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Identifying Talented and Gifted Students in a Northeastern Middle School

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Identifying Talented and Gifted Students in a Northeastern Middle School

by

Lucky U. Abu

M.S.Ed., Monmouth University, New Jersey, 2006

B.A., Monmouth University, New Jersey, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2017

Abstract

The process of identifying talented and gifted (TAG) students in one local northeastern middle school was generally inconsistent with the state and local school district identification policies. The result was that qualified students were not always identified for this program, and this practice became a rationale to conduct a modified policy analysis of the TAG program placement procedures. The local school district policies on TAG are based on the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). Using the NAGC standards as the conceptual framework, the implementation of district policies on identification of students into the TAG program were explored in this case study of one school. The purpose was to clarify the implementation of the TAG program processes in accordance with NAGC standards and state policy. Data were collected from multiple sources through interviews with guidance counselors, teachers, the data coach, and local middle school administrators who were involved in placement of TAG students, and from review of policy documents and archived data. Data from interviews and document review were analyzed using typological analysis model in alignment with the NAGC standards from which themes formed a policy compliance/noncompliance basis for a white paper. In this white paper, recommendations were made to the local district that included screening consistency for all students, using multiple measures for qualification, and assuring certification of testing personnel. Social change implications include the potential to improve TAG identification policy for those responsible in this district and other similar districts for placement consistent with state and NAGC standards.

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Dedication

First, God is good for giving me the light to do this work. This work is dedicated to my parents, my late mother, Ozomwogie Aigbekan-Abu, who passed on May 24, 2012, and my late father, Raphael Edomwonyi Abu, who passed on October 10, 1999. My mother used to say to me, "if you have the courage, your determination will lead you to success." My father was very poignant, he says to me, "if the bottom is crowded, then, there must be space at the top." Their words of wisdom have inspired me greatly. I will never forget you both. Special dedication goes to my lovely daughter, Eliza Osayuwamen Abu who always tells me, "daddy take a break" after many hours of writing sitting in front of my desktop. I love you baby girl.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Ogie School District (OSD) (pseudonym) for the local school district in this project study serves a New Jersey community of approximately 10,000 people. The district has five public schools: two elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, and one high school. The district serves 2,098 students and employs about 400 teachers. At the time of data collection, about 70 students were enrolled in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program at the middle school. The guidance department makes the ultimate decision about whom to place in the TAG program. The district adopted the state policies on TAG, but placement was not strictly arbitrary. Stakeholders associated with OSD's TAG program, including principals, were dissatisfied about how students have been identified and placed for the program. This was reflected and indicated in the principal's speech to the staff in one of the faculty meetings at the middle school (OSD, June 2010). Some archival data on record suggests placement issues of students into the TAG. For example, when a parent provides a recommendation their child to the guidance counselors for placement into TAG, many times, it is in conflict with what teacher would recommend for that child. There is no program coordinator from the central office to oversee how the guidance department identifies and places students into TAG program. According to school archival data between 2009 and 2013, sixteen (16) students were self or parent nominated for TAG placement and all were accepted into the TAG classes. Therefore, identification and placement of students into TAG was loosely guided. This project study was designed to enhance policy regarding student identification and placement of students for the TAG program. The project study

provided some understandings to the policymakers in identification and placement of students for TAG program.

The Problem

The problem at the OSD was that there has never been policy evaluation on how the TAG selection process is run to determine whether or not the current implementation procedures are in adherence to the local school board of education policy on TAG. The state of New Jersey requires the local school board to adopt multiple criteria-based NAGC in the selection of students into their TAG programs so that students with academic and intellectual ability would not be underserved. According to the New Jersey Administrative Code for the Gifted (2005), the label *gifted and talented students* refers to those "students who possess or demonstrate high level of ability, in one or more content areas, when compared to their chronological peers in the local school district and who require modifications of their educational program if they are to achieve in accordance with their capabilities" (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2005 p. 6). The code further specifies that

- District boards of education shall be responsible for identifying gifted and talented students and shall provide them with appropriate instructional adaptations and services.
- District boards of education shall make provisions for an ongoing K-12 identification process [and appropriate educational challenges] for gifted and talented students [initiated in kindergarten and reviewed annually through grade12] that include multiple measures.

- District boards of education shall provide appropriate K-12 educational services for gifted and talented students.

- District boards of education shall develop appropriate curricular and instructional modifications used for gifted and talented students indicating content, process, products, and learning environment.

District boards of education shall take into consideration the Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards of the National Association for Gifted Children in developing programs for gifted and talented students (NAGC, 2010, p. 6-8).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

When this started, parent groups, teachers, and the state monitors have expressed concern that the current TAG selection of students is not consistent (Local School Board Minutes, 2007, 2008, & 2010). District officials have received numerous complaints from teachers and parents about the identification and selection of students for TAG classes. This was indicated by the Curriculum Management Audit Report ([CMAR]) ordered by the state in 2005. Some teachers have complained that they are unaware of the process through which TAG students are selected. A curriculum management audit report performed by Phi Delta Kappa, which was ordered by the state in 2005, was presented at the OSD board meeting in the summer of 2010. This report showed insufficient "measurement tools were used for the manner in which students are identified to participate in the TAG classes" (OSD Board Meeting, 2010). Although the purpose of the CMAR was to gather pertinent information on OSD—specifically, its inability to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined by the federal No Child Left Behind

legislation, the report also revealed insufficient methods in the TAG selection process regarding procedures for identifying and selecting students for district TAG classes (CMAR, 2010). According to OSD, gifted and talented students are those students with demonstrated and/or potential exceptional performance. Thus, may benefit from differentiated educational programs and/or facilities beyond those normally available in order to fully develop their talents so as to lead more satisfying and productive lives and enhance the quality of life in the community (OSD School Policy Manual, p. 20, 2000).

The TAG admittance policy currently used seems weighted heavily on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), but specific areas in which students are identified as talented or gifted have been "undocumented" (Teachers CPT Minutes, 2009-2010). This procedure is inconsistent with the OSD policy for TAG programs, which includes the following criteria for selection:

- Grades received in a specific subject or area that reflects superior achievement consistently over a period of time.
- Samples of the student's work (reports, projects, pieces of artwork, etc.) that show both superior quality and unique or creative approaches to the assigned tasks.
- Recommendations from the student's teachers both past and present.
- Auditions and/or demonstrations of superior talents or skills in a specific program area.
- Scores on standardized tests of achievement or tests or general intellectual ability that reflect superior achievement and/or potential when compared to the norms for the student's grade, age, school, district, etc. (Local School Policy Manual, 2000, p. 20).

According to archival records, the admittance procedures used indicates inconsistency with the OSD policy on TAG. The OSD policy reflects identification standards of the National Association for the Gifted and Talented (NAGC) and Gardner's multiple intelligences (MI). The OSD admittance policy states that multiple criteria based on identification standards of the NAGC should be used to identify students for TAG:

- Use multiple measures and multiple criteria.

- Acknowledge that there is a range of giftedness and a range of associated services.

- Assess talent broadly.

- Use different strategies to identify different aspects of gifted.

- Use an individual case study approach to identify students.

- Identify and place students according to needs and ability.

- Use appropriate measurements for underrepresented populations.

- Use instruments that are valid and reliable for the construct of gifted.

- Provide for all identified students, not just a set number of students that can be served. (NAGC, 2009)

Just as NAGC recognizes a range of giftedness and different talents in children, Gardner (1993) also understands talented and gifted students have multiple talents with different ways of representing their talents based on their cognition strengths and styles (Gardner, 1993). However, the NAGC standards will form the conceptual framework for this project study.

OSD admittance procedures are inconsistent with scholarly research suggesting that admission into TAG programs should be based on multiple criteria (Belanger & Gagne, 2006; Bracken & Brown, 2006, 2008; Chan, 2000; Gardner, 1983, 1993, 2006; NAGC, 2010). A archival data on students' identification and placement into TAG program suggests that the guidance department seems to give undue weight to "standardized" test such as the NJASK without a generous consideration based on NAGC standards. This practice of using "standardized" test only was insufficient for recommending students' placement in a TAG classes. Archival data records on the identification process and the placement of students for TAG are based on the opinion of the policymakers. For example, parents sometimes would suggest to policymakers that their child should be placed in TAG program. Some of these students were then placed in the TAG classes. In the midst of this process, no one really knows for sure how the counseling staff at the middle school is identifying and selecting students to participate in the TAG program. As a result of this identification scenario, this project study is designed to explore identification and processes of students' selection into TAG classes through the development of a policy white paper to provide some understandings of the administrators and policymakers in the local middle school at OSD so that the district policies on TAG are consistently implemented.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

In January 2002, the New Jersey State Legislature authorized a commission to study the most effective methods of TAG education. The commission's findings were published in January 2005. According to that study, New Jersey is one of six states that does not provide funding for TAG education and is the only one of those states that

mandates TAG identification and services. State policies and regulations on TAG education under the New Jersey Administrative Code are intended to provide guidance to school districts on procedures for placing students into TAG programs. The commission report, *Local Policies and Procedures to Support Gifted and Talented Program*, stated that district boards of education be required to develop and approve policy, administrative guidelines, and procedures that address of the following areas:

- The definition of giftedness in the district.

- Identification procedures (e.g., multiple measures, tests and scores, rubrics, checklists).

- Program and services (e.g., time allocation per grade level, access, assessment of student progress, curricula and materials, grouping and delivery).

- Resources (e.g., staffing, facilities, funding, transportation).

- Professional development.

- Documentation of student records and reporting.

- Supervision and coordination of gifted programs (e.g., budget, supplies, teacher observations).

- Parent notification and education.

- Articulation between elementary and secondary schools, sending and receiving districts, and institutions of higher education and secondary schools. (New Jersey Commission on Programs for Gifted Students, 2005, p. 6-8)

The commission also advised state school districts to adopt recommendations based on the NAGC's Pre-K-12 Gifted Program Standards as follows:

- Assess talent broadly.

- Acknowledge that there is a range of giftedness and a range of associated services.

- Use different strategies to identify different aspects of giftedness.

- Use appropriate measurements for underrepresented populations.

- Use instruments that are valid and reliable for the construct of giftedness being assessed.

- Use multiple measures and multiple criteria.

- Use an individual case study approach to identify students.

- Identify and place students according to needs and ability.

- Provide for all identified students not just a set number of students that can be served. (New Jersey Commission on Programs for Gifted Students, (2005, p. 11 2005)

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was that misidentification of qualified students to participate in the TAG classes might leads to unqualified students being placed in the TAG and may serve to overlook those who were indeed qualified. So, when students who were not qualified are placed in the TAG, it can negatively impact the intent to enhance gifted students' learning. These students might suffer numerous academic setbacks such as the issue of not being able to meet the demand of the program and not being able to succeed in the program. In addition, students who have TAG potential who were not identified can become underserved. Social change implications include the potential to

increase knowledge of how OSD policymakers identify and place students in TAG

classes so that academically and intellectually able students are not underserved, and to

avoid misidentification of those who do not meet appropriate criteria. Not only will the

results of this study help to minimize complaints from teachers, but will also serve to

inform all stakeholders. To further positive social change, recommendations were written

for the policymakers based on the study's findings. Results of this study can also inform

subsequent research on how to identify TAG students similar to the students OSD serves.

Guiding Questions

This case study was designed in a way to address how the guidance counselors at

local a middle school carry out identification and placement of students for the TAG

program. The resulting project white paper provided some understandings to the local

policymakers in identification and placement of students into TAG program based on the

local school district policies. Data were collected from multiple sources through

interviews with the guidance counselors, teachers, data coach, administrators, and from

archival data from the local middle school records. Data gathered from the interviews

provided perspectives on identification and selection processes into TAG program. And

archival data and TAG program documents regarding selection of students will provide

data on past practices in identification of TAG students.

The guiding research questions were:

1. What are the processes and criteria by which students are identified and placed
   into the TAG program in the local middle school?

2. What are the roles of administrators, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and
   others in the TAG selection and placement processes at the local middle school?

3. How are TAG selection and placement policies and practices at the local middle school consistent with district guidelines regarding TAG identification and placement?

4. How might TAG selection and placement policies and practices at the local middle school and district be adjusted to meet the standards put forth by the National Association for Gifted Children?

Review of the Literature

To identify prospective, peer-reviewed articles and books, the following databases- Education Research Complete, Thoreau and Eric were searched for the years 2005-2010 using the following keywords: *gifted education, history of gifted education, gifted education program, and talented and gifted criteria, identification and selection.* I used the Boolean operators, AND and OR to optimize the results. Abstracts were used to judge an article's relevance to the research questions. The references of significant articles were scanned for additional sources. In this section, I cover the following topics: conceptual framework, history of gifted education, pioneers in gifted education, other influences on gifted education, identifying talented and gifted students, national educational policy analysis on TAG, implications of the study and summary.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this case study explored the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). The rationale for using the NAGC standards is their acceptance by a national organization geared to benefit the gifted populace (2009). The criteria evident in these standards will encourage both administrators and policymakers in the local middle school at OSD policies on TAG

to be consistently implemented. After a massive search of related studies on TAG (25-45), the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children was the best fit for this project study: It provided multiple criteria to identify and place students in a TAG program. The goal of the guiding research questions was to help the counseling staff at OSD middle school understand _____. Identifying students into a TAG program is a complex process. The assessors have to know the criteria to use and how to use them. Although certain criteria were in place and should be used to identify and place students for the TAG program at OSD, the criteria were not consistently used.

Using a white paper on identifying gifted students, I sought to provide a knowledge base for the counseling staff in the local middle school at OSD. Knowledge of gifted students' characteristics will serve as a foundation for their ultimate placement in the TAG program. Since it began, the varying definitions and procedures for identifying talented and gifted students have been the major problem in the field of the talented and gifted (TAG) education, and have created a complex and challenging identification processes for school districts across the United States (Baker, 2001; Bracken & Brown, 2006; Wood, Portman, Cigrand, & Colangelo, 2010). Some common findings after conducting an extensive search of scholarly articles and books revealed that researchers on TAG programs consistently recommended using the gifted standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2008-2009).

A archival data from school records into how the guidance counselors in the local middle school selected students into a TAG program, suggested inconsistency in processing and that the NJASK was being given undue weight in the selection process. The archival data from the school records (OSD, 2005a) indicated 90 % of students'

admissions into the TAG program were based on NJASK scores, 7% were based on

teachers' recommendations, and 3% are based on parental recommendations. In addition,

the content area in which a student was identified for TAG was not clearly stated or

termed "undocumented." This approach was inconsistent with the New Jersey

Commission on Programs for Gifted Students, which recommended that school districts

base TAG decisions on NAGC multiple standards. The guidance counselors' decisions in

the local middle school were inconsistent with the local district's TAG policy found in

the archival data from the school records (OSD, 2005a) which was based on the gifted

standards of the National Association Gifted Children (NAGC).

