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The perceptions of African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs: A qualitative study to promote social justice in gifted education

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2010

Abstract

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Jenelle Susan Nisly

MA, Olivet Nazarene University, 2004

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

African American students have been historically underrepresented in gifted programs throughout the United States. Research about retaining identified African American students in gifted programs is limited. This qualitative phenomenological study examined the perceptions of a purposeful sample of seven identified talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs. The purpose of the study was to understand the meaning of participants' expectations, attitudes, and experiences with regard to participating and remaining in a gifted program or participating and then dropping out. Data were collected through individual interviews. Interpretative phenomenological analysis revealed that participants expected talented and gifted programs to be challenging, boring, or fun. Attitudes about learning in gifted programs included a preference for hands-on activities, the study of other cultures, accelerated work, and a desire for a daily class rather than a pullout program. Male and female African Americans experienced participation in gifted programs differently. Males perceived that they are normal and like everybody else, but females perceived the need to resist conforming to negative African American stereotypes. Recommendations that could improve retention rates for African Americans in gifted programs include revising policies regarding gifted program delivery and providing teacher training with an emphasis on African American cultural sensitivity. The contribution of this study to the body of research literature has implications for positive social change because developing the talents and gifts of African Americans through gifted programs could result in higher college graduation rates and greater employment opportunities.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to three “women of substance” who have been important influences in my life. First, I dedicate this doctoral research study to my paternal grandmother, Dr. Rachel Carleton Sparks, who became a medical doctor in 1924 at a time when few women became doctors. My memory of her served as a constant source of inspiration. Second, I dedicate this work to my mother, Janet Arlene Peake Sparks, who passed away during my dissertation journey. She was my best friend, an amazing woman, and my hero. Third, I dedicate this doctoral study to my daughter, Susan, who studied with great intensity to become a registered nurse at the same time that I was studying for my doctorate degree in education. We have supported and inspired each other to achieve our academic and personal goals over the course of many years. I am grateful for these three relationships in my life.

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Finally, thank you to my colleagues, the talented and gifted facilitators, for allowing me the opportunity to conduct research for this doctoral study in their schools.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Educators have the responsibility to pursue and implement positive change toward social justice in the education of African American students (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Students of color continue to be underrepresented and underserved in gifted education programs across the United States (Ford et al., 2002; Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Lockwood, 2007; Lohman, 2005; McBee, 2006; Miller, 2004; Ogbu, 2004; Simonton, 2008; Speirs Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007; Worrell, 2007). According to Ford et al. (2002), identifying African American students in gifted education programs is highly deficient in American public schools. Most identified gifted students are White and upper-middle class (Lockwood, 2007). Of the African American students who are identified for enrichment in gifted programming, many, for a variety of reasons, decline services (Ford et al., 2002). Although studies have been conducted on the methods used to identify gifted minority students, only limited research addresses the retention of gifted minorities once they have been identified (Ford, 1994; Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997; Moore et al., 2006).

Exploring the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American students about participation in gifted programs is essential to promoting an understanding of the issues from students' viewpoints and using that new understanding to effect positive social change in gifted education. Although most minority groups suffer equity issues in education, the African American minority group stands out as a cultural group

with historically complex issues that are different from other minorities. In sharp contrast to immigrants who have voluntarily settled in the United States from other countries eager to create a better life for their families, the African immigrants were brought by force to this country to serve as slaves under horrific conditions (Ogbu, 2004, p. 4). With the abolition of slavery, African Americans gained access to education. Over the years, they have continually pursued and fought for equity and social justice in schools for their children (Alexander & Alexander, 2005).

When contemplating social justice and equity for talented and potentially talented African American students, it is important to define the term *gifted and talented* and to understand the purpose of gifted programs. According to the national definition of gifted students found in the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), gifted and talented children are those

> who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (p. 535)

In comparison, the State of Iowa, where this research study took place, defines gifted and talented in a similar way:

> *"Gifted and talented children"* are those identified as possessing outstanding abilities who are capable of high performance. Gifted and talented children are children who require appropriate instruction and educational services

commensurate with their abilities and needs beyond those provided by the regular school program.

Gifted and talented children include those children with demonstrated achievement or potential ability, or both, in any of the following areas or in combination:

- General intellectual ability.
- Creative thinking.
- Leadership ability.
- Visual and performing arts ability.
- Specific ability aptitude. (Gifted and Talented Children Defined, 2001)

Whereas the national definition of gifted and talented suggested that gifted students were those who demonstrated the capability for high achievement, the state definition included students who demonstrated potential ability. In comparison with the national and state definitions, the talented and gifted (TAG) service statement in the Rivercity Community School District (RCSD) in eastern Iowa, where participants for this study were selected, states:

> The Talented and Gifted Program serves students who demonstrate outstanding abilities or potential in the areas of general intellectual ability or specific ability aptitude.
>
> Students who demonstrate outstanding potential when compared with others of their age require differentiated instruction. (Talented and Gifted Program, n.d., para. 4)

This service statement focuses on the service of students with general intellectual ability or specific ability aptitude. Creativity, leadership, and visual and performing arts abilities are incorporated into some enrichment activities, but students are not selected for gifted programming in this district based on those abilities or aptitudes. A statement in the TAG program brochure clarifies the eligibility of minorities for gifted programming in this district: "We believe that talented and gifted students exist in all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups across gender. We are committed to identifying them and providing appropriate services" (Reaching New Heights, n.d., para. 2).

TAG programs must include children who have identified educational abilities and potential regardless of their background. Gifts and talents can be developed in students of any gender, race, cultural group, or socioeconomic status. However, African Americans are and continue to be underrepresented in gifted programs on local, state, and national levels. Administrators and educators in the RCSD are concerned with equity issues in gifted programs. TAG facilitators in this district have been making efforts to find and use identification methods that would help to increase the percentage of talented and potentially talented African American students for gifted programming. However, TAG facilitators are concerned that some of the identified talented and potentially talented African American middle school students have declined TAG services or have dropped out of the TAG program. A more detailed discussion regarding these issues is found in section 2.

Problem Statement

African American middle school students are underrepresented in gifted programs, and many who are identified as talented or potentially talented are not receiving the services and enrichment experiences to which they are entitled. Although identified for gifted programs, some African American students in the RCSD decline or drop out of gifted services. Research literature that concentrates on the puzzle of retaining identified African American students in gifted programs is scarce (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Moore et al., 2006). According to Moore et al. (2006), testing has been an obstacle to identifying and recruiting African American students into gifted programs. However, Moore et al. (2006) observed that after African Americans are recruited, it is difficult to retain them in gifted programs. There are many possible factors contributing to this problem, among which are "deficit thinking" (Ford et al., 2002; Ford et al., 2004); "acting White" (Ogbu, 2004); "coping strategy of ambivalence" (Ogbu, 2004); "ethnic identity" (Worrell, 2007); and the need for culturally relevant programming (Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005; Sternberg, 2004; Tatum, 2005). These terms are defined in the Operational Definitions subsection of this introduction to the study.

Nature of the Study

This doctoral study examined the meaning of the perceptions of identified talented and potentially talented African American students' about participation in gifted programs. The phenomenological tradition was appropriate for this study because it is an approach that "includes entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of the

participants' experiences" (Creswell, 1998, p. 31). The objective was to describe the essence of the phenomena surrounding the retention puzzle of identified African American students in gifted programs as voiced by the students themselves and to contribute to the limited body of literature about this dilemma. A more detailed discussion is made in section 3.

Research Questions

The central research question for this doctoral study was: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? Topical subquestions for this study included: (a) What are the expectations of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students towards gifted programming? (b) What are the curriculum programming interests of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students in gifted programs? (c) How do talented and potentially talented African American middle school students perceive peer pressure regarding their participation in gifted programs? (d) What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about being identified as talented or potentially talented? and (e) How do perceptions about participation in gifted programs differ between talented and potentially talented African American male and female middle school students in Grades 6, 7, and 8? This study consisted of individual student interviews. Additional details regarding data collection are included in section 3.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs in the RCSD. The perceptions about participation in gifted programs included students' expectations, experiences, and attitudes.

Conceptual Framework

African American students have historically been underrepresented in gifted education programs (Borland, 2004; Ford & Grantham; 2003; Ford et al., 2005; Ford et al., 2008; Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, & Bridges, 2005; Lohman, 2007; McBee, 2006; Milner & Ford, 2007; Moore et al., 2006; Naglieri & Ford, 2003). The majority of identified gifted students are White and upper-middle class (Borland, 2004; Lockwood, 2007). In the RCSD, a much higher percentage of White students were identified as gifted and participating in gifted programming than the overall percentage of White students in the district. Comparatively, a much lower percentage of Black students were identified as gifted and participating in gifted programming than the overall percentage of Black students in the district. Details regarding this comparison are discussed in section 2.

Over the past 15 years, researchers have studied a variety of methods and procedures to identify and recruit African American students for gifted programs, but little research has been conducted about retaining students after they are identified (Ford et al., 1997; Ford & Grantham, 1997; Ford et. al., 2008; Moore et al., 2006). According to Ford et al. (2002), students of color often reject offers to participate in gifted

programming. TAG facilitators in the RCSD verified that this situation is also a local problem and have expressed concerns regarding the number of identified African American middle school students who decline or drop out of TAG services and enrichment opportunities.

Deficit thinking is a significant concept to consider when examining the retention issues of African American students in gifted programs. Ford et al. (2002) suggested the following indicators of deficit thinking:

1. traditional IQ-based definitions, philosophies, and theories of giftedness;
2. identification practices and policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on Black students (e.g., a reliance on teacher referral for initial screening);
3. a lack of training aimed at helping educators in the area of gifted education;
4. a lack of training aimed at helping teachers understand and interpret standardized test results;
5. inadequate training of teachers and other school personnel in multicultural education;
6. inadequate efforts to communicate with Black families and communities about gifted education; and
7. Black students' decisions to avoid gifted education programs. (p. 54)

Of particular interest to this doctoral study was how these deficit thinking issues negatively impact Black students causing them to reject participation in gifted programs. These programs should be designed to develop the talents and potential of all gifted

students regardless of their diverse cultural background, so when talented and potentially talented students drop out of gifted programs or decline to participate, social injustice for the African American community is a result.

Another significant view to consider is the theory of acting White. Ogbu (2004) explained the evolution of the negative concept of acting White through a historical account of slavery and the emergence of freedom. He reported that after emancipation, "some Blacks opposed adopting White cultural and language frames of reference or 'acting White' anywhere because they believed or feared that this would mean giving up their Black ways" (p. 16). In addition, Blacks faced the continual lack of social acceptance in the White culture after becoming free which created a coping strategy of ambivalence (p. 15). Worrell (2007) concluded in a study that "academic achievement for African Americans may occur at the expense of this group's sense of ethnic identity" (p. 34).

When designing enrichment programs for students of color, cultural sensitivity is essential for creating an environment for enthusiastic learners. Students may drop out of gifted programming or refuse to participate when the students' culture is not considered in the development of curriculum or enrichment opportunities (Tatum, 2005). Ford et al. (2004) defined culture as "beliefs, values, traditions, customs, and habits that are specific to a group" (p. 19). In an article on the relevance of culture to intelligence, Sternberg (2004) concluded, "If we want best to understand, assess, and develop intelligence, we need to take into account the cultural contexts in which it operates" (p. 336). The use of African literature to provide culturally relevant learning for African American students

may create an educational environment that helps students make connections and deepens their understanding and knowledge (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). In addition, Perry et al. claimed that, "Through omission and distortion, our curriculum and treatment of African [American] children tends to make matters worse year by year, alienating African [American] people from themselves." (p. 163). Ford and Grantham (1997) suggested that African American students would benefit both academically and personally if they had teachers who were from their same minority group. African American teachers have the cultural experience and knowledge that could be helpful in addressing educational and socioemotional needs of African American students. However, Ford and Grantham described concerns over the shortage of African American educators as role models in gifted education. This shortage is evident in the RCSD because the majority of teachers in the district are White and female. In addition, all of the TAG facilitators in RCSD are White women. Kunjufu (2006) expressed concerns about the lack of role models in schools for African American students when he stated, "The future of the Black race literally lies in the hands of White female teachers" (p. 11).

The conceptual framework presented in this section is discussed in more detail during the literature review in section 2.

Operational Definitions

The following terms and abbreviations are used in this report.

Acting White is associated with African Americans "abandon[ing] Black cultural and dialect frames of reference to behave and talk primarily according to White frames of reference" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 21) in order to be successful in a White-controlled institution.

Among African American students, academic achievement is often associated with acting White and elicits negative peer pressure (Ford et al., 2002).

African American refers to persons of African descent. The terms *African American, Black*, and *students of color* are used interchangeably in this study.

Coping strategy of ambivalence refers to how Blacks attempted to function in two different cultural environments in order to get by with the least amount of racial tension. Ogbu (2004) suggested that "ambivalent Blacks knew, for instance that 'proper English' was necessary for school success. However, they also knew that no matter how hard a Black person tried to talk like White people, he or she would still sound Black" (p. 15).

Culturally relevant programming as it applies to the topic of this doctoral study refers to meaningful learning opportunities that are designed or developed for the enrichment of individual students or small groups of students. It involves making real-world connections to a student's cultural and ethnic background in order to motivate talent development (Perry et al., 2003; Sternberg, 2004; Tatum, 2005). This approach would ensure that "no single culture group dominates any other cultural group in its representation" (Ford & Harris, 1999, p. 31), especially with regard to curriculum, instruction, and the learning environment.

Deficit thinking refers to when "students of color who are culturally different from their white counterparts are viewed as culturally deprived or disadvantaged" (Ford et al., 2002, p. 52).

Edward Middle School (EMS) is a pseudonym for a middle school in the RCSD.

Ethnic identity is considered to include "a sense of peoplehood and commonality derived from kinship patterns, a shared historical past, common experiences, religious affiliations, language or linguistic commonalities, shared values, attitudes, perception, modes of expression and identity" (King, 2002, p. 247).

Gentry Middle School (GMS) is a pseudonym for a middle school in the RCSD.

Rivercity Community School District (*RCSD)* is a pseudonym for the school district in which this study took place.

Talented and gifted (TAG) as defined in the RCSD refers to "students who demonstrate outstanding abilities or potential in the areas of general intellectual ability or specific ability aptitude" and "students who demonstrate outstanding potential when compared to others of their age" (Talented and Gifted Program, n.d., para. 4). These students require differentiated instruction.

TAG facilitator is a teacher who is responsible for the implementation of TAG programming in an elementary, middle, or high school in the RCSD. TAG facilitators are expected to have completed college credits toward a TAG endorsement as required by the Iowa State Board of Education.

Talented or potentially talented is another term to describe identified gifted students, particularly culturally diverse students, who have outstanding talent or potential talent that could be developed through gifted programming.

Assumptions

There were two important assumptions in this study. The first was that approximately six to eight identified talented or potentially talented African American

students from one to three middle schools in the RCSD who had experienced participation in a gifted program would agree to take part in the study with the consent of a parent or guardian. Secondly, participating students would cooperate in providing genuine responses and perceptions to the interview questions.

Limitations

This doctoral study relied on students' perceptions regarding their participation in gifted programs. It was limited to selecting individuals from one to three middle schools in the RCSD who had "experienced the phenomenon…[and were] willing to participate in a lengthy interview" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107). An additional limitation was that the research results might not be generalizable beyond the participants. However, as explained by Hycner (1985), "In the process of even investigating the experience of one unique individual we can learn much about the phenomenology of human being in general" (p. 295).

Scope

The scope of this doctoral study includes individual interviews that were conducted over 3 weeks between October 27, 2009 and November 13, 2009 with a purposeful sample of seven identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students who had experienced participation in a gifted program at least once between Grades 3 and 8. In addition, individual follow-up interviews and member-checking took place over 10 weeks between November 30, 2009 and January 29, 2010. Each follow-up interview was conducted after the first interview was transcribed, synthesized, and summarized (Hycner, 1985). The date and time for each follow-up

interview depended upon when the individual descriptive summaries were completed. Participants were selected from two of the six middle schools in the RCSD.

This doctoral study confined itself to interviewing identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students in the RCSD. Of this group, male and female students in Grades 6, 7, or 8, who were participating in or had chosen to drop out of the RCSD gifted program, were selected to participate in the study. Because there were not enough willing participants who had experienced the phenomenon at just one school, participants were selected from two middle schools in the RCSD.

Principals from GMS and EMS were sent a draft copy of the doctoral study research proposal for their review. I called each principal to discuss the doctoral study proposal and to obtain preliminary verbal consent to interview students before school, after school, or during noncore class time. Each of the principals gave both verbal and written consent to me and to the director of assessment in the RCSD allowing students to be interviewed at the identified times, subject to the approval of the doctoral study proposal by Walden University (see Appendix A). In addition, I obtained a letter of cooperation from the director of assessment in the RCSD who gave consent for me to interview students for this doctoral study (see Appendix B).

I conducted individual interviews at participating schools in one of three ways, based on the preference of the participants. The three choices included (a) in the morning before school, (b) after school, and (c) during school as long as it was during noncore class time. Meeting with participants before or after school was not possible because

some students participated in sports before or after school and some students rode the bus to and from school. For those reasons, meeting during a noncore class such as music, art, or physical education was the choice of each participant. If participants chose to meet for the interview during a noncore class and then developed anxiety about missing that class, I would reschedule the interview for a more suitable time or allow them to decline to participate. The longest time any interviewee missed class instruction to take part in this research study was 46 minutes for the initial interview and 35 minutes for the follow-up interview.

After interviewing the participants and transcribing the data, I analyzed each interview using inductive phenomenological analysis (IPA), an inductive approach researchers use to explore and interpret the meanings of participants' lived experiences (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005, p. 20). Following the analysis, I wrote a synthesized descriptive summary of each participant's experiences, attitudes, and expectations about participation in gifted programs. The descriptive summary was read with the participant during a follow-up interview, which provided an opportunity for coresearchers to participate in member-checking for accuracy (e.g., Humphry, 1991; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, I asked follow-up questions that added more depth to the initial interview data.

Delimitations

Students not eligible for participation in this doctoral study included those from racial-ethnic backgrounds other than African American. In addition, African American students who had not been identified as talented or potentially talented were not included in the study.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study and its implications for positive social change are that it contributes to the currently inadequate body of literature regarding the retention of identified African American middle school students participating in gifted programs. As a result of this study, administrators and TAG facilitators in the RCSD could more clearly understand the experiences, expectations, and attitudes of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students regarding participation in gifted programs, which may enable them to implement culturally relevant changes that could increase participation and representation of students of color in gifted education programs.

Summary

This section introduced the study which explored the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs. The inspiration for the study was researchers' findings that African American middle school students are underrepresented in gifted programs in the RCSD and often decline TAG services once they are identified. This study contributes to the current body of scholarly research in the field of gifted education and could also be of importance to TAG facilitators as they develop a new understanding of the expectations, experiences, and attitudes of Black middle school students regarding participation in gifted programs. New understanding of the phenomenon may be helpful to TAG facilitators as they implement culturally relevant social change in gifted education to increase retention rates of African American students in RCSD gifted programs.

The methodology for this research study was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The study used broad open-ended interview questions. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using IPA. In addition, the analysis of interview data involved methods and steps suggested by Humphrey (1989), Hycner (1985), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1990) and included the processes of horizontalization, delimiting, clustering, and imaginative variation.

Section 2 of this study includes a review of literature that focuses on cultural and historical aspects of African Americans' struggle for social justice in gifted education. It expands the conceptual framework by conducting an in-depth discussion of the issues related to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs. Section 3 provides details regarding the research design. It justifies the use and appropriateness of the chosen design, explains the role of the researcher, tells how participants for the study were chosen, and describes in detail the data collection procedures and validity methods. Section 4 presents a discussion of the findings. Last, section 5 provides an interpretation of the findings of this study along with implications for social change with regards to the RCSD. In addition, recommendations for action and further study are discussed.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the complex puzzle involving the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs with respect to retaining students once they were identified as talented or potentially talented. Although current research literature regarding identification and recruitment of African American students is numerous, literature informing the retention of identified talented and potentially talented African American students in gifted programs is scant (Moore et al, 2006). The central research question that I examined in this study was: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? According to Van Manen (1990), the phenomenological researcher asks, "What is the nature or essence of the experience...?" (p. 10). While describing the essence of talented and potentially talented African Americans' experiences, expectations, and attitudes regarding participation in gifted programs, as voiced by the students themselves, themes of meaning surfaced and contributed to a new understanding of the retention phenomenon.

According to Moustakas (1994), "Preparing to conduct a phenomenological study involves review of the professional and research literature connected with the research topic and question" (p. 111). The following review of literature focuses on multifaceted cultural themes and perceptions that may inhibit identified talented and potentially talented African American students from participating in gifted programs. Many of the issues described in this study have a historical background, with roots that have grown

out of the oppressive and horrific period of slavery in the United States (Ogbu, 2004). Further exploration of the issues leads to a better understanding of culturally-related concerns that African American students face in the educational environment.

This literature review begins with an examination of the percentages of gifted students according to ethnicity in the RCSD. Identification procedures for talented and potentially talented students in this district are discussed. According to the identification procedures, the goal of the gifted program in the RCSD is to identify talented and potentially talented students from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds for participation in gifted programming. After examining inequity in gifted programs on a local level, this literature review focuses on the reports of professional literature with regard to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs on a national level.

While searching for journals through EBSCO databases, I focused on my research question and used it as a guide. As I looked for information that would inform the literature review and substantiate the conceptual framework, I obtained books regarding the education of African American children from the local public library, the main library at the University of Iowa, and the Saint Ambrose University Library. After considering research designs that would be conducive to the exploration of students' perceptions, I conducted an online search of the local libraries to find books written by a variety of authors about qualitative research methodology and the phenomenological tradition. I found books at several libraries, placed them on hold, and had them sent to a library nearby so that I could check them out. Terms and descriptors used to search for the literature included (a) gifted, (b) African American, (c) culturally diverse, (d) minority,

(e) underrepresentation, (f) multicultural, (g) Black, (h) retention, (i) intelligence, (j) qualitative, and (k) phenomenology. This literature review provided me with a greater understanding of this equity-crisis for African Americans in gifted education and the needed to explore the issues through the perceptions of students.

