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The Underrepresentation of Low Socioeconomic Status Children in Gifted and Talented Programs

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Teresa Clark-Massey

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2018

Abstract

The Underrepresentation of Low Socioeconomic Status Children in Gifted and Talented

Programs

by

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MA, Grand Canyon University, 2008

BA, University of Wyoming, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

The problem is children from low socioeconomic status households are often underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. Only a small percentage of these students is selected to participate in the district's gifted program. The purpose of the study was to help appropriately identify and include low SES children in the district's gifted program. The social constructivist foundation was applied for a better understanding of how the environment affects a child's learning and how social factors contribute to cognitive development, which could possibly alter the perceptions of how successful children can be. The guiding questions revolved around the teachers' perceptions of elementary (K-6) gifted and talented program's identification process in finding all children in need of advanced curriculum and instruction regardless of socioeconomic status level. A qualitative case study is designed to collect data from 6 elementary gifted and talented teachers from 1 district. Information was gathered through interviews, then transcribed and through the lens of the social constructivist framework, axial coding followed as well as use of open coding. Through the field notes some strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations were gathered about the gifted program. The identified the codes used supported answering the research question and subquestions. This project study has the potential to create social change by guiding teachers to understanding all children, regardless of their background, can learn through developing a stronger identification process and more locations to grow awareness of the opportunity.

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Dedication

Dedication of this paper goes to my husband, Christopher Massey; my parents, James and Sheila Clark; and my sister, Amanda Mellott. My husband has been my rock and encourager through the process. He stood by my side during this journey and continued to push me through the difficult times. My parents always told me to do my best and improve my life by going to school. They never doubted my endeavors of pursuing a doctorates degree. My sister was my sounding board when things got rough and I was overwhelmed. Without everyone's encouragement and loving words, the completion of this journey would not have happened.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The use of standard screening procedures for gifted programs may miss identifying students with talents since more than half of public school students are coming from low-income families (Sparks, 2015). Brown and Garland (2015) discussed the importance of social values, including equity and excellence. Student equity provides an equal opportunity for good education, and student excellence provides the chance to go as far and high as a student is capable (Brown & Garland, 2015). It is the expectation for public schools that all children succeed, regardless of household income level (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, Cole, 2008, Elhoweris, 2008, Williams, 2013). In studies from Moon and Brighton (2008) and de Wet and Gubbins (2011), a focus on the reconceptualization of gifts and talents among the primary students was realized to ensure representation of all ages, cultures, linguistics, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Over the last several years, poverty has continued to increase according to national, state, and local statistics. The federal poverty threshold in 2016 was \$24,036 for a family of four with two children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). In 2014, the Casey Foundation (2016) estimated that 22% of children were living in poverty in the United States, with 13% of Wyoming's children living in poverty. These children often face the effects of poverty no matter where they live, with the overall effect on academic achievement (Borland, 2004, Burney & Beilke, 2008). The gifted and talented (GT) identification process could be influenced by limited definitions of intelligence and giftedness, biases and prejudices, types of tests used, a student's ethnic status, physical and learning disabilities, or living in

poverty with a low socioeconomic status (SES), which have ultimately resulted in underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (Ambrose, 2013, Carman & Taylor, 2010, Clark, 2012, McBee, 2010, Warne, Anderson, & Johnson, 2013).

Children who do not have enriching experiences are often at a disadvantage (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Enriching experiences include additional education materials and providing meaningful and relevant learning across all subjects. Children entering school unprepared often fall behind in the early grades, making the task to close gaps that already exist even more difficult (Ford, 2007, Stull, 2013) Successful schools use strategies such as student-centered instruction, interaction between teachers, parent involvement, small class size, and project-based instruction as well as staff-initiated professional development, and proactive leadership (Morgan, 2012, Stull, 2013).

The Local Problem

The problem within the northwestern region of the United States is the underrepresentation of children from low SES in GT programs. One northwestern region state has a policy on GT education programs, which leaves the local education agencies (LEA) in charge of development and implementation of the gifted program (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014, Neumeister & Burney, 2012). By allowing individual districts to set policy, not only are there differences in programs but also variance in identification procedures, curriculum choices, instructional methods, and the assessment of students. While these different practices are noticeable across the state, due to privacy concerns, access to student enrollment and data on academic success are limited. More than 3.4 million K to 12 students are coming from low SES families who often go unrecognized

for accelerated programs (Sparks, 2015, Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007). The GT program offered in two schools in the Mountain district (pseudonym), one of the largest in the state, served 3% of the student population (Sommers, 2010). In general, low SES students were underrepresented in GT programs across school districts in the United States (Peters & Gentry, 2010). In 2009, the Civil Rights Data Collection team estimated that 15% of the students in the United States enrolled in gifted programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The local program served 218 children in the GT program during the 2010 school year.

The concern of underrepresentation of low SES students in GT programs continues to grow. The Mountain district identified students as being low SES based on free or reduced lunch qualifications. The Mountain district demonstrated a 34% increase in children eligible for free or reduced lunch programs over the past 10 years (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2014). In 2016 (Laramie County School District #1, 2016), 30.6% of students received free lunch, and 8.4% of students received reduced lunch. A student's SES level is one of the common factors used to determine free or reduced lunch (Carman & Taylor, 2010, Peters & Gentry, 2010, Sirin, 2005) and is often the only socioeconomic indicator used to analyze academic data (Lubienski & Crane, 2010). While decision makers cannot change the effects that SES has on academics, adjustments could be made on school conditions to compensate (Stull, 2013).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The rationale for the project study was to gather an understanding of the GT identification process for inclusion of children regardless of SES through teacher perceptions. The number of low SES students represented in the GT program remains small when compared to the total population. Only 228 children were served in K to 6 from a total population of 7,622 students, which is 3% from the low SES (A. Gates, personal communication, January 27, 2015). Any child considered for the GT program needs a body of evidence collected. The Mountain district required data gathered in four areas as part of the evaluation process: achievement, performance, aptitude, and behavior. Identification of gifted students should focus on instruction, discipline, and procedures to monitor disproportionality in special populations (Erwin & Worrell, 2012, Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008, National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). The recommendations from the National Association of Gifted Children (2010) programming standards included the use of multiple assessments that measured diverse abilities, provided quantitative and qualitative data, and remained unbiased and equitable (Cross, 2013, Johnsen, 2011). The Mountain district used achievement data from primary skill assessments and district assessments, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and state testing (3-6, 8, and 11).

Aptitude testing was done using either the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V) or the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI-III) tests. The WISC-V is one of the most commonly used and best-suited

identification measures for gifted students (Rowe, Dandridge, Pawlush, Thompson, & Ferrier, 2014). See Table 1 for other commonly used tests. Table A1 of the appendix summarizes additional tests that could be used to identify students for gifted programs. Report cards, classroom observations, and student work samples provide performance information. Teacher rating scales, teacher indicators, and parent rating scales, parent indicators, or interviews contributes to behavior information. Enrollment submissions occur during August, September, and November each school year.

Table 1 provides a list of commonly used tests for enrollment into the GT program in the Mountain district.

Table 1

<i>Commonly Used Assessments</i>		
Test	Purpose	Age range
Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-R (WPPSI-R)	Measure of cognitive ability of preschool children	4 - 6½
Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fifth Edition (WISC-V)	Measure of cognitive ability of school-age children	6 - 16
Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test Second Edition (NNAT-2)	Nonverbal, culturally neutral assessment of general ability in diverse populations	4 - 18
The Woodcock-Johnson, Revised-Tests of Achievement	Measures academic achievement	2 - adult
Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)	Measures abilities in reasoning and problem solving using verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal (spatial) symbols	K - 12

According to Education Trust (2006), there was a lack of equity in GT student identification. With 39.6% qualifying for free or reduced lunch in 2015 (Laramie County School District #1, 2016), the underrepresentation of low SES is significant since 3% of the K to 6 population receive service in two schools within the Mountain district (Sommers, 2010). In reviewing the Mountain district data from the last 5 years, only 228 students were being served. The percent of GT served in the United States was recorded as 7% in 2012, and only 3% in Wyoming (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), therefore making the number of children served below the national level.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

A national issue of underrepresentation for children of low SES backgrounds exists (Swanson, 2006, Warne et al., 2013). Traditional approaches to screening and identifying for particular demographic groups has become a highly discussed and controversial topic in the field of GT (Plucker & Callahan, 2014, Warne et al., 2013). Borland (2014) stated that a limitation exists in research on the practices and policies for identification. Also focusing on identification work, Worrell (2009) and Warne et al. (2013) indicated that focusing on multiple measures would identify more students from minority and low-income families. However, McBee, Peters, and Waterman (2014) claimed that multiple measures would not support the outcome predicted in finding more students from diverse backgrounds. Recognized over several decades in the literature is the issue of disproportionality, which yields an inconsistency across studies with regard to economic variables, used to determine admission to gifted programs (Carman &

Taylor, 2010, Noguera, 2011, Payne, 2011, Peters & Gentry, 2010, Stein, Hetzel, & Beck, 2011).

Underrepresentation often occurs more in African American males than any other minority group and has caused recurring and persistent problems in education (Ford, 2010, Ford, Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013, Ford & Whiting, 2010, Gagne, 2011, Michael-Chadwell, 2010, Payne, 2011, Warne et al., 2013). Payne (2011) and Ford (2010) discussed three more massive problems causing underrepresentation, which include low teacher referrals, culture-blindness, and white privilege, while Gagne (2011) correlated the issue to be improper identification practices and out-of-date and invalid definitions. Ford and Whiting (2010) noted that for these students, underrepresentation in the program might be a result of negative peer pressure, negative images of themselves, media, and their academic worth. The current trend and increase in enrollment of minorities and English language learners (ELL) will only increase disproportionality (Payne, 2011). Furthering the research are Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, and Shevitz (2013), along with Warne et al. (2013), Peters and Gentry (2010), Carman and Taylor (2010), and Payne (2011) who declared the underrepresentation of African American students as well as American Indian and Hispanic students in GT programs. Minority boys were less identified and overpopulated in some special populations (Weinfeld et al., 2013). Overrepresented in gifted programs are Asian Americans, but little research has been conducted further to investigate this finding (Warne et al., 2013, Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Erwin and Worrell (2012) identified the use of nominations, cognitive and academic testing, along with rating scales GT placement. Stambaugh

(2007) mentioned many factors of the identification process, including multiple opportunities for entrance, valid and reliable assessment instruments, teacher or parent checklists, portfolios, and multiple measures and assessments. The Mountain district appeared to be using similar methods to identify children for enrollment into the gifted program. Educational policy needs to be changed rather than the assessment practice to reconcile minority underrepresentation from low SES (Erwin & Worrell, 2012, Stambaugh, 2007).

Definition of Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): Each state determines the methods and procedures for measuring continuous and substantial progress on an annual basis (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

At-risk: A student who has a higher probability of academic failure or dropout out of school (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

Disadvantaged: The term can be interchanged with economics or academics and is related to family income or poverty level (Ladd, 2012).

Gifted: The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC; 2008) defined giftedness as having high levels of aptitude and documented performance in more than one domain. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) described gifted students as intellectual, creative, artistic, leaders, academically successful, and having a need for services to develop those capabilities.

Highly qualified professionals: An individual certified with credentials to perform a particular job. Teachers must have a bachelor's degree, state license or certificate, and

be competent in the knowledge of core subjects being taught (Center for Parent Information Resources, 2014, Education Commission of the States, 2006, U.S. Department of Education, 2004,2005, Wyoming Department of Education, 2007).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): Federal law to ensure all children the opportunity for high-quality education and meet the minimum proficiency on state academic assessments (U.S. Legal, 2015).

Poverty: The Census Bureau uses the money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. When the family's income is less than the threshold, the family and everyone in the household is considered in poverty. The poverty line does not vary by geographical location. Poverty is the income before taxes and does not recognize capital gains or other noncash benefits (United States Census Bureau, 2013).

Socioeconomic status (SES): SES can be conditional, imposed on people, used as a comparison, or based on economics, opportunity, and means of influence (American Psychological Association, 2014). There are three levels: low, moderate, and high. Sometimes poverty level is compared to low socioeconomic status (Brogan, 2009). For the purpose of this study, SES is based on free or reduced lunch qualification.

Special population: An individual who is disadvantaged. The definition can vary but does include individuals from economically disadvantaged situations (Perkins, 2014, U.S. Legal, 2014).