The recorded minutes of teachers' discussion during common planning time

(CPT) (2005, 2006, & 2008), revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with how students

were identified and placed into the TAG program. Minutes cite teachers' awareness of

instances of parental requests to have a child placed in the TAG program, which were

then granted. A TAG program, by its nature, benefits everyone when a unified matrix of

criteria is used to select the academically and intellectually able students who have the

capacity to excel in the program (CPT, 2005, 2006, 2008.).

Implementing a TAG program is not only a theoretical matter but a practical one

as well, and the diversity of practices among states has led to inconsistencies and inequity

(Baker, 2001; Bracken & Brown, 2006; Brown, Chen, Gubbins, Renzulli, Siegle, &

Zhang, 2005). According to the State of the States address on Gifted Education National

Policy and Practice Data (2008-2009), there are many variations in policies resulting in a

disparity of services between and within states. Some states do not provide much

direction regarding the education of gifted and talented leaving decisions to be made with

the local school board to find the best ways to serve their gifted and talented students. And some states that do provide some directions, there is limited specificity and clarity regarding identification procedures, programs, and services for gifted learners.

History of Gifted Education

Public education is an important part of American political philosophy since the early days of the republic (Cremin, 1970). The advancements in education and psychology has increased empirical and scientific knowledge. This have helped to shed light on gifted education (Jolly, 2009). According to Jolly (2009), attempts in the United States to accommodate the unique learning needs of gifted children can be traced back to the 1800s. In 1868, for example, the St. Louis public schools, under the leadership of William Torrey Harris, designed a system for early grade promotions for those who exhibited outstanding academic ability (Jolly, 2009).

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC; 2008), studies of giftedness during the 1920s and 1930s were based on mental inheritance, construction of instruments to measure both sub- and supernormal children, and the realization that graded schools could not adequately meet the needs of all children (2008). The field of gifted education received great attention after the Russian launched Sputnik on October 4, 1957 (Jolly, 2009; NAGC, 2008). Sputnik was an enormous technical achievement for the Russians (2008). The U.S. reaction to the launching of Sputnik led to increase in federal funding to public education (Jolly, 2009). In 1958, the U.S. Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) (Jolly, 2009). The purpose of the NDEA was to create an elite generation of scientists, technologists, engineers, and mathematicians (2009). Representative Carl Elliott, coauthor of the NDEA, recognized gifted students as

an underdeveloped resource that would benefit American society (2009). Title V of the NDEA specifically earmarked funds for identifying, guiding, counseling, testing, and encouraging gifted students (Jolly, 2009).

The launching of Sputnik and the establishment of NDEA brought gifted education into relevancy. The field received increased in research through expanded programming and a rich research agenda (Jolly, 2009). Gifted education received federal monies from the Jacob Javits' Gifted and Talented Students Education (2009). The monies helped fund the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and its programming (2009). The publication of *A Nation At Risk* (1983) and *National Excellence*: *A Case For Developing America's Talent* (1993) provided additional momentum for gifted education. The definition of giftedness expanded along with programming options for gifted students (Jolly, 2009). This increased research and programming in the field of gifted education (2009). Standards developed by the NAGC provided school districts across the country with a set of programming criteria (Jolly, 2009; NAGC, 2008). Significant events in the history of TAG education are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Significant Events in TAG Education

Year	Significant events
1868	William Torrey Harris, superintendent of St. Louis public schools, established earliest systematic efforts in public schools to educate gifted students.
1916	Lewis Terman, called the father of the gifted education movement, published the Stanford-Binet test, which changed how people viewed intelligence testing.
1918	Lulu Stedman established an "opportunity room" for gifted students at the University Training School at the Southern Branch of the University of California.
1922	Leta Hollingworth began a special opportunity class at P.S. 165 in New York City for gifted students. This effort resulted in nearly 40 research articles and a textbook.
1925	Lewis Terman's *Genetic Studies of Genius* concluded that gifted students are (a) qualitatively different in school, (b) slightly better physically and emotionally in comparison to normal students, (c) superior in academic subjects in comparison to average students, (d) emotionally stable, (e) most successful when education and family values are held in high regard by the family, and (f) infinitely variable in combination with the traits exhibited by those in the study.
1954	National Association of Gifted Children founded to provide guidance and leadership in research for gifted students.

(Table1 Continues)

Table 1

Significant Events in TAG Education

Year	Significant events
1957	Launching of Sputnik by Soviet Union prompted United States to increase research in science, mathematics, and foreign language education.
1958	National Defense Education Act passed a large-scale effort by the federal government in gifted education
1972	First formal definition of giftedness includes (a) academic and intellectual talent, (b) leadership ability, (c) visual and performing arts aptitude, (d) creative or productive thinking, and (e) psychomotor ability
1983	*A Nation at Risk* charged that many of America's brightest and academically able students were not achieving on a par with international counterparts. The report recommended policies and practices in gifted education to raise academic standards and to develop an appropriate curriculum for the gifted learners.
1990	National research centers on the gifted and talented established at the University of Connecticut, University of Virginia, Yale University, and Northwestern University.
2001	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with provisions for competitive statewide grants. Definition of gifted and talented modified to accommodate new initiatives. "Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities."

(Coleman, 1999; Imbeau, 1999; Jolly, 2009; NAGC, 2008; & Roberts, 1999).

Pioneers in Gifted Education

An awareness of the unique learning needs of gifted children can be traced back to the 1800s (Jolly, 2009). In 1868, the first known attempt to educate TAG students was prompted by William T. Harris, superintendent of St. Louis public schools. Harris designed a system that would allow an early grade promotion for students who exhibited outstanding academic ability. Harris's effort to educate TAG students was well-intentioned, but he lacked the advantage of tested ways to measure intelligence (Jolly, 2009). Although no academic field of TAG education existed at the time, subsequent developments in education and psychology led to burgeoning interest in how best to meet the needs of students with unusual academic potential.

Terman has been called the father of gifted education and one of the earliest tied to a definition of intelligence (Shurkin, 1992). According to Shurkin, there are huge files Teraman collected. The collection is the one of the great icons of social science (Shurkin, 1992). One of the largest collection of information because of the scope and pathological attention to detail. Terman's reflection on the proper educational environment shed light on youngsters how they grow academically forms many of the debates in science about the definition of intelligence, (Shurkin, 1992).

Terman (1925) described gifted students as (a) qualitatively different in school, (b) slightly advanced physically and emotionally compared to other students, (c) superior in academic subjects compared to average students, (d) emotionally stable, (e) most successful when education and family values are held in high regard by the family, and (f) infinitely variable in how they combine the foregoing traits. Terman was influenced by Binet's work on intelligence. Terman's work for the Army during World War I

showed that measuring intelligence had profound implication for the disciplines of

psychology and education (Jolly, 2009). Terman provided no definition of giftedness, He

focused on an academic interest in the phenomenon by emphasizing native intelligence

(Jolly, 2009). When the Stanford-Binet IQ test was first published, Terman classified

mental ability as exceptional when someone had a score of 125. By that measure, about

2% of children could be called exceptional. Terman upped the criterion to a score of at

least 140, which confined exceptionality to 1% of the population (2005). Exceptional

students were described as high in intelligence, sustained attention, willpower,

persistence, dependability, and studiousness (Jolly, 2005). Terman's work enriched the

academic debate on what constitutes intelligence, and the study of gifted children was the

first major one in the field (Coleman, 1999).

Another important pioneer in the field of gifted education was Lulu Stedman, a

teacher trainer who worked with pre-service teachers in the practical application of

teaching skills at the Los Angeles State Normal School, and established an "opportunity

room" (Jolly, 2005, p. 38) for gifted students in 1918. The purpose of the opportunity

room was to provide students with unusual academic capacity an environment where they

could develop to their fullest capacity and "in accordance with the psychological

principles of underlying individuality" (Jolly, 2005, p. 38). Although Stedman did not

offer an explicit definition of giftedness, but refined the understanding of gifted children

by describing them as "enterprising, adventurous, mature, and greatly above average,"

exercising "self-control and the poise of an adult" (as cited in Jolly, 2005, p. 38). The

present-day understanding of giftedness is still tied to Stedman's description of the

opportunity room students as "endowed with superior intellectual endowment and extraordinary ability" (as cited in Jolly, 2005, p. 39).

Leta Hollingworth was another pioneer who built on the work of previous researchers to develop a definition of giftedness that included specific traits and behaviors. Like the predecessors, emphasized the superior intelligence, which defines as a Stanford-Binet score of 130 or above. Further, that the gifted children display an early interest in numbers and words; learn to read with comprehension at a young age; show an advanced awareness of the clock, calendar, and almanac; and are characterized by relentless curiosity (as cited in Jolly, 2005). The researcher deepened the understanding of gifted education by showing that giftedness is manifested in a variety of areas, including the arts, drawing, mechanical aptitude, abstract knowledge, and leadership.

Guy Whipple was one of the earliest researchers to rely on intelligence tests to identify gifted children. He believed that such tests reveal individual differences within heterogeneously grouped students, allowing for appropriate educational practices to be applied (Jolly, 2005). Using IQ tests to identify gifted students continues to be popular. Experts do not always agree on what score should be used to classify someone as gifted, and the current lack of unanimity reflects differences among the four researchers cited above. For Whipple the IQ score cut-off was 115, for Hollingworth it was 130, and for Stedman and Terman it was set at 140 (Jolly, 2005).

Other Influences on Gifted Education

One of the major outcomes of Sputnik for gifted education was the Marland Report, issued by the U.S. Office of Education in 1972. This report was significant in two ways. First, it addressed the low level of awareness among educators about gifted

children. Second, it heightened a realization that the field lacked a consensus definition of

what giftedness is. The Marland Report advanced a conception of giftedness that

included six categories:

- General intellectual ability.

- Specific academic ability.

- Creative or productive thinking.

- Leadership ability.

- Visual and performing arts aptitude.

- Psychomotor ability (Marland Report, 1972).

These six categories, coupled with the work of earlier theorists and practitioners,

helped advance the burgeoning field of gifted education (Imbeau, Roberts, & Coleman,

1999). The field also witness the establishment of national and state organizations

devoted to gifted education, and these organizations were instrumental in the formation

of support and advocacy groups to address the needs of gifted children. One such

organization was NAGC, established in 1954. One of NAGC's accomplishments was the

creation of the Curriculum Council of the National and State Leadership Institute on the

Gifted and Talented in 1982. Under the leadership of Dr. Sandra Kaplan, the Curriculum

Council outlined principles of curriculum development for TAG students (Roberts,

1999).

Another important development in the history of TAG education was passage of

the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. That legislation led to intensified

interest in gifted education, one manifestation of which was a 1960 White House

Conference on Children that focused on "opportunities for children and youth to realize

their full potential for a creative life in freedom and dignity" (Fleming, 1960, p. 133).

Fleming described this new awareness as reflecting an emphasis on the discovery of

intelligent and talented young men and women and stimulating them to devote

themselves to the sciences, foreign languages, technology, and in general to those

intellectual pursuits that will enrich personal life, strengthen resistance to totalitarianism,

and enhance the quality of American leadership on the international scene.

The NAGC (1960) made several recommendations on behalf of gifted children:

1. All schools should be required to make special provisions for the education of

   the gifted, talented and creative students, using high order thinking skills.

2. State departments of education should assume greater responsibility for gifted

   education.

3. Teachers should acquire a better understanding of the nature and needs of

   gifted students (p. 38).

More sensitive means of identification should be developed, especially to find those

students from diverse and underserved populations. Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple

intelligences (MI) has been influential force in the field of gifted education. Educators

have used Gardner's theory to differentiate instruction based on individual intelligences

and abilities, and those practices have enlarged and enriched an understanding of

giftedness and gifted education.

Gardner's theory of MI demanded a more complex and nuanced assessment of

children's ability and potential for success than is provided by traditional IQ tests.

Gardner explained that intelligence comes in many different ways for different people

and in many ways people learn and apply the knowledge (Gardner 1993). Such view,

Gardner argued, should take into account eight intelligences:

Table 2: *Gardner's Eight Intelligences*

Type of intelligence	Definition
Logical-mathematical	Ability to understand and use logic and numerical symbols and operations.
Linguistic	Ability to understand and use spoken and written communication.
Musical	Ability to understand and use such concepts as rhythm, pitch, melody, and harmony.
Kinesthetic	Ability to coordinate physical movement.
Spatial	Ability to orient and manipulate three-dimensional space.
Interpersonal	Ability to understand and interact well with other people.
Intrapersonal	Ability to understand and use one's thoughts, feelings, preferences, and interests.
Naturalistic	Ability to distinguish and categorize objects or phenomena in nature.

(Gardner, 1993).

Gardner's theory of MI has had important implications for educators. As the

theory became accepted, educators began considering criteria other than IQ in assessing

students for TAG programs. No longer was that process solely dependent on a monolithic

measurement of intelligence. Instead, those who attempted to identify suitable students

for TAG programs could consider a more holistic conception of intelligence in keeping

with Gardner's theory.

Identifying Talented and Gifted Students

In the absence of federal guidelines, it is difficult to arrive at a coherent national strategy for the field of gifted education. Studies on TAG education have explored the design and content of state policies (Coleman, Gallagher, & Foster, 1994; Gallagher & Coleman, 1992, 1994; Passow & Rudnitski, 1993, 1994), but few have explored the results of these policies for practice and implementation. According to Brown et al. (2005), discrepancies exist between the beliefs expressed by educators and the identification practices documented by research (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Davis & Rimm, 2004; Gagne, 1999; Gallagher & Gallagher 1994).

In recent years, federal advocacy for TAG education has increased but has not resulted in a unified policy. In October 1999, the Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (H.R. 637, as part of H.R. 2, a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act) was considered by the U.S. Senate (CSDPG, 2009). The emphasis of this legislation was on stimulus grants to states to encourage school districts to develop programs for gifted education. But with government funding drying up in most states, gifted education programs were actually reduced (2009).

According to CSDPG and NAGC (2008-2009), there are two types of state ordered mandates for TAG education: mandates to local school districts to identify children, and mandates that services be provided. If a state does not have mandates to identify and serve TAG students, it is up to each school district to determine whether and how to identify students and what programs and services to offer high-ability learners (2008-2009). The question is whether state mandates for identification and services are accompanied by state funding. In some instances, mandates do not guarantee funding for

TAG education because programs and services are tied to whether students are considered by law to be gifted and talented (CSDPG & NAGC, 2008-2009; NJAGC, 2005). In the 1980s and early 1990s, some educational activists in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey charged that TAG programs are elitist. Although this perception has largely subsided, the current economic climate has hampered states' ability to allocate funding and personnel for TAG education (NAGC, 2009).

In 1998, NAGC developed Pre-K-Grade12 Gifted Program Standards to assist school districts in assessing their programming for gifted students. These standards were divided into seven criterion areas: (a) program design, (b) program administration and management, (c) student identification, (d) curriculum and instruction, (e) socio-emotional guidance and counseling, and (f) program evaluation. According to NAGC (2010), gifted learners are students, children, or youth who possess evidence of high achievement capability in different areas that may include intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in some specific academic fields, and may need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school to develop their capacities.