Examining the Problem at the Local Level

In the RCSD, there exists a disparity between the percentage of White students and the percentage of Black students who are identified for and who participate in TAG programming (see Table 1). During the 2007-2008 school year, the percentage of White students enrolled in the RCSD was 63.3% (Iowa Department of Education, 2008), but 75.46% of the students who were identified for and participated in TAG programming were White (see Table 1). In comparison, the percentage of Black students in the RCSD was 18.4% (Iowa Department of Education, 2008), but only 11.8% of students who were identified for and participated in TAG programming were Black (see Table 1).

Table 1

Rivercity Community School District Identified Talented and Gifted Students 2007-2008.

Ethnic Group	District Total Students		District TAG Totals	
White	9717	63.30%	1279	75.46%
Black	2822	18.40%	200	11.80%
Hispanic	1296	8.40%	117	6.90%
Asian	379	2.50%	86	5.07%

Note: District TAG totals by ethnicity were obtained from pre-existing information provided by the district TAG coordinator (personal communication). Adapted with permission (see Appendix C).

Students selected to participate in gifted programming in the RCSD had gone through a process of identification described in a district-created procedure manual written during the 1997-1998 school year. This manual, which was being used as a guide for identification, included a wide variety of multiple criteria beginning with the Concern Form, which could be generated by a teacher, a counselor, a parent or guardian, an administrator, a peer, or oneself, expressing reasons why the student should be considered for gifted programming. The next step in identification involved data gathering, including the consideration of students' strengths through academics, thinking styles, and multiple intelligences. National norms from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (Hoover, Dunbar, & Frisbie, 2001) and the Cognitive Abilities Tests (Lohman & Hagen, 2001), as well as students' reported grades were evaluated as part of the data gathering process. In addition, there were questionnaires to be completed by parents, students, and teachers that could assist TAG facilitators from each school in assessing interests and perceived abilities. Even with all of these criteria and consideration of cultural and ethnic diversity, students of color are historically underrepresented in gifted programs in the RCSD. One reason for underrepresentation may be that once identified, some Black students choose to drop out of participation in TAG services. During my employment as a middle school TAG facilitator in the RCSD, all of the middle school TAG facilitators reviewed preexisting information about students' participation in TAG programs and determined that 25 of 73 (34%) identified talented or potentially talented Black students enrolled in the six RCSD middle schools dropped out of TAG programming during the 2007-2008 school year. I was concerned about these numbers and wanted to understand

the issues in greater depth so that suggestions for positive culturally relevant social change could be made.

Examining the Problem at the National Level

The puzzle of the underrepresentation and lack of retention of African American students identified for gifted education programs is seen throughout the educational system as far up as the number of Black recipients of doctorate degrees from United States Universities (see Table 2). In 2006, the number of Black doctoral recipients was 1,659 in comparison with the number of White doctoral recipients, which was 21,280 (Hoffer, Hess, Welch, & Williams, 2006, p. 65).

Table 2

Number of U.S. Citizen Doctorate Recipients, by Race/Ethnicity and Broad Field of Study, for Selected Years, 1986-2006

Field of Study and Race/Ethnicity	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
All fields	23,097	25,583	27,777	27,042	26,917
Known race/ethnicity	22,685	25,098	27,444	26,560	26,491
American Indian	99	130	185	149	118
Asian	531	787	1,066	1,413	1,560
Black	824	1011	1,305	1,614	1,659
Hispanic	572	733	957	1,123	1,370
White	20,640	22,428	23,846	21,921	21,280
Other	19	9	85	340	504

The inequity in the number of higher level education graduates begins early in the African American student's educational experience. This issue warrants attention from administrators and educator leaders in both primary and secondary grades on a national level. To rectify this situation, these leaders must develop the vision and passion necessary to change an educational system that has yet to provide equity and social justice for African American students.

To obtain a greater understanding of this equity crisis in gifted education, educators need to understand the historical background, cultural issues, and developed perceptions surrounding the education of African American students. Prior research suggests a variety of complex issues or pieces of the puzzle at the root of this social injustice including (a) coping strategy of ambivalence, (b) deficit thinking, (c) acting White, (d) ethnic identity, and (e) the need for culturally relevant programming.

Historical and Cultural Background

The historic oppression and prejudice experienced by the African American ethnic group has distinguished them from other groups (Ogbu, 2004). Ogbu suggested that African Americans were "forced into minority status against their will by conquest, colonization, [and] enslavement" (p. 4). He reported that they became "involuntary minorities when they were enslaved by White Americans" (p. 6). They were required to relinquish the culture and language they knew. As a mistreated group, their response became "bitter" and "oppositional" (p. 5). Some of the mistreatment of African slaves identified by Ogbu (2004) included (a) they were denied basic human rights; (b) they were not allowed to act in ways that were considered White and received punishment if they appeared to do so; (c) they were not allowed to speak their native African languages; (d) they were punished if they learned to read and write, which was not allowed; (e) punishment was often collective and given to all for the disobedience of one member of the group; and (f) they were not allowed to gather together as a group.

Ogbu (2004) explained that Blacks developed an oppositional expression to control and oppression by Whites in areas of religion, music, and dialect. Religion and

music helped them to rise above the pain and suffering they endured daily at the hands of slave owners. A unique dialect of the English language was developed by Blacks when "white people forced Blacks to give up their African cultures and languages" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 8). The secondary meanings given to their words were instrumental in helping them to escape slavery on the Underground Railroad.

Coping Strategy of Ambivalence

Ogbu (2004) reported that the responses that African Americans have today toward White Americans and the White culture were formed and influenced by the horrific treatment of African slaves by White slave owners. Due to the tensions that ensued with the continual lack of social acceptance in the White culture, a coping strategy of *ambivalence* developed among Blacks to help them respond to "burden of acting White" (p. 15). African Americans made positive attempts to function and connect with people and ideas within and among the White culture, but due to the prevailing racial bias and prejudice against Blacks those positive attempts turned to negative oppositional thinking and behaviors as a coping strategy against the futility of trying to rise above the continual oppression being dealt to them.

Deficit Thinking

Some educators view African American students as "culturally deprived or disadvantaged" (Ford et al., 2002, p. 1). This "deficit perspective" inhibits the acknowledgement of talent or potential talent and therefore leaves "students of color underrepresented and underserved" (p. 1). Ford et al. (2005) described deficit thinking as "when teachers recognize cultural differences but in negative ways. Thus, students who

are different may be perceived as disadvantaged or dysfunctional: their values, beliefs, norms, and practices may be viewed as 'abnormal,' 'wrong,' or 'incorrect'" (p. 97).

According to Ford et al. (2002), indicators of deficit thinking include (a) lack of educator preparation to interpret correctly the results of standardized tests, (b) failure to identify students of color, and (c) rejection of offers to participate in gifted programming by students of color. Cloud (2007) reported that "for reasons no one understands, African Americans' IQ scores have tended to cluster about a standard deviation below the average—evidence for some that the tests themselves are biased" (p. 46). Deficit thinking toward Black students is cultivated regularly by the annual results of culturally biased standardized tests, which are a leading method of student identification for gifted programming. Ford et al. (2002) professed that many teachers receive "inadequate preparation in testing and assessment. [As a result, they are not able to] reliably interpret intelligence and achievement test scores" (p. 55). The test scores from culturally biased standardized tests often negatively affect students' perceptions of themselves. As a result of deficit thinking, "gifted African American students may underachieve deliberately, refuse to be assessed for gifted education services, and refuse placement in gifted programs" (p. 56).

Acting White

The concept of Blacks acting White has gone through several phases throughout the history of African Americans in the United States. According to Ogbu (2004), in early United States history as slaves, Blacks were not allowed to act in White ways. In addition, Whites insisted that slaves adhere to certain behaviors and ways of speaking.

After they had obtained freedom, Blacks were "required to behave and talk the way White people actually behaved and talked" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 14). Ogbu pointed out that even when Blacks learned to talk and behave like Whites, they were not accepted or treated as equal to Whites.

Underachievement among Blacks has a connection to students' perceptions of acting White. Ford et al. (2008) conducted a study on the psychological and social factors that impact the achievement gap between African American and White students. During this study, they looked at Black students' academic achievement in relationship to their perceptions of acting White or "acting Black" (p. 230). These researchers found that students' perceptions of stereotypical characteristics of acting White included (a) using proper Standard English language, (b) demonstrating good behavior, (c) earning good grades, and (d) exhibiting a stuck-up and snobbish attitude. In contrast, students' perceptions of stereotypical characteristics of acting Black included (a) the use of poor English and slang, (b) demonstrating uneducated or underachieving academic behaviors, (c) acting "ghetto" or "gansta," and (d) wearing saggy pants. Based on students' survey responses, the findings showed that "acting Black is associated with negative behaviors…[and] acting White is associated with positive behaviors" (p. 232). In addition, they found that Black students' perceptions of acting White included acting conceited or superior. Therefore, Black students who acted White were considered unpopular among their peers.

The behaviors associated with acting Black and needing to please a peer group can result in peer pressure, which negatively affects a student's educational experiences

(Ford et al., 2008; Thompson, 2004). Thompson indicated, "Peer pressure and the lure of street life cause many African American students to reject school and a formal education" (p. 19). The negativity can take the form of "misogyny, disrespect, glorification of gangs, the prison culture, and gansta rap" (p. 21). Negative peer pressure has kept many Black students in a mode of purposeful underachievement where effort is not given to academics but instead is given to social relationships and activities. Gifted Black students are placed in the precarious position of choosing to please their social group or pursue their academic success and goals for their future (Ford & Harris, 1997; Lindstrom & San Vant, 1986).

With regard to academic success and goals, Kunjufu (2006) suggested that a good education is not how African American students view the road to success. He determined in a study that many students believed that monetary success could be achieved by participation in "the NBA, rap, and drug dealing" (p. 56). He claimed that the remedy for changing this perception was to encourage students to think outside of those limited opportunities and explore a wide range of career possibilities. Thompson (2004) reported that the influence of "positive values from their parents, extended family members, and religious and community-based organizations that promote cultural pride and good citizenship" (p. 22) helps some African American students to resist the affects of negative peer pressure.

Ethnic Identity

The word *ethnicity* as defined by King (2002) means "a sense of peoplehood and commonality derived from kinship patterns, a shared historical past, common

experiences, religious affiliations, language or linguistic commonalities, shared values, attitudes, perception, modes of expression and identity" (p. 247). Phinney, Dupont, Espinosa, Revill, and Sanders (1994) described ethnic identity as "a feeling of belonging to one's group, a clear understanding of the meaning of one's membership, positive attitudes toward the group, familiarity with its history and culture, and involvement in its practices" (p. 169). The collective historical experiences of African Americans as a group have created a concrete sense of belonging (Ogbu, 2004, p. 3). Within the Black culture, members maintain a strong sense of kinship, history, and attitudes. There is an understanding between them regarding expected relationships and involvement with each other.

Worrell (2007) conducted a study comparing "ethnic identity and other group orientation attitudes… [of] African, Asian, Hispanic, and White Americans" (p. 26) for the purpose of determining how a student's ethnic identity might be related to academic achievement. He wondered if one could predict achievement by assessing students' perceptions of their academic standing in relationship to their ethnic identity. The results of his study showed that "ethnic identity and other group orientation attitudes were both meaningful predictors—medium effect sizes—of school GPA, with ethnic identity attitudes contributing negatively and other group orientation attitudes contributing positively" (p. 31). The data indicated that "although African American and Hispanic students are both classified as stigmatized or marginalized minorities, ethnic identity attitudes may not always have the same meaning in these groups" (p. 34). In addition,

Worrell determined that "academic achievement for African Americans may occur at the expense of this group's sense of ethnic identity, an outcome that is not desirable" (p. 34).

Culturally Relevant Programming

A growing concern regarding the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education is the lack of consideration of students' cultural background when determining and developing appropriate enrichment instructional programs. Thompson (2004) alleged that "a high percentage of teachers are underprepared to work effectively with students of color" (p. 4) because they may be culturally insensitive or ignorant. Thompson explained that "some teachers are uncertain about which topics and materials are acceptable and which are unacceptable for classroom use" (p 198). In addition, "there is often a cultural mismatch between teachers and African American students that has many negative consequences" (p. 4). Sternberg (2007) suggested that educators need to understand the culture in which students are raised in order to evaluate them in a way that "enables each child to capitalize on his or her strengths and to compensate for or correct weaknesses" (p. 165). Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004) reported the importance of considering students' potential ability for success in relationship to their cultural background.

According to Renzulli et al. (2002), educators should be reminded that it is more important to provide for the academic needs of gifted students through appropriate programming rather than simply to identify them for gifted programs. VanTassel-Baska (2004) advised that "the beginning point for all meaningful curricula for the gifted must be their individual and group characteristics and needs" (p. 171). In addition,

consideration should be given to gifted students' areas of interest when designing meaningful curriculum for enrichment programs. Brody (2004) implied that the prospect of pursuing learning in an area of interest can impact "a student's willingness to seek additional opportunities and work hard to master more advanced content" (p. 131). However, according to Tatum (2005), The risk of "using an instructional approach disconnected from students' culture creates student resistance" (p. 74).

Milner and Ford (2005) advocated that race matters in educational settings and said that because "our classrooms are diverse; our curriculum must be diverse" (p. 36). Baldwin (2002) suggested that relevant programming sensitive to a student's cultural identity should be offered in the form of differentiated curricula that is "inclusive of the histories and significant events of the cultures of students selected for the program" (143). With regard to providing diverse, multicultural curricula, Porter (1997) indicated that the curricula taught by some educators negates the accomplishments of Africans and teaches students that "African Americans…had no existence before the Western slave trade" (p. 31). However, in an atmosphere of "Afrikan-based school culture" (Wilson, 1991, p. 90), the Marcus Garvey School boasted tremendous academic success in teaching Black children. Wilson (1991) reported that the students developed "Afrikan identity and consciousness…[and] a positive self-image and pride through the intense study of Afrikan and Afrikan American history" (p. 90).

Summary

The literature review provided a conceptual framework for the study of the research problem. First, the review provided an in depth discussion regarding the puzzle

of underrepresentation and retention of identified talented and potentially talented African American middle school students on a local level. Second, the review made a connection to underrepresentation and retention issues for African American students in higher level graduate programs on a national level. Considering the state of this puzzle from both local and national settings, the need for further research was established. Third, the review discussed prior research findings regarding the complex, multifaceted ethnic and cultural issues faced in the United States by African American students in the educational environment, specifically with relationship to underrepresentation in gifted programs. In addition, the review focused on cultural and historical aspects of African Americans' struggle for social justice in education.

Section 3 provides details regarding the research design. The use and appropriateness of the chosen design are discussed. In addition, section 3 explains the role of the researcher and how participants for the study were chosen and describes in detail the procedures used for data collection, data analysis, and validity.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

This section describes the methodology chosen for this qualitative research study. The principal focus and purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of identified talented and potentially talented African American students about participation in gifted programs in the RCSD and to understand the expectations, experiences, and attitudes of these students regarding their participation. The goal was to describe the essence of the phenomena surrounding the retention puzzle of African American students in gifted programs and to contribute the findings to the limited body of research on this topic. An interpretative, qualitative approach was the paradigm used during this study to examine students' perceptions. According to Merriam (2002), the purpose of conducting an interpretive qualitative approach is to understand how "individuals experience and interact with their social world" (p. 4). Qualitative research involves the study of "lived experiences of real people in real settings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 6). Phenomenology is one of several qualitative research designs that may be used to examine a phenomenon in order to "reveal the essence of human experience" (p. 30).

Research Design

An effective approach for ascertaining the appropriate design for a research study is to look at the nature of the questions that develop out of the researcher's topic of interest (Merriam, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers "seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 13). Qualitative research is a methodology that is used to understand

the essence of a phenomenon and to discover the meaning of specific experiences to individuals who have encountered them (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Van Manen, 1990).

I considered the topic of this doctoral study regarding the underrepresentation and retention issues of African American middle school students in gifted programs and determined that a study focused on the retention puzzle would involve the examination of students' perceptions regarding their experience in a gifted program. A qualitative study was chosen over a quantitative study because, according to Silverman (2005), "Qualitative methods can provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data" (p. 10). Coyle (2007) described qualitative research as "the collection and analysis of non-numerical data through a psychological lens…in order to provide rich descriptions and possible explanations of people's meaning-making—how they make sense of the world and how they experience particular events" (p 11). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), "Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect" (p. 1). As stated by Glesne and Peshkin, "To make their interpretations, the researchers must gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants" (p. 6). In order to gain these perspectives, the researcher "observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants" (p. 6). In so doing, the researcher becomes the main research instrument (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Janesick, 2004).

Creswell (2003) discussed five strategies of the qualitative approach: (a) ethnographies, (b) grounded theory, (c) case studies, (d) phenomenological research, and

(e) narrative research. Ethnographies are usually conducted by collecting observational data with members of the same cultural group over time (Creswell, 1998, 2003). This approach was not suited to this research study because observations were not possible of those students who had declined to participate in gifted programs. Grounded theory results when "the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 14). According to Creswell (1998), the collection of data through interviews is a primary strategy for use in a grounded theory approach. In addition, Creswell (2003) described the grounded theory design as using "constant comparison of data with emerging categories" (p. 14). I considered grounded theory to be a viable approach to this research study. However, when comparing grounded theory with the benefits of conducting a phenomenological study, I decided not to use grounded theory.

In the case study approach, "the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, of one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). In this approach, data are continually collected over a lengthy period of time (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995). This approach could have been considered because of my desire to explore in depth the perceptions of several students. However, it was not feasible due to the extensive time it would have required. The narrative research approach is the study of stories of the "lives of individuals" Creswell, 2003, p. 15). In this approach, the researcher develops a chronology using the narration of the stories and the viewpoints are merged together collaboratively with the life of the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000; Creswell, 2003). I did not consider this strategy to be appropriate for this study because the research was not about the life stories of individuals.

Instead, the research study examined experiences, expectations, and attitudes of participants about a phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) explained that "in phenomenological research the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience" (p. 62). Moustakas (1994) described phenomena as "the building blocks of all human science and the basis for all knowledge" (p. 26). In addition, he claimed that "phenomenology is the *first* method of knowledge because it begins with 'things themselves' (p. 41). According to Crotty (1998), phenomenology is viewed as an investigation of "people's subjective and everyday experiences" and uses the "'point of view' or 'perspective' of the subject" (p. 83). Crotty indicated that by looking at parts of normal, everyday experiences of individuals, the essence of a phenomenon can be understood.

Research Question and Subquestions

This phenomenological study examined the perceptions of identified talented and potentially talented African American middle school students' about participation in gifted programs. The central research question is: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? Subquestions included:

- What are the expectations of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students toward gifted programming?

- What are the curriculum programming interests of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students in gifted programs?
- How do talented and potentially talented African American middle school students perceive peer pressure regarding their participation in gifted programs?
- What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about being identified as talented or potentially talented?
- How do perceptions about participation in gifted programs differ between talented and potentially talented African American male and female middle school students in Grades 6, 7, and 8?

Context of the Study

The research study took place at two middle schools in the RCSD in eastern Iowa. The initial intention was to conduct the study solely at GMS with approximately six to eight student participants. However, there were not enough willing volunteers from GMS, so volunteers were also recruited from EMS.

Measures for Ethical Protection

In order to conduct a study in the RCSD, I was required to follow specific research and survey approval procedures. These procedures required the submission of a completed Application to Conduct Research form along with a written proposal and approved university Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to the Office of Assessment, Equity, and Record Services for review prior to approval (Office of

Assessment, 2008). Other documents required in the IRB application approval process were copies of student assent forms (see Appendix D), parent consent forms (see Appendix E), and a letter of cooperation from principals granting permission to conduct the study in his or her school. The university IRB approval number for this study is 09-29-09-0350595. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that access to conduct research at a particular location may be easier to obtain if the researcher has a friend who works at the desired location. The RCSD employs TAG facilitators at each of its schools. All TAG facilitators met on a monthly basis. I previously worked as a TAG facilitator in the RCSD and had maintained an excellent relationship with the middle school TAG facilitators. TAG facilitators at GMS and EMS provided access to their students and building locations as soon as I received approval of the research proposal by the RCSD. Because of my previous employment as a TAG facilitator, I took steps to limit potential bias as a qualitative researcher by conducting the study with participants who had not attended the school in which I had worked. In addition, I refrained from responding as a TAG teacher to participants during the interviews so that I would not influence their answers.

This study depended upon the participation of identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students in Grades 6 through 8 who were enrolled in the RCSD and had participated at least once in a gifted program during Grades 3 through 8. During the introductory meeting with selected participants, I read an assent form that described the purpose of the study, what they as coresearchers would be expected to do (Moustakas, 1994), and the token of appreciation they would receive for their participation. As a token of appreciation for participation in the study, I offered each

participant a choice of either a $15 prepaid Blockbuster gift card for renting movies or games or a $15 prepaid iTunes gift card for purchasing and downloading music or videos from the iTunes website. I informed all participants that they would receive the token of appreciation at the end of the study. If they decided to drop out of the study, they would receive the token of appreciation at that time.

When students volunteered to participate in the research study, they were asked to sign the assent form. I made a copy of the assent form and suggested that they keep a copy for their own records. After signing the assent form, volunteers were given a cover letter (see Appendix F) and consent form to take home to their parent or guardian. The cover letter and consent form explained the research study to parents or guardians. Directions on the consent form requested that parents or guardians sign the consent form to give approval of their student's participation in the study. The directions also requested that parents or guardians return the consent form with the student to the TAG facilitator at school within 1 week of receiving the information. Parents or guardians were also instructed to keep a copy of the consent form for their own records. My phone number and e-mail address were listed as contact information in the cover letter and consent form in case the parents or guardians had any questions or concerns about the research study.

Role of the Researcher

For the past 8 years, my professional role in the RCSD was that of a TAG facilitator. Prior to collecting data for this research study, I resigned my TAG facilitator position at the RCSD and took a position as an administrator at a local university. However, my experience as a TAG facilitator has given me inside knowledge of the

district's expectations for the administration of gifted services. According to the RCSD, TAG facilitators were expected to do the following:

- Collaborate with classroom teachers to identify strategies, instructional practices, and resources for gifted students within the classroom;
- Provide staff development;
- Work with students whose needs are not being met in the general education classroom;
- Provide direct instruction as needed;
- Monitor student progress;
- Facilitate and coordinate selection procedures;
- Guide individual student programming;
- Compile and maintain personalized education plans; and
- Participate in program evaluation (Talented and Gifted Program, n.d.)