Title I schools: Schools serving a large number of children from low-income families and receiving financial support for assurance of academic success (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Significance of the Study

This project could help teachers gain a better understanding of the GT identification process for inclusion of children regardless of SES, the teacher's perception about enrollment and biases that may have existed; it may also help to discover if the indicators are subjective in the identification process. Currently, 13% of the student population is labeled as special education students, and enrolled in a gifted education program was 3% of the student population (Sommers, 2010). Seeing all children succeed is a desire for many educators, who wish to empower families and students in their daily lives.

Gaps in the literature exist regarding the inclusion of all students irrespective of their SES (Carman & Taylor, 2010; Noguera, 2011; Payne, 2011; Peters & Gentry, 2010; Stein et al., 2011). Throughout the literature, there is a multitude of definitions, instructional techniques, and assessments used in identifying students, but little documentation exists on teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of low SES students during the identification process of the gifted. The collaboration to make a change in current systems needs to be inclusive of community members, school staff, and parents (Rothstein, 2008). Grasping the issue at hand requires understanding the thinking of all parents, staff, and community members (Rothstein, 2008). The results of the project study could help reinforce the importance of a commonly used definition of GT and provide an equal balance of identification procedures that includes children from all backgrounds.

Research Question

A gap in the current research exists on the selection of GT children from low SES families (Cross & Dockery, 2014, National Association for Gifted Children & the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted, 2013, Worrell, 2007). Interviewing teachers in the elementary GT program gave insight into their perceptions of the identification process and any biases that may have existed. Below are the research questions for the project study.

1. What are the GT teachers' perceptions of the elementary (K-6) GT program's identification process in finding all children in need of advanced curriculum and instruction regardless of SES level?
 - a. What is the equitability of the different indicators used in the identification process?
 - b. What bias exists, if any, within the materials used toward certain groups? (cultural or SES)

Personal thoughts and feelings may influence the responses provided by the teacher when responding to a rating scale or when answering questions about student performance, causing the results to be more subjective. I reviewed the intake materials for entry into the gifted program to learn if these items were more subjective or objective or if there was an equal balance within the required items.

Review of the Literature

A gap in the literature existed as there are few studies related to GT identification, policies, and practices with relation to underrepresented low-income students (Borland,

2014, McBee, 2010, Warne et al., 2013). Research studies from the past 5 years (2012-2017) that involved underrepresentation were limited. Many researchers have made suggestions as to what is needed, yet to date, a general consensus has been established in the literature regarding a substantial underrepresentation of socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority students in gifted programs (Bernal, 2007, Callahan, Renzulli, Delcourt, & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, McBee, 2010, Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007, Stambaugh, 2007). Regardless of the next step, subjectiveness was a variable in the initial placement process. Teacher and parent recommendations, rating scales, portfolios, and writing samples are open to personal biases (Callahan et al., 2013, Stambaugh, 2007). Neumeister et al. (2007) claimed that teachers might focus on attitude and behaviors only to miss nominating a potential student.

The following sections represent the theoretical literature supporting underrepresentation of low-income students in the gifted programs. I used peer-reviewed journals, professional journals, books, and education research on the identification of low-income students in gifted programs, along with teacher perceptions of the enrollment process. Conducting searches through the multidisciplinary electronic databases—ProQuest, and Academic Search Complete—with the following keywords: *underserved populations, qualitative research, case studies, low SES, gifted programs, gifted and talented, teacher perceptions, socioeconomic status, and identification*. Relevant categories for the materials in the literature review included the theoretical framework, early education, SES and stereotyping, teacher perceptions of GT procedures, identification of gifted children, and equity in identification.

Conceptual Framework: Social Constructivist Foundation

The conceptual framework that was used in this study was based on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory. Social constructivism is a model used to consider how children develop knowledge through their interactions with the environment. Knowledge is constructed from experiences and supports a researcher to justify answers in a final report (Creswell, 2014, Stake, 1995). Four constructs aligned with the research question and subquestions. This study was grounded in the relevant constructs of social constructivism theory, including (a) teacher knowledge (i.e., teacher training and identification of students for GT; Vygotsky, 1929, 1978), (b) diversity (Culatta, 2013, McLeod, 2018a, Vygotsky, 1978), (c) communication with parents and teachers about the gifted program, and (d) student attributes (i.e., intelligence testing, student academic achievement, and student motivation). I used the constructs of the conceptual framework to support the interview questions, notes derived from interviews, and in the review of existing Mountain district documents. I also used the constructs of the conceptual framework to develop a priori codes for the data analysis process.

Numerous student attributes are used to determine if a student is eligible for GT. One of those attributes is intelligence testing. Intelligence testing is completed with an IQ test, and students need a score of 130 on to be considered for the GT program. Academic achievement happens when students build their knowledge through learning, and the progress monitoring tools reflecting the 95th percentile are factors for qualification. The motivation of children is the interaction with the educational environment. Teacher knowledge includes two components: the training a teacher has to assist a student in

learning and the knowledge of the identification of students for GT. Diversity includes the SES as well as the cultural background of children. Communication supports parents knowing about the gifted program.

As a foundational tool, I reviewed the work of Piaget, Bandura, and Bruner. Piaget's ideas began with the concern of all children and not just learners, and the thought that each child would go through the same stage no matter what the culture (as cited in McLeod, 2018a). Piaget stated that learning occurs over time with the absence of sociocultural interactions (as cited in O'loughlin, 1992, Wadsworth, 1996). Human development is grounded in the individual process according to Piaget's theory (Ackermann, 2004, Wadsworth, 1996). The constructivist work includes active engagement, which also revolves around knowledge developed within a social group (Ackermann, 2004, Au, 1998). Consideration of Piaget's ideas toward learning revealed no reference to the cultural background of the child.

Bandura's social learning theory complimented Vygotsky's theory (McLeod, 2018b). The social learning theory supports that learning occurs when the child interacts with and observes the environment (McLeod, 2016). Bandura (1986, 1989) associated cognitive theory with students' beliefs about ability. The theory established that a student's effort at an activity was successful if they applied themselves (Bandura, 1986). Bruner studied how children engaged in learning as well as focused on social and cultural aspects of learning (as cited in Culatta, 2013). Bruner built ideas around environmental and experimental factors (as cited in Smith, 2002). Influence from Vygotsky's theory is relevant through the notation on how the interest in materials will spark the student's

learning (Smith, 2002). Smith (2002) noted how instruction affects what students construct in Bruner's ideas.

Continuing to support the social constructivist framework was Vygotsky's (1929,1978) theory, which showed that early educational environments could improve cognitive development and elicit potential growth of skills in all children. Vygotsky discovered that children socially developed as they adapted through the interactions of the sociocultural environment and people around them (Vygotsky, 1978). The social constructivist theory contributes to cognitive development through social factors and demonstrates how the environment affects children's learning (Vygotsky, 1929). According to Vygotsky (1929,1978), academic success increases through early support for children. Vygotsky's theory, a holistic learning approach, supports the whole child (as cited in Ackermann, 2004, Au, 1998). Au (1998), Liu and Chen (2010), and Ackermann (2004) discussed how the zone of proximal development helps support the difference between child's actual level of development and the level of performance when the child collaborates with the adult.

The social constructivist model supports children constructing knowledge through interactions with the environment by making learning visible (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, Garrett, 2013, New, 2007, Stull, 2013). Further investigation of the social constructivists Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, and contemporary psychologists Bronfenbrenner, Bruner, and Gardner uncovered the inspiration of the Reggio Emilia approach created by Malaguzzi (Arseven, 2014, Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, Edwards, 2003). The Reggio Emilia approach focused on children's well-being and offered a system of relationships

enhancing the learning experience of young children (Arseven, 2014, Edwards, 2003, Elliott, 2005). Malaguzzi knew children were social from birth and developed relationships for children with people, society, and the environment (as cited in Edwards, 2003).

Vygotsky's theory supports the construct of teacher knowledge. Vygotsky's theory highlighted ideas around the lack of equality of educational opportunities, referred to as discrimination, which remained noticeable when teachers had no training or understanding of what students needed for academic success (Au, 1998). While some classrooms provided inferior instruction from an inexperienced teacher, other classrooms were composed of a high number of low-income students (Au, 1998). Bruner's ideas also support teacher knowledge. The diversity construct also emerges through Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky noted the exclusion of children due to the limited language used in the home (as cited in Au, 1998). Au (1998) also noted in Vygotsky's theory the lack of school success based on cultural differences. Both Piaget and Vygotsky's work supports the student attribute construct. Students are developing cognitive abilities through their environment, learning situations, and social interactions. Bandura and Bruner's work supports the motivation construct. Bandura (1989) discussed self-efficacy beliefs supporting motivation. Children with strong beliefs about their capabilities will stay with a task (Bandura, 1989). Hickey (1997) noted the negotiation of thinking and learning along with the emphasis on collaboration as being present in Vygotsky's theory around socio-constructivism, which supports motivation. All of the ideas within the social constructivist model reflect a type of communication that occurs during teaching. The

idea of how information is constructed helped support the need for communication on a larger scale. There is a need to communicate beyond the classroom and to parents.

The study's research questions were designed to explore the perceptions that teachers perceive as the way to identify gifted students. The purpose of the current study was to help appropriately identify and include low SES children in the Mountain district's gifted program. The social constructivist model relates to the study's approach of inquiry method through the idea of asking questions and developing knowledge from the information. As a researcher, I used the premade questions from Neumeister and Burney's (2012) gifted evaluation handbook and Szymanski and Shaff's (2013) article. From the interviews, I recorded and viewed through the lens of social constructivism the teacher perceptions. The transcribed interviews contained levels of information around how the teacher has perceived the enrollment of students into the GT program. The essential elements found in the social constructivist model relate to the explanatory case study questions in support for how children develop their skills and can help teachers to select children from more diverse backgrounds. I aligned research question 1 with the following constructs: teacher knowledge, diversity, and communication. I then aligned research question 1a to student attributes. I also aligned the research question 1b to student attributes with a focus on intelligence testing and student academic achievement. While the basis of the social constructivist foundation is found mostly in teaching science, the foundation can be applied to other learning areas.

Early Education

Children are entering school unprepared and fall behind in the early grades, making the task to close gaps that already exist more difficult (Ford, 2007, Stull, 2013). Even with a lack of readiness for school, these children suffer from the disadvantage poverty leaves in its wake (Cross, 2013). Children who have the highest risks for coming to school unprepared to learn and fall behind from the onset may come from poor neighborhoods, have limited English proficiency, have language impairments, or have special needs (McBee, 2010, Peters & Gentry, 2010, Stull, 2013, Wyner et al., 2007, Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Children who do not have enriching experiences may be at a disadvantage (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Enriching experiences include additional education materials and providing meaningful and relevant learning across all subjects (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003).

Lamy (2013) brought up several points regarding preschool education and focused on three longitudinal studies, which examined high-quality preschool programs. The Perry Preschool Study and Carolina Abecedarian Study focused on high-quality and robust education that was staffed with well-educated teachers who had backgrounds in child development and early learning (Campbell et al., 2011, Schweinhart et al., 2005). The Chicago Child-Parent Centers Study was a quasi-experimental study with more children and more generalized results (Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011). The goal was to achieve similar results as the Perry Preschool and Carolina Abecedarian studies. The children served in the programs had higher levels of success in life as well as significantly higher test scores (Reynolds et al., 2011). Elimination of

barriers helped children succeed when environments are structured to ensure supports are available (Stull, 2013). The bottom result became quality by providing a change in children, families, and schools.

Publically funded early intervention programs can alleviate the adverse effects of poverty on children's development (Barnett, 2011, Lamy, 2013, Mervis, 2011, Yoshikawa et al., 2013). The assistance from community agencies and organizations used fundamental variables such as expectations of students, staff, and parents, the quality of instruction, accessing rigorous academic opportunities, and parent and community involvement in educational endeavors (Smith, 2012, Taylor, 2005, Wright, Chau, & Aratani, 2011, Yoshikawa et al., 2013). There are relative effects on early cognition, social skills, family support, and teacher expectations that continue to influence schools themselves (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002, Johnson, 2011, Lamy, 2013).