According to NAGC (2010), working with TAG necessitates understanding the characteristics and needs of the students for whom curriculum, instruction, assessment, programs, and services are developed. Responding to that charge, NJCPGS recommended that identifying students for TAG programs should reflect diverse measurements. According to NJCPGS (2005), state and local policies to identify gifted students should be based on the following principles:

- Standardized achievement, intelligence, and creativity tests, when used properly and selected with care, are valuable parts of the identification and screening process for gifted programs and services.

- The first step to identification is a screening process that considers all children. Subsequent identification processes are administered to students who have been noted as potentially gifted as part of the general screening process.

- Despite their potential usefulness, tests have limitations. This is especially important when assessing underserved gifted students (e.g., young children, linguistically or culturally diverse students, economically disadvantaged students, students with special needs).

- No single measure should be used to make identification and placement decisions.

- Multiple measures and valid indicators from multiple sources must be used (e.g., information from family and caregiver, teachers and/or student observations, portfolios, products, interviews).

- Personnel who administer, use or, advise others in the use of these tests should be qualified to do so (p. 8).

Despite advances during the middle of the 20th century, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) revealed continuing weaknesses in the field of gifted education, especially regarding how to identify students for TAG programs. Identification and placement remained both a theoretical and practical concern for researchers, administrators, and teachers as they strove to conform to Title V of the NDEA. Reis (2004) summarized the state of affairs surrounding publication of *A Nation at Risk*: the

nation's gifted and talented students have no rigorous curriculum, they read fewer

demanding books, and therefore are less prepared for work or in postsecondary education

than the most talented students in other industrialized countries.

A Nation at Risk called for wide-ranging educational reform, including TAG education,

but that report did not advance a definition of what constitutes giftedness. In the absence

of a federally sanctioned definition, individual states and school districts were left to

come up with their own definitions and with procedures for identifying gifted students.

Some states created general principles; others defined specific procedures.

In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education described gifted and talented children

to be students who have outstanding talent to perform or show the potential for

performing well at high levels of accomplishment if compared their peers of the same

age, experience, or environment (NSGT], 2010). Because it did not specify what

constituted talent or accomplishment, that description was of minimal help in informing

educators' efforts to identify TAG students and develop curricula to meet their academic

needs. There was still a need, observed Passow (2004), to come up with a

"comprehensive theory of giftedness which could help to explain how individuals could

be talented and gifted" (p. 5). Passow argued for assessment tools that have both

cognitive and non-cognitive components. According to Passow, giftedness consists of an

interaction among three basic clusters of human traits— above-average general abilities,

high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children

are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying

them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Children who manifest or

are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety

of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs.

NSGT (2010) developed its own list of characteristics that distinguish TAG students:

1. Gifted students are often perfectionist and idealistic.

2. Gifted students may experience heightened sensitivity to their own expectations and those of others.

3. Gifted students are asynchronous.

4. Some gifted students are "mappers" (sequential learners), while other are "leapers" (spatial learners).

5. Gifted students may be so far ahead of their chronological age mates that they know half the curriculum before the school year begins.

6. Gifted children are problem solvers.

7. Gifted students often think abstractly and with such complexity that they may need help with concrete study and test-taking skills.

8. Gifted students who do well in school may define success as getting an "A" and failure as any grade less than an "A." (para. 8).

Bracken (2008) and Parke (2007) noted that most school districts use standardized achievement and intelligence tests to identify gifted students. Arguing that a high IQ test score is an insufficient means of identifying those students, Parke offered three characteristics that gifted students' exhibit:

- Gifted youngsters tend to get their work done quickly, and may seek further assignments or direction.

- They ask probing questions that tend to differ from their classmates in depth of understanding and frequency.

- They have interests that are unusual or more like the interests of older students.

    (p. 2)

National Educational Policy Analysis on TAG

According to a report by the Council of State of Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG) and the (NAGC), there is the "lack of coherent national strategy to educate and inspire the next generation of scientists, mathematicians, peacemakers, artists, and engineers" (CSDPG & NAGC, 2009, p. 6). Lack of funding for TAG programs has meant that school districts are unable to provide the training necessary for school personnel to be able to identify gifted students. In New Jersey, some state funds have been designated for that purpose, but funding cutbacks led to the elimination of the advisory council that had developed a state plan for TAG education (New Jersey Commission on Programs for Gifted Students [NJCPGS], 2005). The report stated that there are an estimated 3 million academically gifted and talented students in the United States, representing a diversity of experiences, expertise, and cultural backgrounds, and requiring a responsive and challenging educational system to help them achieve their highest potential (CSDPG & NAGC, 2009). In the absence of a federal mandate, all TAG decisions are made at the state and the local levels, a state of affairs that has led to widespread inconsistency.

Besides policy inconsistencies, TAG programs have faced funding challenges, especially in the current economic climate. NAGC (2009) described the absence of federal funding for gifted education services. It indicated that the success and long-term

stability of gifted programs and services are tied to the degree to which states commits reliable funding to the districts in order to meet student needs (NAGC, 2009). Lack of funds means lack of trained personnel knowledgeable about how best to plan, identify, and select academically and intellectually able students for TAG programs. Even so, it is in the best interest of the students for districts to find better means to train personnel on the identification process to ensure that students who are academically and intellectually able are not underserved.

Implications of the Study

Although there is general consensus that TAG students deserve specialized educational opportunities, but there is less agreement on how to identify those students (Renzulli, 2005; Gagne, 1985). The majority of TAG programs rely on a child's IQ test scores or standardized test to identify candidates.

Relying on a single IQ test or standardized test to determine academic ability and potential has been under increasing critical scrutiny. This research study may help to promote the implementation of a more consistent adherence to the New Jersey and local school board of education policies on TAG identification. According to NAGC (2008-2009) and Passow (2004), there is a growing consensus that identification procedures must not be limited to unitary tests of intelligence. Instead, a variety of techniques, procedures, and instruments should be used to identify TAG students. Gardner (1993) and Passow (2004) argued that it is more fruitful to describe an individual's cognitive ability in terms of several relatively independent but interacting cognitive capacities rather than in terms of a single "general" intelligence.

One "IQ" test or standardized test measure is insufficient to evaluate, label, and plan educational experience for talented and gifted students (Passow, 2004). In light of this emerging consensus, the time is right for research that explores whether schools are identifying TAG students using multiple criteria based on the NAGC standards and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. The state of New Jersey recognizes that students have varied abilities, talents, gifts, strengths, and needs, all of which should be considered when placing students in a TAG program. This is a case study of the selection criteria and processes for placement in the TAG program in one middle school. I will interview stakeholders and review archival data and program selection documents to answer the four research questions as I indicated above. This study is not a research study. The results of the research findings was a white paper with recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders (guidance counselors and others) for implementation of appropriate policy and procedures related to identification and selection of TAG students. The implication of the project was that, it is likely to increase awareness on TAG selection, and provided further a clear direction for identifying students into TAG program for school districts that serves similar student population as Ogie school district.

Summary

In section 1, I described the background and general outlines of the problem, the problem at the local level and problem from the professional literature, significance of the problem, the guiding questions, review of the literature, and possible implications of the case study on policies and procedures regarding TAG student identification and selection processes at OSD. I described both national and New Jersey educational policies governing TAG programs. School personnel vary in how they define talented and gifted

and in the procedures they use to target and place students in TAG programs. The proposed case study explored those policies and procedures in light of the gifted program standards of the NAGC (2010), which have been influential in the field of gifted and talented education.

In the next Section 2, methodology, was based on a qualitative case study, began with introduction, described the research design, role of the researcher, the participants, brief discussion on the project, steps taken for the ethical protection of the participants, data collection, interviews, data analysis and described the project study methods to address credibility/trustworthiness.

Section 2: Methodology

Introduction

At a middle school in the OSD, not all qualified students were identified for the TAG program. Therefore, the goal of this qualitative case study was to conduct a modified policy analysis, from the prospective of various stakeholders, of the implementation environment of the TAG selection process. A white paper was written to enhance the understanding of the implementation environment of the TAG selection process. In this way, the administrators and policymakers in the local middle at OSD could work together so that the district policies on TAG can be consistently implemented.

In the second half of this section, I collected interview data from the guidance counselors, teachers, data coach, administrators, as well as from the school archives. The interviews shed light on current practices identifying TAG students while the archival data and TAG program documents shed light on past practices. Data collected from the interviews shed light on identification and selection processes into TAG program.

Research Design

According to Merriam (2002) qualitative research is based on the assumption that individuals in interaction with their world socially construct meaning. The world or reality is not a fixed, single, agreed-upon, or measurable phenomenon, and there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. A qualitative study involves the collection of data in a natural setting. A qualitative approach and the design was chosen because the results will yield data can answer the guiding questions. In addition, the proposed study was a problem-based research project,

and a qualitative research design was best fit with problem-based research study (Ellis & Levy, 2008).

I conducted a qualitative study to understand students' placement in TAG program through the perspectives and experiences of participants, in this case, the guidance counselors in an OSD middle school. According to Merriam (2002), there are three major sources of data for qualitative research: interviews, observations, and documents. For this case study, I used interview, the archives from the middle school, and documents to gather. I interviewed the guidance counselors because they understood the TAG selection process. Also, I interviewed the administrators, teachers, and data coach to understand the implementation environment of the TAG program.

I considered other qualitative research paradigms such as phenomenology and grounded theory. Merriam (2002) states that a phenomenological study focuses on people how they conduct their daily experiences. It is a form of inquiry and is an attempt to explain inner experiences of people's everyday lives. Creswell (2007) described phenomenological study as a meaning for individuals of how they lived their lives full of experiences. Van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as a way to reduce individual experiences which has description of universal importance. This description consists of what they experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Another qualitative research paradigm considered was grounded theory, in which Merriam (2002) talks about how adults in real-world situations take control of their lives through management systems. In doing so, they are able to have productive lives. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation of a process, action, or interaction

shaped by the views of a large number of participants. Charmaz (2006) advocated for constructivist grounded theory in which an inquirer examines participants' perspectives about procedures. The other qualitative method I considered was ethnography. An ethnographic approach was not appropriate for this project study because this type of research only seeks to understand beliefs and customs in human societies.

Case Study

According to Stake, (2005), case study research is "mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization" (p. 445). The case study was to learn about a particular issue or problem by focusing on a specific case. In this case study, the identification and selection processes of students into TAG program in the OSD school district will be explored. According to Stake (2005), the case study is undertaken because one wants to learn and understand the perspectives of the particular case (p. 445). Hatch's (2002) perspective on program and policy analysis suggests conceptualizing information and patterns or regularities to learn about the problem.

Rationale

The nature of the study was a qualitative case study design. Within this research design, I was focused on the participants' perspectives in the identification and placement of students into TAG program. According to Creswell (2007, 2003) and Merriam (2002) a case study offers "an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community" (p. 8). In a case study, wrote Merriam, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. According to Creswell, in a case study an investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection

involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. The goal of this qualitative case study was to conduct a modified policy analysis of the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. Specifically, this is a case study of the selection criteria and processes for placement in the TAG program in one middle school. The resulting project is a white paper with suggestions for policymakers and stakeholders (guidance counselors and others) for implementation of appropriate policy and procedures related to identification and selection of TAG students.

Role of the Researcher

I have been a social studies teacher in the OSD for over 10 years. I collected data from multiple sources through interviews: guidance counselors, teachers, data coach, administrators, and archival data from the local middle school records. TAG program documents regarding selection of students provided data from the local middle school on past practices in identification of TAG students in conjunction with the interviews. I do not teach TAG students and am not affiliated with the program. Neither, my past or current roles; and, relationships affected data collection because I do not hold supervisory power over the participants. I do, however, have professional relationships with potential participants and was able to establish a productive working relationship with the participants. I explained the nature of the study to the participants. The participants were informed that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the project study. The project study commenced after I had obtained an approval number **09-09-15-0076287** from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I have obtained a written approval

letter from the local school district to use TAG documents records at the local middle

school (Appendix B).

The Participants

The participants were various stakeholders from the TAG program at the local

OSD middle school. The sample consisted of three guidance counselors, three teachers,

one data coach, and two administrators.

Data Use Agreement

I obtained a letter of cooperation from the local school district to interview

participants. TAG documents records at the local middle school, and as well as from the

local middle school administration was obtained for review in this case study. I obtained

a data use agreement with the school to review de-identified data (see Appendix B)

Step-by-Step Procedures for Site Entry

I obtained permission from the building principal to conduct the study at the

school. I have been a teacher at the local middle school for over 10 years where the

research took place. I used both school and personal email for an initial contact with each

participant. Throughout the duration of this study, I used phone or email to contact

participants. Once this was finalized, the next phase was to contact each participant to

arrange convenient time for the face-to-face interview. The interviews were held in the

main conference room at the local school district. Interviews were held during planning

or after school to accommodate all schedules. The interview with each participant took

about 20-25 minutes.

The prospective participants were contacted by phone or through e-mail. Archival

data and TAG program documents for the present year and previous 3 years on selection

and placement of students was reviewed to provide information on trends in selection. The guidance counselors in this setting have experience ranging from 9 to 22 years. The teachers, one female and one male have experience ranging from 11 to 25 years. The data coach, a female has about 8 years of experience. The administrators were males, and have experience ranging from 15 to 29 years. They had been purposefully selected as each relates to the selection and placement of TAG students. I conducted a semi-structured interview with the participants to learn about their perspectives on identification and placement of students into the TAG program. The participants were assigned codes to strictly protect their identity.

Further, confidentiality was strictly safeguarded to protect the participants' names' from appearing on interview transcripts and I strictly adhered to the protocol of IRB requirements of Walden University. The participants in this interview could withdraw at any time, and the participants did not receive any monetary compensation.

Data Collection Procedures

Interview

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005) interviews unearth special kind of data in a research study. I interviewed three guidance counselors, three teachers, one a data coach, and two administrators to learn about their perspectives on the identification and selection processes in the placement of students into TAG program. In addition, I conducted document reviews of the current TAG policies and procedures selection procedure for admitting students into TAG. Each participant interview took approximately 20-25 minutes. Each interview with the participants was audio taped with permission (see Appendix D).

Review of Archival Data

I reviewed archival data from the local middle school records on selection of students into TAG program. I reviewed archival data for a consecutive 3-year period, 2008-2010, to trace the consistency of identification and selection processes (OSD, School Records, 2008-2010).

Review of TAG policy and Procedures Documents

I conducted a review of TAG policy and procedures documents to learn of the policies regarding identification and selection processes of students placed into TAG program. This review was conducted to compare written policy on identification and selection processes with what is gleaned from various stakeholders in the interviews about the actual implementation of these TAG (OSD, Procedure Documents 2008-2010) processes as reported in the interviews with stakeholders.