Because I had had the role of a TAG facilitator in the RCSD, I was wellacquainted with identification practices and the variety of gifted programs and services that were available to qualified students.

Prior to conducting interviews, I met with selected students, who were chosen with the help of the TAG facilitators at GMS and EMS, to explain the rights of the participants and the purpose of the study. This meeting took place during the 15-minute advisory period at the beginning of the school day. I informed students about how and when the individual interviews would take place. In addition, I gave students an assent

form to sign for participation in the research study and a cover letter and consent form for parents to sign giving permission for their children to participate as coresearchers.

After coresearchers volunteered for the study and I collected the signed assent and consent forms, TAG facilitators and I discussed possible dates and times for the interviews. TAG facilitators contacted the participants to make sure the dates and times were acceptable and sent an e-mail to me to confirm the schedule. Both school principals received the schedule of interviews through e-mail. TAG facilitators notified participants of the date and time of their individual interviews.

Because I am White and do not have firsthand experience of the ethnic culture experienced by African Americans, it was important for me to set aside any prior judgments, biases, and expectations regarding African American middle school students and their participation in gifted programs while conducting this study. Setting aside biases allows a researcher to analyze the data with a fresh, nonjudgmental viewpoint. Ford and Harris (1999) explained the importance of setting aside biases especially when White Americans conduct research on minority populations:

> The overwhelming majority of research conducted on or with minority groups is conducted by White Americans. Research is not a neutral process, for it is conducted by human beings who, ideally, are bias-free, but realistically cannot be. It takes a great deal of effort to conduct research that is untainted by biases, yet this ideal must be our goal. (p. 193)

Biases and preconceived ideas about a topic should be set aside by the researcher when conducting phenomenological research so the phenomena can be examined without

prejudice (King, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). *Epoche* is a term that Moustakas (1994) used when referring to the "process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and look and see them again as if for the first time" (p. 85). As a TAG facilitator, I had developed personal biases and opinions about gifted education policies and teacher training; however, I set aside my biases and opinions so that I could perceive the life experiences of the participants without determining the conclusions in advance.

Criteria for Participant Selection

According to Merriam (2002), "Since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. This is called a purposive or purposeful sample" (p. 12). In addition, Moustakas (1994) stated that in phenomenological research, "there are no in-advance criteria for locating and selecting the research participants" (p. 107). However, he indicated that when considering participants for a research study it is important that volunteers have firsthand experience with the phenomenon and are agreeable to being interviewed (p. 107).

Prior to the start of the study, I met with two middle school TAG facilitators from the RCSD on separate occasions. We discussed the criteria for selecting a purposeful sample of six to eight identified talented or potentially talented African American students in Grades 6, 7, or 8 who had participated in gifted programming at least once in grades 3 through 8. With assistance from each TAG facilitator, male and female students

were selected who met the criteria and were either participating in or had dropped out of the gifted program.

The TAG facilitators and the district's TAG coordinator suggested during a previous discussion that, based on the number of students who currently met the sample criteria, the research study should be conducted at GMS and, if necessary for an adequate number of interviewees, EMS. Between these two schools an adequate number African American students were identified from which to choose. In addition, the TAG facilitators from each school were willing to help with the logistics of conducting research at their specific locations.

The names of all potential participants were compiled and separated into four groups: (a) identified male students who participate in the gifted program, (b) identified female students who participate in the gifted program, (c) identified male students who have participated and then dropped out of the gifted program, and (d) identified female students who have participated and then dropped out of the gifted program. A purposeful sample of 7 students was chosen from among these groups.

Once the TAG facilitators and I confirmed the list of potential participants, a group meeting was held with those who were selected at GMS. The meeting took place during the morning 15-minute advisory period to discuss the research study and to provide each volunteer with an assent form to sign. Volunteers were given consent forms to take home and discuss with their parents or guardians. They were instructed to return the signed consent forms to the TAG facilitator at their school within one week of receipt, if their parents or guardians approved of their participation in the study. To keep

participants' identify confidential, pseudonyms were assigned to each volunteer who returned a parent consent form.

Data Collection

According to Merriam (2002), "The data collection strategy used is determined by the question of the study and by determining which source(s) of data will yield the best information with which to answer the question" (p. 12). The primary question of this qualitative phenomenological research study was: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? Moustakas (1994) recommended that phenomenological researchers follow a procedure of "conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question" (p. 104). In addition, he advised the use of a follow-up interview to clarify prior statements that would add additional depth to the data. Therefore, individual interviews and a follow-up interview for member-checking were determined to be the most appropriate form of data collection for this study. In addition, I was the primary data collection instrument (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

I contacted the principals at GMS and EMS by phone to obtain consent as to the time of day for the interviews. Their consent was based upon final approval of the research proposal by Walden University and the RCSD. Principals from each middle school gave verbal consent for the interviews to take place before school, after school, or during a noncore class period, pending the preferred choice of the volunteers. In addition, both principals gave written consent through an e-mail to the director of assessment, equity, and record Services in the RCSD. The director then wrote a letter of cooperation

for this research study to take place upon approval of the doctoral study proposal and the IRB. IRB approval was granted on September 29, 2009. Individual interviews took place between the months of October and November of 2009. Each interview was transcribed and synthesized, and a descriptive summary was written. The descriptive summary was provided to students for member-checking during the individual follow-up interviews which took place during November and December 2009 and January 2010.

Interviews

According to Van Manen (1990), "Educators have a professional interest in (auto)biographies because from descriptions of lives of individuals they are able to learn about the nature of educational experiences and individual developments" (p. 72). As an educator and researcher, I am interested in learning through the perceptions of coresearchers why identified African American students choose to stay in gifted programs or drop out. Moustakas (1994) suggested that "evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first person reports of life experiences" (p. 84). A common and preferred method of phenomenological researchers for obtaining real-life experiences of participants is the long autobiographical interview (King, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Silverman, 2005). Moustakas indicated that "the phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p. 114). According to King (2004), "The goal of any qualitative research interview is…to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective" (p. 11).

In-depth autobiographical interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of seven identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students in the RCSD from Grades 6 through 8 who had experienced the phenomenon of participating in a gifted program. Some of the participants maintained their involvement in gifted programs and some had dropped out. Understanding coresearchers' perceptions about the issues African American students face with regards to their participation in a gifted program should help educators to recommend changes in gifted programs that may retain them and increase their representation in gifted programs.

Because coresearchers are identified TAG students, they are accustomed to missing various classes for participation in TAG programming. The director of assessment, wquity, and record services in the RCSD and the principals of participating middle schools were fully aware of the coresearchers' status as TAG students and agreed to allow them to miss class on the condition that the meeting would not be held during a core class such as reading/language arts, math, science, or social studies. Another condition for meeting with participants was an agreement to reschedule an interview for a more suitable time or allow participants to decline to participate if they became anxious about meeting with me during a noncore class period such as music, art, or physical education.

Coresearchers were given their choice of three meeting times for individual and follow-up interviews. They could choose to meet before, after, or during the school day. Each participant chose to meet during the school day. The meetings took place on three occasions: (a) during a 15-minute advisory period at the beginning of the school day to

introduce the research study, request participation, and hand out student assent and parent consent forms; (b) for approximately 1 hour during a noncore class period to conduct individual interviews; and (c) for approximately 1 hour during a noncore class period for member-checking and a follow-up interview.

According to Janesick (2004), it is important to have a back-up plan in place in the event an interviewee decides at the last minute not to participate. My back-up plan was to refer to the potential participant list generated with the assistance of the TAG facilitators at GMS and EMS in order to select another student as a replacement.

I framed the initial interviews by developing an informal interview guide based on examples provided by Moustakas (1994) which were conversational in nature (see Appendix F for the Researcher's General Interview Guide). Moustakas suggested that "broad questions…may…facilitate the obtaining of rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the coresearcher's experience of the phenomenon" (p. 116). Furthermore, if the researcher is not able to elicit "sufficient meaning and depth," Moustakas recommended that a "general interview guide, or topical guide," may be used (p. 116). The objective of the interview questions was to make it possible for the coresearchers to completely reveal their experience about the phenomenon.

Topic questions were broad, allowing the interviewer to ask unplanned questions for clarification and additional depth as the interview progressed. Moustakas (1994) recommended that an interview session should commence "with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere" (p. 114). Humphrey (1989) gave an example of how he established a relaxed, informal

environment for coresearchers during a phenomenological study that he conducted when he explained as follows:

> The message I attempted to convey throughout this process was that I considered my coresearchers to be my equals in this journey. I gave them my full, uninterrupted attention and respect. From my first communication, I indicated that each of us holds keys to illuminate the nature and essence of searching for life's meanings and that opening the door to a full description of this experience required a truly mutual, collaborative effort. (p. 72)

Furthermore, King (2004) suggested the following:

> Potential participants must be assured of confidentiality, and should be told clearly who the research is being carried out for and what it hopes to achieve. These points should be repeated at the start of the interview itself, and permission to tape-record the interview must be obtained. The interviewee should be told what kind of feedback about the study he or she will receive and at least a rough idea of when he or she is likely to receive it. (p. 17)

I recorded the interview data with a digital recorder, and I allotted room on the interview guide for taking notes during interview sessions (Creswell, 1998). Wolcott (1990) suggested that researchers "make notes *during* observations or interviews—including written notes to supplement mechanically recorded ones" (p. 128). He maintained that by so doing, researchers may "minimize the potential influence of some line of interpretation or analysis that might [result from] remembering…too selectively" (p. 128). In addition, Wolcott advised keeping a journal of bracketed notes and first

impressions because doing so could help the researcher develop a good foundation and starting place from which to begin the processes of analysis and writing.

At the beginning of the interview sessions, I spent a few moments helping interviewees feel comfortable and relaxed by thanking them for agreeing to participate and by reiterating that their personal interview was important to the research study. Coresearchers were assured that their statements would be kept confidential. I began the interview by asking the participant to describe what their experience was like when they participated in a gifted program (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Beginning this way allowed the coresearcher to become comfortable and to decide what information was important. Van Manen stated the following:

> As we interview others about their experience of a certain phenomenon, it is imperative to stay close to experience as lived. As we ask what an experience is like, it may be helpful to be very concrete. Ask the person to think of a specific instance, situation, person, or event. Then explore the whole experience to the fullest. (p. 67)

To obtain in-depth responses, I referred to the interview guide when necessary and asked open-ended conversational questions to elicit elaboration such as, “Can you tell me more?” and “What makes you feel that way?”

According to Hatch (2002), remembering to “bring closure to interviews, thanking informants for their participation and contribution” (p. 114) adds to the success of the interview. Following the interview, I thanked participants again for their involvement in the study. I explained that a summary of the interview would be written

and given to them for their review during a follow-up interview that would be arranged when the summary was available.

As soon as possible after each interview, the recording was downloaded to my laptop computer and transcribed with the use of a foot switch that provided a smooth and timely transcribing session. After transcribing the interview, I read the transcription to check for errors or omissions. A synthesis of the interview was developed and summarized for the review of the coresearcher. I communicated through the TAG facilitator at each individual coresearcher's middle school to arrange a meeting for member-checking and a follow-up interview. During this meeting, the coresearcher and I discussed the findings in order to make sure the interpretation precisely reflected the essence of the coresearcher's perceptions regarding their experiences, expectations, and attitudes about participation in gifted programs. This ensured that (a) the interview was analyzed accurately, (b) the interviewee was satisfied that the answers were articulated as intended, and (c) greater depth was obtained regarding the coresearcher's experience with the phenomenon. The follow-up interviews were digitally recorded, and I took notes during the conversation. In addition, each follow-up interview was transcribed as soon as possible after each individual meeting.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this doctoral study was to understand the meaning of identified talented or potentially talented African American students' experiences, expectations, and attitudes with regard to participating and remaining in a gifted program or participating and then dropping out. Interviews were the primary method of data collection. Once the

interviews were transcribed, data analysis began by following the examples of steps and procedures for phenomenological data analysis suggested by Humphrey (1989), Hycner (1985), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1990).

According to Moustakas (1994), "Organization of data begins when the primary researcher places the transcribed interviews before him or her and studies the material through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis" (p. 118). Van Manen (1990) indicated that "the insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (p. 76). Moustakas modified the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (p. 120) as a guide to provide several specific steps that may assist phenomenological researchers through the process of analyzing individual transcriptions. The steps included (a) "listing and preliminary grouping," which is also called *horizontalization*; (b) "reduction and elimination;" (c) "clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents;" (d) "final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application;" (e) "individual textural description;" (f) "individual structural description;" (g) "textural-structural description;" and (h) "composite description" (pp. 120-121).

In comparison, Hycner (1985) indicated that there is more than one method of analyzing data collected in a phenomenological study and that consideration for the phenomenon being studied should guide the method that is used. Hycner suggested 15 steps for analyzing an interview transcript: (a) "transcription," (b) "bracketing and the phenomenological reduction," (c) "listening to the interview for a sense of the whole,"

(d) “delineating units of general meaning,” (e) “delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question,” (f) “training independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning,” (g) “eliminating redundancies,” (h) “clustering units of relevant meaning,” (i) “determining themes from clusters of meaning,” (j) “writing a summary for each individual interview,” (k) “return to the participant with the summary and themes: conducting a second interview,” (l) “modifying themes and summary,” (m) “identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews,” (n) “contextualization of themes,” and (o) “composite summary” (pp. 280-294).

Prior to approaching an interview transcription, the epoche process was used to set aside assumptions and prejudgments (Humphrey, 1989; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explained, “*Epoche* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33). He suggested that before an interview is conducted the researcher “engage in the Epoche process…so that, to a significant degree, past associations, understandings, ‘facts,’ biases, are set aside and do not color or direct the interview” (p. 116). In addition, epoche is “looking before judging and clearing a space within ourselves so that we can actually see what is before us and in us” (p. 60).

According to Hycner (1985), while studying the interview transcriptions, the researcher should keep an open mind for meanings that surface. He explained that keeping an open mind “means suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher’s meanings and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed” (p. 281). Moustakas (1994) suggested that pertinent

phrases relating to the participants' experiences should be listed and grouped. He referred to this as *horizontalization* (p. 120), a term that signifies the importance of giving equal value to every statement or "meaning unit" (p. 122). After horizontalization, redundant expressions are eliminated, and the relevant meaning units are "clustered into thematic groupings (delimiting)" (Humphrey, 1989, p. 79). Meaning units that are the most important in understanding the experience are considered to be the "invariant constituents of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

According to Van Manen (1990), "Phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience" (p. 79). He explained that researchers seek to "unearth something 'telling,' something 'meaningful,' something 'thematic' in the various experiential accounts—we work at mining meaning from them" (p. 86). Van Manen described three strategies to identify and separate thematic meaning from the transcribed text of a lived experience:

"1. the wholistic or sententious approach;

2. the selective or highlighting approach;

3. the detailed or line-by-line approach" (p. 92-93).

Furthermore, Van Manen explained as follows:

1. In the wholistic reading approach we attend to the text as a whole and ask, *What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?* We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.

2. In the selective reading approach we listen to or read a text several times and ask, *What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?* These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight.
3. In the detailed reading approach we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?* (p. 93)

Once the significant invariant constituents were clustered and themes that represent the heart of the experience were identified, the next step was to compose an "individual textural description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) for each of the participants. The textural description involves bringing in direct quotations from individual interviews. Similarly, Hycner (1985) suggested that after themes of meaning have been determined, the next step would be to compose a "summary for each individual," (p. 291) by referring back to the interview transcription. He also suggested sharing the summary with the coresearcher for a validity check and to conduct a follow-up interview.

Moustakas (1994) suggested that as the next step the researcher should use the individual textural description and imaginative variation to compose an "*Individual Structural Description* of the experience" (p. 212). He explained that the individual structural description "provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience" (p. 135). Imaginative variation, as explained by Humphrey (1989), is a technique for researchers "to look beneath the texture of the experience to identify and develop descriptions of important universal structures" (p. 79). After writing the

individual textural and individual structural descriptions, I used them to compose a textural-structural description of each coresearcher's experience (Humphrey, 1989; Moustakas, 1994). The final step, according to Moustakas, was to take the *"Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions* [and] *develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole*" (p. 121).

Validity

According to Hycner (1985), an important means of ensuring validity "is to return to the research participant with the written summary and themes and engage in a dialogue with this person concerning what the researcher has found so far" (p. 291). Member-checking, as described by Merriam (2002), is the process of "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they were plausible" (p. 31). Miles and Huberman (1994) explained member-checking as "feeding findings back to informants" (p. 275) to substantiate the analysis of the data. Miles and Huberman stated the following:

> There are…good reasons for conducting feedback after final analysis. For one thing, you know more. You also know *better* what you know—are less tentative, have more supporting evidence, can illustrate it. In addition, you can get feedback at a higher level of inference: on main factors, on causal relationships, on interpretive conclusions. Finally, the feedback process can be done less haphazardly. You can lay out the findings clearly and systematically and present them to the reader for careful scrutiny and comment. (p. 276)

Member-checking is one of the strategies that was used in this research study to check the data and interpretations for accuracy. In order to conduct member-checking with each participant, I scheduled a follow-up interview at which the participants reviewed a synthesized and summarized description of their individual experience (Humphrey, 1989; Moustakas, 1994). Each participant was asked to examine the written descriptive summary for omissions or inaccurate interpretations. I conducted the follow-up interview with participants to discuss any comments or concerns they may have found with regard to the accuracy of the description. This enabled coresearchers to contribute additional in-depth data as well as make any corrections to the interpretation.

Summary

This section provided details regarding the methodology chosen for this qualitative research study. The topic was described and the central research question was presented. In addition, the phenomenological research design was explained, which included specific information regarding the context of the study, the role of the researcher, criteria for participant selection, collection of data, data analysis, and validity. In section 4, the findings of the study are presented.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of identified talented and potentially talented African American students about participation in gifted programs in order to understand the essence of the phenomena surrounding the retention puzzle. The retention puzzle refers to why some identified African American students participate in gifted programs and continue to participate, but others participate and then drop out of the programs. The guiding research question for this doctoral study asked: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? Topical subquestions for this study included: (a) What are the expectations of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students toward gifted programming? (b) What are the curriculum programming interests of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students in gifted programs? (c) How do talented and potentially talented African American middle school students perceive peer pressure regarding their participation in gifted programs? (d) What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about being identified as talented or potentially talented? and (e) How do perceptions about participation in gifted programs differ between talented and potentially talented African American male and female middle school students in Grades 6, 7, and 8? The Researcher's General Interview Guide, which includes 12 questions that were asked during individual interviews, is included in Appendix F.

This section describes the process used for generating and collecting data, the systems used for working with and organizing the data, presentation of the findings and emergent themes, and a discussion about the evidence of quality. It concludes with a summary of the outcomes.

Process

According to Moustakas (1994), "Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences" (p. 84). The semistructured interview is a primary means of investigating the essence of lived experiences (Fade, 2004; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). As the interviewer, I was the primary research instrument for this doctoral study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Janesick, 2004). Moreover, coresearchers and I collaboratively generated the interview data (Richards, 2009). Three steps were involved in collecting interview data for this doctoral study: (a) an introductory meeting with a purposeful sample of seven identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students, (b) an interview with each volunteer who signed an assent form and submitted a signed parent/guardian consent form, and (c) a follow-up interview that included member-checking with each coresearcher.

Introduction of Study to Potential Volunteers

The first introductory meeting took place on October 20, 2009, at GMS. Prior to the meeting, the TAG facilitator recommended six identified African American students (four female students and two male students) from her school based on purposeful sample criteria that were determined for the study. The TAG facilitator scheduled the introductory meeting to take place during the morning advisory period (AP) class from

8:55 to 9:12 a.m. She notified students about the meeting and reminded them to attend. In addition, she arranged the location for the meeting to be in an unused classroom that was located next to her classroom. She reminded students to come to the meeting and she called their AP teachers if they forgot. The TAG facilitator did not attend the meeting.

When I arrived at the school at 8:30 a.m., the TAG facilitator met and directed me to the meeting room. With permission, I rearranged the desks into a semicircle so that the meeting would have a comfortable atmosphere. Students came into the meeting at 8:55 a.m. and chose their own seats. As they were entering the classroom, the morning announcements took place. At 9:00 I introduced myself and explained the study.

The TAG facilitator had arranged for six students to attend the meeting, but only five students were present. After a brief introduction, I read the assent form to the students and gave them the opportunity to ask questions. All of the students who attended the meeting were interested in volunteering for the study. There was one problem, however. One of the female students came to the meeting by mistake. The TAG facilitator thought she was African American and had included her on the list by mistake. During the meeting, the student said that she was actually biracial and did not have an African heritage. I thanked her for coming to the meeting and excused her from in the study.

The remaining four students signed the assent forms and took the parent/guardian consent forms home for their parents to sign. I explained that the consent forms must be returned to their TAG facilitator within 1 week in order for them to participate in the study. If they did not return the signed consent form within 1 week, another participant

would be selected to take their place. As the meeting was came to a close, the sixth student, female eighth-grader who was not able to make it to the meeting, came in the door and was interested in learning about the study. I found the TAG facilitator and told her that this student had arrived late for the meeting. The facilitator called the student's first period teacher to ask if the student could spend a few minutes with me, which was agreeable with the teacher. I spent about 5 minutes extra with the student to inform her about the study. She signed the assent form, and I gave her the parent consent form. All five students brought the parent consent forms back to their TAG facilitator before the deadline. The TAG facilitator sent me an e-mail when the forms were turned in, and I picked them up from her at the school.

I arranged with the TAG facilitator at EMS to select three students who met the criteria, because I had planned to have a purposeful sample of between six and eight participants. One female and two male students were selected by the TAG facilitator to attend the introductory meeting which took place on October 23, 2009. I met with students in a conference room in the main office during the morning AP class from 8:55 to 9:12. After a brief introduction, I read the assent form to the students. All three students were interested in volunteering for the study and signed the assent form. I gave them each a parent/guardian consent form with instructions that it had to be signed and returned to the TAG facilitator within 1 week in order for them to participate in the study. Both male students returned their parent consent forms, but the female student did not return hers and therefore did not participate in the study.