Early intervention programs included comprehension services that focused on improving children's lives both directly and indirectly including health, education, parental involvement, and social services (Barlow & Dunbar, 2010, Dearing & Wade, 2005, Edwards, 2003, Froese-Germain, 2009, Hodgkinson, 2007). Programs such as Head Start fell short as the program lacked resources dedicated to quality standards for teachers (Coley & Baker, 2013, Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Initiated in 1965, Head Start programs for low-income children began from birth to age 5 years, Title I followed as the first section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided funds to schools with large portions of low-income students (Mervis, 2011, Taylor, 2005). Head Start's outcomes included providing impoverished children with school readiness early learning

skills and searching for ways to serve more children as the program serves only 40% of eligible children (Mervis, 2011). Early intervention and class size reduction benefited children from impoverished families (Froese-Germain, 2009, Hodgkinson, 2007). Teachers adequately trained worked with the low-income students (Kitano, 2007, Morgan, 2012, Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Children provided with academics and interactions with people in a socio-cultural environment developed socially.

Socioeconomic Status and Stereotyping

The disproportionality of low SES students could be attributed to race, class, gender, and should consider school policies and practices (Carman & Taylor, 2010, Payne, 2011, Sirin, 2005, Sullivan & Bal, 2013). One of the most commonly used factors in educational research of underrepresentation in gifted programs is students' SES (Carman & Taylor, 2010, Sirin, 2005). SES has affected children by denying the fundamental rights of learning and has been correlated to an educational disadvantage (Borland, 2004). This educational disadvantage continued to grow as inequality of the gifted program in our society (Borland, 2004). Others argued that the underrepresentation of minority students was prevalent in GT programs (Elhoweris, 2008, Erwin & Worrell, 2012, Gagne, 2011). A strong relationship existed between SES and ethnicity, which influenced decisions in GT placement (Carman & Taylor, 2010, DeWet & Gubbins, 2011, Stambaugh, 2007, Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Children of poverty are less likely to be chosen for a gifted program (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015, Warne et al., 2013) and leave teachers with strong beliefs and expectations regarding SES and ethnicity in determining placement into a gifted program (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011). Socioeconomic barriers

could mask the potential in students who come from a different social class or race (Ambrose, 2013, Merrotsky, 2013). Families living in poverty often lack the resources for housing, food, clothing, and books, and are found in neighborhoods with low-performing schools (Hernandez, 2012, Noguera, 2011, Olszewski-Kubilius, 2007). Economically disadvantaged families exhibited a variety of symptoms such as lacking access to high-quality child care, early education, rich language or experiences, low birth weight, poor health, less participation in summer or after school programs, higher risk of developing socio-emotional problems, and frequent school changes all of which are relevant to educational outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008, Ambrose, 2013, Dearing & Wade, 2005, Hernandez, 2012, Hodgkinson, 2007, Ladd, 2012). Social class interacts with student achievement contributing to deficiencies and intellectual abilities according to Sinha and Mishra's (2013), and Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell's (2011) findings. Sinha and Mishra (2013) also noted low SES students underperformed and completed fewer problems than their counterparts when threatened with social identity.

Stereotypes of low-income students persist in America (Gorski, 2008, Subotnik et al., 2011), and dwells on perceived deficits (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Teachers should focus on children's competencies within the culture they come from (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011, Sato & Lensmire, 2009), and continue to educate themselves about class and poverty levels, while setting biases aside in order to focus on each child's strength (Ambrose, 2013, Borland, Schnur, & Wright, 2000, Carman & Taylor, 2010, Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, Gorski, 2008). Stereotyping and prejudging through opinions could lead to the denial of economic diversity within all groups of children (Ford, 2010, Subotnik et

al., 2011). Child poverty adversely affects how school leaders and teachers view student achievement based on the child's intellect and linguistic development (Payne, 2011). Children who come from low SES groups face stereotyping and treated in a hostile manner by peers and teachers (Sinha & Mishra, 2013). Teacher perception of students leads to biases and estimating student abilities (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011, Spencer & Castano, 2007, Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). A teacher's thinking could manifest perceptions of low expectations and weaker cognitive development in low SES children (Payne, 2011). Teachers who possess low expectations and lack understanding of children coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds limit the ability to overcome negative attitudes when selecting children to participate in gifted programs (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011, Ryser, 2011, Wyner et al., 2007).

Children from deprived populations required more beyond the concepts and measurements of giftedness during the identification process to be discovered (Ambrose, 2013, Borland, 2004, Borland et al., 2000, DeWet & Gubbins, 2011). Highly qualified teachers facilitated developmentally appropriate activities and targeted instruction that supported interactions in the classroom (Dwyer, 2011, Stull, 2013, Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). There is no evidence of the best schools overcoming the effects of poverty or influencing the factors outside of school (Noguera, 2011, Smith, 2012). Third grade identifies students nurtured in the early years for gifted programs, yet this process could be approached differently based on SES (Hernandez, 2012, Wyner et al., 2007). Previous research on the SES and teacher judgment for the gifted programs identified general perceptions, negative teacher attitudes, and biases as issues for the underrepresentation of

economically disadvantaged students (Clark, 2012, Elhoweris, 2008, Swanson, 2006).

The study conducted by Elhoweris (2008) investigated teacher referral and placement based on the effect of the student's SES. The results from Sullivan and Bal's (2013) study confirmed the need to go beyond race and view the creation of disproportionality. The suggestion for further examination of how SES and school policies related to decision-making came after the notation in the strength of sociodemographic variables and academic performance for determining the identification of special populations (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Gender and free/reduced lunch status had effects of risks, but the risk was not consistent across racial groups (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Sociodemographic variables and academic performance could hinder how teachers view a child.

Teacher Perceptions

There continues to be a need to examine teacher perceptions regarding recommendations for gifted and talented programs. Gubbins, Callahan, and Renzulli (2014) discussed the effect of beliefs and perceptions teachers have about the identification practices. These are beliefs and expectations shaped by classroom practices related to talent development (Moon & Brighton, 2008). Individual experiences influence teachers who are not trained to recognize the needs of the gifted from diverse backgrounds (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Those who have no experience with gifted children view them often as highly motivated, intelligent and performing at higher levels (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, Quek, & Struck, 2004) while others had negative attitudes and stereotypes toward gifted students (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Those who rely on traditional classroom practices will fall short in developing individual student talent and

fail to nominate the child (Gubbins et al., 2014, VanTassel-Baska et al., 2004). Teachers notice fewer talents as they held a distinct set of impressions regarding high-poverty children such as readiness to learn, parent involvement, and health (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Teachers with effective practices in developing talents in young children would more likely have a role in selecting these students (Moon & Brighton, 2008, Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

Low-income and minority students were often overlooked because the teacher believed there was no support outside of school (Frasier et al., 1995, Gubbins et al., 2014, Moon & Brighton, 2008), while others considered behavior and social adjustment to be more natural for White children (Moon & Brighton, 2008). Some even believed identification to be detrimental to social development (Moon & Brighton, 2008). The belief of labeling young children to perform academically led to low-income and minority students less likely being selected as the lack of school readiness often masked their potential (Moon & Brighton, 2008).

The teacher's race can effect rating a student's success (Gubbins et al., 2014, Moon & Brighton, 2008). A teacher's conscious and unconscious biases along with assumptions about race and social stature can mostly affect the identification of children (Frasier et al., 1995, Gubbins et al., 2014, Moon & Brighton, 2008, Neumeister et al., 2007). Another belief was focusing on behavior and attitude problems along with relying on a published checklist of characteristics when the selection process began (Neumeister et al., 2007). Teachers often believed that gifted students required a different curriculum

and selection should occur later in the third or fourth grade or even in the middle school years (Moon & Brighton, 2008).

Also, how a teacher conceptualizes giftedness would allow more diverse populations to be selected (Moon & Brighton, 2008, Warne et al., 2013). Most teachers were in support of a broader gifted definition (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011). VanTassel-Baska et al. (2004) discussed that the teachers' fear of compromising the program if low SES students are nominated. Testing biases also exist (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011). A negative effect on cognitive, academic, and social development became apparent when there was a failure of early identification and talent development (Frasier et al., 1995, Moon & Brighton, 2008). The lack of opportunity affects the student's motivation (Swanson, 2006).

Identification of Gifted Children

Identification began with a definition of what giftedness is. The federal government and many individual states adopted Marland's (1972) definition of giftedness (Schroth & Helfer, 2008), which was also recommended by Michael-Chadwell (2010) for all states and to be inclusive of underserved populations. Gubbins et al. (2014) study also confirmed the extensive use of Marland's definition. Marland's (1972) balanced approach focused on potential ability rather than the current existent ability. The following areas included: a) general intellect, b) specific academic aptitude, c) creative thinking, d) leadership ability, e) talent in visual or performing arts, and f) psychomotor ability (Marland, 1972). The definition focused mostly on the capacity of students rather than the environmental issues (Plucker & Callahan, 2014) while the federal definition

expanded in 1993 to include children from all backgrounds (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). Matthews and Kirsch (2011) found that often developed at the local level, within the guidance of state law, are the procedures for identification.

There must be criteria for identifying participants in gifted programs (Cooper, 2012, Persell, 2010, Stein et al., 2011). The criteria typically were based on standardized testing, intelligence testing, teacher recommendations, and curriculum accountability (Cooper, 2012, Cross, 2013, Persell, 2010, Schroth & Helfer, 2008). An appropriate approach in identification procedures included multiple and varied assessments that were inclusive and culturally responsive to all populations (Callahan, 2005, Johnsen, 2012, McBee et al., 2014, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012, 2014, Warne et al., 2013), adequate policies and procedures, knowledgeable, positive teachers, and a clear connection between criteria and curriculum (Callahan, 2005, Johnsen, 2012) as well as multiple entry points, and pathways (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012, 2014). Multiple measures improved the effect on the validity, reliability, fairness, and security (McBee et al., 2014). The method of identification, definitions, teacher biases, prejudices, inaccurate perceptions, and a lack of other qualitative data could have an effect on participation rate in the gifted programs (Clark, 2012, Matthews & Kirsch, 2011, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012, Peters & Gentry, 2012). McBee (2016) noted teachers often fail to recognize the potential without the test results leading to under-referred groups of students from low-income families. O'Connor (2012) highlighted the importance of achievement outcomes over the assumptions of the average learner. Biases could be avoided by including nonverbal assessments as a means for a fair and equitable

way to assess a student's general reasoning ability (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). Sulak (2014) proposed that connecting identification procedures with instructional programming as a means to developing the skills of all students from diverse populations. According to McBee et al. (2014) research, the use of multiple measures for identification was under-documented. There was limited research on how the variability of measure might affect identification of gifted students (McBee et al., 2014).

Some factors that influenced underrepresentation included two theories. The first theory was discrimination, which was based on inappropriate identification, limited definitions, prejudice (Clark, 2012) and biased tests (Clark, 2012, Warne et al., 2013). The second theory was distribution, which included unequal distribution across demographic groups, and low SES having restricted learning environments (Clark, 2012). Matthews and Kirsch (2011) discuss that behavior rating scales have also been used to narrow the potential candidates. Johnsen (2012) noted other factors affecting participation rates, which included the student's ability to access challenging learning experiences, educators who understood diverse student needs, qualities of specific instruments and the interpretation of the assessments.

Early identification with content-based enrichment assisted in nurturing talents (Callahan, 2005, Miller & Gentry, 2010, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Capitalizing on abilities and increasing the expectations helped educators keep the purpose of service at the forefront of decision-making (Cooper, 2012, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Teachers who differentiated the curriculum so that all children could access comprehensive assessments (Johnsen, 2012) brought forth a

curriculum that was high-powered, enriched and scaffolded for advanced thinking and questioning skills (Callahan, 2005, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Miller and Gentry (2010) focused on ways to further talent development through social support systems and extracurricular resources (i.e., clubs, mentors, programs), and cultural opportunities. To increase the identification of children from underrepresented groups, people would need to restructure their thinking, beliefs, philosophy, and behaviors (Callahan, 2005). Professional and staff development programs related to gifted and talented programs for educators could provide adequate information to make decisions about identifying children from all demographics levels (Michael-Chadwell, 2010).