Contingency Plan for the Interviews

I arranged to meet with each participant for a face-to-face interview. As a last resort, I will arrange a contingency plan for any participants unable to meet face to face. The participants will be asked to participate in the interview through email or by telephone. If the interview was done through email, I will send the interview questions to the participants email addresses. If there are needs to send follow-up questions to clarify some meanings to their responses, I will certainly do that. If the interview is done via the telephone, I will call each participant to conduct the interview. I will obtain permission from each participant to audiotape the interview.

Data Collection

Data was collected from multiple sources through interviews with guidance

counselors, teachers, data coach, administrators, along with archival data from the local

middle school records and document review of TAG policies and procedures for

selection. The information derived from the interviews provided insights on the

identification and placement of students into TAG program. The interviews illuminated

some understanding of the participants' perspectives on the TAG program in the local

middle school at OSD. These interviews provided some insights on participants'

knowledge about identification and placement of students into TAG program. Hatch

(2002) described qualitative interviews as special kinds of conversations or speech events

that are used by researchers to explore informants' experiences and interpretations.

Creswell (2003) and Rubin (2005) stated that interviews are a data gathering process that

provides critical information to a qualitative research. Further, interviews usually uncover

the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences (Hatch, 2002).

The triangulation of data is comparing data from multiple sources. For example, type of

participant, interviews and documents as in this case study to establish credibility and

trustworthiness of the themes and findings.

Each interview lasted about 20-25 minutes. I sought permission to audiotape the

interviews with the participants, who received a written explanation of the study.

Member checking occurred after I have coded and analyzed the data. Each participant

was given the findings for their own data and the opportunity to discuss their findings

with me. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to conduct a modified policy

analysis of the identification and placement of students for the TAG program. This is a

case study of the selection criteria and processes for placement in the TAG program in one middle school. The project study was designed to explore identification of and the processes of students' selection into TAG program, resulting in the development of a policy white paper to provide some understandings to the administrators and policymakers in the local middle school at OSD so that the district policies on TAG are consistently implemented. Data was collected from multiple sources through interviews with the guidance counselors, teachers, data coach, and administrators. Archival data from the local middle school records and TAG program documents regarding how students are selected provided data on past practices in identification of TAG students. In order to achieve this goal, the following interview questions were used:

    1. How are students selected for the TAG program?

    2. What documents are used in placement of students in the TAG program?

    3. How are these documents used?

    4. What information do you have regarding the TAG selection processes? Explain

    5. How are recommendation made by parents to request that their child be placed in the TAG Program?

    6. How does a teacher made recommendation to have student placed in the TAG program?

    7. What roles do administrators play in identification and placement of students into TAG program?

    8. Is there anything you would like to add?

Administrators

1.What roles do you play as an administrator during student selection into the

TAG program?

2.What is your role in placement?

3.What complaints from parents about TAG program have you had to deal with
over

    the years?

4.What complaints from teachers have you receive about student placement into

TAG program?

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

Teachers

1.Why would you want to recommend a student to participate in the TAG

program?

2.What qualifications do you consider when you refer student?

3.Where do you get the information regarding referral?

4.To whom do you refer a student for the TAG program?

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

Document Review

I conducted document review such as the archival trends and policy documents to

compare what was listed in policy and what was actually done in practice on

identification and selection processes in TAG program. This review showed the history

of what was actually done in practice on identification and selection processes in the

TAG program.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) explained that data analysis begins during data collection since the researcher is engaged in a painstaking arrangement of the information he or she is gathering from the field. In this process, information is chunked into units or into themes so as to provide typology of the data. In this way, researchers' usually organize and categorize the data into meaningful arrangements. Merriam and Hatch (2002) observed that data analysis involves asking questions of the data, and those questions should relate to the research question(s) under investigation. Creswell (2007) and Hatch and Merriam(2002) stated that data analysis is a systematic search for meaning, and this means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns and identify themes.

Typological Analysis

The main purpose of this case study was to conduct a policy analysis of the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. The case study was about the criteria and processes for placement of students into the TAG program in one middle school. I used a typological approach to explore guidance counselors, teachers, data coach, and administrators about their knowledge base on students' selection and placement into TAG program. This approach allowed the researcher to gain in-depth data collection from all the participants. The interviews from each participant and from other sources were recorded for data analysis. For example, data collected from the interviews provided perspectives on identification and selection processes and procedures. Archival data and TAG program documents regarding selection of students provided data on past practices in identification of TAG students. According to Salama (2008), typology is use

to classify data into meaningful units. I used the conceptual framework based on the national standards of the (NAGC) to guide my data analysis. I classified entries to reflect the major elements of these national standards are as follows:

- Use multiple measures and multiple criteria.

- Acknowledge that there is a range of giftedness and a range of associated services.

- Assess talent broadly.

- Use different strategies to identify different aspects of gifted.

- Use an individual case study approach to identify students.

- Identify and place students according to needs and ability.

- Use appropriate measurements for underrepresented populations.

- Use instruments that are valid and reliable for the construct of gifted.

- Provide for all identified students, not just a set number of students that can be served. (NAGC, 2009).

I started by dividing the data gathered from each participant into groups or categories. I analyzed the data gathered from a structured- interview with each participant using codes assigned to them previously. Specifically, I adhered to the steps in typological analysis outlined by Hatch (2002) as follows:

1. Identify typologies to be analyzed.

2. Read the data, making entries related to your typologies.

3. Read entries by typology, recording the main ideas in entries on a summary sheet.

4. Look for patterns, relationships, themes within typologies.

5. Read data, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with which elements of your patterns.

6. Decide if your patterns are supported by the data, and search the data for non-example of your patterns.

7. Look for relationships among the patterns identified.

8. Write your patterns as one-sentence generalizations.

9. Select data excerpts that support your generalizations. (p. 153)

Using the above steps in typological analysis, data was organized, categorized, and placed into typological groupings to identify common themes that relate to implementation of policy requirements in selection of students for the TAG program.

As the data were sorted by themes, categories emerged as themes, which were color-coded to identify segments (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2007; & Moustakas, 1994). The codes identified the type of data gathered from each participant, and provided description of the identification and selection processes used to place students into TAG through categorization and typology of the data. For example, themes from the interviews with the guidance counselors shown that, they did not follow the local school district policy on TAG. The themes that resonated from the teachers' interviews were lack of awareness how the guidance counselors identified and placed students into the TAG program. By identifying themes within typologies through categorization regarding the conceptual framework to help recognize the identification and selection processes used for placing students into TAG program. Yin (2000), asserted that thoroughly categorizing typological data allows the researcher to understand common themes.

Methods to Address Credibility/Trustworthiness

Data was collected from multiple sources through interviews with guidance counselors, teachers, data coach, administrators, and from archival data from the local middle school records. TAG program documents regarding selection of students provided data on policy practices in identification of TAG students. I provided the findings for each participant's own data for their review. Also, I compared my notes, logs, and journals. I reflected on my own assumptions, worldview, biases, and theoretical orientation regarding identification and placement of students into TAG to insure the credibility and trustworthiness of this case study (Merriam, 2002). To maintain the credibility and trustworthiness, I recorded data collection, and insure that data analyses were in accordance to this record keeping.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations of the Project

This case study was based on the assumption that I was given unrestricted access to all information and records regarding the TAG program at OSD. Also, the interviewees respond to my questions honestly. The study was limited to Ogie School District (OSD). The project results may not be applicable to schools in other school districts or states. Purposeful sampling to identify participants may further limit the generalizability or transferability of results. I was limited to the information willingly provided by the personnel at OSD. Some participants, out of a proprietary feeling about the TAG program at OSD, may have been less than fully complete or candid in answering interview questions because I teach at OSD and may assume I have a vested interest in the study's results.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Because this research involves human subjects, I obtained authorization from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), number 09-09-15-0076287 to conduct the study. In addition, I obtained the National Institutes of Health Certificate of Completion: Certificate Number: 471064. I also obtained written authorization from the local middle school at the OSD from the superintendent of schools and a verbal cooperation from the building principals on January 24, 2012, and I obtained written permission upon IRB Approval.

Participants were not compensated for this project. Also, the participants will be provided with a summary of the project upon request. I will strictly adhere to the National Institutes of Health protocols. Participants would be protected from harm. Data collection was confidential and would not identify the participants because each participant was assigned numerical code and their identity will be strictly protected. I will keep the data for 5 years in a safe cabinet with pad lock.

Data Analysis Results

Findings

The analysis of data reported in this project study was based on the data collected from nine participants that I interviewed which included two administrators, three guidance counselors, three teachers, and one data coach. The findings justify the use of interview to learn about the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. Each participant was assigned a code to protect his or her confidentiality as follows:

- three guidance counselors were assigned G1, G2, and G 3.

- two administrators were assigned A1 and A2.

- three teachers were assigned T1, T2, and T3.

- one data coach was assigned DC

An analysis of the data collected from the 9 participants for the project study shown that the local school district policies on TAG were not being followed.

Guidance Counselors Interviews

I interviewed three guidance counselors to learn about how identification and selection of students into the TAG program is run by the department. The guidance counselors have no "official procedures" (participant G2) based on the local school district (LSD) policy on TAG program on how the students should be selected and placed in the TAG program. The guidance counselors are the ultimate decision makers in the identification and selection process to place students into the TAG program. Although, certain criteria are in place and should be used to identify and place students into the TAG program at OSD, these criteria are not followed accordingly. When asked how are the students were selected for the TAG program? G1 replied "we look at their standardized test scores," and G2 responded "students were selected for the program based on several different scores they received." The responses from the two administrators demonstrated that the selection of students for the TAG program was heavily weighted on standardized test scores. In addition, this meant that the guidance counselors were not in compliance of using multiple criteria of the local school district to identify and place students for the TAG program.

As shown in figure 1, are example how grades and tests scores are solely used to place students in the TAG program. Based on the chart below, students are expected to

have 90 % or above in Language Arts and Mathematics in order to be considered for

TAG acceptance. In standardized test such as the NJASK, students are expected to score

200 or above in Language Arts and Mathematics to be qualified for TAG program. But,

the problem arises, when a student scored 200 in Language Arts, and not in Mathematics

or vice versa. On the state test such as NJASK, a score of 200 in both Language Arts and

Mathematics is needed by a student to be admitted into the TAG program. The figure 1

illustrates how the guidance counselors used standardized test scores or test grades to

place students into the TAG program. The figure 1 also shown excessive reliance of

standardized test scores and grades to place students for the TAG program.

Figure 1: Grade Distribution in TAG Selection

Letter Grade	Grade Point Average Equivalent	Description	Numerical Grade Equivalent
A+	4.0	Excellent	97-100
A	4.0		94-96
A-	3.67		90-93
B+	3.33	Above Average	87-89
B	3.0		84-86
B-	2.67		80-83
C+	2.33	Average	77-79
C	2.0		74-76
C-	1.67		70.73
D	1.0	Below Average	65-69
F	0	Failure	64-0

The implications of these responses were that the district TAG policy which was based on the state, adopted from NAGC (2009-2010), standards programs were not used, and test scores only were used in combination with teachers' recommendation which was as well based on student grades to identify and place students into TAG program. According to Brown and Garland, (2015), educational policies (TAG) can help to create and support an infrastructure within which the needs of students can be addressed. Moreover, identification and placement of students into TAG ought to be research criteria driven process based in order to maximize the potential of all candidates entering the TAG program. The selection, identification and placement of students into the TAG program ought to be or should be driven by policy (Coleman, 2012). Decision making process driven by policy can sustain the direction and successes of a program such as TAG (Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). According to Gallagher, (2013), research and evaluation of the TAG program can strengthen identification and placement of students into the program. Policy implementation is the key to ensuring the success of the identification and placement of students into the TAG program (Gallagher, 2013). The use of policy to direct and guide a local-level educational policy (Coleman, 2012) such as the TAG program is the best practice that can have an enormous benefit for all stakeholders and as well as other school district similar to OSD.

In addition to the "standardized test scores," participants G1, G2, and G3 answered that a "teacher's recommendation" is used to place students in the TAG program. This clearly shown inconsistency with the multiple criteria outlined in the local school district on TAG policy based on the state and NAGC. According to McBee, Shaunessy, and Matthews, (2010), the use of locally developed policies for identifying

TAG students is the most efficient and effective way to identify and place students into the TAG program so that some groups within student population are not underserved and underrepresented. The New Jersey Commission on Programs for Gifted Students [NJDOE], [NJCPGS], 2005) provided the New Jersey Administrative Code that outlined the eligibility criteria based on the National Association for the Gifted program standards (NAGC) and were locally adopted by the local district for use to identify and place students into the TAG program. The New Jersey Department of Education has no requirements mandate for the TAG programs in the state, but rather its' ought to the individual school districts to develop and strengthen their TAG program so that every student in the student population can participate.

According to participants G2, "the district hired a scheduling person an outside consultant who analyzed the scores such as NJASK to place students" for the TAG program. In the next question, what documents are used in placement of students in the TAG program? Participant G1 responded that "the documents are NJASK scores and a written recommendation from teachers." Participant G2 answered that documentation such as NJASK as well as recommendation from teachers," and G3 replied to the question that "the test scores – the NJASK" are used. Participant G3 stated "a lot of parents had called me, and said "how come my child is not in it?" Participant G3 gave the reason that "they have to go by scores and with recommendation from teachers." In my follow-up question to participant G3 to learn more about this outside consultant hired by the district, participant G3 replied that the consultant is "not connected to the TAG program." The interviewees did not provide clear insight as to why the school district used an outside consultant to select and place students into the TAG program.

The next was question: how are the documents used?

Participant G1 - We use it [document] to decide. We can of kind put all the kids in the pool – all the kids that are either proficient in English or Math. Based on grades and qualifications, we start to put kids in the program.

G2 – I don't have much to speak to that. They hired outside consultant for that, and I am not sure what procedure was used for that.

G3 – I don't know how she [consultant] uses it [document]. She (consultant) didn't specify to me how she did it [how students were placed in classes]. All based on scores they had from last year.

In further analysis, it was evident that multiple criteria were not being used in the selection and placement of students into the TAG program at the local middle school. It was also evident that, even though procedures were in place, it was not followed nor does it adhere to the outlines dictated by the school district policy on TAG program. When the question was asked: What information do you have regarding the TAG selection processes? The participants responded in the following way:

Participant G1 – "That's a good question, but unfortunately for me, I don't have concrete documentation for what I have been asked to do. Nobody told us what to do. We pretty much guided by past practices. It's not really documented of what was to be followed, that would be been appreciated."

Participant G2 – "I guess word of mouth, and past practices. I never received an official procedure to follow-up how students are selected into the program. That's not to say there isn't one available. I am not aware of one."

Participant G3 "We went by grades, math scores, and teachers' recommendation."

I asked: How are recommendation made by parent to request that their child to be placed

for the TAG program?