The final participant count was seven students: 4 male and 3 female. One student was a sixth grader, two were seventh graders, and four were eighth graders. In order to maintain confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms for each participant's name (see Table 3).

Table 3

Participant Age, Grade, and Gender

Number and Pseudonym	Age 12	Age 13	Age 14	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Gender M	Gender F
1. Minkah		x			x		x	
2. Ashanti		x				x		x
3. Sanaa	x			x				x
4. Taye	x				x		x	
5. Zoela			x			x		x
6. Amare		x				x	x	
7. Talib			x			x	x	
Number	2	3	2	1	2	4	4	3
Percentage	29%	43%	29%	14%	29%	57%	57%	43%

The Interview Process

Individual interviews were held in an empty classroom or a small closetlike office at GMS and in an office conference room at EMS. I provided participants with the option to meet with me for the interview before, during, or after school, but not during a core class. In accordance with terminology used by Moustakas (1994), during this study, participants were referred to as *coresearchers*. Each coresearcher chose to meet for his or her interview during the school day. I recorded the interviews with a small, high-quality digital audio recorder. The date, time, and location of each interview are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Interview Schedule

Coresearcher	Date	Start Time	Length in Minutes	Room Location	School Location
Minkah	10/27/09	8:55 a.m.	46:03	Empty classroom	GMS
Ashanti	10/27/09	11:45 a.m.	43:34	Small closet-sized room	GMS
Sanaa	10/27/09	2:06 p.m.	40:24	Small closet-sized room	GMS
Taye	11/2/09	8:55 a.m.	38:03	Empty classroom	GMS
Zoela	11/2/09	11:45 a.m.	42:51	Small closet-sized room	GMS
Amare	11/10/09	8:55 a.m.	24:38	Office conference room	EMS
Talib	11/13/09	8:55 a.m.	30:05	Office conference room	EMS

Two interviews took place in the empty classroom at GMS. Prior to each interview, I moved a small table next to the wall where there was an electrical outlet so that the digital audio recorder could be plugged in. I did not want to depend on battery power but had batteries in case they were needed. I created a comfortable, friendly environment by arranging the chairs so that the coresearcher was on one end of the table, facing the wall, and I was sitting to the right, sharing the corner of the table. I felt that would be a comfortable way to sit and talk so that we could have easy access to the digital recorder and the coresearcher could have eye contact with me or not, according to his or her preference. That arrangement was also convenient for taking notes.

Three of the interviews at GMS were in a much more intimate setting; a small closetlike office. The coresearcher and I sat side by side, facing the wall at a counter/desk in a small office area, but there was enough personal space and lighting for the meeting to

be comfortable. I plugged the digital audio recorder into an electrical outlet. The recorder was accessible during the interview.

The two interviews at EMS took place in the school's main office conference room. The room did not have easy access to a power source for the digital audio recorder, but the school secretary solved the problem by unplugging a nearby computer so that I could use the electrical outlet. The coresearcher and I and sat across the table from each other. We had to wait for the morning announcements to finish before we began the interview.

Interviewees were asked to respond to 12 questions from the General Interview Guide (see Appendix H). I asked probing questions when there was a need for clarification or more depth in an answer (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Questions on the General Interview Guide were designed to answer the doctoral study's guiding research question and five subquestions. The questions on the interview guide explored coresearchers' experiences, expectations, and attitudes about participating in gifted programs including information about the likes and dislikes about certain gifted programs, coresearchers' learning interests, how they felt about being gifted, and how they perceived their peer relationships with regard to being gifted.

All of the coresearchers were friendly, at ease, and helpful during their individual interviews except for Taye. Taye wore a red sweatshirt with the hood over his head, looked straight ahead, and made no eye contact. He was cooperative during the interview and gave some good information; however, he did not elaborate when answering the questions. I gently encouraged him to explain and give more details by asking additional

questions. At first, he kept his hands in front of his mouth. I suggested that he remove his hands from his mouth so that his voice could be clearly heard on the digital recorder. Toward the end of the interview, he started to answer the questions with shorter answers, and I could tell that he did not want to talk anymore.

The Follow-Up Interview Process

After each interview, I listened to the audio recording several times to explore the meaning of participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Humphrey, 1989). In addition, I transcribed each interview within 2 weeks of the meeting and imported it into NVivo 8, a computer program designed to help researchers process, organize, and work with qualitative research data (Richards, 2009). After importing the digital audio recordings and transcribed interviews, I studied each transcript and gave "equal weight to each (horizontalization), of the 'meaning units' which appeared in the participant's description of the experience" (Humphrey, 1989, p. 78-79). Adhering to Humphrey's data analysis process, I coded and delimited these meaning units by grouping them into themes. Once the data were coded and organized in to thematic folders and sub-folders in the NVivo 8 program, I synthesized the data and wrote a descriptive summary of each individual interview. The summary was read with the coresearcher for member-checking during the follow-up interview. See Table 5 for the date, time, and location of each follow-up interview.

Table 5

Follow-Up Interview Schedule

Coresearcher	Date	Start Time	Length in Minutes	Room Location	Location
Minkah	11/30/09	8:55 a.m.	20:10	Empty classroom	GMS
Ashanti	11/30/09	11:45 a.m.	35:57	Small closet-sized room	GMS
Sanaa	1/11/10	2:00 p.m.	18:46	Small closet-sized room	GMS
Taye	1/15/10	8:55 a.m.	16:59	Empty classroom	GMS
Zoela	1/19/10	11:45 a.m.	28:25	Small closet-sized room	GMS
Amare	1/25/10	8:55 a.m.	18:07	Office conference room	EMS
Talib	1/29/10	8:55 a.m.	22:59	Office conference room	EMS

At the beginning of the follow-up interview, I explained to each coresearcher that I had transcribed and summarized his or her previous interview. I conveyed the importance of reading the summary together to make sure it was an accurate representation of what the coresearcher had previously expressed. Coresearchers had the choice of taking turns reading every other paragraph of the summary aloud with me or listening to me read the summary. While reading the summary, we stopped after each paragraph to assess whether or not it was accurate and to give coresearchers the opportunity to clarify, elaborate on, and make corrections to the information. Stopping between paragraphs also gave me the opportunity to ask additional follow-up questions that had emerged while synthesizing the initial interview data.

The level of coresearcher interest during the follow-up interviews seemed different from the initial interviews. Five of the seven coresearchers did not appear to be as interested in participating in the follow-up interview. They came to the meeting

willingly and did not ask to be dismissed from the study; however, they appeared distant with less eye contact and had difficulty engaging in friendly conversation. They gave shorter answers, and I felt like I had to work very hard to acquire depth in their answers. In contrast, two of the female coresearchers were cooperative and friendly. They provided rich, thick descriptions, elaborated on previous statements and answered questions with long explanations. At the end of each follow-up interview, I gave coresearchers a choice between two items as a token of appreciation. Six coresearchers chose a $15 Blockbuster Video gift card, and one chose a $15 iTunes gift card.

Systems

As indicated by Rubin and Rubin (2005), a researcher needs to keep records of interviews, log notes, journals and other forms of data collection for analysis afterward. At the beginning of the data collection process, I kept track of data records in a journal that included the identity and pseudonym of each participant, the dates and times of each interview, notes of my impressions during interviews, and emerging thoughts about the study. In addition, I developed a numbering system to keep track of which coresearcher belonged to which set of data: (a) digital audio recordings, (b) transcribed interviews, (c) journal notes, and (d) memos. Each interviewee was identified by a series of numbers and letters based on the digital audio file number, the first initial of the middle school's pseudonym, the gender of the student, the grade level of the student, and the order in which the interview took place (see Table 6). For example, Minkah's first interview identification number displays the following information: (a) DS400022 (the digital audio

recording file number); (b) GM7 (Gentry, male, seventh grade); and (c) 1 (the first interviewee).

Table 6

Cataloging System

Coresearcher	First Interview Identification Number	Follow-up Interview Identification Number	Final Composite Identification Number
Minkah	DS400022-GM7-1	DS400035-GM7-1	DS400022/35-GM7-1
Ashanti	DS400023-GF8-2	DS400036-GF8-2	DS400023/36-GF8-2
Sanaa	DS400024-GF6-3	DS400038-GF6-3	DS400024/38-GF6-3
Taye	DS400028-GM7-4	DS400039-GM7-4	DS400028/39-GM7-4
Zoela	DS400030-GF8-5	DS400040-GF8-5	DS400030/40-GF8-5
Amare	DS400033-EM8-6	DS400041-EM8-6	DS400033/41-EM8-6
Talib	DS400034-EM8-7	DS400044-EM8-7	DS400034/44-EM8-7

After recording each interview, I immediately transferred the audio file from the recorder to the computer. After the transcription of each interview, I imported both the audio file and the transcription into QSR's NVivo 8 computer program. I chose to use this computer software because it provided a way to gather and organize all of the data in one place. NVivo 8 provided a means to write and store memos about important comments that I discovered when reviewing the interviews and to keep a journal of my thoughts and impressions as I worked with the data. In addition, it provided a means to code the data and search the material by category to find relationships and patterns (Richards, 2009).

The Findings

This doctoral study's qualitative phenomenological research design provided the methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing thick, rich descriptions from

coresearchers regarding their perceptions about participation in TAG programs. As reported previously, the study's retention puzzle involves why identified African American student remain in or drop out of TAG programs. The current TAG participation status of coresearchers is shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Talented and Gifted Participation Status

Coresearcher	Current Grade Level	Began Participating in the TAG Program	Current Participation Status
Minkah	7	Kindergarten	He is not currently participating in the TAG program. He is not interested in available programming.
Ashanti	8	Third grade	She started participating in Mock Trial in September, but dropped out before it was finished. She is currently participating in National History Day.
Sanaa	6	Second grade	She is currently participating in Foundations for Success, but did not want to participate in that or anything else this year for social reasons. She would like to participate in Mock Trial next year.
Taye	7	First grade	He is not currently participating in the TAG program. He does not know what programs are available for his participation. He heard about Mock Trial and is interested; however, Mock Trial is already over for this year.
Zoela	8	Kindergarten---above grade level reading First grade TAG program participation	She is not currently participating in the TAG program. She wanted to do Mock Trial last year in seventh grade, but missed the sign-up date because of illness. No one approached her about TAG programs for the remainder of her seventh grade year. Participation in Mock Trial or TAG is not a priority for her in eighth grade because she is participating in sports.
Amare	8	Sixth grade	He only participated in the LEGO robotics program in 6th grade. He dropped out in seventh grade to participate in after-school sports.
Talib	8	Third grade	He dropped out of TAG in middle school because he did not have time to make up missed class work and because his friend stopped going to the TAG group.

According to Richards (2009), when "the reader is immersed in the situation, vividly pictures the people, hears the voices, and is moved by the experiences" (p. 204), the encounter with the data can be "enthralling." However, when presenting the data, Richards suggested using selective passages that are concise and express the important ideas rather than giving an excessive account. The findings are presented here through the stories of coresearchers' experiences and in a way that addresses the guiding research question. Each subquestion is used as a heading under which emergent themes are organized as subheadings.

Subquestion 1

Subquestion 1 was: What are the expectation of talented and potentially talented African American Middle School students toward gifted programming? Themes generated from this question explore how students perceived the TAG program prior to their participation in an elementary or middle school TAG program. Some students compared what they expected with what they experienced. Themes that emerged were that coresearchers expected the TAG program would be challenging, boring, or fun. In addition, one coresearcher expected he would take field trips in elementary school and another coresearcher expected that in middle school she would be pulled out of the same class each week.

Challenging. When Minkah came to middle school he thought the TAG program "was going to be the same [as in elementary school] except…with the work a little harder."

When Zoela began participating in TAG in first grade, she expected the academic work would be more challenging than in her classroom. “I thought it was just going to be, they’re gonna have us do even more academically level activities and stuff like that.” However, she found that “they had us just doing things that’s a little bit above like the average student.”

When Ashanti first heard that she was identified for the TAG program, she thought it was going to be difficult.

> My cousin, who is about to graduate…said that he was in TAG and that only really, really, really smart people will get into it.… That’s when my confidence wasn’t too high; I barely thought I was smart…. He said that it was really, really hard, so when I got…accepted into TAG, I just thought it was going to be really, really hard. But, after a while, it just seemed to be easier every day.

In both elementary and middle school, Ashanti expected a greater level of challenge than she received.

> I thought that the teachers would push me harder than they did. I mean…they did push me, but they pushed me to a level where…it was a little bit under how far I could be pushed…. When I started TAG [in middle school] the teacher actually didn’t challenge me as much as I wanted to be challenged…. Most of the time she’d give me simple worksheets to work on and I’d finish them in like 15 minutes. I thought that maybe she’d give me a harder worksheet to work on…to occupy my

> time.... If I have something harder to work on, there's a bigger chance of me learning more.

Boring. When Talib started middle school, he expected the TAG program would be boring because he thought he would have more work to do. "I don't know—it would be boring to do, have to do more work. I don't know—just have to do more work."

Zoela thought that being in a TAG math group in elementary school would be boring but instead she made some new friends.

> First I thought it was going to be boring…like being in a room just doing math and stuff, but it ended up being okay, it ended up being fine. 'Cause you're in there with students that you already know…and if you don't know them already, you get to make new friends in there.

Fun. When Zoela came to middle school in sixth grade she thought the TAG program would be fun, but more difficult. "I thought it was going to be fun. I knew it was gonna be harder because we're older and we've got to get ready for high school."

Amare expected the TAG program to be a "fun environment" where he "could be safe" with his friends. He explained, "A safe environment, for me, would be like you can express your ideas and opinions without being negatively criticized."

Field trips. When Taye was first notified that he would be participating in the TAG program in elementary school, he expected the TAG group would go on field trips. "I thought we'd be, um, having like field trips and stuff that we do as a class…like we don't have to learn, since we…know everything."

Same class for each meeting. In middle school, Sanaa expected the TAG program to take place during the "same class for every single meeting," as it was in elementary school. She also expected that the middle school TAG meetings would "be shorter in meetings and time." Instead, she found, "They're…one period long and you get pulled out—I mean, the whole group gets pulled out [of] different periods each time we meet."

Summary of Subquestion 1. Emergent themes generated from this question were that coresearchers expected the TAG program would be challenging, boring, or fun. In addition, one coresearcher expected he would take field trips in elementary school and another coresearcher expected that in middle school, she would be pulled out of the same class each week.

Subquestion 2

Subquestion 2 was: What are the curriculum programming interests of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students in gifted programs? Themes generated from this question explore the learning interests of co-researches. Overarching themes that emerged were that coresearchers learn best when the activities are "hands-on," coresearchers would like to learn about different cultures and how people live, and they are interested in careers in the field of law. In addition, coresearchers were interested in programs that offer creativity without being judged or criticized, daily classes instead of weekly pullout programs, and learning subjects that were one or two grade levels ahead of their current grade.

Learning styles. Four out of seven coresearchers preferred learning environments where they could do "hands-on" activities. Three coresearchers learn best by "doing it" on their own.

***Hands-on activities*.** Ashanti believed that "when you have a hands-on activity you get the gist of things and it helps you more to understand everything…. When I actually get to do things like make a website, it helps me more understand my subject."

Taye liked to learn "by making it into an activity, like hands-on activities." According to Taye, "There hasn't been any that I know in TAG, but that is how I learn best."

Zoela liked to learn by experience. She said, "I'm more of a hands-on person…I don't like to just listen about it and hear it, I want to actually do it and get my own experience of it."

Amare liked "hands-on." He said, "I chose that particular program [LEGO robotics] because I could, uh, use my hands a lot; it made me, uh, think outside the box, and I just always like to build stuff."

Learn by "doing it." Minkah said, "I like to learn by…just doing it. And…if I see someone do it, then…if I think that it looks cool to do it, then I'll just do it."

Sanaa likes to learn by doing.

> By doing it myself; by someone giving me instructions, or hardly any at all, and telling me to look at what's on my desk and do it. That way I would make my own mistakes and I would learn from them and know what to do in the project or situation.

Talib liked to learn by "doing it." "If the teacher will show the problem on the overhead, I like to try to figure out the problem on my own."

Different countries and cultures. Four coresearchers were interested in studying about different countries or cultures and how other people live.

Minkah would "like to learn about different countries…like their history." He wanted to know about the people who live in Zimbabwe, Vietnam, and Germany. "I want to learn…about their language…and how to like the kind of food they eat."

Ashanti was interested in learning about the African American culture. She expressed the following:

> Like right now, I did want to learn more about like my culture, about African Americans, and so I have this book called *African American Literature*, and it's about like 2,611 pages, and like I'm really enjoying it, because it—in the book it just tells you about how African Americans felt. It gives stories, poems, all these things written all by African Americans, and it just gives you a feeling that—it just makes you feel like you're really there and that you can understand all of their problems…. Some of their stories were just telling about…the problems that African Americans went through: like maybe racism and just problems where it—you know, their families might have been having problems. And me and my family, we get along perfectly, but some of the time we're just—like we might have problems with certain things. And racism is a big thing in my family; we really don't like it. And my aunt sued a store because they were being

> racist to her. And I've had certain parents be racist to me just because they don't think that I should be friends with their children. And I just see…by reading those stories that—I mean, I can feel how they're feeling….I kind of feel lucky because when I read the stories I see that we have similar problems, but their problems were a little bit worse.

Zoela was also interested in learning about the African culture and how the people live.

> I want to take a vacation in Africa and see what the people is like, and then at the church I go to I help support two African children. Well, they live in Uganda and we help support them. Um, I don't know, it's just something about the way other people live and how we live and how it's so different…. And like, sometimes I like seeing how spoiled we are in the United States, and then see how they're living up there in poverty—and then now what happened in Haiti and stuff. And I know we could do a lot more to help them…. I read *aLive* and I watch on like the Discovery Channel whenever there's a special in about…it doesn't necessarily have to be African, but that's just one of the ones I'm most intrigued by.

Talib was interested in learning about history, other countries, and how people live. He said, "I would like to learn everything about it…. I like learning about what happened in the past, and then I want to learn about…all the different um, like countries and what not...find out how other people live."

Law career interests. Five coresearchers expressed an interest in pursuing a career in law. Ashanti's career goal was to be a criminal defense lawyer. She explained,

> The thing that I really would like to learn most about is more about like criminal and law, because it's like my dream to be like a lawyer; it's like my dream job, and I think that you should try to fulfill your dreams. Sometimes some people get accused of things that I don't think they necessarily have done and I just think like if I could defend somebody, it would make me feel like a better person. I'm keeping someone out of a place that they really don't want to be.

Taye's career goal was to be a "lawyer…'cause I am really intelligent and I know a lot about the…crime system, and it would make a lot of money."

Zoela was also interested in becoming a lawyer. She described this interest as follows:

> I want to go to law school to become a lawyer…. I don't know, it was just something about lawyers that interested me, and then, like people were always telling me, "You would make a good lawyer," and, and that was something that I wanted to do.

Zoela not only wanted to be a lawyer, she wanted to own her own law firm. She explained as follows:

> I wanna get my major in finance and then start…my own...business for lawyers…. I'm gonna be a business person and then I'm gonna have a, oh,

what is it called? I just said it—um, "law firm." I'll start my own law firm. That's what I want to do.

Amare was also interested in a career in law. He said, "Growing up, I always watched criminal shows like *Law and Order* or *CSI*. But, I know that's not always that easy. But, there's just something about helping other people that always interested me."

Talib had thought about a career in law. He described, "I figured out what I probably, what kind of career…I probably have something to do with um, like law enforcement…. They get to catch like, they get to catch the bad people." Talib was especially interested in being a secret agent. He described, "You know how they have, like the regular police, and then they have like, they have like government, and then they have, like secret agencies and all that. I want to be part of that."

Other subject interests. Minkah believed that he was "good at playing sports, but they don't have a gifted program for sports." Math was Ashanti's favorite subject. She expressed, "I really want to learn…more about Math because that's…the subject that I do most enjoy." Taye said that he would like to know more about "all the creatures that are at the bottom that I have no idea about." In addition, Taye wanted to know more about "some of the stuff that we learned back in other grades about space…like…planets and other, uh, galaxies and comets and stuff." Sanaa enjoyed reading. "I'm a natural reader. Just like other people in my family, we love to read any type of books, as you can see, that we are obsessed in mysteries, comedies, chic flicks, anything." In addition, Sanaa is interested in writing. "Right now my goal is to be a writer for…a magazine…*People* magazine—the celeb magazine. That's what I plan on doing."

Personal program design. For the purpose of exploring coresearcher's ideas about TAG curriculum in which they would be interested in participating, coresearchers were asked to describe what they would design for their own personal TAG program. Interviewees' ideas included (a) designing video games, (b) creating inventions without the judging process, (c) creative writing without judging or criticism, (d) interesting educational conversations, (e) taking weekly field trips, (f) having a daily TAG class rather than a weekly pull-out group, (g) sports training, and (h) having a daily class where students could be challenged with work that was two grade levels above their current grade.

Video game design. Minkah's TAG program would be a daily class where students would design a prototype of a video game.

> I like playing them and think programming them would be fun…. There's so many different kinds and so many different things you can do….
>
> Games I like to play are actions and adventure games where you…go around…to different places and…find out like what I'm supposed to do there…. Then in video games, it's not like the real world, so like, people don't really get hurt and stuff. So, I like doing that.

Inventions without judging. Another thing Minkah would like to do if he could design a TAG program is "make a product, and …instead of judging it, just seeing how many people like it…. What's useful to me might not be useful to the people that are judging it, so then I don't think…it's fair."

Creative writing. Ashanti's TAG program would involve writing. She said, "I think it would be…a writing program, because it's not—not even just to me, but I know a lot of really good people who really can write, like some of the students in my honors English class." She wants a creative writing class because "then people can see how much work you put in the things in your feelings like poetry, stories, stuff like that." Ashanti agreed with Minkah about his dislike for judging. She explained, "I think that writing helps you express your feelings, and if there was a program like that, you can't get criticized because it's your feelings. Nobody can actually judge you. They can't tell you that it's wrong or right." Ashanti had concerns about the meeting time for her writing group. She said, "I think that, first of all, I would like get them together like in the morning or after school and see what times best work for them, and then try to work around their schedule."