Equity in Identification

Quality educational opportunities and easy access afforded to low-income students were not equal, nor were there enough competent teachers who understood the students' needs (Brown & Garland, 2015, Morgan, 2012, Subotnik et al., 2011). The NCLB law was created to close the academic gap, yet low-income children continue to be low achievers with little opportunity for learning (Morgan, 2012, National Education Association, 2013). According to NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2004,2006), highly qualified teachers have a bachelor's degree, full state certification or licensure, and could prove they knew the subject they were teaching. The need for placing good teachers in underperforming schools and high-poverty communities continues to be a challenge for each state (Morgan, 2012, U.S. Department of Education, 2005). According to Morgan's (2012) findings, experienced teachers will leave poverty schools while others avoid them. Teachers deemed as highly qualified were struggling to keep children of

poverty from falling through the cracks (Education Commission of the States, 2005).

Holland (2007) found growing evidence of skilled educators succeeding with disadvantaged children.

Inequalities occurred when disadvantaged children began school with less developed cognitive abilities and attended schools with fewer resources, which limited the potential to excel (Ford, 2007). A child's intellectual and linguistic development happen through conversations at home and access to reading materials, which may not be readily available (Payne, 2011). The increase in poverty over the last 10 years translated into reductions in average tests scores (Ladd, 2012, Schmoker, 2012). The gap in performances of poverty-stricken children attributed to many causes such as lack of parental involvement, cultural attitude towards education, educational resources available at home, and school and teacher effect on students (Morgan, 2012, Stull, 2013).

Research has shown that poverty highly correlated the equity issue in gifted education with the imbalance of minority groups, improper identification practices, low referral rates, and exclusive reliance on tests as being essential factors (Bernal, 2007, Gagne, 2011, Gubbins et al., 2014, Stambaugh, 2007, Stein et al., 2011, Subotnik et al., 2011). Many of the same factors continue to surface across the literature. Standardized testing, especially intelligence testing, was blamed for the disproportional representation in gifted education (DeWet & Gubbins, 2011, McBee, Shaunessy, & Matthews, 2012, Peters & Gentry, 2012). Not only do underrepresented students suffer because the challenge to reach full potential lacks for these students; continuing to lead the participation issues, but also their families, schools, communities, state, and nation (Ford,

2010,2012a). Some of the roadblocks of representation included a lack of teacher referrals, students' differential performance on traditional intelligence or achievement tests, and stagnant or outdated policies and procedures (Ford, 2010, Olszewski-Kubilius, 2007, Stambaugh, 2007). Erwin and Worrell (2012) and Olszewski-Kubilius (2007) pointed out that multiple sources of information should be gathered to ensure all race/ethnic groups received consideration, as well as review prior achievement scores, and not just depend solely on IQ scores. Michael-Chadwell (2010) pursued the need for professional development training, and issues related to testing and assessing as well as noting the misperceptions about race and ability and lack of parent awareness programs on issues about gifted and talented education.

The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988 supported research-based programs and focused services for students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities (Elhoweris, 2008, Scott, 2014, Subotnik et al., 2011). Elhoweris (2008) referred to several studies as the basis of how students are teacher selected for gifted education. The identification procedures revealed SES as the highest bias, then referenced during selection was culturally, and diverse backgrounds (Elhoweris, 2008, Ford & Grantham, 2003, Gagne, 2011). Teachers who believed children were capable no matter what cultural background still needed to broaden their perspectives to make sure their values were not affecting their evaluation of students (Elhoweris, 2008, Gubbins et al., 2014). Among the groups, not represented are the minority and disadvantaged children, as they

do not score as well on academic achievement tests or IQ tests as their counterparts (Erwin & Worrell, 2012, Ford, 2010, Peters & Gentry, 2010, Weinfeld et al., 2013).

Another essential element was the removal of monies from the fiscal year 2012 for gifted programs (Stephens, 2011). The decline of support for the Javits Act began in 2002 and continued to be evident with the achievement of proficiency or minimal competency in recent education policies (Gallagher, 2002, Kitano, 2007, Stephens, 2011). The policymakers were favoring equity over the expense of excellence, causing schools to focus on underperforming students (Stephens, 2011). The identification process was left to the local school systems when the state level lacked direction (Stephens, 2011). While there were 32 states with mandates, only six provided full funding (Cross, 2013, National Association for Gifted Children, 2014, Stephens, 2011). Approximately half of the states had specific procedures for identifying typically underrepresented groups of minority students (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). The narrowing of the curriculum and the disempowerment of teachers negatively affected gifted students (Stephens, 2011). The NCLB did not afford gifted students from low-income families the opportunity to succeed beyond the general curriculum but expected underachievement (Jolly & Makel, 2010).

Hispanic students scored lower than White students when the same scale was used to rate students (Payne, 2011). Underrepresentation could come from a misconception of what giftedness is, how identification occurs, and the attribution of assessment practices (Erwin & Worrell, 2012, VanTassel-Baska, 2009). The different factors found for underrepresentation of ethnic/racial groups included a narrow definition of giftedness,

used standardized tests as criteria for identification, differences in cultural learning styles, lacked recognition by teachers, parental mistrust of schools, academic underachievement, failure to use multiple intelligences, schools lacking resources, and the training of personnel (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). Using instruments that provided sound psychometric information regardless of language, culture, gender, race, or SES were prominent in the alignment of program goals and objectives (Warne et al., 2013, Weinfeld et al., 2013). The teacher-rating instrument, the HOPE Scale, provided information regarding academic and social strengths for all learners, even those from low-income families (Peters & Gentry, 2012). Another instrument, the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test, was noted to be better for children from all backgrounds (Giessman, Gambrell, & Stebbins, 2013). The measurement should be administered and interpreted by adequately trained staff, along with ethical decision making for program placement (Weinfeld et al., 2013).

While there was a lack of funding for the gifted programs, the TALENT (To Aid Gifted and High Ability Learners by Empowering the Nation's Teachers) Act was created to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by focusing on four areas (Stephens, 2011). These four areas included changes to the assessment and accountability systems, emphasis on professional development in gifted education pedagogy, focus on providing support to the underserved populations, and emphasis on research and dissemination (Ford, 2007, Kitano, 2007, Stephens, 2011). Research findings indicated that all 50 states have moved beyond permitting a single IQ score as a sole identifier, and some states have modified or changed their definitions of giftedness (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012, Yoon & Gentry, 2009). The use of IQ scores alone was not enough to denote

giftedness, and was cause for the underrepresentation of lower SES children, as well as children from racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities in gifted programs (Bernal, 2007, Borland, 2009, Carman & Taylor, 2010, Olszewski-Kubilius, 2007, Payne, 2011, Webb & Gore, 2012).

Early identification and talent development were just as important as early education (Ford, 2010). Teachers should ensure that proper testing procedures are used to avoid unfairness, bias, and underrepresentation, allowing all children the same chance (Ford, 2010). The need for unbiased opinions was a necessity when it came to identifying for placement or program practices and balancing the diversity of students (Kitano, 2007, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014, VanTassel-Baska, 2009). Since there was an absence of adequate assessment procedures and programming efforts, Dickson (2012) suggested that parents and schools engage in the identification process by using the Pre-K through Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards framework from the NAGC (2010). Throughout the research, many have noted the use of multiple sources to determine giftedness to avoid cultural and socioeconomic biases, even with multiple sources studies reported possible biases toward minorities (Bernal, 2007, Borland, 2009, Carman & Taylor, 2010, Erwin & Worrell, 2012, Olszewski-Kubilius, 2007, Payne, 2011, Webb & Gore, 2012, Yoon & Gentry, 2009). A paradigm shift in leadership and gifted program practices is needed and must occur to reduce identification and placement gaps (Michael-Chadwell, 2010).

As reviewed from the literature, there was a lack of funding and often misconstrued understanding about giftedness. Many researchers discussed the barriers

faced by low-income students, including a lack of available and appropriate resources. All children need access to quality education and opportunities to learn. Properly trained teachers could help guide children to manifest their abilities and achieve the highest degree. Identification of gifted children should also be equitable. There was no doubt about each of these items that a change in policy and requirements would benefit many additional children from the underserved populations.

Implications

The purpose of this project study was to explore teacher perceptions of GT identification process while gaining a better understanding of how the process provided inclusion of all children regardless of SES. The research conducted allowed for an understanding of the small percentage of low SES student enrollment in GT programs in the Mountain district. Increasing the identification of low SES students in gifted programs could be transferred to other areas. The study also sought insight into possible policy changes to ensure a balance between socioeconomic backgrounds. A change in identification procedures and services would have a potential positive social change throughout the state as well as possibly filter across the United States. According to Sommer's (2010) report, there was a need to discover hidden talents in students from low-income and culturally diverse students. Revising the identification measures for all learners and provide professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators to better service all levels of students would create equity for the gifted program (Stein et al., 2011).

Professional development related to poverty could support better identification procedures and retention rates of low SES students at the Mountain district. The referrals and identification need consideration with more focus on disproportionality research (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Teachers need to be open-minded to perspectives of other cultures and aware of their values when evaluating the economically disadvantaged gifted student and avoid referrals based on SES (Elhoweris, 2008).

Summary

The literature presented addressed early education, teacher perceptions, stereotypes, the issues of under-identification for gifted students; as well as emphasized the SES factor and the effects on achievement for these children. Identification and referrals to specialized programs used the SES factor (Callahan et al., 2014). The underrepresentation of low SES in the GT programs existed according to the current research (Gubbins et al., 2014, McBee, 2010, Merrotsy, 2013, Peters & Gentry, 2010). I was able to understand teacher perceptions of the process of identifying students from all backgrounds through the leading question in the study.

The next section introduces the methodology and procedures, which were used to determine the outcome of the questions. Also addressed are the setting, sample population, and data collection. The analyzing of data occurred next. Then assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations are presented. The subsequent sections will outline the project based on findings from the research, a review of the literature supporting the genre related to the problem, as well as the implications for social change. The final section includes reflections and conclusions as related to future research and the

importance of the project study. Also located in this section are implications and application.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The inquiry method for this study was a qualitative design. I selected an exploratory case study design that qualitatively represented GT teachers' perceptions of the elementary (K-6) GT program. The case study design was used to examine individual perceptions about a program in one setting to discover meanings, to look at the process, and to gain the insight needed to understand a situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, Creswell, 2014, Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010, Merriam, 2009, Stake, 1995, Yin, 2014). The specific issue in the study was the identification of children from all SES levels for the GT program. Reviewing the online documents of the Mountain district (Laramie County School District #1, 2017a) provided a starting point for the case study and a better understanding of the process of referring a student to the GT program. The documents outlined the process of referring students to the GT program. The best choice was an instrumental case since the focus was unique to the perspective of several teachers to understand the identification process of the GT program. An instrumental case takes into consideration an issue or redirects generalizations (Creswell, 2012, Merriam, 2009). The design derived logically from the problem as a case study with a general public interest and little research relating to the topic, building an established framework with the social constructivist foundation for discussion around a single case (Yin, 2014). The underlying issue of underrepresentation was valuable on a more prominent level such as policy changes, which could benefit districts within the state, as well as radiate out on a national scale.

Data Analysis Results

The research conducted in the most extensive district in Wyoming served 39% of 13,784 students who receive free or reduced lunch. The Mountain district encompasses three rural elementary schools, 26 urban elementary schools, three junior high schools, three high schools, one alternative high school, and one charter school. Sommers (2010) documented two elementary schools in the Mountain district serving 3% of the total district population in GT programs. Both of the schools were Title I schools. Each school was on opposite ends of the city; one houses a multiage forum, and the other has classrooms for each grade.

The intention was to interview all nine GT teachers in the Mountain district, but only six volunteered to assist in the project. The scheduled interviews for the six participants occurred at different times with a set of questions that related back to the three research questions and then a review of the Mountain district documents on the enrollment process for the GT program, which provided an understanding of the enrollment procedures.

The required research request approval form was submitted to the Mountain district requesting access to the two schools providing the GT programs along with their nine gifted teachers. I followed ethical practices throughout all aspects of research. Before gathering any data from the existing Mountain district employees, the proposal was submitted to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain permission (approval number 06-29-16-0301170). Included in the submission was the initial request to the school district. The IRB process followed the federal regulations that

protect human rights (Creswell, 2012, 2014, Lodico et al., 2010). A current certificate from the National Institutes of Health for protecting human rights was also part of the submission.

The GT teachers were contacted through email to request their assistance in the research project after receiving permission. Along with the email was a copy of the Mountain district's letter showing the approval for the project. Consequently, a follow-up email was sent out when there was no response asking the potential participants to respond whether they wished to participate or not. Their name was then added or removed from the list. Also, the use of phone interviews allowed for quicker access to information and allowed convenience for the participants. I offered a multitude of times to fit all participants' schedules with one hour allotted for each interview. Moreover, interviews were the evidence, according to Yin (2014), as they guided the conversation rather than using structured queries.