Participant G1 - "We look at the scores the child has in testing and teacher's

recommendation. On the question: how does a teacher made recommendation to have

student placed for the TAG program? Participant G1 - "We give binder to teachers for

basic placement for all the kids for their grade levels. In that binder, teacher can use the

space provided to make comments where to place a student." Participant G2 - "We had a

binder that we passed around for the teachers to fill out for their subject area."

Participant G3 - "I have to look at the scores those students have." When

participants G1, G2, and G3 were asked the question: What role do administrators play in

identification and placement of students for the TAG program?

Participant G1 - "Administrators are not really part of the process. But, if they

question why a student is placed for the TAG program, we have to provide them

documentation."

Participant G2 - "They [the administrators] should have the say, and make the

guidelines. If I have a student that should be in TAG class, I looked at his or her

standardized test scores and test grades from his or her teacher. So, I guess that's it."

To provide the opportunity for the participants to clarify their previous responses or to

elaborate further, I asked the following question: Is there anything else you would like to

add? Participant G1- "It would have been nice to have more information before we place

students into classes- putting together these groups on past practices. It would have been

nice to have some state standards to show exactly how students should be placed into the

TAG program. Everyone involved should get some of kind of proper training from the state about TAG what should be done, what to expect, and how we are going do it." The responses given by this participant suggests that there was the need for the guidance counselors to participate in a training program on how to carry out identification and placement of students into the TAG. It also revealed, perhaps, the reason why the local school district policies on TAG were not being followed.

Participant G2 - "I would just say that there should be guidelines in place for the TAG program but there should be flexibility."

Participant G3 - "Not really, I have answered every question to the best of ability."

In continuing the analysis of the guidance counselors' interviews, the respondents G1, G2, and G3, answered that the "administration has nothing to do (LSD)" with the identification and placement of students for the TAG program. Apart from that, the administrators do not provide any leadership role in the TAG program to ensure that the program is properly managed. The data collected from the guidance counselors revealed that the district policies on TAG program were not followed. It was also evident that, the processes that were used by the guidance counselors were inconsistent with both the local school district and the state policy on TAG program.

Further review of literature on the talented and gifted education shown that the underlying philosophy in the identification and selection of students into the TAG program is not abundantly clear (Dai, 2011). This was due in part to lack of national standards needed to identify and place students in the TAG program. Instead, contentious policies are put into place by various school districts which often result to inconsistency

in the manner students are identified and placed in the TAG program such as the local school district where this study was conducted. The local school district policies on TAG are based on the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), and using the conceptual framework of the (NAGC), based on the outcomes of this study in relation to the research questions and research findings, using research and inquiry, engages the educators in identifying, evaluating, using, conducting, and disseminating educational research that informs best practices in the education of students with gifts and talents (Johnsen, 2012).

According to Dai (2011), the various paradigms in the field of education, of which the most common is the gifted child model, which assumes that high-ability students can be located and identified through testing has been found insufficient. Identification practices are best when all levels of students' abilities are considered in the selection process (Dai, 2011). According to Cross, 31 states mandate identification and services for gifted children (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009). Millions of dollars are spent every year in support of gifted education, not only in the schools but also outside the schools, but nor address the identification and placement of student into gifted program (Cross, 2013). Defensible gifted education uses multiple criteria for identification, changing the view of whose gifted students are and what should be happening for them (Cross, 2013).

There are theoretical benefits if multiple criteria are implemented correctly to identify and place students for the TAG program. It serves the students at the highest ability levels, and gifted education appear to be the best education of for this type of student population (Cross, 2013). The tests have proven to be bone of contention in the

identification and selection of students into the TAG program. Cross (2013), argued that

students have multiple abilities and different criteria should be used to identify and place

students for TAG program in order to maximize their potential. The local school district

did not provide separate funding for the TAG program. According to DeNisco, (2015),

lack of funding and patchwork policies across states often leave decisions on identifying

and serving gifted students to district administrators.

In the local school district, the district administrators were not familiar with the

identification, selection, and placement processes of the TAG program (DeNisco, 2015).

In addition, there was the absence of leadership, and this has impeded guidance

department's ability on how to use the district policy on TAG efficiently and effectively

on identification, selection, and placement of students for the TAG program in the local

school district. Further review of literature substantiated that using multiple criteria is the

best practice to identify and place students into the TAG program. Gifted identification is

usually determined by a combination of ability and achievement tests, teacher

nominations, behavioral observations, and portfolios (DeNisco, 2015). This served as

justification for the local school district to encourage the use and implementation of the

National Association for Gifted Children Standards programs (NAGC, 2009-2010) to

select and place students into the TAG program. According to DeNisco, (2015), local

school district should look to local performance norms rather than standardized tests

scores in the identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program.

Jolly, (2014), cautioned educators to look beyond standardized tests in the

identification of academically talented students for TAG program, and it is only in this

way that students who may have qualified would not be underserved. Children are gifted

in different ways, and using multiple criteria to identify their different ability levels and placing them in the TAG program is the best practice (Kettler; Puryear; Mullet, 2016). Different school districts have different perspectives on the TAG program. As a result, school districts identify and place their students for the TAG program differently depending on the multiple criteria they have. Therefore, the unique traits of gifted students call for educational programming that is commensurate with the students' ability and needs (Young; Balli, 2014). According to McBee; Shaunessy; Matthews, (2012), gifted education for intellectually gifted students was mandated in Florida beginning in 1975 using multiple criteria for gifted program services so that certain group in their student population would be marginalized (Florida Department of Education [FL DOE], 2010).

The gifted selection criteria should utilized multifaceted criteria of children gifts and talents for potential placement in the local school district TAG program ([FL DOE], 2010). In furtherance the analysis of this study, the National Association for Gifted Children ([NAGC, 2010]), Hu & Kubilius, (2016), noted that there are often large disparities among scores of a majority of gifted children, and that standardized test scores often do not depict children's abilities. It is the reason for example, Brown and Garland, (2015), stated that multiple criteria and policy is the key to identify and place students into the TAG program, and to ensuring a strong infrastructure for gifted education. In the United Kingdom, according to Koshy; Smith; Brown, (2014), there is gap between policy and practice in the gifted education, and most especially the process of identifying and placing students into the gifted program. As Siegle (2015) noted in the United States,

policy and practice must address the way gifted education identify, select, and place students into the TAG program to maximize their various ability levels.

Administrator Interviews

I interviewed two administrators to learn about their perspectives on how identification and selection of students into the TAG program is run. An analysis of the data collected from the administrators indicated that administration does not play a part in the identification and selection of students into the TAG program and this was evident as well from the data I collected from participants G1, G2 and G3. On the question: what role do you play as an administrator during student selection for the TAG program?

Participant A1 - I was not involved in working with TAG students.

Participant A2 - I have not had much interaction with the TAG program. But, there's something in our system that needs to be looked into because I was worried about the academics of all our students. They were not meeting the criteria." As revealed here in the responses provided by this respondent, if the administrators were not involved in the identification and placement of students for the TAG program, who provides direction to ensure the TAG program is run properly? Further analysis of the data collected, revealed that the administrators did not assumed leadership role in order for the TAG program to run properly. In the absence of leadership, the TAG program was not properly run and managed by the guidance department. In consequence, the guidance counselors did not have the skills and knowledge to carry out identification and placement of students into the TAG program due to lack of training. The next question was: what is your role in placement?

Participant A2 - Not much as I would like to have." The recurring themes from the responses given by participants A1 and A2 provided further evidence that the administration did not set direction as to guide the goal for the identification and placement of students for the TAG program. The recurring themes which emanated from the data gathered were what guide the recommendation provided in this project study. On the question: what complaints from parents about the TAG program have you had to deal with over the years? In response to the questions about parental complaints about the TAG program, A1 did not answer the question, but provided useful insight about standardized test usage by the guidance counselors. A1 answer meant that students who did not score 200 or above in the state assessments such as the NJASK were not admitted into the TAG program. This was inconsistent with the multiple criteria outlined in the local district manual on TAG policy. It also meant that test scores and student grades were weighted more over the multiple criteria outlined in the local school district TAG policy.

In response to the question: What complaints from parents about the TAG program have you had to deal with over the years? A2 said "I heard that some parents have complained to the guidance counselors about the TAG program. I am not sure of the specific complaints they have received." Again, this is further evidence that the administrators did not take leadership role in the management of the TAG program. The identification processes and placement of students that are used are inconsistent with the state and local school district policies on TAG, which were based on NAGC (2009-2010) standards. The responses provided by participants A1 and A2 were inconsistent with the

multiple criteria outlined in the local school district TAG policy based on the state and NAGC.

In response to the question: What complaints from teachers they have received about the student placement into the TAG program? A1 said "Students were reading below two or three grade levels, poor comprehension skills, and lack of focus and the TAG program is not rigorous enough."

In the final question for the administration, I asked if there is anything else they would like to add. Participant A1 responded that the "TAG program is a good program, but it has not been managed properly. And I do know that a lot of parents in the past wanted their sons and daughters to be enrolled in TAG program. But, sometimes, when they were placed into the program, it created frustration for teachers because those students that were truly designated as TAG." A2 answered that "Students that were placed in TAG program were not talented and gifted. Some students were placed into TAG to "motivate" them." This is further evidence that the students who were occasionally placed for the TAG program were not placed for the program based on the multiple criteria outlined by the local school district, but rather by test scores, teachers' grades, or were simply placed for the TAG program to "motivate" them.

In summary, an analysis of the data collected from the administrators revealed the administrators were not part of the identification processes nor do they know about how the TAG program is run. In further analysis of the data collected from the administrators, it was evident that the administrators were not part in the identification and selection of students into the TAG program. The administrators do not take any leadership role in the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. As a result, there was no

set goal or direction how the TAG program would run. According to the State of States address on Gifted Education National Policy and Practice Data (2008-2009), it stated that it is the responsibilities of the local school district to find the best way to serve their gifted and talented population. Harvey and Kosman (2014) indicated that, implementing a policy such as the TAG program benefits the population it intended to serve. In addition, according to the National Association for the Gifted Children (2009-2010), it is essential to adhere to the standards for the gifted program because it provides equal opportunity for every gifted child in the school population when these criteria are used for identification and placement.

Teacher Interviews

In this project study, I interviewed three teachers to learn about their perspectives on students that are placed in TAG program. The teachers do not agree with the way the TAG program was run in the local middle school. Most of the teachers stated they would prefer that multiple criteria such as the state and the NAGC criteria which the local school district based their TAG policy on would be followed to identify and place students in the TAG program. One of the biggest complaints from TAG teachers according to participants A1 and A2 have been that students, who were placed in TAG were reading at 2 or 3 grades level below, have poor comprehension skills, demonstrate a lack of focus, and that the TAG program is not rigorous enough. Participant A1 stated, "the TAG program is a good program, but it has not been managed properly."

The teachers were asked: why would you want to recommend a student to participate in the TAG program? T1- said "I would do it (recommendation) based not solely on their test scores, but their daily activities, and making an effort with their work.

And I don't think you can determine a TAG student solely what they get on their standardized tests." T2 – responded "I recommended students by their performance in class, the ability to complete in-class and homework assignment, their interaction not only with me, but with their classmates." T3 – answered "I basically consider the grades they received from me and other classes they have taken." This is further evidence in the manner students were identified and placed into the TAG based on the responses given these teachers.

I asked the teachers: what qualifications do you consider when you refer a student? T1- replied "I consider their homework, their daily behavior, and their participation in class, their time, and their effort." T2 – responded "Definitely, their grades are number 1, their behavior, not only in my class, but in the entire building as a whole. I take into consideration their character" T3 – said "I use definitely their grades, and compare with performance level from other classes."

In response to the question: Where do you get the information regarding referral? T1 said "I used my daily grades. And also, I looked at their study habit and completion." T2 – said "Usually, I get it through guidance. I would contact guidance counselors and say I really think so and so really need to be placed in the TAG program." T3 – replied "I use my grade book to look at their performance across the marking period."

In response to the question: To whom do you refer a student for the TAG program?

T1- replied "Normally, we refer a student to TAG through the guidance department. And there have been special circumstances where a student has been moved to TAG program, um for having a really good behavior or simply they need exposure to other students." T2 – said "Usually, it is through guidance or administration. I will bring it up – usually nothing has ever written down."

To summarize, the teachers did not agree with the way the TAG program was run in the local middle school and there was also inconsistency in the way the teachers recommended and referred students to participate in the TAG program. For example, some teachers' referral of students into the TAG program were weighted heavily on their test grades and state test scores, but some teachers' referrals of students into the TAG program included some indicators such "motivation," "behavior" and the student "study habit." In general, the teachers did not agree with the way students were identified and placed in the TAG program. The teachers would rather prefer if multiple criteria were used to identify and place students in the TAG program based on the state and the NAGC standards which the local school district based their TAG policy on.

The implicationsof the data collected from the teachers revealed that the way students were identified and placed into the TAG program was inconsistent in accordance to the TAG policies set forth by both state and local school district. Analyzing the data further (McBee; Shaunessy; Matthew, 2012), indicated that lack of knowledge about the fidelity of policy implementation of TAG programs has created problems for local school districts for students identification and placement. Even so, the local school district can benefit from the existing TAG policies based on state standards adopted from the National Association for Gifted Children Program Standards (NAGC, 2010).

From a policy and practice perspective, the identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program is the heart of the gifted education. According to Van Tassel-Baska , Hubbard, (2016) part of the problem in the identification, select ion, and placement of students for the TAG program rests with the lack of data on how to address policy and practice. This study presented ideas grounded in research based on the conceptual framework of the program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (2009-2010) for the practitioners that can be applied during identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program. The review of the relevant literature substantiated that the multiple criteria of the NAGC served as justification for identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program. According to Assouline, Colangelo, Van-Tassel-Baska, & Lupkowski-Shoplik, (2015), this is the researched strategy for any gifted child. Kettler, (2016) arguably noted that, the state of gifted education has been in decline in recent years. Although, the decline was due to funding but it was also due to problems arising from policy and practice. Warne (2012) argued that gifted education experts have long recognized that regular standardized achievement and aptitude tests are not suitable for testing the abilities of gifted children. This further substantiated that multiple criteria such as the program standards of the NAGC would best served the student population if faithfully used and implemented correctly.

The *Marland Report* (1972) has been the impetus and structure on how to provide a more systematic approach to building state and regional gifted programs, but one of the main focus has been how to identify, select, and place these students with talents and gifts into the appropriate program (Jolly, 2014). This effort according to Winkler &

Jolly, (2011) has resulted to different standards such as these program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children and other standards that have been adopted by several states across the nation and within different school districts. The conceptual framework of the program standards for National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) was used to address policy and practice in terms of identification and placement of students into the TAG program. Using multiple criteria to identify, select, and place students into the TAG program would be provide equal opportunity for every child within the student population since children brings different levels of abilities and intelligences to the classroom (Shanunessy-Dedrick & Cotabish, 2014).