Movies and educational conversations. Sanaa was concerned about students' lack of interest in class content. Her TAG program would involve interesting educational conversations.

> I would, basically, create my TAG program around just normal stuff that kids would want to do, but more educational-like. Most kids would like to watch movies and sit around and talk, but I make it an educational conversation about the movie that pertains to what we were learning…. I would do a topic on, I guess, reading. It would be, basically, about a…movie that turned into a book, or something like that…. It would be

> fiction or fantasy—something that would get the kids to talk about it…and interested, instead of just sitting in class and waiting until it's time to go.

Field trips. Taye expected the TAG program to involve field trips, so he would design his TAG program as a daily class that took a field trip each week.

> I'd have a lot of good students in the class, and we'd do work for 4 days of the week and then 1 day each week we'd, uh, go on a field trip, whether it's just outside the school or in another city.

His TAG group would be "probably a class."

Several challenging subjects all day long. Zoela's TAG program design would be "something that includes like poetry exercises, learning about the African culture, and just a lot of different things." Zoela agreed with Taye about having the TAG program take place during a class. She said, "I think I'd have it as a class, because some students want to be challenged all day, not just for a little bit of time throughout the day."

Sports. Amare would include sports in the TAG program. He would design a sports training facility. "The facility would be like a sportsplex….Then there'd be like different places set up for different sports…. The program would be about identifying your best sport and working towards that."

Challenge and acceleration. Talib preferred the challenge of above grade-level curriculum. According to Talib, his TAG program would "be a lot more challenging…. They probably be learning about—like if they are in eighth grade, they'd be learning about things…that people in 10th grade be learning."

Summary of Subquestion 2. Emergent themes generated from Subquestion 2 regarding learning interests include the preference for "hands-on" learning, the study of different cultures and how people live, and careers in the field of law. In addition, coresearchers were interested creativity without being judged or criticized, daily classes instead of weekly pullout programs, and accelerated curriculum.

Subquestion 3

Subquestion 3 was: How do talented and potentially talented African American middle school students perceive peer pressure regarding their participation in gifted programs? Themes generated from this question explore how coresearchers perceived peer pressure in relationship to TAG participation. Emergent themes include: (a) coresearchers did not feel that they were treated differently by there peers, (b) peers who participated in name-calling were jealous because they were not in the gifted program, (c) one coresearcher felt pressured to be "cool," (d) another female coresearcher wished that there were other African Americans in the TAG program, (e) coresearchers noticed differences in the way they related to TAG peers versus non-TAG peers, and (e) coresearchers perceived that their peers expected help from them with schoolwork.

"A regular friend." Peer pressure was not an issue with Minka because he and his peers helped each other out.

> They don't really think of me any different, or they don't actually really even care, because…some of my friends, like I help them out with stuff and they help me with stuff, so…even though I'm in TAG, they still treat me like…a regular friend.

Minkah explained that the reason he thought his friends did not care about him being gifted is, "some of them are in TAG and some of them aren't, but the ones that aren't don't really care…. They're talented…and they're gifted in a sport, and TAG doesn't have TAG for sports."

"The same." Amare did not believe his friends thought of him differently because he is gifted. According to Amare, "I think that they just look at me…as the same. I don't think that it changed their perspective on me."

"Nerd, geek, or smart-aleck, or smarty." Ashanti explained that her jealous friends called her names.

> Most of my friends—I mean some of them do—are, like they do accept the fact that I'm really smart, but others are kind of jealous of me. So it's like, sometimes I feel really bad that…I have a really good gift, but…other people don't accept me for how I am…. Some of the people who are really jealous of me, they've called me like, names like nerd, geek, or smart-aleck, or smarty. But, I really just ignore them because it's a gift that God gave me, and I think I should be happy for it.

"I should have permission to act this smart." When Ashanti's friends called her names, she tried to ignore them. However, according to Ashanti, "Sometimes after a while, it does actually get to you, and it gets to a point where it's hard to ignore." When that happens, most of the time Ashanti confronted them.

> Well, you don't know what it's like to be me, so you shouldn't criticize me, because if I work this hard I should really, I should have permission to

act this smart or to do things my way. And you shouldn't be the one yelling at me, calling me names, because you don't work as hard as I do sometimes.

"People say stuff they don't mean." When Ashanti's friends got mad or called her names, she tried to be understanding.

I know that people say stuff that they really don't mean, or you may say something just because you're mad or something or that you had a bad day, so I really just push it to the back of my head and say, "Oh, maybe they had a bad day; they're just saying that." Because people do make mistakes and they say things that they really don't mean.

"We're cool, we're best friends…." Sanaa doesn't think that her friends were bothered about her participation in the gifted program.

I think…knowing my friends, they're really not that bothered about it. I mean, I know that my friends aren't jealous because I always tell them that even though I'm gifted, it doesn't mean anything, you know. I'm just like you; we're cool, we're best friends, we hang out, we talk on the phone, we do this, we do that, being gifted is just a side; it's just another thing that is going on in my life.

"You're really lucky." When Taye would go out of class to participate in a TAG program, sometimes his friends would say, "You're really lucky, 'cause you don't have to do all the boring stuff we do. You getta have fun." Taye did not feel so lucky. He

explained, “they—some thought I was lucky, ’cause they didn’t know that I would still have to do the work that they do.”

“Sometimes you can see they’re kind of jealous.” Zoela’s friends were not in TAG, and some of them were jealous of her.

> They’re not in there with me, but two of my best friends—they’re both straight-A students, but they have not been in any talented or gifted programs…. They’re always, like, “You’re in Honors [English]. How come I’m not in honors [English]? I get straight As too.” And sometimes you can see that they’re kind of jealous and stuff like that…. I think TAG is seeing something further than just grades…. Their straight As mostly come from them just turning in their work on time, and just doing it.

Zoela’s other friends were not influenced by her best friends’ jealous reactions and gave her some support about being in TAG. She said the following:

> When they were around my other friends hearing them saying stuff like that, they’re like, “Well, maybe there’s something that’s not in them that’s in you that’s making you be in TAG and be in honors and do stuff like that.”

“Mad” or “Irritated.” In middle school, when Amare would leave class for TAG, he felt that his friends would get mad or irritated.

> Well in sixth grade we actually liked to get out of the class, that’s what people—that’s what people did; but I actually like class, so when I got out of class my friends would get mad because I’m leaving class. But I

> actually, uh, didn't like to leave class…. Most of my friends they like to…go out of a class because most of the time they don't pay attention anyway.

Amare thought that rather than his friends being mad, they were irritated. "I wouldn't say really mad, I would just say like irritated. 'Cause its kind of—give me like low faces, but we always did…that in sixth grade."

"Came to be friends." When Amare participated in the robotics program, he made new friends. "The friends that I participated with were from sixth to eighth grade. They were people I didn't know, but that…I came to be friends with through that program."

"If he will go to TAG, then I will go to TAG." Talib's best friend was in TAG and has been an influence on Talib's participation in the TAG program. "I became his friend in third grade, and me and him…would hang out a lot…. I knew other people; I had other friends, but I got to know him better because we were both in TAG." Talib thought the math group would be fun, but the only reason he went was "because me and my friend…would be in it, and if he will…go to TAG, then I will go to TAG." When Talib and his best friend were in middle school, they continued participating in TAG, "but then we both didn't really go any more."

Social pressure. Social pressure on relationships ranged from putting schoolwork before parties to changing a perceived negative image; from getting along with everyone to noticing that their relationships were different between friends in TAG programs and friends not in TAG programs.

"Stay home and study." Some of Ashanti's friends got mad when she prefered to study rather than attend a social event.

> A couple of them really aren't too happy because they don't like it when like they're—they might be throwing a party and they might get mad because I say, "Oh I have to stay home and study for this," or, "I'm staying home and I'm going to read this book," or whatever.

Known as a "bragger." Sanaa felt that her friends in elementary school knew her as a "bragger, someone who was rude and mean." She decided to change her image when she came to middle school. "I learned to be nicer and actually let people talk to me instead of having me on my own choose the friends that I want."

"I'm just a people's person." There were other African American students besides Zoela in the TAG program. However, she explained as follows:

> We're not—well, we're not best, best friends, but yeah, it's someone that I'm friends with and get along with perfectly and things like that…. Why, I get along with everyone. I'm just a people's person…. I pretty much get along with everyone in there, and I know everyone…along the school.

"Separate my education from being popular." Being popular was important to Sanaa; however, she believed that her education was also important.

> I do want to be the number one person that everybody talks to, but yet I know how to separate my education from being popular. And I know that I can be popular just by having a good education and that I shouldn't get rid

> of and deny my education, because nobody will really want to talk to someone that just is not smart.

Relationships between TAG and non-TAG friends are different. Zoela, Talib and Sanaa noticed differences in the way they relate to their friends. According to Zoela, "Like in TAG, we're talking about math and all this, and then outside of it we're like talking about weekends and stuff like that."

Because the majority of Talib's friends were not in the TAG program, Talib felt that he was around "a whole bunch of people that…aren't that good at learning." But, when he was in TAG, he felt that he was around "a whole bunch of people that are good at learning."

Sanaa was selective about who she chose as friends. She explained that she was "friends with some people." According to Sanaa, "Some people in TAG I really don't know, or I really don't want to talk to them. I'm just friends with the people I'm friends with outside of [TAG] class."

Friends expect help with assignments. Five coresearchers were expected by their peers to help them with class assignments. Experiences ranged from helping others as a part of their friendship to feeling used because their peers wanted the work done for them.

"They don't try to use me." Minkah did not believe that anyone looked forward to doing homework, but if Minkah and his friends had homework, sometimes he would do it with them. He explained,

> Sometimes…one of my friends knows one of the answers that I don't get, and sometimes I know some of the answers that they don't get. So…it works out, 'cause then we could have all the answers even if…one of us didn't get it done one night….They don't just try to have me do everything for them…that has to do with work; they don't just have me try to do all the answers or anything. They still want to learn it, and so…even though they know I'm in TAG and that I participate in it, they just still…treat me as if I wasn't. But they treat me as if I wasn't because they know I'm smart…. But they don't just try to use me to get their work done fast so they can just play with…other people and just do what they want.

"I'm like a tutor." Sanaa believed that her friends accepted the fact that she was smart because she helped them with their schoolwork.

> They're pretty acceptive, because…if they have…a question on what we're doing during class, they ask me and I can help 'em out. So I'm like a tutor that is always around for them…. I am a part of their lives educationally and just being their friend, so it's like in school and out of school, no matter what, I am still there.

"They know the kind of work I do." Taye believed that his friends thought positively about him being gifted because they needed "someone that's their friend to help them out with their work…. They know the kind of work I do; how I always get it done faster and correct, so they ask for help so they can understand it." He helped them when he finished early with his work.

"I'm always like the first name that comes up." Zoela usually finished her work early and was the first one done in both math and Spanish. Because her friends knew that she was gifted, they, as well as other students in the class, asked her for help.

> Well in classes they're always coming to me for help and stuff, and like that's for like everyone in the class, they're just like, "Zoela, can you help me?" "Zoela, can you help me?" And I'm always, like the first name that comes up when they need help if the teacher's not available…. Sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes it's a bad thing because I'm just like everyone else, I have to get my work done too, at the same time. But, if I'm done already, um, I have no problem helping people out.

She figured that she spent about one fourth to one half of her time in class helping others.

"People choose me." Because Taye was gifted, people asked for his help. He remarked, "People choose me just because they know that I'm in TAG. People choose me for certain things that I could help them in."

"Slow down and I can help them." Ashanti often slowed down while doing her class work so she could help others in the classroom.

> Actually, I mean, I still get my work done, but I tend to work with other people. So, then I can actually…slow down and I can help them; I can explain it to them while I'm doing my work, too.

Friends "have actually tried to use me." Some of Ashanti's friends pressured her to help them with their schoolwork.

> A couple of them have actually tried to use me and like get me to do their work, and they really do get mad because I'll sit there and tell them that they should learn on their own. I mean I'll help them, but I won't do their work….Sometimes when I like tell them to learn on their own, they will get mad because, I mean, I tell them, "How can you learn if you don't try?" They'll just tell me like, "Oh, you're such a nerd, you don't want to help me. You must really not be my friend." And it's kind of hurtful when they use that against you like that.

Summary of Subquestion 3. Emergent themes generated from Subquestion 3 regarding perceptions about peer pressure included not feeling different, name-calling by jealous peers, the importance of being "cool," the relationship to TAG peers versus non-TAG peers, and helping peers with schoolwork.

Subquestion 4

Subquestion 4 was: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about being identified as talented or potentially talented? Themes generated from this question include the perception of feeling "normal" or like everybody else and that African American TAG students had more self-confidence knowing that others considered them gifted. In addition, female African American TAG students found themselves resisting the negative African American stereotype. Furthermore, some gifted African American students did not perceive others as "Black" or "White," but some wished there were "more like me" in the TAG program.

Normal. Minkah, Taye, Amare, and Sanaa felt that they were still "normal" regardless of being identified as talented or potentially talented.

"A normal, regular person." Even though Minkah was identified as gifted, he did not try to act smarter than others.

> I still feel the same. Like, even if I wasn't in a program, I would still feel the same, 'cause…maybe I was still gifted in a different area that they don't have TAG for, so I'd just still feel the same…. I don't go around and try to act like I'm smarter than everyone. I just act like a normal, regular person.

"Like any other kid." Taye felt "like any other kid in the school that's in TAG… I don't think that I'm different than anybody else 'cause I'm African American."

"Just like everybody else." According to Amare, being gifted "kind of makes me feel a little special, but I know that I'm just like everybody else…. I don't think that I'm different in the classroom." He believed that "everybody's gifted in their own way." He said, "I'm gifted in like sports and education; people are gifted in art, sports, stuff like that."

"It's just normal." Sanaa said, "TAG is just like…an extra class because…I already get good grades, so I know I'm going to be in TAG. It's just a matter of when and where, and it's just normal."

"I don't see anybody as Black or White." Although Amare was the only African American student in the robotics program, he did not feel that he was different from anybody else just because he was African American. "I honestly, I just don't feel

any different….I feel like…any other kid in the school that's in TAG." According to Amare, most of his friends were of different races. "I have Hispanic friends, Asian friends, African American friends, White friends. It doesn't really matter to me; I don't see anybody as Black or White, I just see them as…Sam or Mark, or just by that person."

"More kids like me." As a gifted student, Ashanti has felt awkward being the only African American in her gifted program.

> Sometimes it does feel kind of awkward because most of the time, like especially during sixth grade and seventh grade and this year, I've been like one of the only African Americans in the TAG program, but then I just think about it and it's like if you really enjoy something, you shouldn't care about the racial groups…. [The TAG students] have actually been pretty nice to me. And, I mean, it's not like I don't enjoy having them, I just wish there were more kids like me in TAG groups."

"Extraordinary things." Zoela expressed, "It feels really good knowing that you're gifted and capable of doing extraordinary things." In addition, Zoela realized that participating in a gifted program could be good "for future references…it would look good on a resume or something, saying that you were in, like, special programs."

"A better chance of going to college." Talib believed that being gifted would help him get into college. He explained, "Like I don't really feel any different…. Um, I don't know. I feel like I probably got a better chance of going to college than other people, and making it to college."

"A confidence boost." Ashanti felt confident and good about herself. She explained as follows:

> Having a confidence boost is basically from the teachers believing in me, some of my friends believing in me, my parents believing in me, and maybe just being identified as a special student. And…sometimes just knowing that people think that you're special like that, it just make[s] you feel really better about yourself.

Teachers "feel lucky." Taye believed that when teachers found out that he was gifted, "they feel lucky for themselves because it won't be as hard to teach a kid…. I think teachers…know that I'm smart and good in TAG, so…if they're teaching individuals, they don't have to…come around to me."

"Not just my mind." Sanaa was concerned about people knowing her for more than being gifted. She explained,

> My feelings are that I'm a nerd, basically. That's what I feel. I feel like I'm a nerd and I'm really, really smart. Known as gifted, I'm just like, "Okay, I'm gifted and there's more about me than just being smart." Being known as gifted, you're known as this smart kid; the one that pretty much understands what's going on in class and is getting good grades, but I really want to be known as my personality and who I am and what I am about, not just my mind.

African American stereotype. Sanaa, Zoela and Ashanti resisted negative stereotypes about African Americans. Pursuing their education as a gifted student was important to them.

"I'm not living up to the statistic." Sanaa explained as follows:

> To me, it feels like I'm not living up to the statistic that everybody else thinks that Black people aren't smart and they aren't like—they're just like really ghetto and they talk loud and everything like that. I want everyone to know that just because you're Black, you're still gifted. And being me, I'm representing my race in being organized and being smart and knowing when to be educational and just when to play around.

"Living the African American smart life." According to Sanaa, she and her parents agreed that a person can be smart and also fun and cool, and that there was a right time for each.

> Okay, we're doing this. We're living the African American smart life. We're not just being ghetto and being loud and not caring about the life of a smart person or an educated person or having an educated mind. We're also fun, we're also cool, but we're also educated and we know what time to do this and what time to do that.

"Not something they see every day." Zoela described being a gifted African American.

> …Something different, like how the students react and stuff. Like sometimes my other friends who aren't straight-A students and stuff like,

> they're not serious, but they play around like, "Oh, you're a nerd," and, I don't know, they just—it's just not something they see every day…. Most of us are just, I don't know, just not straight-A students, not really caring about our work. But, like I take mine seriously, very serious. It's just something that I want to do.

"Because you're Black." Zoela was the only African American student in her honors English class, which consisted mainly of TAG students. She often felt targeted because she was African American.

> Being the African American…in…my honors English class…, sometimes the topic of discussion leads back to me because there's something about being the only African American person or something. We'll get on that type of discussion and then like they'll start targeting me, not targeting like in a bad way, but they're like using me as an example and sometimes it makes me feel like, like—it doesn't make me mad or anything—but just because I'm African American doesn't mean that, I don't know, it's just complicated…. 'cause we were on the Holocaust subject, and we were going to be doing it all semester. And so we were talking about Germans or something, and like, I've seen African Americans say that they had German in them or something. And then we were saying something and I was like, "Why can't I be German?" And then she, the teacher, was doing a demonstration on how the Jews were treated, like if they looked German or something, and so I was, she made me sit down, like she was pointing

> to all the people who were…standing—she asked all of them, did they have German in them. And they all said, "Yeah." And that was her way of identifying them. And then I was like, "How come I can't be German?" And then one of the girls, she goes, "Because you're Black." And I'm like "Okay." And so, it's like sometimes how the topic of discussion goes.

"Just because they're African American." Ashanti believed that her friends did not understand what she got out of being gifted and how much work she and other TAG students put into their education. She was concerned about the lack of motivation for learning that she saw in many of her African American friends.

> It's like some of the kids that are like me at the school just think that just because they're African American that they don't have to try to be gifted….Like some of the African American students don't even try at school….They just think that something should be given to them, which I actually think is pretty wrong because nothing in life is going to be given to you. You have to work for everything that you want…. They just think, "Oh, I'm just going to get a bad grade or something, it doesn't really matter." And, I think that you should put, like, all your heart into it. Like, you should try to be the best that you can be…. I actually have tried to talk to them about it, and they actually…they do say that, "Oh, we'll try better." And most of my friends have…increased their grades, but they don't try to exceed, they just try to…meet the requirements…. I think [that's] because most of the people that they hang out with see people like

> me and like the other people on the TAG groups and just think, "Oh, those people are nerds and geeks and we don't want to hang out with them." And they don't see…all the hard work that we put into it, and they don't see what we get out of it.

Another reason Ashanti thought her friends did not try at school was because of studying slavery in class.

> Well, most of the time, we'll be studying in social studies about slaves and stuff, and they'll just get the idea, "Oh…maybe my ancestors were slaves, so I don't have to work for what I want." And I just think, "Yeah, you should," because it's not right for somebody to just give you something if they have to work for it, too.

Summary of Subquestion 4. Emergent themes generated for Subquestion 4 about being identified as gifted included the perception of feeling "normal" or like everybody else. Identified African American TAG students had more self-confidence. Female African American TAG students found themselves resisting the negative African American stereotype. Some gifted African American students did not perceive others as "Black" or "White," but others wished there were "more like me" in the TAG program.

Subquestion 5

Subquestion 5 was: How do perceptions about participation in gifted programs differ between talented and potentially talented African American male and female middle school students in Grades 6, 7, and 8? Themes generated from this question did not reveal marked differences in the perceptions about participation in gifted programs

between genders or between grade levels. However, perceptions differed in the way coresearchers viewed their participation experience. Some experiences were viewed positively and some negatively. Positive perceptions included programs that were challenging and fun and that provided opportunities to learn something new. Negative perceptions included having to do extra class work because of TAG participation or having to complete TAG work when it would not receive a grade. Negative perceptions also included reasons for dropping out of TAG, which included participation in sports, the importance of grades, and a lack of interest in TAG curriculum. Some perceptions about participation were both positive and negative and included being pulled out of class for TAG groups and the level of support provided by TAG facilitators. See Table 8 for a matrix of themes and a comparison of coresearchers' perceptions about participation.

Table 8

Perceptions About Participation

Themes	Positive	Negative	Gender	Grade Level	Participants
Challenging TAG program/easy and boring general education classroom	x		M	7	Minkah
	x		F	8	Ashanti
TAG program not challenging		x	M	8	Talib
		x	F	6	Sanaa
Accelerated work	x		M	7	Minkah
	x		F	8	Zoela
	x		M	8	Talib
	x		M	7	Taye
Keep everyone on the same pace		x	M	7	Taye
Higher level thinking	x		F	6	Sanaa

(*table continues*)

Themes	Positive	Negative	Gender	Grade Level	Participants
Fun	x		M	7	Taye
	x		F	8	Zoela
	x		M	8	Amare
	x		M	8	Talib
	x		F	8	Ashanti
Learn something new	x		F	8	Ashanti
	x		M	7	Minkah
	x		F	8	Zoela
Pull-out TAG groups	x		F	8	Zoela
	x		M	8	Amare
	x		M	7	Minkah
Pull-out TAG groups		x	M	7	Minkah
		x	F	6	Sanaa
		x	F	8	Ashanti
Lack of interest		x	F	8	Zoela
Too late to participate		x	F	8	Zoela
Extra class work or no grade for		x	M	7	Taye
TAG work		x	M	8	Talib
Drop out of TAG for sports		x	F	8	Zoela
		x	M	8	Amare
TAG facilitator support	x		M	7	Minkah
	x		M	7	Taye
	x		F	8	Ashanti
	x		M	8	Amare
TAG facilitator support		x	F	8	Zoela

Challenging TAG program/easy and boring general education classroom.