Once a response was received, a follow-up email was sent requesting a day and time that was convenient for the participating teacher to partake in a telephone interview. The invitations to participate eventually led to six teachers participating in phone interviews. The participants included teachers from both GT program locations in the Mountain district and represented grades K to 6 as intended. All potential participants received the signed Letter of Cooperation, and the Confidentiality Agreement. The letter of cooperation included an outline of expectations during the project study of the program, along with the right to withdraw from the project, explanation of voluntary participation in the project, and a description of the purpose of the study. In Table 2, the

participating teacher demographics show that five of the six teachers were female (one male). The grade levels taught were K through 6 grade, and the level of experience spanned from 2 to 22 years.

Table 2

Participating Teacher Demographic Information

Teacher	Gender	Current grade	Number of years teaching
Teacher 1	Female	5 and 6	2
Teacher 2	Female	1 and 2	11
Teacher 3	Female	3 and 4	22
Teacher 4	Female	4	19
Teacher 5	Female	1	17
Teacher 6	Male	K	3

With the number of participants being low, the level of inquiry during interviews was in-depth to gain as much information as possible to answer the research question and subquestions. The working relationship established between myself and the participant began with the initial contact. Time was taken to ensure the participants understood the purpose of the research and how their participation would be used to build a better understanding of the GT identification process. Working for the Mountain district as an elementary general education teacher, I had limited influence on the study since no direct contact with the gifted program or the nine teachers who taught within the program existed.

Lodico (2010) discussed the importance of a proper study providing substantial information in detail making confidentiality more challenging to maintain. To maintain confidentiality, as a researcher, the information collected from the Mountain district employees and any identifying information was coded accordingly for reporting

purposes. The data were reported in a way to protect the site and provide an honest picture of the site. Once the data were gathered and analyzed, all identifying information was removed allowing anonymity of individuals (Creswell, 2012, 2014, Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, with the small number of participants and only two school sites, the participants are coded using a letter and number. The following provided insight on the procedures used to gather data from the participants. Stake (1995) discussed qualitative researchers as builders of knowledge rather than discoverers. Researchers employing a constructivist view leads to clarifying and interpretation in helping others to make generalizations rather than giving generalizations. Also, Elhoweris (2008), Ford (2007,2010), and Ford and Whiting (2010) stated that SES was influential in decision making for placement in gifted education programs. Furthermore, Elhoweris (2008), Ford (2007,2012a), Ford and Whiting (2010), and Naglieri and Ford (2003) noted that teachers are judging children's SES levels when considering placement into gifted education programs.

The interviews were conducted using questions from Neumeister and Burney's (2012) handbook and Szymanski and Shaff's (2013) article (Appendix B). Each question from Neumeister and Burney's book was reproduced with permission from Prufrock Press (Appendix C). Szymanski also granted permission to use the questions from the article (Appendix C). Through phone interviews, several questions asked about identification and enrollment of pupils in the gifted program as perceived by the gifted teachers. Furthermore, the questions allowed for clarity about the process for identification (how much is perception, how much is hard numbers, and does this affect

students), how the teacher felt regarding the program, and what percentage of students come from low-income backgrounds. As a result of asking these questions, the information gathered revealed the basis of the GT program. To have better evidence of the interview, each participant permitted me to record the interviews digitally. In addition, notes taken during the interview sessions helped place the findings into categories. The categories provided opening topic areas that the GT teachers identified through the conversation. The topics were selected by choice of particular words. For example, if one participant stated how they saw something happening from their viewpoint, a code of perception was applied. Another idea emerged from discussions around ethnicity allowing for a code of diversity was assigned. Consequently, an understanding of the culture around the gifted program emerged from the categories. One purpose of the study was to discover if the elements of the intake process provided access to all individuals regardless of the income level.

The recorded phone interviews were transcribed using transcription software. Nuance's Dragon Naturally Speaking (Nuance Communications, 2014) speech recognition software assisted me in transcribing the recordings. The program ranked as one of the best for speech recognition. The process for analysis of the information began with an initial reading of the transcript, followed by multiple readings for prominent words or phrases, and with notes written in the margins (Creswell, 2012, Merriam, 2009, Yin, 2014). QDA Miner Lite software (Provalis Research, 2016) was used to organize the frequency of the codes (Yin, 2014). Open coding was used to identify themes and responses that provided evidence about the problem and research questions (Creswell,

2014). These items related back to the research questions. The transcription notes were reviewed for accuracy. A copy of the transcribed interview was forwarded back to the participant to check for any corrections or clarifications that they felt necessary.

Along with the interviews, a document review of the Mountain district's online application for the GT program was conducted to gain an understanding of the intake process. The document review was used to aid in the analysis of interview information collected from participants. The constructs of the framework helped in coding through teacher perception and training, learning through social interaction, interacting with culture and society, and communication.

Coding of Transcripts

I reviewed the transcripts a first and second time, conducting open coding where words or phrases used multiple times in the interviews were physically highlighted (Glaser, 2016). Through the lens of the social constructivist framework, axial coding followed as I read the transcripts a third, fourth, and fifth time. This coding allowed identification of relationships among the open codes (Sandu, 2018). Ultimately, four significant codes emerged through the multiple analysis of the interview data. These four codes were Teacher Knowledge, Diversity, Communication, and Student Attributes. Provided in Appendix A2 is a detailed table that presents the process, including frequency counts, of both open and axial coding. I then identified the codes used to answer the research question and subquestion.

Research Question Answered

The research question that drove this study was as follows:

1. What are the GT teachers' perceptions of the elementary (K-6) GT program's identification process in finding all children in need of advanced curriculum and instruction regardless of SES level?
 - a. What is the equitability of the different indicators used in the identification process?
 - b. What bias exist, if any, within the materials used toward certain groups? (cultural or SES)

The analysis of the data conducted, through first framework constructs, then open and finally axial coding is summarized below to provide answers to the primary research questions as well as the subquestions.

RQ 1: What are the GT teachers' perceptions of the elementary (K-6) GT program's identification process in finding all children in need of advanced curriculum and instruction regardless of SES level?

While all of the GT teachers had a slightly different perspective about what gifted was, yet they all agreed about the process for identification. Identification was the process of recognizing children with academic talent. The identification process involves having the parent and the general education teacher filling out a packet of information from the Mountain district (Laramie County School District #1, 2017a) then submitting the information packet to the Mountain district for review. The classroom teacher would include classroom work samples, test scores, report cards, and observations. One teacher talked about finding the information online: "There is a process on the website parents can go to it or educators can go to it...essentially, it is a packet of stuff they fill out, and

they bring it to our building" (Teacher 5). Another teacher commented, "We recognize obviously that gifted goes into a lot of different areas. So, unfortunately, our program does not serve students who are gifted in art or kinesthetic...but we just look at the academic levels" (Teacher 1). With these comments, this would indicate the program is weighted toward academic success. The program does not account for any other strength that may exist. An unfair advantage could arise with a program weighted in academic success only for culturally diverse students or a student coming from a low SES home.

All of the GT teachers discussed the process of meeting to review the application and review the body of evidence included. One teacher stated, "I have been a strong advocate for looking at a wealth of data and not just a couple of assessments" (Teacher 2). Another teacher also had powerful feelings about the process and stated, "We look at their test scores and look at consistency as well. Are they continually performing high" (Teacher 6). Teacher one responded with, "It is a case by case basis. some student's body of evidence still leaves some questions for us after talking altogether as a team."

Additionally, this teacher recognized the difference among the grade levels:

From grades two to six it is going to be the same document. Kindergarten and first grade have a few more measures that they take with just some pre-literacy skills, I know I prefer the consistency of the documents that are required, but taking into consideration difference of sixth-grade students in general. (Teacher 1)

Besides, the team focused on the real-world situation rather than the data results as noted in the following statement: "We value the parent's opinions and teacher's opinion on why their child needs something beyond the regular classroom to keep them engaged

in their learning" (Teacher 3). Teacher four supported the wealth of information in the following statement: "We have to rely on the teachers." All six teachers noted that awareness was essential for identifying students with 30 comments throughout the discussions relating back to student identification.

The need to be thorough in the application process will support who is accepted. A procedural code applied to the equitability of the indicators used in the identification process. Also during the conversation, if there were references to the type of tests, then a procedural code applied. Identification was a term used for what happens when a student is recognized as having potential and should apply to the gifted program. The word was also used to describe the process of reviewing paperwork and meeting as a gifted team for discussion around a possible candidate. Procedures referenced any of the steps used in completing paperwork as well as testing a possible candidate for the gifted program. Referrals were directly related to what a teacher, parent or student could do to start the enrollment process.

Teacher Knowledge

Teacher training. The results were analyzed using teacher knowledge with a focus of teacher training from the constructs within the framework. The amount of training and classroom time supports the result of being exposure to gifted students and the education a student will receive. The knowledge gained allows the teacher to recognize a child's full potential. The discussion on what background teachers possess revealed a factor in the selection of children for the gifted program. With the gifted program being present in two of the schools, teachers from these schools were aware of

what the program offered and how crucial it is in identifying all possible candidates. Teachers who have no exposure to the program are less likely to refer their students. Not only do these teachers who teach in other schools have no direct contact, neither do new teachers coming into the Mountain district as mentioned by three of the six teachers. Teacher one remarked, "If they do not have the GT program at their school it is not as much on their radar." Teacher three also reflected a similar statement: "Some teachers do not know anything about it at all, and some teachers are open." Two participants also shared that many of the students have had siblings in the program. The parents with children already enrolled possess the knowledge needed to encourage others to apply for the GT program. A parent may even know of someone who has had the gifted experience with their child. These were some reasons the participants were persistent in seeing changes brought to the program. Consider the following statement from Teacher five it is steadfast in a belief about how some students may get recognized for the GT program:

I have already said that the whole nomination process sometimes depends on their background. They might be in a ring of people that know about the program, and through people that have known about it, and gone through the program. But, other people, depending on their background or who they have had contact with, may not know about the program, but I think sometimes it maybe does have an impact. (Teacher 5)

Identification of students for GT. The results were analyzed using teacher knowledge with a focus on identification of students for GT from the constructs within the framework. The construct supports the knowledge teachers possess to identify

students in need of an accelerated program. The process used in finding children for the GT program was typically through teacher nominations but can be a parent or student referral too. Children who are consistently scoring above the 95th percentile on their tests; such as MAP and STAR, should be referred by teachers, who then contact the parents about the gifted program. The parents could receive a packet of information or access the application from the school or the Mountain district's website. The parents complete a biographical profile of their child, and both the parent and teacher complete a rating scale about the child's behaviors and answer questions about the child's classroom performance. The teacher gathers grades, test performance reports, as well as classroom work samples as part of the application submission process. There may also be an observation of the child during a class period. The parent would also provide permission to test the child. The team looks at four areas: achievement, aptitude, performance, and behavior. Once the gifted and talented team reviews all the information, they would decide on whether the child is a good fit for the program. Once this decision is made, and before the start of the following quarter, the parent receives a letter or a phone call regarding the placement.

The six participants fully supported the gifted programs' identification process though they felt that changes were needed to continue growth and improvement in the program. Some of the key phrases and words included in the conversation were "I think," "We feel," and "For me." The choice to state the answer with a personal pronoun supported an individual view. Academic success was one of the selection factors for the gifted program. All six teachers stated that they believed the definition of gifted varied

depending on whom you spoke to, yet each gave similar explanations about the academic success students must show to be considered for the gifted program. While each definition varied slightly, there was passion in each voice as they spoke about the program and the type of children who are selected. Five out of six teachers discussed the same procedures for selecting students into the program. Each teacher talked about how students must be in the 90th percentile or higher for consideration, while two out of the six teachers discussed that students in kindergarten do not have as many tests to support their abilities. These two teachers referenced the use of screeners and the tests done at the first-grade level. All of the participants explained that the required packet of information was used to apply for placement in the program.