The various articles and literature that I reviewed, confirmed that school districts should consider the use of a broad-based approach to assessment that involve multiple criteria for giftedness (O' Reilly & Matt, 2012; Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2013; Ziegler, & Phillipson, 2012). According to Colangelo & Wood, (2015), the identification of gifted individuals has the analysis of characteristics, traits, and abilities resulting from researchers and psychologists' work with gifted students. In other words, again, this substantiated that the multiple criteria of the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children is best for identification and placement of students into the TAG program in the local school district. Policies play a vital role in decisions making process regarding practices, and the analysis of these policies would be essential for the improvement of effective gifted program (Mammadov, 2015). According to Mammadov, (2015), theory and practice are interrelated phenomena in education.

The stakeholders in an educational system should have some understanding on how, and to what extent a policy is reaching its intended goals (Mammadov, 2015). "An

Educational leaders who are responsible for ensuring high standards of achievement in programs need to be literate about the policy and the policy process" (Mammadov, 2015, p. 139). According to Mammadov, (2015), the identification and placement processes of students in Turkey call for interaction and collaboration among the Committee on Special Education. Policy structures are particularly important to the success of gifted education. The local middle school must adhere to the TAG policy based on the gifted program standards of the NAGC (2009-2010) accepted by the state, and adopted by the local school district on TAG programming. The use of multiple criteria for identification and placement of students into the TAG program increase reliability success of the program (Moon, 2016). This policy is consistent with the multiple criteria outlined in the local school district policy manual on TAG program for identification and placement of students into the TAG program.

Data Coach

In the 2015-2016 school year, an outside consultant was used to place students into classes including the TAG program according to the data coach (DC). The DC indicated that "the current curriculum and methodology" regarding the TAG program is not "challenging enough" for the TAG students. On the question to the DC: why would you want to recommend a student to participate in the TAG program?

DC - said "I have never seen any set criteria students have to meet for the TAG program. I have been here for seventeen years." In response to the question: What qualifications do you consider when you refer students? DC – replied "I recommended student based on several criteria, but the guidance counselors place students in TAG based on their tests

scores." The next question I asked was: where do you get the information regarding

referral?

DC – responded "I have never seen an actual referral in writing. Usually, a

recommendation is made to   office." To whom do you refer a student for the TAG

program? DC – answered "I refer a student to the office." To gain more insight about the

role of data coach, I asked the DC:

what is your role as a data coach? DC – replied "In general, I assist staff with technical

support I can give. I do not analyze data, but I have assisted the administration to put

together some of kind of data for the staff." In my final question to the DC: Is there

anything else you would like to add? DC – said "The TAG classes are too heavily based

on test scores. Some students are not good test takers. I have never seen any set of criteria

students have to meet for the TAG program. I have been here seventeen years."

In summary, the data coach did not analyze data for placing students into the

TAG program, but instead, an outside consultant was hired by the local school district to

analyze data to place students for their grade level including the TAG students. However,

the data coach provided useful information to the researcher which added further

evidence that identification and placement of students into the TAG program was heavily

weighted on test scores and test grades of students instead of applying the criteria set

forth by the local school district. This shown further evidence of inconsistency in the

identification and placement of students into the TAG program. The importance of

having and using school policy is to inform educational decisions such as the TAG

program. According to Bracken & Brown, (2006, 2008, 2010), and the National

Association for Gifted Children, (NAGC, 2010), multiple criteria are used to identify and

place students into the TAG program based on the type of student population to avoid inconsistency during identification and place processes.

McClain and Pfeiffer (2012), noted in the survey of state policies and practices on gifted identification showed that most states have moved beyond policy and practices of using a single IQ score for identifying gifted students. In addition, majority of states endorse the use of multiple and somewhat varied measures and means to identify giftedness and make selection decisions (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014; NAGC & Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted, 2015). According to Steenbergen-Hu & Olszewski-Kubilius, (2016), the research findings concerning gifted identification has been the focus of study to find the best way of identification and placement of students into the TAG program, and using multiple criteria like the gifted program standards outlined in the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2009-2010) would provide every student equal chance to participate in the TAG program.

Review of Archival Data

I checked for archival data records for a consecutive 3-year period from 2008-2010 on the TAG program. I found the TAG policy and procedure documents for the TAG program in the local middle school were not properly maintained. I conducted a research into the archival data records at the local site. I found three hand written recommendation letters made by teachers. One of the recommendation letters dated 2003 with a room number 210 written at the top right corner of the page. A teacher was recommending a female student who had a score of 220 in mathematics in the state test. There was nothing on file to know the outcome of this recommendation the teacher made to the guidance's office. There were no current archival data records. The recurring

themes which emerged from the responses given by different participants above, confirmed further that the local school district policy on TAG which was based on the state multiple criteria adopted from the NAGC (2009/2010) standards on TAG were not being followed. According to the data I gathered from the data coach, he or she has never seen any set criteria students have to meet for the TAG program. This is further evidence that the local school district policy on TAG were not being followed by the guidance counselors to identify and place students into the TAG program.

Review of TAG policy and Procedure Documents

I researched into the TAG policy and procedure documents. I had access to the huge cabinet in the main office conference room at the local site where school files are stored. I found few procedure documents on how students are identified and placed in the TAG program. In this cabinet, I found the documents on TAG program that are not current. Instead, these documents reflected an attempt made in the academic school year of 2006/2007 to restructure the TAG program. The restructuring involved the creation of two TAG groups called "Fielder A" and "Fielder B." Admission to either of the fielder group was primarily based on standardized test scores such as the NJASK and teachers' test grades.

For a student to qualify for a Fielder A, he or she would have to receive a score of 200 or above on a state standardized test in Language Arts and Mathematics, and a teacher's test grade of 97-100, 94-96, 90-93 or an equivalent grade point average of 4.0, 4.0, and 3.67 respectively. For the Fielder B, a student would be qualified if he or she received a score of 188-199 on a state standardized test in Language Arts and Mathematics, and a teacher test grade of 87-89, 84-86, 80-83 or an equivalent grade point

average of 3.33, 3.0, and 2.67 respectively. This restructuring never took off because the guidance counselor who introduced the "Fielder" system into TAG program retired in that academic school year of 2006/2007.

Summary

In this section, I described the research methods for the case study. I described role of the researcher and rationale, the data collection procedures, step-by-step site entry to the participants, contingency plan for the interviews, and the interview processes. Also, I conducted the review of the archival data, and review of TAG policy and procedures documents. In addition, this section included the guiding/research questions, interview questions, typological analysis, method to address quality/validity, assumption, limitations, scope and delimitations of the study, and the ethical protection . I conducted individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews with participants, all of whom have signed an informed consent form. In the second part of section 2, I described the final study data analysis results.

In summary, the search for TAG program policy and procedure documents was confined to consecutive 3-year period 2008-2010. There were no current TAG policy and procedure documents. Based on the data I gathered from the participants and analyzed, it revealed that the guidance counselors were not following the local school district TAG policy on the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. In addition, there was no "concrete documentation" as far as policy and procedure documents were concern. Based on further analysis of the data collected, it was evident the TAG program was not properly run based on the NAGC criteria which district adopted as outlined in the district policy manual on TAG program.

Section 3: The Project Study

Introduction

This section is about the project study. Based on the research findings, a policy recommendation guide would be provided to the local school district (Appendix A). I analyzed how the guidance counselors at the local middle school carry out identification and placement of students for the TAG program. In this section, I cover the following topics: description and goals of the project study, the rationale for the study, review of the literature and the potential barriers to the project. I also describe the project, its implications of social change and conclusion.

Description and Goals of the Project Study

I conducted interviews with various stakeholders: administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, and data coach. In addition, I reviewed archival data and TAG policy and procedure documents at the local middle school (LMS) to compare with the interviews data that I gathered. The interview with administrators targeted what leadership role was undertaken by the administrators during identification and placement of students into TAG program. The interview with the guidance counselors targeted what specific processes were used by the guidance department when placing students into TAG program. The interview with teachers explored what complaints the teachers might have had both past and present about the TAG program. The interview with the data coach examined the role of the data coach during grade analysis of students to be placed in the TAG program.

The ultimate goal of the policy recommendation change is to disseminate research findings to the local school district (LSD) to guide the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. This policy recommendation was a research-based best practices to the local school district, and ensure that students who have talents and gifts are not underserved among the student population. Another goal of the policy recommendation was to insure consistency in the way students are identified and selected for the TAG program.

The Rationale for the Study

The project was chosen because the process of identifying talented and gifted (TAG) students at the local site is generally inconsistent with the state and local school district (LSD) identification policies. The result is that, students who may have been qualified are not being selected to participate in the TAG program. Conversely, there are also instances where students who may not have been qualified, were accepted into the TAG program (LSD), 2008 -2010). This practice became a rationale to conduct a modified policy analysis of the TAG program by interviewing all the stakeholders involved in the identification and selection processes.

I selected an interview format because according Rubin and Rubin (2005), interviews can yield good data for case study such as this project study. The proposed interviews with the stakeholders targeted the problem of the inconsistency in the identification and selection of students by the guidance department to participate in the TAG program. In the white paper, recommendations was provided for the local school district based on the policy analysis of the TAG program with the potential for positive

social change implications for improving TAG identification and selection of students consistent with state and NAGC standards.

Review of the Literature

To identify prospective, peer-reviewed articles and books, the following databases-Education Research Complete, Thoreau, and Eric were searched for the years 2008-2016 using the following keywords*: policy analysis, policy recommendation, identification and selection of students into TAG program.* I used the Boolean operators, AND and OR to optimize the results. Abstracts were used to judge an article's relevancy to the research questions. The references of significant articles were scanned for additional sources.

The conceptual frameworks for the project study based on the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2009-2010) were reviewed. The rationale for using NAGC standards was their acceptance by a national organization geared to benefit the gifted populace. Therefore, the criteria evident in these standards will encourage both administrators and the guidance department in the local middle school at OSD on TAG to be consistently implemented. The research project was conducted to gain insights how the guidance counselors at the local school district identify and place students into the TAG program. Also, the findings revealed some insights that have relevance to the policy and practices of the guidance counselors on TAG program. The project study highlighted that the guidance counselors at the local middle school were not following the local district policy on TAG program that was adopted from the state criteria based on the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2009-2010). Jolly and Hughes (2015), agreed that multiple criteria are required to identify and place students into the TAG program so

that students with gifts and talents are not under-identified especially in the high-poverty school district. Horak and Galluzzo, (2017), argued that policy for identification and placement of students into the TAG program should be aligned with practices so that students with academic potential and intellectual ability would not be under-identified and underserved within the student population. It would be appropriate to use multiple criterial or measures in order to address different levels within the student population. Using multiple dimensions to capture every gifts and talents for identification, selection, and placement of students for the TAG program is best for gifted identification (Snyder; Barge; Wormington; Schwartz-Bloom; & Linnenbrink-Garcia) 2013), The policy recommendation provided was a position paper. The ultimate goal of the research findings is to provide this policy recommendation change to be disseminated to the local school district (LSD) to guide the identification and placement of students into the TAG program. The process of identifying talented and gifted (TAG) students in the local middle school was inconsistent with the state and local school district (LSD) identification policies. According to the local school (LSD) TAG policies, it recommended that identification and selection of students into the TAG program should be on the criteria below:

- Grades received in a specific subject or area that reflects superior achievement consistently over a period of time.
- Samples of the student's work (reports, projects, pieces of artwork, etc.) that show both superior quality and unique or creative approaches to the assigned tasks.
- Recommendations from the student's teachers both past and present.

- Auditions and/or demonstrations of superior talents or skills in a specific program area.

- Scores on standardized tests of achievement or tests or general intellectual ability that reflect superior achievement and/or potential when compared to the norms for the student's grade, age, school, district, etc. (OSD School Policy Manual, p. 20, 2000).

The students who may have been qualified were not being selected to participate in the TAG program in the local middle school was a problem. Conversely, the students who may have not been qualified were being selected to participate in the TAG program was also a problem. The identification and selection approach was inconsistent with the New Jersey Commission on Program for Gifted Students, which recommended that school districts base TAG decisions on NAGC multiple standards (2010). However, there were some students who were properly identified and placed in the program. The review of literature focuses on the scholarly journals and scientific literatures that support policy in an organization such as the OSD. A look at policy in general, suggests that policy can impact the success or failure of any organization depending on the way it is used (Harvey& Kosman, 2014). The problem at the local middle was that the personnel identifying and placing students into the TAG program were not following the district policy on the TAG program that was adopted from the gifted program standards of the National Association for the Gifted Children (NAGC, 2009-2010). Although, identifying students into a TAG program is a complex process. But, the personnel identifying the students have to know what criteria to use and how to use the criteria so that the gifted and talented students within the student population are not underserved.

According to Peters and Matthews, (2016), using individual IQ testing is no longer common in gifted identification, and that the adoption of multiple-criteria identification systems is becoming more widespread in schools. There is a strong evidence base that using multiple criteria for identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program is the best policy and practice for the gifted education (Peters & Matthews, 2016). As Peters and Matthews noted, it is not about using a different test or a different process to identity and place students into the TAG program, but schools need to use existing assessments in a different way to best find talents among diverse student populations. According Peters and Matthews, (2016) the primary criterion for the quality of an identification system seems to be the degree to which it correctly identifies every student who needs and will benefit from the program. The data for this project study were gathered from multiple sources, from guidance counselors, administrators, teachers, and data coach, to provide perspectives on the identification and selection processes in the placement of students into TAG program. According to Merriam (2002) using multiple sources of data or collection methods of data are good strategies for promoting validity.

How are policies used in an organization? A look at policy in general, suggests that policy can impact the success or failure of any organization depending on the way it is used. According to Harvey and Kosman (2014), the implementation of a policy framework has a procedural challenge, but it also has the propensity to benefit students, staff, and the organization. Implementing a TAG policy program is not only a theoretical matter but practical one as well. State of States address on Gifted Education National Policy and Practice Data (2008-2009), indicated that there are variations implementing

policies on TAG program resulting in a disparity of services between and within states, but it is the responsibilities of the local school district to find the best way to serve their gifted and talented students.

Defining the goal of policy contributes to the practice-informed decision making process (Harvey and Kosman, 2014). Policy serves its best when it is used in accordance with its intended purpose. The implementation of identification policy on TAG is designed specifically to increase the representation of students so that students who are qualified are not underserved, and conversely, to decrease the numbers of students who may not have been qualified yet were admitted into the program. The importance of having and using school policy to inform educational decisions has been documented in research. According to McBee, Shaunessy, & Matthews (2012), the calls for using results of research to inform educational policy have increased in recent years, in the United States as well as in other countries. Nevertheless, stakeholders may respond to other forces in preference to evidence-based practices making it difficult in practice. Furthermore, the philosophy of local school control is deeply entrenched in educational practices in the United States, and this is especially true in the area of gifted education (McBee, Shaunessy, and Matthews, 2012).