Minkah believed that participating in a TAG program was more challenging than work he received in the classroom.

> When I'm in TAG and they give me stuff that's harder to do…it'll help my mind, and so I won't just sit there and do all the easy stuff…. When I was in TAG last year for math…it was stuff that was challenging and like…learning new stuff at the same time.…It would tell us stuff…about science and then…we'd have to use our math problem to figure out an

> answer…. If I would not have been in TAG, then I still would have been in class, but I would have just had to keep doing stuff that was too easy.

When Ashanti began participating in TAG in middle school, she felt, "They challenged me and pushed me more." According to Ashanti, the thing that she liked the most about being in TAG was that it was challenging. She explained, "It's fun to be challenged, because with classes that are really, really easy…when you can get through with your work so fast you really just sit there and get bored while you're in the class." In contrast, Ashanti was bored in most of her elementary school classes. She explained as follows:

> I don't like being in a class that makes me feel like I'm going to get bored every 5 minutes because I'm already done with my work before the rest of the students.… That's how it was in elementary school before I got accepted into TAG; I…always got done with my work before everyone else. And it feels kinda awkward when you're done with all your stuff and then everyone's just looking at you.

TAG program not challenging. Talib and Sanaa did not experience challenging curriculum in their middle school TAG programs. In seventh grade, the math work in Talib's TAG group was "kind of [challenging, but] it wasn't really that hard…. We…got a sheet and it'd have a whole bunch of problems on it…. We try to figure it out…individually, but then we shared…what we got in a group."

When Sanaa began sixth grade at the middle school, she was chosen for a TAG program called Foundations for Success. During the group meetings, she "did activities

about reading and language arts and describing…main characters, doing worksheets." According to Sanaa, "It's not really challenging to me at all." In addition, she did not think she learned anything valuable during this program. If she had been given the opportunity to choose, she would not have chosen to participate in the Foundations for Success TAG program. "I didn't want to do anything this year. I just wanted to get used to the school."

Accelerated work. In kindergarten, Minkah had the opportunity to learn at an accelerated pace with some friends. He explained, "It was…me and some of my other friends, and…instead of learning how to do kindergarten stuff, we were learning…how to add and read."

Teachers first noticed that Zoela needed to learn at an accelerated rate when she was in kindergarten. "In kindergarten, during like reading time and stuff, they had to move me—they had to move me up with third graders, 'cause like reading's one of my strongest talents."

During fourth and fifth grade, Zoela participated in a math group that worked on accelerated math concepts from higher grade levels.

> In elementary we started working on division and stuff, division and multiplication, earlier that the other students. We started working on fractions, like harder fractions, um what fractions—the equivalent—and stuff like that; just like more advanced math than what…students our age were already doing.

When Talib began participating in the math group, he felt that above-grade-level work was more challenging than regular class work. “We’d be more like challenged…. It would be more like—not third grade math, but, like fourth or fifth grade math—junior high math, that kind of stuff.”

When Taye participated in a TAG math group, students worked on “math problems and reading problems that we were going to do in the future of that grade…earlier than everyone else…. We like, jumped ahead grades.”

“Keep everyone on the same pace.” During Taye’s regular math class when he got to the material he already knew, the teacher made him do the work again, even though he had already completed it in a TAG group. This made him bored. “I just got bored, but, just…I still did the work, but I got bored, since I already knew it.” Taye talked to his teachers about the fact that he already knew the material and sometimes he asked for something different to do.

> We had to do it, even though we knew it was just to keep everyone on the same pace. But, sometimes she—instead of doing some work—our teacher would give us more challenging work that was from TAG to do.

According to Taye, the challenging work that the teacher gave from TAG was “sometimes different math things that we’ve never learned before that are four grades ahead of us.”

Higher-level thinking. In Sanaa’s second grade math group, she worked on curriculum that called for higher-level thinking.

> It's like…for math, if…she [the TAG facilitator] will pull you out and give you a worksheet that was like a tic-tac-toe sheet, and…it would basically have the same problems that you were doing in Math, but it would be higher-level thinking…. I had to think more about what the questions were compared to in class, when I would just automatically know in a couple seconds.

TAG participation is fun. Taye, Zoela, Amare, Talib, and Ashanti thought participation in TAG was fun. According to Taye, "I think that it has been fun participating, 'cause I get to do…new things that are more challenging and with a lot of my friends."

Zoela described her participation in TAG programs every year from first through third grade.

> Well, it was fun. It was fun. It wasn't really a challenge, but it helped stretch my academic levels and help me to further it, and…it just got me up to where I needed to be instead of like in regular classes where like it's not really challenging to me.

Zoela was chosen to participate in the Battle of the Books TAG program in third grade.

> It seemed like it would be fun, 'cause, I don't know, I just like to read, and since the main concept of it was to read books and then discuss it, it was—um, I thought it was going to be kind of easy for me.… I guess it was,

> yeah, 'cause all you had to do is read, remember what you read, and then make a summary.

Amare discovered that, although he liked to work by himself, participating in a TAG group was fun because it was safe.

> The reason why I like to work by myself is because I always thought that people would negatively criticize you. But once I started the TAG program, then I found out that it's not always that bad to work with other people… I thought that it'd just be like a fun environment that, you know, I could be safe, you know, with my friends…. A safe environment, for me, would be like you can express your ideas and opinions without being negatively criticized…. As I worked through the robotics program, I began to…like working in a group more, just simply because we could express our opinions without anybody smashing them down.

Talib thought it was fun to get out of class for his third grade math group to play math games.

> It was like, fun because we got to like get out of class to go. And, I don't know, it helped me to learn a lot more than like, other people were learning. And we play like, a whole bunch of games.

Talib liked playing math games. He explained that "when you do regular math work, you got to do it on…a worksheet, and it wasn't really no fun to do it. But if you make a game out of it, it would make you…be more interested in it."

Learn something new. Ashanti, Minkah, and Zoela enjoyed participating in TAG because they felt they learned something new. According to Ashanti, learning something new was fun. She said, "I think that when you do National History Day, not only do you learn, but you actually figure out some stuff that you haven't known and you actually have fun doing it, because some of the stuff you may not be interested in until someone else like, actually gets you interested in [it]."

Minkah liked learning new things in TAG. "When I'm in TAG, I get to work on stuff that I wouldn't be able to work on in class, so I like doing that, too."

Zoela believed that TAG exposed her to new concepts. She said, "Sometimes it brought up new things that you wouldn't ordinarily think of just out of the blue."

Learning something new is preferable to getting straight A's. If Zoela had the choice between learning something new and getting straight A's, she would choose to "learn something new and don't get straight A's, 'cause that's sort of how it is now in honors English. Like I'm leaning new concepts and things like that; learning how to write different things that's for, like furthering in ninth and 10th grade and stuff like that, helping be better. 'Cause there's sometime I have a A and sometimes I have a B…. At least I'm learning."

Pull-out. Being pulled out of the regular classroom to participate in TAG enrichment activities was viewed both positively and negatively by coresearchers. In first grade, Zoela was pulled out of class to participate in TAG. "It was in a TAG group, and we'd meet in the library and do brain activities and stuff." She enjoyed the small-group

atmosphere. “[I was] happy because…there was only about…six to eight of us, so I thought that was special since I got to be in it out of the—such a little amount.”

Amare attended meetings with his robotics team at various times both during and after school.

> Depending on which program we were doing she [the TAG teacher] would pull us out of class, and that’s just for overviewing what we have done in the past week or so…. Then after school we would do the program itself, which is about maybe an hour.

Each year during elementary school, Minkah participated in a TAG group. “It was in a separate classroom. Like, it was down the hall, and usually I get pulled out during math class.” During middle school, Minkah was pulled out of class “for a shorter time…. Sometimes you’ll be in TAG for just first quarter and then not be in it for second quarter.” Sometimes Minkah did not like leaving class for a TAG group. He said, “Sometimes, like in class, we kinda be doing something fun, but then I have to leave out for TAG. Like, I remember one time we were having like, a party and I had to leave to go to TAG.”

Sanaa did not like being pulled out of class in middle school. She said, “To me, it’s a distraction, I guess…it was my goal to come here and really impress my teachers with high grades, and being out of class for a period really didn’t help me.”

There were some instances where Ashanti did not want to be pulled out of class to participate in TAG.

> I think it would be sometimes during certain classes I don't like to be pulled out, because I really like some of the classes. Like, I was really happy that I didn't get pulled out of science last year at all because we were doing some real fun things in there. It's like some of the subjects [that] I really enjoy, I don't like to get pulled out of the class.

TAG pullout makes some teachers mad, disappointed, or sad. Ashanti had classroom teachers who were not pleased when she left class to participate in a TAG group. "Some of my teachers might get mad when I leave." When asked how she knew her teachers were mad, she replied as follows:

> Teachers, like, I know in my gym class, they may tell me that, "Oh well, you're gonna miss this or miss that." And…if I tell them…that I really have to go, they'll say, "Okay, but you'll have to come in in the morning, and I'm really kind of disappointed in you that you have to leave." And then once I tell them what it's for, they may not be so disappointed, but I know that they told me they were disappointed because I won't be in the class.

In addition, Ashanti perceived that some teachers were sad when she was pulled out of the classroom for TAG.

> One of my favorite teachers that works here, she actually encourages me and she compliments me every day that I see her…. She's always kinda sad when I leave, because she says that I'm really—I'm like one of her

> best students, and she knows that I'm really, really smart, but she enjoys, like, me being in the class.

Lack of interest. In fifth grade, Zoela thought she might try Invent Iowa. However, she ended up dropping out. "First it was like interesting to me, and then I just wasn't interested anymore, and I didn't want to do it." During sixth grade she thought she would try it again. She gave the reason she decided to participate in 6th grade:

> They gave more information on it, and like, 'cause in fifth grade I didn't really have an idea of what we were doing. I thought we were just going to invent something and do this. But then in sixth grade they just gave a lot of information that made it sound like fun, as I thought it was going to be in the first place in fifth grade.

Had to drop out. Zoela chose to create her Invent Iowa invention with a partner, but that did not work out. "I was going—I was suppose[d] to do the Invent Iowa again, but my partner, she was one of my friends, she dropped out, and you had to have a partner for it, so I didn't get to do that one either"

Too late to participate. In seventh grade, Zoela was interested in participating in Mock Trial. However, when she was going to join the group, she was too late. "They had a cut-off date 'cause—like they were already ahead assigning things and stuff, so it would have been too late to join that." Zoela explained what happened.

> They announced it on the announcements like, Mock Trial stuff is coming up, and then I ended up being sick the week that they announced it, and then when I came back I had forgot all about it. And then, like I seen some

> kids leaving and I was like, "Where are you guys going?" and they said, "To Mock Trial," then I was like, "Oh, they started that?" They're like, "Yeah, but it's too late to join now."

Extra work. Taye and Talib did not like having to do extra work because of participating in a TAG group. Taye explained,

> We still have to do that [TAG] work and then she doesn't—the TAG teacher doesn't let us get out of the regular work that we do in regular classes…. Sometime[s] my work…gets doubled for homework, and it takes me longer to finish it, 'cause…I wasn't able to finish it during class.

Talib explained that during middle school he participated in the TAG program "for…a little bit."

> [Then I] just quit coming…. Every year they would call me down and tell me that I could be in it if I wanted to…. Usually at the beginning…for one meeting, I'd be in it. But, then after that, I wouldn't come anymore.

One reason for not coming to the meetings was that Talib "had to make up work [and] just really didn't have time to."

In contrast to Taye and Talib, Zoela did not mind the extra work and caught up on any she missed. As a result, her classroom teachers were supportive of her going to her TAG meetings. Zoela explained, "They don't really let it bother them or anything 'cause they already know that I'm in TAG. Like, they're not going to hold me back, because they know I'll catch up anyways; like for work and missing things."

TAG work is not graded. During sixth grade, Taye participated in Foundations for Success, a TAG program specifically designed for sixth graders. “It was fun, but I couldn’t do it a lot, ’cause it was interrupting one of my classes I was having a hard time in.” Taye was “running behind on some work” in his industrial tech class. “We weren’t doing our work fast enough in 1 day, so we’d get behind.” After about 2 days of getting behind, “I didn’t go there ’cause I had to go to Foundations, so I got more behind.” Taye’s parents advised him to stop going to the TAG program. “They told me, ‘Since Foundations isn’t that important, maybe you should stop going there and work more in industrial tech.’” Taye believed that his parents felt that industrial tech was more important than going to Foundations for Success as part of a TAG program because “it actually gets a grade.”

Because the TAG work did not receive a grade, when Taye participated in a TAG class, he did not take the work home to do it. “I just decided not to…. I do it during class, ’cause…sometimes in math class I get my work done before everyone else and then I’d start on my, TAG homework.” According to Taye, “The TAG work isn’t really required, [but] if you don’t do it, you could just get kicked out of TAG and go back to your regular classes.”

Drop out of TAG for sports. Participation in sports was more important to Zoela and Amare than participating in the TAG program. According to Zoela, “This year, I don’t know, it [the Mock Trial TAG program] just wasn’t like, one of my priorities, ’cause I’m in sports and things like that, and so it wasn’t one of my top priorities for this year.” Zoela explained further:

> ’Cause I’m a very active person. ’Cause I have a lot of different talents, some very active and I like to be active…. And, along with sports, like, I know I don’t have to worry about, like academics and keeping our grades up, because I know I’m already passing. And like, most students are sweating, like “Oh, I have to get my grades up”—like I don’t have to worry about that, ’cause I make sure all my work’s turned in.

For Amare, participation in the TAG robotics program was contingent on whether or not he could play after-school sports. “I chose the robotics program because in sixth grade we couldn’t do any [after school] sports, so I decided to participate in that program.” The sports program for sixth graders was held before school. “We could only do…it’s kind of like an elective—before school sport, kinda… It was pretty much, they just open the gym and you could…bring like basketballs, footballs, stuff like that.” Playing before-school sports conflicted with the robotics program “only a few times.” Amare was able to play before-school sports while he was participating in the robotics program. Participation in robotics and sports became a conflict when he was in seventh grade.

> Personally for me, I actually like the program that I was in. I participated in the…robotics competition, and it was a—it was really fun for me. But, I had to…drop out because I had—because I participated in sports.

TAG facilitator support. According to coresearchers’ experiences, TAG facilitators provided students with academic support as well as affective needs support. Minkah thought the best things about participating in TAG were meeting in a group and

being able to ask the TAG teacher a question. He explained, "Sometimes, like it started in a group, then it was still in a group, but like, if I had questions or something, I would ask her, and then the TAG teacher in there, she would answer me."

Taye felt that the most positive experience he had in TAG was "that we can talk to the TAG teacher about any problems we're having in our new challenges…. We don't…have to do them alone."

Ashanti felt her TAG teachers helped her to feel comfortable when she first began to participate in a TAG math group.

> When I first did it, I was kinda scared because, like, when you first get all the problems and stuff…you think that…you're gonna get them all wrong when you're first seeing them. But, after the TAG teacher just described it and stuff to me, you know, you get the concept and you kinda like wrap it around your head and get, "Oh, this is how you do things."

Ashanti thought the "TAG teacher was pretty nice…how she described the things…based on something that you would know.… She'd actually apply [new math concepts] to something…that you used every day in your life." In addition, Ashanti noticed how the TAG facilitators seemed to care about their students.

> The [TAG] teachers that I had, they…really got interested…They were always interested in…how the person was learning and stuff, and they were always interested in the progression of a person, so they always would help the students in the class…. I'd also like to add that like the TAG teachers, they don't just care about how you learn, they also care

> about you as a person, like they're always interested in your everyday life…. Most of the time when I would go to the class, the teacher would be like, "Oh, hi. How are you doing today." Um, "How was your weekend?" and they'd just ask you…about how things were going in your personal life…. Sometimes when I was really, really down and I didn't want to talk to most of my friends about it, I would tell the [TAG] teacher, because…the teachers that I have had, you can confide in them.

Ashanti described conflicts with being pulled out of the classroom for participation in a TAG group.

> The TAG teachers are really understanding when you ask them not to pull you out of a certain class.… Last year the TAG teacher said that…if you were doing something in that class that you really needed to do or that you really wanted to do, she wouldn't pull you out of it.

Amare's first and only experience in a TAG program was in sixth grade when he was invited by the TAG facilitator to participate in robotics. "[She] told me about the program, and she wanted me to, uh, be in the program…. It actually helped me with more computer skills that I could use on different software that they had."

No communication. Zoela didn't participate in any TAG activities in seventh grade.

> I don't know, last year I just wasn't interested in being in TAG. Well it wasn't that I wasn't interested, it was—it was like no one came and talked

to me about it or anything, so I really didn't know when to go into the meetings or anything like that. 'Cause at sixth grade they came to me.

However, Zoela actually went to talk to the TAG teacher a couple of times. "I've talked her—I talked to her a couple times last year and she didn't give me any dates or anything when they were meeting."

Summary of Subquestion 5. Emergent themes generated from Subquestion 5 regarding how perceptions about participation differed illustrated positive and negative perceptions. Positive perceptions included programs that were challenging and fun and that provided opportunities to learn something new. Negative perceptions included having to do extra class work because of TAG participation or having to complete TAG work when it would not receive a grade. In addition, negative perceptions included the reasons for dropping out of TAG, which included participation in sports, the importance of grades, and a lack of interest in TAG curriculum. Some perceptions about participation were both positive and negative, including being pulled out of class for TAG groups and the level of academic and affective support provided by TAG facilitators.

Evidence of Quality

This qualitative phenomenological doctoral study explored coresearchers' perceptions about participation in gifted programs. According to Richards (2009), the process of conducting a qualitative research study is valid, "because the steps you have taken were firm and sound and the logical progression from one stage to the next is well grounded, and we can see what those steps were" (p. 148). I attempted to take firm, sound

steps and use a well-grounded progression from one stage to the next. The steps as outlined in previous sections were as follows.

The first step in the process of data collection was to obtain permission for the study from the intermediate school principals and the school district where the study took place (see Appendices A and B). Next, a purposeful sample of seven participants was selected for the study with the help of TAG facilitators from two intermediate schools. After participants and their parents returned their signed assent and consent forms giving approval to take part in the study (see Appendices C and D), a Researcher's General Interview Guide was used for data collection during individual interviews (see Appendix F). Next, interviews were recorded and transcribed (see Appendix G for sample interview transcript). After the transcript was typed, data were analyzed and coded with the help of the NVivo 8 computer program. Following the analysis, a descriptive summary was written.

Member-checking is a method of establishing the validity and trustworthiness of a qualitative study. To obtain evidence of validity and trustworthiness, researchers engage in a conversation with the interviewee to make sure the written descriptive summary accurately reflects what was said during the interview (Humphrey, 1989; Hycner, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the final steps in the progression of this study were to (a) read the descriptive summary with the coresearchers during a follow-up interview so that member-checking could take place to insure accuracy of the data and (b) transcribe, code, analyze, and summarize the follow-

up interview. The above steps were followed carefully and provide evidence of the quality of this study.

Summary

From the analysis of interview data, several themes and subthemes emerged and were described in the Findings section. Out of those themes, several overarching themes developed. For the first subquestion, coresearchers expected participation in a TAG program to be (a) challenging, (b) boring, or (c) fun. For the second subquestion, coresearchers' learning interests were (a) hands-on activities, (b) the study of other cultures, especially the African culture and how other people live, (c) creativity without being judged, (d) above-grade-level work, (e) daily TAG class instead of weekly pull-out, (f) a career in a law profession. For the third subquestion, coresearchers' perceptions about peer pressure were (a) there is no difference between coresearchers and peers, (b) jealous peers are the name-callers, (c) the importance of being "cool," (d) relationships between TAG and non-TAG friends are different, and (e) non-TAG peers expect help with their school work. For the fourth subquestion, coresearchers' perceptions about being identified as gifted are: (a) normal, like everybody else; (b) have more confidence; (c) resistance to the African American stereotype, and (d) there's no "Black" or "White" versus wishing there were "more like me" in the TAG program. For the fifth subquestion, themes about participation in the gifted programs emerged with both positive and negative perceptions. Positive perceptions included (a) challenging curriculum, (b) TAG programs are fun, (c) opportunity to learn something new. Negative perceptions included (a) having to do extra work because of TAG participation or having to complete TAG

work when it would not receive a grade and (b) reasons for dropping out of the TAG program. Perceptions that were both positive and negative included (a) being pulled out of class for TAG groups and (b) the level of support provided by TAG facilitators.

Section 5 is a summary of the doctoral study and includes an overview, interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, a reflection of the research experience, and a conclusion.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview of the Study

As stated in previous sections, African American students are underrepresented in gifted programs in the United States. A review of the literature reveals that it is difficult to retain talented or potentially talented African American in gifted programs once they have been identified (Ford, 1994; Ford et al., 1997; Moore et al., 2006). TAG programs are designed to provide academic services that are appropriate for identified students' abilities and to meet their educational needs beyond what the general education program can accomplish (Gifted and Talented Children Defined, 2001). Identified talented or potentially talented African American students who drop out of gifted programs do not receive the educational services to which they are entitled. Literature that addresses the retention puzzle in gifted programs is limited. This research study was designed to explore the perceptions of African American middle school students about participation in or dropping out of gifted programs.

This interpretative qualitative phenomenological study explored the perceptions of seven identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students in Grades 6, 7, and 8. Phenomenology is a research design that seeks to discover the essence of a participant's experience through bracketing researcher bias and conducting interviews about a phenomenon (Hatch, 2002; Humphrey, 1989; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews, follow-up interviews, and member-checking were conducted with coresearchers at their individual schools in order to collect data that would examine the guiding research question: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially

talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? Topical subquestions for this study included (a) What are the expectations of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students toward gifted programming? (b) What are the curriculum programming interests of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students in gifted programs? (c) How do talented and potentially talented African American middle school students perceive peer pressure regarding their participation in gifted programs? (d) What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about being identified as talented or potentially talented? and (e) How do perceptions about participation in gifted programs differ between talented and potentially talented African American male and female middle school students in Grades 6, 7, and 8?