Teacher one mentioned that the process was systematic and consistent: "It is pretty systematic...we do not proceed with acceptance until we have all of the documents in our hands and so it is consistent" (Teacher 1). Teacher six stated, "A decision is being made on the teacher's knowledge of what's best for the student." Teacher six explained that the decision was made based on the current dynamics of his classroom. Teacher three discussed the identification process from her point of view:

So it is a lot of subjectiveness that goes into the nomination process. I think we do a pretty good job overall in identifying the right kids for the program because once they are in we do not have too many exit or that are unsuccessful. (Teacher 3)

Teacher six also noted, "We look at their test scores and look at consistency as well. Are they continually performing high? I also think about their innate sense."

According to Teacher three, students start to develop their skills by the end of second-grade, and there are many more referrals in third-grade.

Diversity

The results were analyzed using diversity from the constructs within the framework. Children learn from their surroundings and others. The concept supported blending environment and people. All six teachers had thoughts about diversity in the gifted program and how diversity relates to the identification process. One of the questions posed to the participants during the interviews asked for their reflection on the racial makeup of their classroom. This question was then followed up with whether they had the same amount of Hispanic students versus non-Hispanic students. The six teachers agreed that their classrooms did contain a mix of students, but the majority of these students are Caucasian. Teacher five contributed the following statement toward the support of the type of children she saw in the program:

Obviously, we are higher on the end of white Caucasian kids as far as kids that are in there. If they are coming from a poverty background or a pretty affluent one, if they qualified, they qualified because of their academic ability, and usually, that does not seem to have a whole lot of difference. (Teacher 5)

Teacher one noted that she did not have any Hispanic children, while the other five teachers did state they have a few Hispanic children in their classroom. Four of the six teachers stated they did have some African American in the program as well. Three of the teachers reported that their classrooms contained children from India. Two of the teachers also reported having children with an Asian background. Children from Yemen,

Pakistan, China, and Korea were in two out of six of the teacher's classrooms. Teacher four discussed how the military base brought in a variety of people, which contributed to the variety of cultural backgrounds in one of the gifted schools. Two of the six teachers mentioned how the population around the city was comparable to what they saw in the classroom. The city's structure lends to different cultures as well as economic status. Teacher one had a background in ELL and felt that there could be more of these students identified. She continued to support that there was still more to be done in identifying children in poverty or from other cultural backgrounds:

I think the parents are more comfortable because culturally they are still close to their home. I think we could go a long way with still identifying kids in poverty. There are many tests that when you get into kids in poverty or kids who do not have English as a second language; there are many things that you could do as far as identifying kids just basically on all nonverbal tests and lots of problem-solving. (Teacher 3)

The gifted and talented team focused on recognizing the talent in all students as relayed by Teacher four: "We have kids from different backgrounds socioeconomic and different ethnic backgrounds, so because of all the things we look at we can identify more students than if we just did straight IQ" (Teacher 4). However, Teacher two stated, "I can tell you that my percentage of the classroom is not as high in poverty, definitely not as much as school two as far as low-income." The number of diverse students tended to be higher in the one school location with the overall population leaning toward the lower SES as well as higher Hispanic populations. One gifted teacher shared, "We could see so many more

ESL represented in the gifted program" (Teacher 1).

The teachers were not given SES information for reasons related to FERPA (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) and the Mountain district's policies. The participants shared their perceptions of how the percentage of students in poverty who participated in the gifted program compared to the overall percentage in the Mountain district. One-third of the students in the gifted program come from the south side schools as noted by Teacher one. The south side school provides all children with breakfast and lunch. The south side school is one of the highest poverty level schools in the Mountain district as shared by two of the teachers. However, after the conversations, the information provided by four of the six participants supported a lower rate of enrollment of low SES children based on the location of the program. Teacher five explains:

I have always been told why we house the program at school one and school two is because those are the home schools we know we will get some of those kids that might be of that poverty more than low economic status. However, if they are in that school they might be identified and likely to be identified. (Teacher 5)

The gifted and talented teachers showed a robust belief system in what they represent in the gifted and talented program. The teachers' perceptions exposed how enrollment occurs along with other evidence about how the process misses some children.

Communication With Parents and Teachers

The results were analyzed using communication from the constructs within the framework. There are some barriers that exist in the communication about the GT

Program. The lack of what a program is or how to enroll becomes a priority in improving a system that exists for children. Without a proper understanding, many adults may not choose to support the gifted program. Communication was discussed eight times by three of the teachers within the context of making parents aware of the gifted program opportunity. These teachers also felt that all teachers in the Mountain district needed to receive information about the program and to also provide an informational brochure to the community through preschools and doctor offices.

The lack of communication about the program exists on two levels. First, parents often have no information about what programs are offered or what the program includes. Another is the missing component of information to the general education teachers, which includes new teachers. Teacher two pointed out the reputation of the gifted program and how that helped in getting some of the south side schools to refer more students. The perception was different in and out of the classroom according to Teacher one. She continued to talk about the varying perceptions about the program due to missing communication. Teacher one continued to discuss the differences being perceived since many times there is no information about what happens in a gifted classroom. The missing component of what the program offers to students and also the support of referring students to the program. Teacher three also discussed how cultural barriers and the lack of providing information to certain families regarding the program could hinder their choice in applying to the program. Teacher one continued with: "We just need to communicate more about what is happening in our classrooms, and I think many times they have different perceptions because the communication is not out there."

Teacher five pointed out during the interview: "families and teachers who do not know about the program need communication." There are many new teachers in the Mountain district and some who have been there for only a few years. Communication became a barrier to these teachers and their students' families. Teacher six had the same thoughts about the lack of communication to the community and stated, "I feel like the community, somehow our word is not always out there just because we are at only two schools. People maybe are not aware of families that could benefit from the program."

The communication factor helps to make parents and general education teachers aware of what is offered in the gifted program. Three out of the six teachers shared thoughts about the lack of offering the GT program in some of the schools. These teachers also stated that several principals do not push for identification as well as some teachers. Teacher two shared her thoughts about the nonsupport of the program: "There are schools in town with teachers and administrators who refuse to refer students, who do not believe in the GT program, do not believe that they cannot teach them in their school" (Teacher 2). Teacher four offered, "Some principals, some teachers, and some schools in general just saying no we do not, we do not recommend GT and badmouthing it."

Teacher four continued to explain how this could affect the students:

We feel like the big thing is that we have several students who are never identified, because of the school that they go to has either teachers and principal or both who do not want students to go to GT. So they do not inform parents, and they do not suggest that students be screened for GT. (Teacher 4)

The concept of not offering the program in every school leaves a question whether the identification process is reaching all potential candidates. The lack of offering the program could be a possible bias toward groups of students or the program. Two out of the three teachers did not confirm which schools or teachers chose not to offer the opportunity. However, Teacher three furthered the discussion with specifics about teachers and principals:

Some teachers who feel the program is elite, that it is not suitable for kids. There are some teachers that feel like they can handle it themselves. There are some principals who do not want to let the scores out of their building. (Teacher 3)

The communication of location could potentially increase the enrollment concerning low SES children. Five of the six teachers noted that having the program in the South Triad of the Mountain district is quite beneficial. The schools located in the South Triad are noted for higher poverty levels. Teacher one shared her thoughts about how the location benefitted her classroom: "I got about a third of the students coming from the south triad...we are seeing more and more south triad kids being nominated for the program" (Teacher 1). Teacher two responded, "I have been fortunate enough to have some kids from the lower socioeconomic background in the class." Another teacher noted, "I have had some years where I had a variety of ethnic background in my room...I think Hispanic kids are harder to draw into the program and I think because of the familio base, Hispanic kind of culture" (Teacher 3). Teacher six had strong statements about the inclusion of diverse culture and low-income children: "The majority of the kids are from pretty affluent families, of different races, you know, that has always been a variety...I

have had a few on the lower income spectrum." These comments were the evidence about still missing the low SES children for the GT program among the participants.

The GT team helped me to understand the identification process based on their perceptions. While the team valued the opinions of parents and teachers, they also relied on the teachers for a picture of who the child is. The focus remains to offer the program to children who meet the criteria. Genuine interest in growing the program came from the participants. The participants discussed how location makes a difference in who may be nominated. With one of the programs located in a south side school, one that has a high poverty threshold, these children tend to be noticed. Again, it came back to communication with teachers and parents about the GT program. Teacher three confirmed the lack of knowledge. Also acknowledging this idea was Teacher one with the following comment: "The communication is not out there." Teacher two reflects the resistance of the teachers to promote the program in the following statement: "There are plenty of people out there who do not believe that we need a self-contained gifted classroom" (Teacher 2). Overall, the group of gifted teachers provided a variety of input and desires, while confirming their thoughts about the identification process. The teacher perceptions supported the process of finding children across all SES to their best abilities as confirmed by all six participants but the lack of communication and location limitation may exist.

RQ1a: What is the equitability of the different indicators used in the identification process?

Equity in assessment has multilayered factors to consider (Mpofu & Ortiz, 2009). Equitability represents the impartialness of any indicators used in the selection of students. According to Mpofu and Ortiz (2009), the outcome may depend on data-gathering procedures of the assessment. While standardized testing was a key component for seeking IQ and academic scores, the selected tests should be reasonable and fair for any student who takes the test. Teachers may assume the testing conditions are the same for every student, when in fact there is no guarantee. Mpofu and Ortiz (2009) pointed out that the assessments should be controlled for technical aspects and also social justices. All candidates are required to have the same body of evidence submitted to the team. The team can request additional materials if further clarification is needed.

The equitability of the different indicators differed slightly between grades K to 1 and grades 2 to 6 as noted by four of the six teachers. The achievement testing used for the application process includes primary skill assessments, district assessments, MAP, and Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS) for grades 3 to 6. The aptitude testing uses the following tests: WISC-IV and WPPSI-III. Three out of the six teachers talked about the testing for the younger students being comparable to the older students, but the younger students come to school with less time for being in school.

Four of the six teachers noted that the kindergarten and first-grade students receive different tests since they have less school experience, and may require additional skill testing. All students take district assessments at each grade level as well as the MAP test. The specific test used for the kindergarten and first-grade students is the Children's Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA). The teachers also shared how the screeners and

grade level tests can be given to the primary students from the grade level above the current one. Four of the six teachers also mentioned it is more challenging to discover younger children because the parents are not aware of the program and have not applied, and the younger children have less exposure to school.

The testing materials used were standardized tests given to all children in the Mountain district for purposes of progress monitoring and required checkpoints. The teachers responded according to what they know about these tests. One gifted teacher projected her perception about how well the students would do on the testing: "You can sometimes tell that they maybe qualify because they were very well prepped or maybe had a very rich upbringing" (Teacher 5). Another category labeled test was selected to refer to any of the direct tests used with students in the Mountain district. When teachers talked about the tests, then this code was applied. The interviews reflected 24 responses from all six participants about tests used with the students. The interviews provided support for the equitability of the tests since all students partake in the same tests.

The gifted teachers shared the need for consistency in the test results. While testing was not the only indicator used, three of the teachers were curious to know if the student was motivated. Teacher one shared the following about motivation: "I think it is hard really to tell how motivated a student is going to be until they get in the classroom." Another thought presented by Teacher two was: "There is a huge piece that goes with the gifted and talented program, on that whole internal motivation, some kids just don't have it." Once the team of teachers begin looking at the applicants, they are no longer seeking the test scores, but the way the whole child operates in the classroom.

The equitability of the indicators should include both quantitative and qualitative matter (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2016). A comprehensive process is critical for a district to keep the integrity of a gifted program (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2016). All six participants spoke of the tests given to all students in the Mountain district which were quantitative. The parent and teacher surveys and any interviews done with the student represented the qualitative component.

Student Attributes

Intelligence testing. The results were analyzed using student attributes with a focus on intelligence testing from the constructs within the framework. Two of the six teachers specifically mention the use of the WISC-V for intelligence testing. Teacher one discussed the qualifying score being 130:

We just look at the academic levels when we do the acceptance process. We look at an IQ test the WISC 5 and look for the baseline of 130. Then we look at classroom performance and performance on standardized tests as well. All students have different strengths, so they might not always be enough strength in every area, but looking for that in one area or another they might be stronger.

(Teacher 1)

Since the IQ test was updated, Teacher one did note some differences from the previous version which the team was trying to work around in accordance to their rubric. Teacher two did report that she had never given an IQ test and was not familiar with the test. Teacher three commented on how students may perform on the IQ test depending on the

situation:

It used to be the direct IQ, and that was it. So we broaden that several years ago to incorporate more of if a kid had a bad day on the IQ test or maybe they are a little bit of perfectionist, and they took a really long time to color in a block on a coding test. That might skew their score. (Teacher 3)

The idea of how things used to be in the Mountain district was brought to light by teacher four. She reminisced about the Peabody test being the screener of choice and then leading to the IQ testing when language scores were high. The kindergarten and first-grade teachers briefly mentioned intelligence testing. These teachers spoke directly about the standardized academic tests and screeners that they use in the classroom. Teacher two responded to IQ testing with the following statement: "On any given day your kid can fluctuate."