The educators' assumptions underlying the identification of gifted and talented students remain discrepant with practices used among states and local school districts. In the local middle school for example, the guidance counselors' assumptions on the TAG program underlie the inconsistency with the state and local school policy on TAG program. In the *State of the States in Gifted Education* (Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted and National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2012-

2013), 32 state directors reported a mandate and noted the use of variations of criteria for identification: IQ scores 44%, range of state-approve assessments 44%, achievement data 41%, and nomination 9%.

Even so, the lack of knowledge about the fidelity of policy implementation on TAG programs has created an impediment for local schools and school districts for the students identification processes (McBee, Shaunessy, & Matthews, 2012). The local school district already has existing TAG policies based on state standards adopted from the National Association for Gifted Children Program standards (NAGC, 2010).

The implementation of the district policies on TAG from the state based on NAGC standards (2010) is critically important to increase the number of student participation including those that have the academic and intellectual potential. This project study addresses the need for policy based on research to be used in gifted identification processes of gifted students for the local gifted program. To do this, an understanding and knowledge of the policy implementation processes is needed on the part of the stakeholders. Lack of knowledge of the policy implementation processes results in inconsistency in the identification, selection, and placement of students in the TAG program.

Potential Barriers to the Study

One potential barrier to the implementation of the project (policy recommendations) is that there is no supervisor for the TAG program at the central office administration. Even so, I did not anticipate that the local school district will not cooperate with this project endeavor because it does not involve any monetary expenditure to implement. In addition, the central office administration of the local

school district has changed various personnel few times. I do not anticipate that this will cause potential barriers to the implementation of the project. The reason is that, at the time I requested for permission to conduct this research, the central office administration requested for Section 1 copy of my dissertation which I provided to them. I assumed that they have read the Section 1 of the dissertation I provided to them, and understood the purpose of this research project. Perhaps, one potential barrier to the implementation of the project might be that the local school board of education might not vote on it unanimously as they all did during the approval of the study. Another potential barrier to the implementation of the project is that, the entire school district is under pressure from the state to improve student performance. As a result, the district might not consider the project a priority.

The Project Study

This project was not an attempt to evaluate the program of the TAG program, but rather it was a policy recommendation that provides and identifies the best practices based on policy implementation for identification and placement of students into the TAG program. It was a modified policy analysis to enhance and provides better understanding how the TAG program should be run by the guidance counselors at the local school district based on perceptions of teachers and the local school district administrators. The project provided the background of the existing problem that the guidance counselors at the local middle school were not following the local school district policy on TAG to identity and place students into the TAG program, and these practices were inconsistent with the state and local school district policy on TAG. In addition, the summaries of the case study findings based on the case analysis are

provided. The policy recommendation was supported by major evidence from both literature and research (Kaplan, & Hertzog, 2016) on how identification, selection, and placement of students into TAG program can successfully be carried out so that academically and intellectually able students are not underserved. The recommendations are tied to the evidence found in scholarly journals (Snyder; Barger; Wormington; Schwartz-Bloom; & Linnenbrink-Garcia).

Project Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan for this project is goals-based. The project was a policy recommendation to the local school district. The goal is to ensure that the guidance counselors at the local middles school are following the district policy on TAG programming to identify and place students into the program. There are 9 board members of the local school district who meets on regular basis to discuss matters of interest such as policy recommendation to the local school district. As such, the local school district board members and central office administration have a vested interest in the TAG program. In order for the both stakeholders to know if the guidance counselors are implementing the policy recommendations correctly, a summative review would be appropriate in the implementation process to be presented to the board members during a regular scheduled board meeting. According to Peters and Matthews, (2016), annual review of policy can help identify where mistakes are made. This summative review plan calls for annual review of the policy recommendation to make adjustment or correction if there is deviation as outlined in the policy recommendation to the district. Through the annual review, the local school district should be able to know if the guidance counselors are implementing the policy recommendations or are doing it correctly. The guidance

department should adhere to proper documentation of identification and processes about selection and placement of students into the TAG program. The stakeholders include the district central office administration, local school district, local middle school administrators, local middle school guidance counselors, and teachers. This project study engages the stakeholders and policy makers in transitioning their thinking about identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program in ways to enhance district identification and placement processes of talented and academically able students to ensure that students are not being underserved. Aside from that, this project study offer productive directions for identification and placement of students into the TAG program. For example, before the school year begins each year, gifted students and their parents or guardians could be invited to attend TAG discussion based orientation to get familiar with the program. The resources that are needed in this project are very minimal. Basically, it involved a simple form to be filled out and placed on the board of education agenda meeting. Attached along with the form were multiple copies of the policy recommendation for distribution to board members including central administration.

The evidence that supports the project includes the general purpose of policy in an organization, the importance of having and using school policy, the benefits to the students and staff, and to the school district. More specifically, it promotes positive social change that will transform an indispensable educational experience for the TAG students. When the local school district TAG policies are correctly used, case study findings based on the data analysis support the propensity to increase students' performance and test scores which the district can benefit from enormously. Due to the

nature of this project, I do not anticipate any resistance or potential barriers to the policy

implementation on the TAG program. The reason is that, it does not involve any

budgetary concerns to implement this policy. The school district policies on TAG which

are based on the NAGC Program standards are already in place in the local school

district, but what is needed is the knowledge and understanding on the part of the

personnel who are involved in the identification, selection, and placement of students into

the TAG program. Change, according to Harvey and Kosman (2014), needs to be

managed and led. This project addressed the need for policy, based on research, to be

used in the gifted identification, selection, and placement processes in order to alleviate

the current inconsistency in the program.

The policy recommendation provides a solution to the inconsistency in identifying

students into the TAG program by empowering the stakeholders with the knowledge,

skills, and understanding to carry out identification, selection, and placement of students

into the TAG program. As outlined in this policy recommendation, I can be utilized as a

resource trainer for the TAG program to the personnel carrying out the identification and

placement of students into the TAG program without monetary compensation.

The policy recommendation is deliverable and can be disseminated immediately.

The proposal for implementation includes the use of appropriate district guidelines for

submitting required form for approval by the board members. The timetable for

implementation can be anywhere from 30 – 60 days depending on the time and date of

the designated board meeting. Normally, copies of the policy recommendation would be

made available to the board members and central administration prior to the board

meeting. At this point, my role would be to initiate a meeting with the local board of

education and central administration. This meeting would update both board of education and central administration about my agenda. The white paper would be presented at a regular scheduled school board meeting. Based on the findings from the project study, it has the propensity to change the way TAG program is being run in the local school district. The recommendations will serve as a cornerstone and road map for the entire local school district as a point of reference for identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program.

Project Social Change Implications

I am open to the presentation of these research findings to the central administration of the local school district if request is made. The social change implications may include the potential for improving TAG identification policy for those responsible for placing students into TAG program and making the procedures consistent with state and NAGC standards. In this way, students who are academically and intellectually able would not be underserved. Over all, it would enhance students' learning for TAG students by bringing together the students for whom the program was designed. These students would then benefit by learning with their peers and everyone benefit. It could also serve other local school district similar to the one OSD serves.

Conclusion

In this section 3, I discussed the description and goals of the project study, the rationale for the study, and review of the literature. Also, I described the analysis of the guidance counselors' interviews, administrators, teachers, and data coach. I discussed the review of TAG policy and procedure documents including the review of the local middle school archives (LMS). In addition, I discussed the project study, and the

implications for social change. In the next section 4, I will discuss the completion of the project study. Specifically, I will discuss project strengths and limitations, policy recommendations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of self as scholar, analysis of self as practitioner, analysis of self as project developer, the project's potential for social change implications, applications, and direction for future research.

Section 4: Reflection and Conclusion

Introduction

In section 4, I discuss the reflections and conclusion of my project study. In this section, I cover the following topics: the project strengths, and limitations, the recommendation for remediation, and the recommendation for the local school district. Also, I will discuss the scholarship, the project development, the evaluation plan, and leadership and change. I also discuss the analysis of self as a scholar, analysis of self as a practitioner, analysis of self as a project developer, the project's potential for social change, and the implications, applications, and direction for future research.

Project Strengths

One of the goals of this study was to contribute to the literature on the identification and placement of students in the TAG program by explaining how guidance counselors at a local middle school identify and place students in the TAG program. The study could not have completed had I not set up interviews with the various stakeholders that included the administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, and data coach. The sample size of the project study may not allow generalization, but the findings have significance to both the practitioners and the stakeholders (Koshy, Torres, & Smith, (2010). The interviews with the participants were designed to conduct a modified policy analysis of the TAG program that would enhance identification and placement of students for the TAG program. As Koshy, Torres, and Smith noted, (2010), "any investigation based on a sample is conducted in the hope that the generated picture is a good reflection of the larger reality from which it was selected" (p.13). The goal was to provide understanding and enhance the identification and placement processes of students for the

TAG program through the use of multiple criteria so that students not underserved academically and intellectually. Conversely, the use of multiple criteria may also prevent students who may not have been qualified from being accepted for the TAG program. According to Casey and Koshy, (2012), one of the pivotal roles of research is to increase the knowledge base of the topic under investigation. The purpose of the project was specifically to let administration and the school board of education know that district policies are not being followed in the identification of gifted students. Providing this knowledge is an essential part in improving the identification and selection of students into TAG program. Above all, the project study represents the first step forward in helping the school district use this study as road map in the identification and selection of students into the TAG program. In addition, through the white paper I am available to present my recommendation to the central administration (see Appendix A). This project study cannot be generalized to fit the needs of other school district because TAG programs are often run different from school district to school district.

Limitations

In addition, I do not have any information about how biased the participants were in responding to the interview questions. According to Brown, Koshy, & Smith, (2014) this could be a limitation to the research study. One of the limitations of the project study was my dual role as a researcher and a teacher in the local middle school where the study took place. This possibly could have created bias in the study. I minimize the bias, I de-identified the data I collected from the participants. The participants were unaware who participated in the study. I set up a confidential arrangement with the participant individually. This helped to resolve potential problems that might have occurred.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The supervisor for alternative approaches to provide the solution to the problem in TAG program are as follows:

- Local school district set the direction for the entire identification and selection process. A decision about the types of talent or ability to be identified should be based on the goals of the program. For example, what specific alternative approaches and criteria that would accelerate the development of mathematical reasoning to identify students who have exceptional aptitude and interests with math. This should be tied to the identification process. That is the scope of this study.

- The school district should consider developing their own definition of talented and gifted or adopt the state definition of TAG which is based on the NAGC standards. This will provide an essential threshold for identifying students into the TAG program.

- The district should consider having operational definitions of the behaviors that are indicators of gifted aptitude. This is very critical to the success of the TAG program because these behaviors could become a checklist that could be added to the identification matrix.

- The district should consider having the description of the goals of the identification and selection process defined.

- The district should establish a specific uniform evaluation instrument that is consistent with the goals of the TAG program.

- Then, the district could develop specific multiple criteria upon which student selection would be based (also see appendix A for recommendations).

Scholarship

Scholarship was evident throughout the course of this doctoral journey. Throughout this journey, the information I have gathered, the techniques and strategies I have learned through the various assignments and group discussions is a rewarding learning experience. I was engaged in academic reading through the various textbooks that have exposed me to intellectual rigor in professional practice (Schon, 1983).

The research has allowed me to build the foundation for my project study. I became an intuitive thinker through the reading of various scholarly journals and articles. Collected and analyzed the data for the development of this project study. I developed a keen professional understanding through which I gained valuable knowledge to search through scholarly articles to inform my research study. In the process, I developed a deeper understanding for the need to create social change to bring about social equilibrium and justice. Education, it seems, is one of the engines to advocate positive social change for the voiceless.

Project Development

The process of project development is cumbersome. It requires a careful planning, determining the population the project study would eventually help, and what potential social change will come out of the study. Setting up the interviews with the prospective participants was not stressful, but I was very careful to keep each of the participants confidential. In this way, it allowed the participants to answer the interview questions freely. None of the participants was aware of who was being interviewed, and where the

interviews would take place except the participant that was scheduled to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted one day at a time with each participant in a private room away from hallway traffic. Most of the interviews were conducted after school hours to avoid noises from the hallway interfering with the interview recording. There were one or two occasions where interviews had to be rescheduled with one of the administrators.

The next process was the qualitative process of data collection. Specifically, data were collected confidentially from the prospective participants so as to maintain data integrity and trustworthiness. Data transcription was cumbersome and time consuming. In the qualitative analysis of the data, several themes emerged based on the responses of the participants. To optimize the underpinning positive social change intended for this project study, a white paper was deemed appropriate in the form of recommendation to be presented to the local school district.

Leadership and Change

Today, in the 21st century, the critical theme in the school improvement narrative is nested on leadership (Murphy, 2005). Leadership is the ability to transform an organization to success, and serve as an advocate for that organization to promote good. More importantly, the ability to engage people to promote positive social change. Leadership is the ability to inspire people to become agents and instruments for positive social change. The ideological and empirical seedbed of teacher leadership has germinated out of the powerful changes in the larger economic, political, and social environments in which schooling takes place (Murphy, 2005).

Throughout this doctoral study, I have learned an endearing lesson which is one of the powerful engines to bridge social equilibrium. That is, to engage in a deeper

meaning of life to serve community and promote positive social change. Over the course of this journey, I have read various textbooks, scholarly articles, and literature for the sole purpose of contributing to my educational knowledge, and perhaps to provide a solution to educational needs through research. In this regards, I collected and analyzed data to change the direction of a local school district in the way the TAG program identifies students in need of TAG services. Other school districts similar to this local school district could benefit as well.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Analysis of Self as Scholar

One of the essential aspects of the doctoral process is self-discovery. I became a writer, reader, analyst, and a professional in the academia. I have learned various approaches, strategies, techniques and the way to look at things from a different spectrum point of view. There is a self-fulfilling feeling that I have become worthy, and that education is the most indispensable instrument to change people's lives.

The doctoral journey provided me the discipline for endurance, and the ability to overcome the many obstacles along the path of this journey. As a scholar, I learned to stay current with the best practices founded in research, to listen to the changing tide and provide direction in the change I want to see the change happen. This project study is a testament to an endearing spirit, and it represents the enlightenment to promote positive social change.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I have been an educator for a number of years, and there nothing that defines me now more than anything else than a "practitioner." I have stumbled over the course of this

doctoral journey, but I did not crumble. I gained stamina. I am aware that sometimes there are limitations in life, but as a practitioner, I remained steadfast to stay on the course to find solutions. As practitioner and a researcher, one other goal in this research study was to find a problem and provide a solution for the sole purpose of promoting positive change.

In this life-long process of learning, the knowledge and experience I have gained over the course of the doctoral process will help me continue this positive social change endeavor. The most meaningful and rewarding experience I have acquired during this project study will allows me to be deliberate, effective and efficient, and to become a good decision maker. As a practitioner, a teacher has to constantly find the best way to make decisions that will eventually change people. To do this, it is necessary to collaborate with my peers.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

I woke up at night to change my plan or design. Sometimes, I woke up just to write down an idea. I have done that numerous times. The project started to take shape when I realized that to collect the data that I needed for the research study I needed to conduct interviews with the participants. After reading scholarly articles and some textbooks (Creswell, 2003 & 2007; Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin), I determined that interviews can yield rich thick data. With continued feedback from my committee chairperson, the project study became a reality. I was able to overcome the initial challenges that I faced during the development of this project by studying the feedback I received.