Individual interviews with coresearchers followed a general research guide. Probing questions were asked to bring forth in-depth data. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed as soon after the interview meeting as possible. The computer application NVivo 8 was used to help organize and code the interview data for analysis. A descriptive summary was written and taken back to each coresearcher for member-checking during a follow-up interview. Follow-up interviews were also digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The initial individual descriptive summaries were modified to include the newly acquired or clarified information.

During the analysis stage of this research study, several themes emerged as previously described in section 4. A brief summary of the findings includes the following:

- Expectations: Talented or potentially talented African American students expected TAG programs to be challenging, boring, or fun.
- Interests: Talented or potentially talented African American students are interested in learning through hands-on activities. They would like to study other cultures, particularly the African culture, and how other people live. They are creative but do not like to have their work judged by others. They are interested in doing above-grade-level work. A daily TAG class is preferred to a weekly pull-out group. A career in the field of law is a common goal.
- Peer pressure: Talented or potentially talented African American students do not feel that they are perceived or treated differently by their peers. Name-calling by peers tends to indicate jealousy. It is important to appear "cool" among peers. There are differences between relating to TAG friends and non-TAG friends. Peers expect help with school work from gifted African American classmates.
- Being identified as gifted: Talented or potentially talented African American male students perceive that they are "normal," like everybody else, and they do not see others as "Black or White." Talented or potentially talented African American female students resist conforming to the negative African American stereotype and wish there were "more like me" in the TAG program.
- Differences in perceptions about participation in gifted programs: Talented or potentially talented African American students perceived participation in

gifted programs in positive or negative ways. Patterns showing differences about participation were not evident between gender or grade levels.

Details explaining how each of the themes answers the research question are described in the following section.

Interpretation of Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the perceptions of coresearchers regarding participating in or dropping out of gifted programs. The guiding question for this research study asked: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs? Prior to interpreting the unique experiences of an individual, a researcher should recognize and set aside any personal bias and beliefs, also known as *epoche* (Fade, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). According to Hycner (1985), "The phenomenological researcher's primary thrust is to understand, and as much as possible not to interpret according to some already developed theory" (p. 300). The conceptual framework presented in the literature review in section 2 provides the foundation for understanding and interpreting the findings. The results are indicated below and are presented as answers to each subquestion.

Subquestion 1

Subquestion 1 was: What are the expectations of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students toward gifted programming? The results for this question indicate that the participants' expectations towards TAG programs were often different from what they actually experienced. Overall, participants expected the

gifted program to be challenging; that the work would be harder than in the regular classroom and that they would be pushed to attain a higher level than other students did. They thought it would be fun to have more difficult and challenging work to do and felt that they would be "safe" in an environment where they could "express…ideas and opinions without being negatively criticized" (Amare). They expected to go on field trips because, according to Taye, "We…know everything." They expected the TAG program would be boring if all they had to do was "more work" (Talib).

Coresearchers found that when they initially participated in TAG programs, they were often disappointed that their expectations were not met. Zoela related, "They [TAG facilitators] had us just doing things that's a little bit above like the average student." Ashanti related, "After a while, it just seemed to be easier every day." In addition, Ashanti said, "The teacher actually didn't challenge me as much as I wanted to be challenged."

According to the literature presented in section 2, appropriate curricula should be developed to meet the academic needs of gifted students with consideration for a student's cultural background (Renzulli et al., 2002; Sternberg, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 2004). However, teachers often lack appropriate preparation for working with African American students (Thompson, 2004). Teacher preparation that combines training in gifted education with teaching strategies that are responsive to the culture of the African American learner would enable the educator "to provide an academically rigorous and culturally relevant education" (Ford & Harris, 1999, p. 48).

Subquestion 2

Subquestion 2 was: What are the curriculum programming interests of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students in gifted programs? The results for this question indicate that African American TAG students would be more likely to participate in gifted programs if the curriculum topics and instructional methods were interesting, culturally relevant, and appropriately challenging. Literature promoting the use of culturally relevant curricula for African American students supports this conclusion. Milner and Ford (2005) suggest that when planning curricula, educators should consider a student's race or culture. In addition, differentiated curricula designed to allow students to explore histories and events from their own cultural background can help promote a positive identity (Baldwin, 2002; Wilson, 1991). In contrast, students may "resist" when the curriculum is "disconnected" from their cultural background (Tatum, 2005).

The findings in section 4 reveal that African American TAG students prefer to learn through "hands-on" activities and by "doing it," experiencing it, or figuring it out on their own. For example, Taye did not perceive that the TAG program offered hands-on learning activities; however, Amare chose a TAG robotics program "because I could…use my hands a lot." In addition, the findings provided evidence that African American TAG students are interested in studying other cultures, especially the African culture. They would like to learn how people in other cultures live so they "can understand all of their problems" (Ashanti). They want to compare the lives of Africans in Africa with their own lives. When they have the opportunity to see how Africans live,

they identify with some of the problems the Africans face. In addition, by studying the African culture, they "see how spoiled we are in the United States" (Zoela).

According to Van Tassel-Baska (2004), "Learning should provide 'a basic diet, but also favorite foods'" (p. 171). The findings show that African American TAG students are interested in programs that promote creativity such as inventing and creating a game or product. In addition, they are interested in creative writing and poetry. However, they are sensitive about the work they create and do not want to have it judged or criticized by others. Many of the TAG programs in the RCSD involve competition. Invent Iowa is one program that several coresearchers participated in and dropped out of. The judging process was not perceived favorably by Minkah because he did not think the judging was fair. "What's useful to me might not be useful to the people that are judging it" (Minkah). Ashanti showed her sensitive side about criticism and judging concerning creative writing when she conveyed, "Writing helps you express your feelings.… You can't get criticized because it's your feelings. Nobody can actually judge you. They can't tell you that it's wrong or right." An environment full of criticism does not feel safe to Amare. The thing he liked the most about participating in the TAG robotics program was that he felt safe because he could "express…ideas and opinions without being negatively criticized."

The findings also reveal that African American students are interested in participation in TAG programs when the curriculum is at an appropriate level for their abilities. Evidence from interviews suggests coresearchers prefer challenging work that is above grade level in their areas of strength. Renzulli et al., (2002) and Sternberg and

Grigorenko (2004) conducted studies that support this finding. They suggested that appropriate culturally relevant programming should benefit students by making use of their strengths. During the study, I asked participants to design a TAG program in which they would like to participate. Each individual thought about how he or she learns best and about the subjects in which he or she excels. This question revealed the following program designs: (a) prototype invention and design without being judged; (b) creative writing without being judged; (c) interesting conversations about relevant topics that would engage students "instead of just sitting in class and waiting until it's time to go" (Sanaa); (d) taking weekly field trips; (e) a variety of challenges that would provide learning for gifted students all day; (f) sports in a sports complex "to identify your best sport" (Amare); and (g) above-grade-level curriculum. The common element in most of these program designs had to do with students' concern and dislike regarding pull-out TAG programs. They desired a challenging and interesting curriculum that would take place as a class during the entire school day as summed up in Zoela's remark, "Because some students want to be challenged all day, not just for a little bit of time throughout the day." Ashanti suggested an alternative to a daily class so that students could meet "in the morning or after school." She felt that the TAG program should "see what times best work for them, and then try to work around their schedule."

During the interviews, coresearchers were asked what they thought would be a suitable career. I asked this probing question in order to examine the ultimate learning interest related to their lifelong goals. As discussed in section 2, fewer Blacks than Whites received doctoral degrees in higher education (Hoffer et al., 2007) which

demonstrates that underrepresentation of gifted African Americans continues from elementary through graduate school. Six coresearchers said that they had goals and aspirations of obtaining a career through higher education, but one coresearcher did not yet know what he would like to pursue. The findings disclose career goals that include becoming a lawyer, a secret agent, an owner of a law firm, and a writer for a magazine. In order to attain these goals, they will need to earn degrees from higher education institutions. When identified African American students do not remain in gifted programs, they do not benefit from the services to which they are entitled. The purpose of TAG programs and services is to provide enrichment and higher level learning experiences that will help individual gifted students reach their academic goals.

Subquestion 3

Subquestion 3 was: How do talented and potentially talented African American middle school students perceive peer pressure regarding their participation in gifted programs? The results for this question indicate that talented and potentially talented African American middle school students experience peer pressure about participating in gifted programs in the following ways: (a) the jealousy of some peers; (b) the need to separate education from being popular; (c) the expectations of peers who want help with class work.

Talented or potentially talented African Americans perceive that they are accepted by their peers and are not treated differently just because they are identified as "gifted." However, when their peers called them names like "nerd, geek, smart-aleck, or smarty" (Ashanti), the perception was that their peers were jealous. This perception of jealousy

demonstrates that there is, in fact, peer pressure because, “it gets to the point where it’s hard to ignore” (Ashanti). The frustration then becomes the feeling of needing to have “permission to act this smart” (Ashanti) or the longing to appear “cool” (Sanaa). Sanaa even went out of her way to make sure her peers were not jealous by telling them “even though I’m gifted, it doesn’t mean anything…I’m just like you; we’re cool, we’re best friends, we hang out…being gifted is just a side; it’s just another thing that is going on in my life.” This form of peer pressure has its roots in the concept of ethnic identity where members of an ethnic group have an understanding about their relationships with each other based on commonalities in their historical background and culture (King, 2002; Ogbu, 2004; Phinney et al., 1994; Worrell, 2007). For gifted African American students, breaking away from the expectations of the ethnic group to pursue academic excellence poses the risk of losing their ethnic identity or sense of belonging to the group (Worrell, 2007).

Another example of peer pressure is the concept that African American TAG students need to switch back and forth between being academic and being social. Sanaa conveyed this concept when she said, “I know how to separate my education from being popular.” Other participants perceived a similar notion of separation by the way they related differently to peers in the TAG program and peers who were not in the TAG program. “Like in TAG, we’re talking about math and all this, and then outside of it we’re like talking about weekends and stuff like that” (Zoela).

Finally, evidence of peer pressure faced by gifted African American students is found when they receive acceptance from peers in exchange for providing help with class

assignments. “They’re pretty acceptive, because…if they have...a question on what we’re doing during class, they ask me and I can help ’em out” (Sanaa). With regard to helping others with their work, Minkah said, “Even though they know I’m in TAG and that I participate in it, they just still…treat me as if I wasn’t. But they treat me as if I wasn’t because they know I’m smart.” In addition, the reason Taye perceived his friends thought positively about him was because “they know the kind of work I do; how I always get it done faster and correct, so they ask for help so they can understand it.” Helping others makes African American TAG students feel good about themselves. “People choose me just because they know that I’m in TAG. People choose me for certain things that I could help them in” (Taye). However, the time spent helping peers rather than learning challenging curriculum that meets their academic needs can be detrimental to African American TAG students because they are not using their time in school for their own academic growth. According to Zoela, she spends from one fourth to one half of her class time helping others. Ashanti slows down on purpose in order to help others. She said, “I can actually…slow down and I can help them.” Renzulli et al., (2002) stressed the importance of providing appropriate curricula for gifted students. Appropriate curricula should include instructional material that challenges gifted students at their ability level. By providing appropriate TAG curricula in the classroom or in a pull-out group, gifted African American students would participate in challenging new learning opportunities which would relieve them from being the role of co-teachers in the classroom.

Subquestion 4

Subquestion 4 was: What are the perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about being identified as talented or potentially talented? The results for this question indicate that talented and potentially talented African American students feel comfortable being identified as gifted but take steps to avoid the appearance of acting White and to resist being identified with the stereotype of acting Black. In addition, the study revealed the need of female African American TAG students to have African Americans in TAG programs in order to maintain their sense of belonging and ethnic identity connection.

Talented and potentially talented African American students feel more self-confident when other people know they are gifted. They realize that they may have a "better chance of going to college than other people" (Talib) and are "capable of doing extraordinary things" (Zoela). "It just makes you feel really better about yourself" (Ashanti). Amare also felt "special" because he was gifted; however, he also perceived that he was "just like everybody else." The importance of being perceived as "normal," "the same," and "no different" is a theme that was expressed by several coresearchers, especially among male participants. "I don't go around and try to act like I'm smarter than everyone. I just act like a normal, regular person" (Minkah). The literature suggests that African American students who perform well academically are perceived as acting White, which correlates to being snobbish and conceited, and is therefore unpopular with peers (Ford et al., 2008). Although African American TAG students perceive that being gifted is something positive, the results of this doctoral study indicate that they

intentionally behave in a manner that gives the appearance of being the same as everyone else. Peer pressure exists because African American students do not want to be seen as different just because they are gifted.

The results for this question also indicate that talented or potentially talented African American students make a definite choice against acting Black, which is associated with underachievement and negative social behavior (Ford & Harris, 1997; Ford et al., 2008; Lindstrom & San Vant, 1986; Ogbu, 2004; Thompson, 2004). The concept of resisting the negative African American stereotype or acting Black is a theme that surfaced particularly among female participants. To live "the African American smart life" (Sanaa) is to resist acting Black. Sanaa illustrated this concept with her revealing statement.

> I'm not living up to the statistic that everybody else thinks that Black people aren't smart and…they're just like really ghetto and they talk loud and everything like that. I want everyone to know that just because you're Black, you're still gifted.

Zoela also experienced resistance to acting Black, as seen in her statement, "Most of us are just…not straight-A students, not really caring about our work. But, like I take mine seriously, very serious. It's just something that I want to do."

The final result for this question reveals that gifted African American male participants felt comfortable being the only African American in a TAG program because they had friends outside of the program who were from other racial groups. "I have Hispanic friends, Asian friends, African American friends, White friends. It doesn't

really matter to me; I don't see anybody as Black or White" (Amare). In contrast, female students had more difficulty with being the only African American in TAG programs. "Sometimes it does feel kind of awkward because most of the time...I've been like one of the only African Americans in the TAG program.… I just wish there were more kids like me in TAG groups" (Ashanti). In addition, another female student felt like she was targeted in her class because she was the only African American TAG student. " Being the African American…in…my honors English class…sometimes the topic of discussion leads back to me because there's something about being the only African American person…it's complicated" (Zoela). Ashanti's awkward feeling and Zoela's perception of being targeted demonstrates the importance of a student's ethnic identity and need for a sense of belonging that are inherent in the cultural values of African Americans (King, 2002; Ogbu, 2004; Phinney et al., 1994; Worrell, 2007).

Subquestion 5

Subquestion 5 was: How do perceptions about participation in gifted programs differ between talented and potentially talented African American male and female middle school students in grades six, seven, and eight? The results of this question did not reveal themes or patterns related to differences in the perceptions about participation in gifted programs between gender and grade level. Instead, the results indicate that perceptions differ among all seven coresearchers about participation experiences that were either positive or negative. Positive themes point to experiences in TAG programs that were more likely to retain talented or potentially talented African American students.

Negative themes point to experiences in TAG programs that would cause African American TAG students to drop out of a program or decline to participate.

TAG programs that are challenging and fun and that provide opportunities to learn something new were common positive themes that emerged among both genders in all three grade levels. Multiple comments from coresearchers provide evidence that African American TAG students crave challenging, above-grade-level work and appreciate the opportunity to participate in a program that challenges them. Van Tassel-Baska (2004) suggested that gifted children have the ability to learn "at least twice as fast as typical learners" (p. 170). Minkah expressed his desire for challenging curriculum when he said the following:

> When I'm in TAG and they give me stuff that's harder to do…it'll help my mind, and so I won't just sit there and do all the easy stuff…If I would not have been in TAG, then I still would have been in class, but I would have just had to keep doing stuff that was too easy (Minkah).

African American TAG students are more likely to participate in a TAG program that is challenging, because they consider challenges to be fun. It provides a much-needed relief from sitting in a classroom where they are bored because the curriculum is not meeting their academic needs. "It's fun to be challenged, because with classes that are really, really easy…when you can get through your work so fast, you really just sit there and get bored while you're in the class" (Ashanti). Conversely, when the TAG program is not challenging or interesting, the perception about participation is negative, and African American TAG students are not motivated to participate. "First it was like interesting to

me, and then I just wasn't interested anymore and I didn't want to do it" (Zoela). In addition, Sanaa did not think she learned anything valuable during one of her TAG programs and wished she was not a participant. She remarked, "It's not really challenging to me at all."

Meaningful curricula that are carefully designed to address the unique attributes of individuals and cultural groups and provide for their academic and affective needs are more likely to motivate students to engage in learning (VanTassel-Baska, 2004). The attraction of a high-level, challenging, fun curriculum is particularly high because it provides an opportunity to learn something new. Ashanti stated, "Not only do you learn, but you actually figure out some stuff that you haven't known and you actually have fun doing it." Learning something new in a challenging class or small group is more desirable than getting straight A's in a class where the curriculum is too easy, because as Zoela observed, "At least I'm learning."

A negative concern voiced by coresearchers was that teachers and TAG facilitators require TAG students to complete more academic work than non-TAG students who stay in the regular classroom. This negative perception is particularly evident when TAG students are pulled out of class to participate in a TAG program, because they not only have to complete the TAG work that does not receive a grade, they are also required to complete work that they miss when they are out of class doing the above-level, challenging TAG work. Taye explained it this way:

> We still have to do that [TAG] work and then…the TAG teacher doesn't let us get out of the regular work that we do in regular classes….

> Sometime[s] my work…gets doubled for homework, and it takes me longer to finish it, 'cause…I wasn't able to finish it during class."

Similarly, Talib had to make up work when he participated a few times in his TAG program, so he decided to drop out. He explained that he "had to make up work [and] just really didn't have time to." In addition, students do not usually receive grades for the work they do in a TAG pull-out program, so it is common for African American TAG students to drop out if they are behind in a regular education class because it "actually gets a grade" (Taye).

The results of this question also suggest that some identified African American students drop out of TAG programs because they give participation in sports a higher priority than participation in TAG. For example, Amare enjoyed his participation in a robotics program but ended up dropping out. He remarked, "It was really fun for me. But, I had to…drop out because I…participated in sports." The literature in section 2 addresses this attitude with a study by Kunjufu (2006) who determined that African American students do not necessarily equate a good education with success but are often drawn to sports and other noneducational pursuits. The way to overcome that problem, according to Kunjufu, is to provide opportunities for the exploration of a variety of subjects that could lead to successful careers.

The results of this question also indicate positive and negative perceptions about being pulled out of the regular classroom to participate in a TAG program. Positive perceptions imply that talented or potentially talented African Americans feel special when they are included in a small group of high-ability students. "[I was] happy

because…there was only about six to eight of us, so I thought that was special since I got to be in it out of the—such a little amount" (Zoela). Conversely, negative perceptions signify that some African American TAG students do not like leaving the class to participate in a TAG group. An example of this attitude was "During certain classes I don't like to be pulled out, because I really like some of the classes" (Ashanti). In addition, Sanaa expressed, "To me, it's a distraction, I guess.… It was my goal to come here and really impress my teachers with high grades, and being out of class for a period really didn't help me." It is important to understand students' perceptions about being pulled out of class, because the evidence throughout this study demonstrates that African American TAG students are more inclined to participate in a TAG program that meets their academic needs and provides an interesting and challenging curriculum. However, the evidence also shows that TAG students would rather stay in their regular class than be pulled out for a gifted program if the regular class is interesting and fun.

Finally, the results of this question revealed that African American TAG students perceive the TAG facilitator as a positive or negative influence with regard to the students' participation in TAG programs. Thompson (2004) asserted in section 2 that a large number of teachers are "underprepared to work effectively" with African American students (p. 4). TAG facilitators could serve identified African American students more effectively if teacher training included sensitivity to students' cultural background. TAG facilitators who are sensitive to the African American culture provide an educational environment that effectively meets their "academic, social-emotional, and psychological needs" (Ford & Harris, 1999, p. 163). Zoela's negative experience with her TAG

facilitator revealed that an identified African American student loses interest in participating in TAG programs when the TAG facilitator is underprepared and lacks sensitivity to his or her needs as seen in her statement.

> Last year I just wasn't interested in being in TAG. Well, it wasn't that I wasn't interested, it was…like no one came and talked to me about it or anything…. I talked to her a couple times last year and she didn't give me any dates or anything when they were meeting.

In contrast, Ashanti's positive experience with her TAG facilitator led her to the following perception: "The TAG teachers, they don't just care about how you learn, they also care about you as a person, like they're always interested in your everyday life."

In summary, coresearchers' positive or negative perceptions about participation in gifted programs indicate that African American TAG students make choices to participate in or drop out of gifted programs based on whether the program or program delivery is relevant, meaningful, appropriately challenging, and sensitive to students' diverse needs.

Implications for Social Change

As stated in section 1, there is an inadequate body of literature available regarding the retention of African American students in gifted programs. This study's significant contribution to the literature has implications for positive social change because it brings to light real-life experiences, expectations, and attitudes that are at the root of the retention puzzle. TAG programs exist to provide educational experiences and opportunities above and beyond those provided by the regular classroom. Talented and

potentially talented African American students should have the opportunity to learn new information and concepts every day. African American students should not have to feel bored because their class work or TAG programs are not appropriately challenging. In addition, African American students need opportunities to study educational content that is culturally relevant. Education becomes fun rather than boring for African American students when they are engaged in meaningful hands-on learning. To serve talented and potentially talented African American students adequately in the regular classroom and in gifted programs, classroom teachers and TAG facilitators need training to become culturally sensitive to the academic and affective needs of African Americans.

School administrators are responsible for educational policies and procedures at the district level as well as individual schools. Programs for gifted students need the support of administrators. This study provides information that is important for administrators to understand as they develop and improve educational policies in their schools. Leaders are instrumental in creating positive learning environments for students and teachers. If administrators would learn how African American TAG students feel about their education—that they have the desire to "live the African American smart life"—and if administrators could understand the obstacles African Americans have to overcome regarding the negative stereotype of acting "ghetto" and not wanting to appear smart, they would take action to make positive social change to address these issues within their learning communities.

When administrators, TAG facilitators, and classroom teachers begin to understand the issues influencing the rate of retention from students' perspectives, as

presented in section 4 of this study, they may work together to develop and implement culturally relevant changes. These changes could result in an increase in participation and representation of African Americans in gifted programs. An increased number of identified African American students would then receive the gifted services to which they are entitled. Local communities, states, and the nation at large would benefit from the gifts and talents developed in African Americans through gifted programs. This doctoral study's ultimate implication for social change is that it promotes social justice in education for African Americans.