Student academic achievement. The results were analyzed using student attributes with a focus on student academic achievement from the constructs within the framework. The six teachers all talked about the students scoring in the 90th percentile or higher, as well as an IQ score of 130 or more. Teacher two pointed out: "We try to take the top 3%, so we are looking for kids at 3's or 4's on the rubric we use." Two of the participants reflected on the consistency and systematic system that was in place for identifying the top students. Teacher one claimed, "It is pretty systematic...it is consistent." Teacher six also stated, "We look at their test scores and look at consistency as well as are they continually performing high." Of the six participants, there was a consensus with three participants about the body of evidence gathered. Teacher two

voiced about being a strong advocate and looking at the wealth of data rather than just the tests. Teacher three confirmed the idea of looking beyond the testing data with the following comments: "The surveys from the teacher and the parents ask what are the kid's styles?, What are the symptoms?, What are they showing, and how are they showing us they are gifted? Are they motivated learners?" She followed with:

"We try to look at the whole child, not just one number, not just a MAP score, not just an IQ score because what we want is an identification process that allows a child to be successful or meet his or her potential." (Teacher 3)

Teacher five confirmed the concept of ensuring all have the opportunity with this comment: "It is just a matter to make sure that every kid that really would benefit from the program, hearing about it, and having the opportunity to apply and be considered for it" (Teacher 5). Not only did the team seek out information from the parent but the teacher too. The consistency of the process played out as the teachers gather together to look at the candidates and make a decision based on the criteria and materials provided.

Student motivation. The results were analyzed using student attributes with a focus on student motivation from the constructs within the framework. A discussion about student motivation occurred in connection to the consistency of identification on five occasions from three of the six participants. A student's general desire to perform or willingness to perform at a higher level was motivation. The focus of motivation comes from achievement goals and general beliefs about ability and intelligence (Hickey, 1997). Hickey (1997) took into consideration the task difficulty, value, and interest as well as instructional approach when discussing motivation. Motivation to learn could develop

from general experiences that are activated by a particular situation (Hickey, 1997).

Teacher one noted the following about motivation:

I think it is hard to tell how motivated a student is going to be until they actually get in the classroom. I know at times there have been cases where you know a student has not blossomed as much as we would hope once they get into the program and so it would almost be nice to have a trial period. (Teacher 1)

According to Szymanski, Croft, and Godor (2018), teachers influence the educational experiences of students and are the most substantial factor in student achievement. Teacher three stated, "sometimes it is a matter of developmental readiness. They are bright, but they do not want to work that hard. It is very hard to find a test for motivation." Hickey's (1997) study suggested improving motivation through meaningful and differentiated tasks, as did a recent study by Card and Giuliano (2014), student-led decision making, cooperative and collaborative learning activities, and developing mastery skills. Teacher one stated, "If there was a way to gauge motivation and work ethic, I think that might be a nice piece to include in the identification process." Bandura (1986), Ritchotte, Suhr, Alfurayh, and Graefe (2016), and Card and Giuliano (2014) reported that motivation variables include students' interests and values relative to the content. One teacher's comment supports the motivation variables:

I also think we are lacking the motivational piece. There is a huge piece that goes with the gifted and talented program on that whole internal motivation. Some kids just do not have it and are not successful, so I definitely wish we could figure out a way to screen for that motivational piece." (Teacher 2).

RQ1b: What bias exist, if any, within the materials used toward certain groups? (cultural or SES)

As for the testing indicators showing bias toward specific groups, the overall consensus was minimal bias was seen as reported by four out of the six teachers. The code of unbiased materials was selected when teachers were asked about the bias of the tests toward specific groups, whether that was cultural or SES. Five of the six teachers discussed unbiased materials at least once, and one teacher spoke about it at least twice. There were seven references to the unbiased materials. This section focuses on the bias of the materials.

Student Attributes

Intelligence testing. The results were analyzed using student attributes with a focus on intelligence testing from the constructs within the framework. Scheiber (2016) noted that special attention was given to the development of the WISC-V to minimize bias in the subgroups (e.g., special populations, second language learners). Scheiber also pointed out that structural invariance existed for African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian groups as well as male and female. Scheiber stated the WISC-V does not reflect a bias in its constructs. Cognitive tests can be affected by several outside sources, which are impossible to control and may influence tests scores (Weiss, Holdnack, Prifitera, & Saklofske, 2006, 2015). These sources include income, home environment, quality of schooling, and cultural opportunities (Weiss et al., 2006, 2015). Greathouse and Shaughnessy (2016) found that during the development of the WISC-V, it was subjected to rigorous bias investigation and reviewed by experts familiar with various

cultures. The responsibility lies with the evaluator to determine if the child's testing is similar to the normative group (Greathouse & Shaughnessy, 2016). SES has a role in cognitive skill development, along with culture influencing an individual's experiences (Greathouse & Shaughnessy, 2016, Weiss et al., 2006, 2015).

Student academic achievement. The results were analyzed using student attributes with a focus on student academic achievement from the constructs within the framework. Teachers adequately trained in the testing protocols will have a higher chance of recognizing disadvantages in tests given to students. Two teachers felt that there were disadvantages in the MAP test toward non-English speaking students, special education students, minority, and low-income children. The two teachers explained how any test could contain a limited amount of bias. Another teacher felt that the psychologist did an excellent job of removing any bias from the test. Only one teacher posed an unsure remark about the tests in general. Teacher three focused on the realm of testing for students who are ELL. She felt that often the tests hinder these students from being identified. Since some uncertainty remained after this particular question, I completed a review of the MAP test information page. Northwest Education Association (Northwest Evaluation Association [NWEA], 2014) claimed that not reading the answer options aloud would reduce the amount of potential bias that could occur. NWEA used five characteristics of quality assessments to build their database. The fairness component allowed students with similar abilities to take the test and show what they know. NWEA team carefully screened each test item for biases such as culture, linguistics, geographical location, gender and more (Evans, 2013).

Further investigation led to also reviewing Renaissance Learning's STAR test (2015), which followed a strict item writing protocol that included bias and fairness criteria that avoid stereotypes. The Renaissance team monitor and track attributes such as gender, age, ethnicity subject matter, and regional references. A quality review ensures items are checked for discipline-specific criteria, accuracy, language appropriateness and readability level, bias and fairness, and technical quality control also completed by the Renaissance team (Renaissance Learning Inc, 2015). As for the level of bias, it remained minimal with the MAP and STAR test. One participant felt a little more strongly about testing biases stating, "Not near as much of course as the actual quantitative academic test that there are usually indicators that are red flags sometimes that need to immediately look at or address for that reason" (Teacher 5).

With the concept of minimal biases being in any test, then the thought provoked may be how many students are affected because of the small amount of bias found in the test? The gifted teachers have a valid argument that children who are non-English speaking students, special education students, minority, and low-income may have a disadvantage. The participants all mention that any test has some bias.

Summary

The teachers are committed to the gifted program, regardless of the time each has spent in the program. The teachers expressed their understanding of how the process of selection into the program works. The teachers understood supporting and building knowledge of the gifted program for general education teachers, parents, and the community as a piece of the communication factor. The teachers continued to advocate

for better methods in finding all children for the gifted program. An analysis of the interview data by the framework constructs revealed that the teachers felt the identification process could be improved through stronger teacher knowledge, and increased diversity. The gifted teachers expressed a need for improved identification of all children through a better communication process, increased program awareness and more widely disseminated information about the programs offered through the Mountain district.

Participants all shared the same basic format of how the application process worked, and they also discussed the difference between the primary grades and intermediate grades. The general perception of the gifted teachers and the many obstacles presented demonstrated a need for some changes to the current GT program. For example, the teachers discussed the need for consistency in testing and materials used. Providing communication to the community will help disseminate information at a faster rate and help to include children from all cultural backgrounds with the hope to encourage all parents to apply to the gifted program regardless of their economic situation.

Data were secured on an offline external media drive. The drive was kept in a locked safe when not in use during the time of research and accessed only by myself. The same procedure would hold true for any paper files constructed, as well as all notes and recordings. Once the project is completed, the data will remain in a secured location for no less than five years. The following section describes what the project will encompass.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The project for this study was a summative white paper with the data findings for delivery to the assistant superintendent of instruction of the Mountain district. The summative white paper offers the insight of the GT teachers' perceptions through a series of questions from Neumeister and Burney's (2012) book and Szymanski and Shaff's (2013) article. The GT teachers' knowledge of their students' backgrounds was limited when referencing SES, making the number of low SES children who were participating in the GT program difficult to process. Also, most teachers were reasonably confident in knowing their students' needs and stating that their classrooms contained a mix of cultural backgrounds.

After data were collected and analyzed, the results were written with suggestions for ways of improving the GT program, including strengths and weaknesses, and possible ways for identifying more low SES students as perceived by the GT teachers. The purpose of the project was to bring awareness to the administration, at the district level, of possible needs and concerns along with workable ideas to improve the identification process allowing for more low SES students to be identified and served. The paper includes suggestions for future research. The interviews with the GT teachers yields results in discovering how to increase the enrollment of low SES children. The product of this project is a summative white paper. The position white paper includes a description of the problem, research questions, and details of the study, as well as a discussion of the study findings and the data analysis.

My goal for the summative white paper is to provide the Mountain district the insight from the GT teachers on ways to improve finding children from low-income families for enrollment in the GT program. The paper includes possible solutions to the problem. This section consists of a rationale for the position white paper and presentation, a review of the literature, a project description, and evaluation, as well as project implications.

Rationale

The limited information about SES involvement in the GT program from the Mountain district and literature that was available at the time prompted a further investigation about teacher perceptions toward identification of low SES children for the GT program. After careful analysis of the interview transcripts, awareness and perceptions about the GT program were the most common themes. The questions reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the identification process that led to more significant discussions on how to improve the process of identification. The suggestions brought forth were first discussed at the Mountain district level GT teacher team meetings and were shared by the participants with me during the interviews.

The information gathered was best shared in an informative position paper with the Mountain district. The position white paper contains research-based ideas for finding low SES children as well as the views of the participants. The paper was written to engage Mountain district stakeholders, administrators, and teachers to stretch their thinking in finding children from the low SES backgrounds who may need GT instruction. The goal is to offer information on the problem and a solution for this project

to the Mountain district about finding more low SES students to be served in the GT program. Therefore, a professional development plan and program evaluation did not suffice the project. The Mountain district was provided a copy of the white paper to make decisions for themselves regarding the GT program.

Review of the Literature

Though a gap in the literature existed when the project began, many subcategories arose from the interviews. As these subcategories developed, prominent themes became evident from the information gathered. The additional review of the literature supports the summative white paper in topics around GT with the inclusion of low SES students. The search for literature was conducted through the online library using peer-reviewed journals, professional journals, books, and education research. The searches were completed through the multidisciplinary electronic databases—ProQuest, and Academic Search Complete—using the following keywords: *white papers, awareness, perception or bias, procedures of identification, cultural values, and experiences with gifted and talented.*

The project is supported by the themes concerning the problem of underrepresentation of low SES students into the GT program. The topics selected were relevant to the struggles of identification of students, as well as supporting the concept of public awareness with the GT program. The chosen genre of topics supports the rationale for the project study, which focuses on the teachers' perceptions toward the GT identification process for inclusion of children regardless of SES. The Mountain district

could use the paper to support the decision-making process toward improving the identification of low SES students for the GT program.

White Paper

For the project, I wrote a summative white paper to provide information to the Mountain district. Gordon and Graham (2003) and Hoffman (2010) stated that there are several definitions and agreed upon a white paper as a tool, which served many purposes. The origin of the white paper was a shorthand document, which referred to an official government document (Owl Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2017, Stelzner, 2007). Stelzner (2007) noted that the history of the white paper, tracing it back to the Winston Churchill White Paper of 1922. Gordon and Graham (2003) and Owl Purdue Online Writing Lab (2017) explained that a white paper is used to convey a position in a decision-making process. Therefore, I decided to use a white paper as a tool of communication for the results of the project.

