapter represent a gateway into meaningful progress toward gifted program equity and long-term educational and social-emotional benefits for the students who are in need of gifted services but are currently being missed due to outdated identification measures and bureaucratic barriers toward progressive improvements to those methods. It is my hope that someday researchers in my field will write studies about how the work being done in gifted programs can be applied to other aspects of society to improve equity, and not the other way around.

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Appendix A: Initial Recruitment Email Template

(Date)

Hello (Insert Name of Potential Study Participant),

My name is Ashley Phelps, and I am a local educator and doctoral candidate at Walden University. In my efforts to research community-based organizations and advocacy groups working with underserved populations throughout the state, I came across your name and I wanted to invite you to be a potential participant in my study.

My study focuses on understanding how efforts to address underrepresentation in society could be applied to improving equitable representation in gifted programs. I am looking to interview participants about their experiences advocating for underrepresented groups, including people living in poverty, English Language Learners, members of minority racial groups, twice-exceptional individuals who are both gifted and disabled, people from rural areas, and girls that have experienced gender discrimination in academics or their career fields.

If this seems like something you would be interested in participating in, please contact me via this email address (Ashley.Phelps@waldenu.edu) or via phone/text at [redacted]. At that time, I can answer any questions you may have regarding my study and provide the consent form approved by my university for participation in the study. Please note that any participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate or not to continue your participation at any time.

Regardless of your decision to move forward, I am grateful for the time you've already spent reading this email and learning about my study and wish you the best.

Sincerely,

Ashley Phelps

Appendix B: Participant Sample Criteria

Group	Sampling strategy	Criterion
Community advocates	Stratified criterion-based and snowball	Willing to participate Resides in Florida Has experience advocating for equitable representation of at least one group identified in the literature as underrepresented in gifted programs Not considered a traditional stakeholder relating to gifted education in a public school setting (i.e., community leader, community-level social worker, nonprofit volunteer) Not currently working directly with gifted students within the state of Florida

Note. Participants invited via snowball sampling were suggested by participants in the purposive sample.