Recommendations for Action

The conclusions of this study indicate three recommendations that could improve retention rates for African Americans in gifted programs. These recommendations include (a) revising policies regarding gifted program delivery, (b) providing teacher training with an emphasis on African American cultural sensitivity, and (c) promoting a positive perception about "acting smart" among African American students.

The first recommendation is that administrators including superintendents, coordinators of gifted programs, and school principals should work together to develop or revise policies regarding pulling students out of class for TAG programs and/or providing gifted services in the classroom with appropriate and challenging curricula. The results of this study imply that TAG programs for African American students should take place in designated TAG classes where the work is hands-on, the curriculum is culturally relevant and academically challenging, and the assignments are graded. If TAG programs continue to include pullout groups, African American students should not be penalized

for their participation by being required to complete extra work or work that is not graded. It is important that administrators resolve and support these issues through clear policies so that TAG facilitators and teachers are able to implement program delivery without conflict and so that African American TAG students are inclined to participate without dropping out.

The second recommendation is for administrators to provide teacher training for both TAG facilitators and classroom teachers in order to develop cultural sensitivity toward the African American ethnic group and to prepare teachers to work effectively with African American students. This training would also equip TAG facilitators to develop academically appropriate and culturally relevant TAG curriculum for gifted and potentially gifted African American students.

The final recommendation is to develop a district-wide campaign to promote "living the African American smart life" (Sanaa) among the student population. This campaign could change perceptions, paradigms, and stereotypes about what it means to act smart. The goal of such a campaign would be to change the perceptions about being smart from the negative acting White to the positive "cool to be Black and smart." This could create a fun school environment where acting Black would also be associated with acting smart and would be desirable for all African American students, thus creating a new dimension to ethnic identity within the peer group.

The results of this study could benefit administrators, TAG facilitators, classroom teachers, and gifted or potentially gifted African American students. Those who are responsible for gifted program delivery should have access to the information in this

study so that improvements are developed and implemented. Therefore, dissemination of this doctoral study will include the equity administrator and the TAG coordinator in the RCSD. In addition, presenting the study at the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association conference would be an avenue of dissemination for administrators and TAG facilitators from the state of Iowa. Similarly, information from the study could reach members of the National Association of Gifted Children through a presentation at their annual conference.

Recommendations for Further Study

This phenomenological study explored the perceptions of identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs. This study provides insight into pieces of the retention puzzle through the expectations, experiences, and attitudes of students who have participated and remained in or participated and dropped out of gifted programs. Because of this research, recommendations for future study have emerged involving parents, teachers, and high school administrators in order to examine the issues comprising the retention puzzle beyond what this study has revealed.

Parents of talented or potentially talented African American students are influential in the academic success of their children. Questions for parents that could shed light on the retention puzzle include: (a) What are African American parents' perceptions about their child's participation in gifted programs? (b) How do African American parents support their child's participation in gifted programs? (c) What do African American parents know about gifted programs and services? (d) How does the

educational level of African American parents influence the academic success of talented or potentially talented gifted children? and (e) What are African American parents' hopes and expectations for their gifted child's academic future?

Classroom teachers are also influential in the academic success of talented or potentially talented African American students. Questions for classroom teachers that could shed light on the retention puzzle include: (a) What are classroom teachers' perceptions of providing differentiated curricula for talented or potentially talented African American students in their classroom? (b) How do classroom teachers perceive collaboration with TAG facilitators in order to provide gifted services for identified African America students in the classroom or in a pullout group? (c) How are classroom teachers prepared to work with culturally diverse students? and (d) How does teacher training regarding cultural sensitivity affect the quality of differentiation provided to talented or potentially talented African American students in the classroom?

High school administrators are influential in the academic success and future of talented or potentially talented African American students. Questions for high school administrators include: (a) What policies and provisions are established by administrators at the high school level to encourage talented or potentially talented African American students to pursue their academic potential? (b) What support is given to TAG facilitators at the high school for providing gifted services to talented or potentially talented African American students? and (c) What is the perception of high school administrators about support and encouragement given to talented or potentially talented African American students regarding the application to colleges or universities?

The findings of these qualitative phenomenological studies involving parents, teachers, and high school administrators could reveal important pieces of the retention puzzle that bring African Americans closer to positive social change and social justice in education. As a result, the African American community as well as the community at large will benefit from changes in gifted programs that promote the successful educational experiences and pursuits of talented and potentially talented African American students.

Reflections

Because of my previous employment as a facilitator of gifted programs, I set aside my personal biases and opinions about gifted education policies, teacher training, and participation by gifted or potentially gifted African American students prior to conducting the study. Setting aside biases and opinions was particularly important because I am a White researcher conducting research with African American coresearchers. Prior to conducting interviews for this phenomenological study, I immersed myself in the research literature with the intent of becoming sensitive to the cultural issues surrounding the education of African Americans as reported by African American researchers. I found that I was ignorant of many issues that African Americans face in life and in their educational pursuits. I was deeply moved by reading the literature and discovering the issues.

During the interviews, I asked questions of participants while refraining from responding to their answers in the same manner I might have responded to my own students. My intention was not to influence coresearchers' responses by my reaction to

their answers. Although I attempted to set a comfortable atmosphere during the interviews, coresearchers may have felt uncomfortable discussing how they felt regarding African American cultural issues with me as a White researcher and previous TAG facilitator. However, because coresearchers understood that their responses could benefit other talented or potentially talented African Americans, I am confident that they voiced their true perceptions during the interviews.

As a result of this study, I more thoroughly understand the issues African Americans face regarding the pursuit of academic excellence and how that pursuit often conflicts with their ethnic identity. The following interview response most affected my understanding:

> We're living the African American smart life. We're not just being ghetto and being loud and not caring about the life of a smart person or an educated person or having an educated mind. We're also fun, we're also cool, but we're also educated and we know what time to do this and what time to do that (Sanaa).

This statement captures the struggle, the desire, and the determination of gifted African Americans to reach their academic potential without losing their ethnic identity. This young woman and her family determined that it is positive to be African American and smart, and that being smart does not mean they have to lose acceptance among peers within their ethnic group. By knowing how to switch from acting smart to acting fun and cool, they bring both concepts together in who they are. They maintain their acceptance in the group while allowing their intelligence to grow as they pursue their academic

potential. I believe that “living the African American smart life” is a powerful phrase and concept that should be promoted in schools among African American students and their families on a national level.

Conclusion

Positive social change in education for talented and potentially talented African Americans is possible if educators make an effort to understand students’ perceptions about participation in gifted education programs. This study contributes to the limited literature about the retention puzzle by providing insights into expectations, learning interests, attitudes, and experiences as expressed in phenomenological interviews by talented and potentially talented African American middle school students. Additional studies with parents and those who are responsible for providing gifted services could provide new insights into the retention puzzle. The results of the study suggest recommendations that could change gifted programs so that the curriculum and program delivery will be more culturally relevant. The ultimate benefit of this doctoral research study is the promotion of social justice for African Americans in gifted education.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation from the Principal

Jenelle Nisly
Walden University Doctoral Student
(address)

July 18, 2009

Dear Ms. Nisly,

Based on my review of your doctoral research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled "The Perceptions of African American Middle School Students about Participation in Gifted Programs: A Qualitative Study to Promote Social Justice in Gifted Education" within (name) Intermediate School. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite identified talented and potentially talented African American students who attend (name) Intermediate School to participate in the study. Student participants' names and contact information will be provided by the talented and gifted facilitator, (name). Students' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

(Typed Name), Principal
(Name) Intermediate School
(address)

Appendix B: District Letter of Cooperation

August 3, 2009

Ms. Jenelle Nisly
(Address)

Dear Jenelle:

It is my pleasure to inform you that your research request, ***The Perceptions of African American Middle School Students about Participation in Gifted Programs: A Qualitative Study to Promote Social Justice in Gifted Education*** dated March 2009, has been approved by the (name of school district.) As outlined in the District's Research and Survey Approval Procedures 2007-2008, all participation in this study will be voluntary and procedures will be followed to ensure confidentiality of student data.

In review of your research request and recent revisions, I understand:

- Students at (the first) Intermediate School, (the second) Intermediate School, and possibly (the third Intermediate School) will be interviewed for this project, approximately six to eight students.
- The TAG Facilitators at the three buildings will provide names of students who meet the criteria of this project.
- Student participation in the survey is voluntary. A parent consent form must be signed before any student can participate in the project. This form, along with a cover letter, will be given to students to take home to their parents. After obtaining a parent signature on the consent form, students will return the form to their TAG Facilitators, who will give them to Jenelle Nisly.
- No additional costs or resources, including district staff time, will be required of the district.
- The data collection for this research study in the form of individual interviews and follow-up interviews for member-checking purposes will be conducted between September of 2009 and March of 2010.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will do what I can to make this research project successful for you and our students.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

(Typed name of Director)
Director, AERS

cc: (school principals)

Appendix C: Rivercity Community School District Letter of Permission to Reprint Information

May 24, 2010

Ms. Jenelle Nisly
(address)

Dear Jenelle:

It is my recollection that in the spring of 2008, prior to beginning your doctoral study, I gave you verbal permission to use pre-existing equity information from the March 3, 2008 TAG Roster Information document. The document identified the number of TAG students in the (school district name) and included a breakdown of how many students in the TAG program belonged to each ethnic group. In addition, in your position as TAG facilitator, you and other TAG facilitators met together with my permission to gather information about the number of identified talented and potentially talented African American students who have participated in or dropped out of TAG programs in each middle school. This information was provided for you to use as a rationale for why you should pursue your doctoral study titled: ***The Perceptions of African American Middle School Students about Participation in Gifted Programs: A Qualitative Study to Promote Social Justice in Gifted Education*.**

I previously gave you verbal permission to analyze and use this pre-existing equity information that was not in public domain prior to the start of your doctoral study. With this letter, I am providing you with official written permission to use this equity information within your doctoral study at Walden University.

Sincerely,

(Electronic Signature)

(Name of coordinator)
Talented and Gifted Coordinator

Appendix D: Consent Form

I would like to invite your child to be a participant in a doctoral research study of identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students because he or she has previously been identified for the school district's talented and gifted program and has participated in gifted enrichment activities at least once between grades three and eight. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing for your child to be part of the study. If you give your consent, please sign and return this form to your child's TAG facilitator, (name), within one week of receiving this consent form.

Jenelle Nisly, a doctoral student at Walden University and former TAG Facilitator at (name) Intermediate School, is conducting the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences, expectations, and attitudes of identified talented or potentially talented African American middle school students with regard to participating and remaining in the talented and gifted program or participating and then dropping out.

Procedures:
If you agree to give permission for your child to be in this study, he or she will be asked to:

- Meet with the researcher twice between the months of September of 2009 and March of 2010.
- The first meeting will consist of an interview which will be held at school either before school, during class, or after school, according to the student's choice and will last approximately one hour. A digital recorder will be used to record the interview questions and participant responses.
- The second interview will be a follow-up interview and will also be digitally recorded. This meeting will also be held at school either before school, during class, or after school, according to the student's choice and will last approximately one hour. During this meeting, the student will be given a written summary of the first interview for his or her review. Follow-up questions will be asked.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want your child to be in the study. No one at (name) Intermediate School or the (name) School District will treat your child differently if you decide not to give permission for him or her to be in the study. If you decide to give permission for your child to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel that your child is stressed during the study you may have him or her stop at any time. Your child may skip any questions that he or she feels are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
The risks for participation in this research study are minimal and include missing class for up to one hour while participating in the interview. The benefits for being in the study are the improvements that may be made in the district's talented and gifted program.

Token of Appreciation:
As a token of appreciation for participating in the study, each student who volunteers to take part in the research project will be given their choice of either a $15.00 pre-paid Blockbuster gift card for renting movies or games or a $15.00 pre-paid iTunes gift card for purchasing and downloading music or videos from the Internet website at www.itunes.com. All student participants will receive the token of appreciation regardless of whether or not they complete the study. The token of appreciation will be given to students after the follow-up interview has taken place. However, if a student drops out at any time during the study, he or she will receive the token of appreciation at that time.

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your child's information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your child's name or anything else that could identify him or her in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher's name is Jenelle Nisly. The researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Michael Sanders. If you have any questions, you may contact the researcher via (phone number) and (e-mail address) or the advisor at (phone number) and (e-mail address). If you want to talk privately about your child's rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Director of the Research Center at Walden University. Her phone number is (phone number).

The researcher will give you a copy of this signed form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

☐ I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my child's involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Child _____

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian _____

Date of consent _____

Parent's Written or Electronic* Signature _____

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature _____

* Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their e-mail address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Assent Form

Hello, my name is Jenelle Nisly and I am doing a research project to learn about how talented and gifted African American middle school students experience participating in the talented and gifted program. I am inviting you to join my research study project. I picked you for this project because you have been identified for the talented and gifted program, you have participated in a gifted enrichment activity at least once between grades three and eight, and you are an African American middle school student. I am going to read this form with you. You can ask any questions you have before you decide if you want to do this project.

WHO I AM:
I am a student at Walden University. I am working on my doctoral degree. Last year I was the talented and gifted facilitator at (name) Intermediate School, but I do not work there any longer.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:
If you agree to join this project, you will be asked to:

- Meet with me twice between the months of September of 2009 and March of 2010.
- The first meeting will consist of an interview which will be held at school either before school, during class, or after school, according to your choice and will last approximately one hour. A digital recorder will be used to record my interview questions and your responses.
- The second interview will be a follow-up interview and will also be digitally recorded. This meeting will also be held at school either before school, during class, or after school, according to your choice and will last approximately one hour. During this meeting, you will be given a written summary of the first interview so that you can look it over and let me know if I interpreted your responses correctly. Follow-up questions will be asked.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
You don't have to join this project if you don't want to. You won't get into trouble with your principal, (name), your talented and gifted facilitator, (name), or anyone else at (name) Intermediate School or in the (name) School District if you say no. If you decide now that you want to join the project, you can still change your mind later just by telling me. If you want to skip some parts of the project, just let me know.

It is possible that you might feel a little uncomfortable when answering interview questions, however, the researcher will do everything possible to make your interview experience positive. In addition, if you miss class for an interview, you will be expected to make up any missed work. But this project may benefit you and other African American students because positive changes might be made to gifted programs in this school district as a result of your participation in this study.

As a token of appreciation for participating in the study, each student who volunteers to take part in the research project will be given their choice of either a $15.00 pre-paid Blockbuster gift card for renting movies or games or a $15.00 pre-paid iTunes gift card for purchasing and downloading music or videos from the Internet website at www.itunes.com. All student participants will receive the token of appreciation regardless of whether or not they complete the study. The token of appreciation will be given to students after the follow-up interview has taken place. However, if a student drops out at any time during the study, he or she will receive the token of appreciation at that time.

PRIVACY:
Everything you tell me during this project will be kept private. That means that no one else will know your name or what answers you gave. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else.

ASKING QUESTIONS:
You can ask me any questions you want now. If you think of a question later, you or your parents can reach me at (phone number) and (e-mail address) or my professor at (phone number) and (e-mail address). If you or your parents would like to ask my university a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is (phone number).

PARENT OR GUARDIAN CONSENT:
In order for you to participate, your parent or guardian will need to sign a Consent form. I will send a cover letter and a Consent form home with you today to give to your parent or guardian. If your parent or guardian gives approval for you to participate in the study, please return the signed consent form to your TAG facilitator within one week from today.

I will give you a copy of this assent form.

Please sign your name below if you want to join this project.

Name of Child _____

Child Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix F: Consent Form Cover Letter

October 2009

Dear Parents or Guardians:

I am a doctoral student at Walden University and am conducting a research study about talented and potentially talented African American middle school students' experiences, expectations, and attitudes regarding their participation in a gifted program. I would like to invite your student to participate in the research study.

Please review the enclosed Consent form. If you would like to give your consent for your student to participate in this study, please sign and return the enclosed form to your student's TAG Facilitator within one week from the receipt of this letter.

I invite you to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding your students' participation in this study at (phone number) or (e-mail address).

Sincerely,

Jenelle Nisly, M.Ed.
Walden University Doctoral Student
(address)

Appendix G: Researcher's General Interview Guide

General Interview Guide

Topic: Perceptions of talented and potentially talented African American middle school students about participation in gifted programs

Time of interview:_____

Date:_____

Place:_____

Interviewer:_____

Interviewee:_____ Pseudonym:_____

Grade level of interviewee:_____

Age of interviewee:_____

Good morning/afternoon. I am Mrs. Nisly. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study.

(Brief description of project) The purpose of this interview is to understand, from your personal perspective, your experiences, expectations, and attitudes about participating and remaining in your school's gifted (TAG) program or participating and then dropping out. I assure you that your responses will be kept confidential.

1. Describe what it has been like to participate in the TAG program?

2. How has that experience affected you?

3. What did you expect it would be like to participate in the TAG program?

4. What do you like the most about participating in the TAG program? What do you like the least?

5. What changes have you experienced as a result of your participation in TAG enrichment groups?

6. How do you feel about being identified for the gifted program?

7. Describe how you think your friends feel about you being gifted.

8. How do you think your friends feel about your participation in TAG activities?

9. What has it been like to be African American and gifted in your school?

10. What are your learning interests?

11. How do you like to learn best?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Appendix H: Sample Transcript

INTERVIEWER: What has it been like to be African American and gifted at your school?

ASHANTI: Um, sometimes it does feel kind of awkward because most of the time, like especially during sixth grade and seventh grade and this year I've been like one of the only African Americans in the TAG program, but then I just think about it and it's like if you really enjoy something, you shouldn't care about the racial groups.

INTERVIEWER: And how do you experience friends amongst, ah, the other TAG kids who are not African American?

ASHANTI: Um, they've actually been pretty nice to me. And, I mean, it's not like I don't enjoy having them, I just wish there were more kids like me in TAG groups. But it's like some of the kids that are like me at the school just think that just because they're African American that they don't have to try to be gifted.

INTERVIEWER: What does that mean?

ASHANTI: Like, some of the African American students don't even try at school. Like, they just think, "Oh, I'm just going to get a bad grade or something, it doesn't really matter." And I think that you should put, like, all your heart into it. Like, you should try to be the best that you can be.

INTERVIEWER: What happens when you talk to your friends about that?

ASHANTI: Um, I actually have tried to talk to them about it, and they actually like they do say that, "Oh, we'll try better," and most of my friends have like increased their grades, but they don't try to exceed, they just try to like meet the requirements.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that's so? Why do you think they don't try to exceed?

INTERVIEWER: Um, I think because most of the people that they hang out with see people like me and, like, the other people on the TAG groups and just think, "Oh, those people are nerds and geeks and we don't want to hang out with them." And they don't see, like, all the hard work that we put into it, and they don't see what we get out of it.

Curriculum Vitae

Jenelle S. Nisly, Ed.D.

EDUCATION

Ed.D. Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, expected conferral in summer of 2010
Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning, GPA: 4.00
Doctoral Study *The Perceptions of African American Middle School Students About Participation in Gifted Programs: A Qualitative Study to Promote Social Justice in Gifted Education*

M.Ed., Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, IL, August 2004
Curriculum and Instruction, GPA: 4.00
Thesis: *Character Development of Talented and Gifted Students through Bibliotherapy, Leadership Training, and Service-Learning*

University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 2002
Talented and Gifted (TAG) Endorsement (K-12), GPA: 4.00

California State University, Long Beach, CA, 1997
California Professional Clear Multiple-Subject Teaching Credential (pre-school through Grade 12 and adult school—in self-contained classrooms), GPA: 4.00

BFA, United States International University, School of Performing Arts, San Diego, CA, 1975
Major: Classical Ballet, GPA: 3.44

OTHER CREDENTIALS HELD

Iowa Teaching Credential (K-8, self-contained classrooms)
Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Certification (K-12) in California
Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) Certification in California
Shared Inquiry Method Leader Certificate, training provided by Jr. Great Books

WORK HISTORY

Vice President of Academic Affairs, June of 2009-Present
Shiloh University, Kalona, Iowa
Responsibilities: Provide leadership, supervision, guidance, and direction for all educational programs, faculty and staff, instructional policies and procedures. Also, provide leadership and supervision for academic support services, including testing and assessment, and library services.

Talented and Gifted (TAG) Facilitator, 2001-2009
Williams Intermediate School (grades 6-8)
Walcott Elementary and Intermediate Schools (grades K-8)
Lincoln Fundamental School (grades K-6)
Davenport Community School District, Davenport, Iowa

Curriculum Vitae
Jenelle S. Nisly
Page 2 of 2

WORK HISTORY (continued)
LEGO Robotics Instructor (grades 2-6), Summer Program, 2006-2009
Challenges for Elementary School Students (CHESS)
Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development
University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

Elementary Teacher (grades 1-2 combination, grade 4, and grades 4-5 combination for gifted and talented students), 1998-2001
Rancho Elementary School
La Mesa/Spring Valley School District, Spring Valley, CA

Elementary Teacher (3rd grade), 1997-1998
Dolland Elementary School
Norwalk/La Mirada School District, Norwalk, CA

Language Arts Teacher (grades 2-8), Summer Program, 1997-1998
Project Think
Claremont College, Claremont, CA

Elementary Teacher (grades 4-5 combination class), 1996-1997
William Orr Elementary School
Little Lake City School District, Santa Fe Springs, CA

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
Board member, Iowa Talented and Gifted (ITAG)
Member, National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)
Member, American Association of University Women (AAUW)
Member, Alpha Epsilon Xi chapter of Kappa Delta Pi (KDP)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS
The Perceptions of African American Middle School Students About Participation in Gifted Programs: A Qualitative Study to Promote Social Justice in Gifted Education (Proposal)
National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) Conference—Research Gala Poster Session
Walden University—Winter Research Symposium Poster Session

STEM Enrichment Through Participation in FIRST LEGO® League
Iowa Talented and Gifted Association (ITAG) Conference

Character Development of Talented and Gifted Students Through Bibliotherapy, Leadership Training, and Service-Learning
Iowa Talented and Gifted Association (ITAG) Conference

Student Publisher's Workshop
California Association for the Gifted (CAG) Conference