The Project's Potential for Social Change

This project study was designed and developed to solve the problem how the stakeholders in the local middle school carry out identification and selection of students for the TAG program which was deemed inconsistent with district and state policies on TAG. The project's potential for social change is to provide understanding of the identification and placement processes of students for the TAG program through the use of multiple criteria. Providing this knowledge is an essential part of improving the identification and selection of students for the TAG program.

Implications, Applications, and Direction for Future Research

The purpose of this project study is to provide information that could then lead to positive social change. The project study could be applied to other school district that serves similar student population OSD servers. Recommendation in the form of white paper will be presented to the district if request is made. The recommendations will serve as a cornerstone and road map for the entire local school district as a point of reference for identification and selection of students into the TAG program.

Future research is needed to look into other programs run by the school district to identify if a similar problem exists to that found in the TAG program. Action research is needed to review data collected on the TAG program to strengthen the consistency of the identification and selection of students into the program.

Conclusion

In section 4, I described the project strengths, remediation and limitations of the project. I highlighted the recommendation to the local school district. I discussed the scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of self

as a scholar, analysis of self as a practitioner, and analysis of self as a project developer.

I wrote about the implications, applications, and direction for future research, and the

potential implication for positive social change.

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Appendix A: The Project

Best Practices in Identification, Selection, and Placement of Students into the TAG Program in a Local Middle School to Address Inconsistency

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Version: December 2017

Executive Summary

For the past several years, complaints have been surfacing about the way TAG

program is run in the local middle school. Teachers' discussion during common planning

time (CPT, 2005, 2006, & 2008), reveals widespread dissatisfaction with how students

are identified and placed in the TAG program. Also, minutes cite teachers' awareness of

instances of parental requests to have a child placed in the TAG program, which were

granted. In addition, the content area in which a student is identified for TAG is not

clearly stated or termed "undocumented." This approach is inconsistent with the New

Jersey Commission on Programs for the Gifted Students, which recommends that school

districts base their TAG decisions on NAGC multiple standards. This process revealed

that the district has a problem with the identification, selection, and placement processes

of students into the TAG program.

A qualitative case study was conducted to identify best practices in the

identification, selection, and placement of students in the TAG program to address the

inconsistency in the identification, selection, and placement processes. Implementing a

TAG program is not mainly a theoretical matter, but a practical one as well. A review of

literature which began with scholarly journals provided a major consensus on what most

scientific literature identified as critical components in addressing inconsistency in the

identification, selection, and placement of students in the TAG program. The literature review further confirmed that the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) were the most efficient and effective policy implementation on TAG program because of their acceptance by a national organization geared to benefit the gifted population. The criteria evident in these standards will encourage both administrators and policymakers in the local middle school at OSD to utilize these policies on TAG to be consistently implemented. I conducted interviews with the guidance department, administrators, data coach, and teachers to collect data. Also, I reviewed archival records, and procedure documents to determine the TAG processes. The findings revealed that the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010) which the local school district base their TAG program policies would best solve the problem of inconsistency, coupled with the local district set goal of the program, and providing training based on the gifted standards of the NAGC to the personnel who are involve in the identification, selection, and placement processes of the TAG program.

The inconsistency in the identification, selection, and placement processes of the students in the TAG program in the local middle school dictate a need for immediate intervention. The qualitative case findings clearly indicate a problem thus exist in the local middle school. A change policy is strongly recommended that would provide a base from theory to research-based best practices to the local school district, and insure that students who are academically and intellectually able are not underserved among the student population.

Policy Recommendation

To address the local problem of inconsistency in the identification, selection, and placement of students in the TAG program, a qualitative case study was conducted with the local middle school guidance department, administrators, data coach, and teachers. This qualitative case study was carried out to identify the problems, and to find research-based best practices (solution) to the problem. This policy recommendation summarizes the existing problem along with summary of the analyses of the qualitative case study findings. The recommendation is aligned with the evidence identified in the scholarly journals on TAG education. The ultimate goal of this policy recommendation is to change the current local school district policy on TAG to address the problem of inconsistency in identification, selection, and placement of students into TAG program which can have enormous implications to improve TAG identification policy for those responsible for placement consistent with state and NAGC standards. Over all, it would enhance students' learning for TAG students.

The Existing Problem

The process of identifying talented and gifted (TAG) students in one local middle school is generally inconsistent with the state and local school district identification policies. For the past several years, the problem that qualified students are not always identified for this program has been evident. The local school district policies on TAG are based on the gifted program standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). According to the New Jersey Commission on Programs for the Gifted Students, it recommends that school districts base their TAG decisions on NAGC multiple standards which the local school district has already adopted. To understand the problem further, I

conducted interviews with the respective participants in the local middle school. Also, examine archival records, policy documents and procedure documents on the TAG program.

In conclusion, it was evident that there was inconsistency in the way the guidance department carry out the identification, selection, and placement of students in the TAG program in the local middle school. The findings of this project study indicate that research based best-practices on the identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program can have an enormous social implication coupled with the knowledge, skills, and understanding on how the program should run efficiently and effectively to benefit the students. The recommendation can be adopted during the month of July when students are being selected to various classes for the beginning of the school year in September.

Summary of Analysis and Findings

The guidance counselors have no official format and procedures based on the local school district (LSD) policy on TAG program on how the students are selected and placed in the TAG program. The guidance counselors are the ultimate decision makers in the identification and selection process to place students into the TAG program. Although, multiple criteria are in place and should be used to identify and place students into the TAG program at OSD, but these criteria are not completely implemented. An analysis of the data collected indicates lack of knowledge, skills, and understanding on the part of the guidance department about identification, selection, and placement processes of students into the TAG program. This lack of knowledge, skills, and understanding about the identification processes and placement of students was a

recurring theme in the interviews with the respective participants. The identification

processes and placement of students that are used are inconsistency with the state and

local school district policies on TAG which are based NAGC (2009-2010) standards.

According to the participants, regarding the identification processes and

placement of students into the TAG program "… we look at their standardized test

scores." This respond is inconsistent with the multiple criteria outlined in the local

school district TAG policy based on the state and NAG C. NJASK test scores are

considered "documents" and as well the "written recommendation from teachers" are

used in the selection and placement processes. There is no evidence of archival data,

TAG policy and procedure documents based on data gathered. According to one

participant, "I don't have concrete documentation for what I have been asked to do.

Nobody told us what to do. We pretty much guided by past practices. It's not really

documented of what is to be followed, that would have been appreciate."

Further analyses of the data, revealed that the administrators are not part of the

identification processes nor do they know about how the TAG program is run. G1 stated

that "they are not really a part of that", and because of that the guidance department will

"use child study team to help us along with that. But, usually administration, they are not

really a part of that process. It would be nice to have more informative way before we

place students into classes – putting together these groups on past practices or not by

heresay. It would be nice to have some state standards to show exactly how students

should be placed into the TAG program. Everyone involve should get some kind of

proper training from the state about TAG what should be done, what to expect, and how

we gonna do it." G2 stated that "the administration has nothing to do" with the

identification and placement of students into TAG program. With regards to the information they have regarding the TAG selection processes, indicated that "I guess words of mouth, and past practices."

Administrators

The administrators do not play any part in the identification, selection, and placement of students into TAG program. According to the interviews with guidance counselors, G3 was very poignant stating that "the administration has nothing to do" with the identification and placement of students into TAG program. As one of the administrator participants pointed out, "I am not involved in working with the TAG students." One of the biggest complaints from TAG teachers according to one of the administrator participants have been that students, who are placed in TAG are reading at 2 or 3 below grade levels, poor comprehension skills, lack of focus of TAG students, and the TAG program not being rigorous enough. By one administrator's own admission, "the TAG program is good program, but it has not been managed properly. With regards to the parents who request that their child be placed in the TAG program, the administrator indicated that "when they are placed or push into the program, it creates teacher's frustration because those students are not truly designated TAG."

Teachers

The teachers do not agree with the way the TAG program is run in the local middle school. Most of the teachers would prefer if multiple criteria such as the state and the NAGC criteria which the local school district based their TAG policy on would be followed to identify and place students in the TAG program. According one teacher, "I would do it based not solely on the test scores, but their daily activities, and making an

effort with their work. And I don't think you can determine a TAG student solely what they get on their standardized tests." On what qualification to consider a student to be placed in the TAG program, one indicated that "their grade is number 1, their behavior, not only in my class, but in the entire building as a whole. I take into consideration their character: Are they leader? Are they willing to take risk? Basically,… the way they treat their peers, and are they respectful to their peers, do they avoid getting into nonsensical things. … my view of the TAG students is not only performance in the classroom, but how they carry themselves throughout the entire building." According to participant number 0030, "usually nothing has ever written down," and the TAG program basically is run by words of mouth. The teacher added that, "the criteria for the TAG program needs to be addressed. I have talked about that for years. The kids were basically placed based on their performance of standardized tests (NJASK)."

In the 2015-2016 school year, an outside consultant was used to place students into classes including the TAG program according to the data coach. The data coach indicated that "the current curriculum and methodology" regarding the TAG program is not "challenging enough" for the TAG students. The participant responded to the TAG selection process that "they it by test scores, and that should not be based on that alone. I have never seen any set criteria students have to meet for the TAG program. I have been here for seventeen years."

Archival Data Records

Archival data records were checked for a consecutive 3 year period from 2008-2010 on TAG, there are no evidence of TAG policy and procedure documents based in the local middle school. According to G2, "I don't have concrete documentation for what

I have been asked to do. Nobody told us what to do. We pretty much are guided by past practices. It's not really documented of what is to be followed, that would have been appreciated." G2 put it this way "I guess words of mouth, and past practices."

There are little documented procedure documents on how students are identified and placed in the TAG program. One participant vented her frustration in response to the question what documents are used to identify and place students into the TAG program. "It would be nice to have more informative way before we place students into classes, and not putting together these groups on past practices or by heresay. It would be nice to have some state standards to show exactly how students should be placed into the TAG program. Everyone involve should get some kind of proper training from the state about TAG what should be done, what to expect, and how we gonna do it." The participants in the study expressed complete dissatisfaction in the way the TAG program is run in the local middle school. Each participant in the study expressed the need to use the district set of multiple criteria based on the state adopted from the NAGC program standards (2010).

Major Evidence

Many scholarly journals and literature indicated that the use of multiple criteria is a research-based best practice in the identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program. The process of identifying, selecting, and placing students into the TAG program in the local middle school is inconsistent with the state and local school district. The result is that, students who may have been qualified are not being selected to participate in the TAG program. Conversely, students who may not have been qualified are selected and placed in the program. According to Gubbins et al., (1995)

researchers have developed studies designed to develop teachers' pedagogy and to enhance the pedagogical content knowledge needed to address array of talents and abilities among their students. Burns et al. (2004), Gardner (1983), Renzulli (1978), and Sternberg (1985) indicate that multiple criteria is the research-based best practice approach to carry out identification, selection, and placement of students into the TAG program. But, the most widely acclaimed criteria were developed by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010) program standards adopted by the New Jersey State Commission for Gifted Children which most school districts across have adopted into their TAG program. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) provides the following: According to NJCPGS (2005), state and local policies to identify gifted students should be based on the following principles:

- Standardized achievement, intelligence, and creativity tests, when used properly and selected with care, are valuable parts of the identification and screening process for gifted programs and services.

- The first step to identification is a screening process that considers all children. Subsequent identification processes are administered to students who have been noted as potentially gifted as part of the general screening process.

- Despite their potential usefulness, tests have limitations. This is especially important when assessing underserved gifted students (e.g., young children, linguistically or culturally diverse students, economically disadvantaged students, students with special needs).

- No single measure should be used to make identification and placement decisions.

- Multiple measures and valid indicators from multiple sources must be used (e.g., information from family and caregiver, teachers and/or student observations, portfolios, products, interviews).

- Personnel who administer, use or, advise others in the use of these tests should be qualified to do so (p. 8).

DeNisco (2015) added that multiple assessments are especially important for identifying gifted students from a diverse student population. The personnel carrying out identification, selection, and placement of students in the TAG program, must have the professional knowledge, skills, and understanding how the TAG processes work (Burn, 2004).

Policy is a fundamental key factor to drive decision making process attainable and to produce best results. Using research-based decision making process in TAG program to identify and place student is the best practice. Using research-based best practices from the qualitative case study findings, the following are the recommendations to the local school district:

Recommendations to the Local School District

- The local school district to set the direction for the entire identification and selection process. A decision about the types of talent or ability to be identified should be based on the goals of the program. For example, what gifted curriculum that would accelerate the development of mathematical reasoning to identify students who have exceptional aptitude and interests with math. This should be tied to the identification process. That is the scope of this study.

- The school district should consider of having their own definition of talented and gifted or adopt the state definition of TAG which is based on the NAGC standards. This will provide an essential threshold for identifying students into the TAG program.

- The district should consider of having operational definitions of the behaviors that are indicators of gifted aptitude. This is very critical to the success of the TAG program because these behaviors could become a checklist that could be added to the identification matrix.

- The district should consider of having the description of the goals of the identification and selection process defined.

- The district should establish a specific uniform evaluation instrument that is consistent with the goals of the TAG program.

- Then, the district could develop specific multiple criteria upon which student selection would be based.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Project Study: Identifying Talented and Gifted Students in a Local Middle School District

Time of Interview:_____

Date of Interview:_____

Place of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Good morning/afternoon.

My name is Mr. Abu. Thank you for accepting to participate in this research study. The purpose of this interview is to gather data for my project study on identification and placement of students into the TAG program. The interviews will provide the researcher the best information on your perspectives and background knowledge you have on TAG identification and placement of students into TAG.

The overarching research question is:

How do guidance counselors at local middle school identify and place students into TAG program?

Interview Guiding Questions

Guidance Counselors

1. How are students selected for the TAG program?

2. What documents are used in placement of students in the TAG program?

3. How are these documents used?

4. What information do you have regarding the TAG selection processes? Explain.

5. How are recommendations made by parents to request their child be placed in TAG program?

6. How does a teacher made recommendation to have a student placed in the TAG program?

7. What roles do administrators play in identification and placement of students into TAG program?

8. Is there is anything you would like to add?

Administrators

1. What roles do you play as an administrator during student selection into the TAG program?

2. What is your role in placement?

3. What complaints from parents about TAG program have you had to deal with over the years?

4. What complaints from teachers have you received about student placement into TAG program?

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

Teachers and Data Coach

1. Why would you want to recommend a student to participate in the TAG program?

2. What qualifications do you consider when you refer student?

3. Where do you get the information regarding referral?

4. To whom do you refer a student for the TAG program?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add