The white paper is a short, condensed paper set with a summary, illustrations, and information on a topic sufficient for most audiences (Hoffman, 2017). Hoffman (2017) also stated that there are two types of presentations used in white papers. One of which contains bulleted lists and the other is in the storytelling flow of problem-solution-benefit, especially in case studies. Stelzner (2007) reported that a white paper could have two approaches. One is focused on self-interest and the other on interests of the reader. The perceptions of the GT teachers about identifying students from the low SES backgrounds for GT services were shared with Mountain district administration.

Program Awareness

Awareness, perception, and bias play a role in a teacher's decision and nomination of students for the GT program. Kaya (2015) described teachers as the heart of the classroom. Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, and Leech (2011) also noted the importance of the teacher's role for students to gain access to the gifted program. Teachers have an understanding of needs and how to accommodate students with the right environment along with materials (Berman, Schultz, & Weber, 2012, Kaya, 2015). Bianco et al. emphasized on teachers nominating students who meet their expectations, as well as the behaviors and performance in the classroom. Yamin (2012) stated that teachers should presume less and inquire more about their students. The biases and stereotypes teachers have contributed to the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Bianco et al., 2011, Troxclair, 2013). On the other hand, Jung (2014) focused on placement in society. An individual culture that ranks higher in society is more likely to be selected for particular programs. Awareness, perception, and bias are three concepts teachers should understand when selecting students for gifted programs.

Teachers continue to possess positives and unfavorable ideas about GT programs (Kaya, 2015). Classroom performance is often the most considered when nominations are made by teachers, while motivation, behavior, and family environment are considerations that other teachers made. Bianco et al. (2011) referenced that the methods used in nominating vary widely between states and districts. For several decades, debates have occurred regarding teacher judgment and the ability to identify students accurately. Perhaps teachers should question the way giftedness is defined when it supports the

procedures of identification. Consideration of teacher perception and bias need to be limited and awareness raised.

The support of teacher nominations is crucial, as many of the students go unchallenged in the general classrooms (Kaya, 2015). Teachers need to have an understanding of cultural and environmental factors and how they affect the expression of giftedness. The lack of understanding expands to include diverse populations. Teachers must be aware of culture and ethnic diversity in the classroom. Kaya (2015) claimed that students who come from low SES backgrounds perform at average or just below due to lower verbal scores but have above average nonverbal intelligence. Often poverty and language affect academic achievement, causing students to be overlooked. Therefore, districts should focus on training teachers in GT identification procedures.

Callahan (2001) stated that effective schools are consistent. Based on 10 hours of training, Gear (1978) pointed out that teachers are more effective in selecting students. Bianco et al. (2011) supported professional training for classroom teachers to increase understanding of gifted students. Providing teachers with appropriate teacher education programs would enhance their skills in selection of students (Kaya, 2015). Teacher perception is shaped through professional education, training, and early experience. The use of professional training could improve the selection process, leading to better identification of students for the GT programs.

Improving Identification

Low-income and minority students remain underrepresented (Card & Giuliano, 2016, Henfield & Byrd, 2014, Milner & Ford, 2007) in GT programs. Brulles (2016)

reported that identifying to match a program only hinders the progression of the program and perpetuates the underrepresentation. Student ethnicity is a significant factor that influences teacher referrals, as noted in Elhoweris's (2008) study. Szymanski and Shaff (2013) reflected on their students regarding the struggle teachers had in identifying Hispanic low SES students, which suggested a lack of gifted education knowledge. Clark (2012) cited several factors for underrepresentation. The factors included the method of identification, the definition of intelligence and giftedness, and the bias and prejudice of educators. Bias could be found in teacher nominations as discussed by Bianco et al. (2011). The most common ways to refer a student to the gifted program are through observations and nominations (Bianco et al., 2011, Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Because there was no testing, Kornmann, Zettler, Kammerer, Gerjets, and Trautwein (2015) noted that the nominations were the most economical way to refer. Teacher nomination ranked as an effective method for identifying GT students (Matthew, Scott, & Erin, 2016, Szymanski et al., 2018). Szymanski et al. (2018) also noted several studies that found a lack of understanding in the identification of gifted children, ultimately interfering with recommending for the gifted program. Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012) argued that the definition of giftedness used for identification purposes and the teacher's level of preparation in gifted education are two key factors leading to the underrepresentation of bilingual students. The federal definition of giftedness includes measurement of academic achievement, intelligence, creativity, artistic ability, and leadership skills. While the gaps may come from differences in the measured cognitive ability of students with different backgrounds, there are biases in these measures (Card & Giuliano, 2016). Kornmann et

al. (2015) stated that identification is crucial. An understanding of what giftedness is and how to identify students from all backgrounds must exist to reduce the lack of low SES students in the GT program.

Likewise, Card and Giuliano (2016) and Warne et al. (2013) discussed that broadening participation through changes to the eligibility criteria based on teacher and parent referrals but still failed to qualify students from underrepresented groups. Moreover, Sparks (2015) noted that more than half of public school students were from low-income families. Poverty could influence the identification of students, letting the school readiness gap widen. Vygotsky (1962) pointed out that instruction leads to development and supports the offering of advanced classes to students. Olszewski-Kubilis (2014) argued the thought of giftedness as a fixed, inborn trait of IQ that needs to be developed. Brulles (2016) endorsed the establishment of procedures in a district to improve consistency throughout the district, and consistency in programming gives support to teachers. Sulak (2014) discussed creating an environment with differentiated teaching. Johnsen (2012) further discussed how gifts are found in all diverse groups of children and would develop over time when given the appropriate learning environment. Focusing on changes teachers need to make, Clark (2012) noted the need to be open and willing to change the standard of what information must be known and skills learned. However, an unequal development has occurred across demographic groups, leaving the identification of students to be completed through testing procedures.

Teacher and parent referrals continue to show evidence of under-referred students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Card & Giuliano, 2016, Matthew et al., 2016). While

nominations were the most used, another idea presented by McBee, Peters, and Miller (2016) included a two-stage diagnostic process. All the children would take a quick and inexpensive screening test. The children who pass would then take a more invasive assessment. Johnsen (2012) asserted identified students need to represent diverse backgrounds and reflect the total student population of the district. According to Clark (2012), teachers have low expectations of children from diverse backgrounds. Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012) explained school districts need to understand underrepresentation as more than an adjustment to policy and procedures concerning testing, but a focus on educating teachers, parents, and communities. Bianco (2011) also noted the importance of professional development training for classroom teachers in identifying gifted and talented students. Intelligence testing was one commonly applied method for identifying a gifted student after making the referral (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012, Kornmann et al., 2015). Testing would not find all students, nor would all children be successful at the appropriate levels. Therefore alternative methods of assessing are in need of being found (Card & Giuliano, 2016, Kornmann et al., 2015, Sparks, 2015). School districts need to be open to applying alternative methods in finding and identifying gifted students.

Schools would need to identify 7% to 8% of the general population for the number of Hispanics to be reflective of the student population (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012, Ford & Grantham, 2003). Kornmann (2015) suggested teachers take into account a student's characteristics. The mistake made was simple testing (Sparks, 2015). According to Clark (2012), there are a few things districts could do to alleviate

underrepresentation. These items included changing beliefs about diverse populations, providing parents from all cultures information about essential experiences to develop a child's intellect, providing additional opportunities for learning necessary skills, and finally, helping students overcome negative stereotypes from their cultures. The beliefs teachers hold about the education needs can affect the selection of students for the gifted program (Pecore, 2013) along with the perceptions of pedagogical practices in the classroom (Tofel-Grehl, Feldon, & Callahan, 2018). Johnsen (2012) suggested the evidence-based practices of the NAGC to be utilized when identifying students for the gifted program. The practices are equal access to a comprehensive assessment, qualities of procedures and assessment evidence, and representativeness of diversity. These four items would require planning to ensure the same opportunity to all students.

Cultural Values of Students

Stereotypes develop based on cultural; unintended bias may persist with just moving students to higher levels of performance. According to Sparks (2015), people were uncomfortable in knowing everyone was a little bit racist and a classist. There were demographic shifts in school districts across the nation, along with a push to increase student academic achievement, especially in students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). As a nation, teachers were moving fewer culturally and low-income students to the high academic levels (Griner & Stewart, 2013, Milner & Ford, 2007, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014). Griner and Stewart (2013) noted that education must be equitable to all students. Teachers should ensure the curriculum encompasses culture and experiences to provide access,

awareness, and empowerment for students of color (Ford, 2014, Milner & Ford, 2007, Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Ford (2014) insisted how stereotypes develop the cultural beliefs without proper education of teachers. The proper education of teachers in the area of culturally and linguistically diverse populations is essential.

The pursuit of cultural competence assists teachers in discovering hidden beliefs, biases, prejudices, and values, thus allowing for sensitivity, awareness, and consciousness toward the world (Griner & Stewart, 2013, Milner & Ford, 2007, Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Anyone who lacks the cultural competence contributes to the disproportionately lower number of students of color in gifted education (Milner & Ford, 2007). Milner and Ford (2007) discussed becoming culturally competent as a life process. Culture cannot be defined as values, beliefs or behaviors, but somewhat dynamic through identity, gender, class, and economic status. According to Henfield (2014), teachers were less likely to recommend black students for the gifted program. In addition, Szymanski and Shaff (2013) noted teacher understanding as a crucial component of successfully working with culturally diverse students. Ford (2012b) brought to light the need for courses on multicultural education. Most teachers do not know how to work with culturally different, low-income, gifted students. Henfield (2014) and Yamin (2012) also pointed out how multicultural training could alleviate biases. There is a need for proper training for teacher preparedness and responsiveness to work with culturally diverse students in the classroom.

Preparation programs allow teachers to see potential in all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, language or gender (Ford et al., 2013, Frye & Vogt, 2010, Olszewski-

Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014, Warne et al., 2013) and allow for the removal of perspectives and beliefs (Ford, 2013, Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). The training helps to alleviate misconceptions or deficit thinking about giftedness (Ford et al., 2013, Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014, Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Nelson and Guerra (2014) commented that teachers often hold negative beliefs about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and their families, as do the teachers from similar backgrounds due to the fact of assimilating and adopting perspectives of others. Teachers who hold cultural deficit views may fail to recognize students capable of high academic achievement (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Olszewski-Kubilius and Clarenbach (2014) suggested creating an environment that rejects deficit thinking toward low-income, racially, ethnically, and linguistically different students. While the idea of proper preparation in the area of cultural competence, personal beliefs still overpower professional knowledge.

Teacher Experiences With Gifted and Talented

Not only was proper preparation necessary, but teaching experience was vital for gifted students' success. There were three groups served in the classroom--struggling learners, gifted learners, and the grade-level group according to Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014). Coleman (2014) acknowledged teachers acquire a body of skills, knowledge, and practical knowledge through experiences that in turn supports these groups of learners. Missett, Brunner, Callahan, Moon, and Azano (2014) along with Tomlinson (1997), and Walden (2014) emphasized good teaching as being responsive to the learner's needs. The appropriate instruction would vary based on the learner's

background. The background includes knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, and interest, which the teacher used to plan content, process, and product (Dixon et al., 2014, Tomlinson, 1997, Walden, 2014). Walden (2014) also argued that the knowledge of familiarity and understanding of theories, research and principles, laws and policies, instructional strategies and educational practices that drive gifted education to be prominent for a gifted teacher to possess. Coleman (2014) found competent teachers have a general passion and are committed to making a difference for gifted learners.

Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) also supported that personal responsibility and investment in student success were evident in research. The basics of what students bring to class also drive what teachers must do to be successful with the gifted children.

Considering Szymanski et al. (2018) work, teachers' attitudes more so than other students play a larger role in motivation. Teachers hold beliefs about students' abilities. These beliefs stem from the teacher's experiences and training. Szymanski et al. (2018) continued the discussion around attitudes being a factor that attributes to behaviors. The attitudes and beliefs develop through experiences and no experiences, along with no training about gifted children. Teachers sometimes form negative stereotypes toward gifted students. The negative feelings could be projected verbally or non-verbally, affecting student motivation and engagement.

Teachers must possess a background that was beyond the regular certification. Dixon et al. (2014) posited that education was always changing and renewing. Throughout the years, the classroom has been affected by common core state standards, standards-based classroom, high expectations, as well as accountability for all students,

multicultural diversity, recognition of learning styles and multiple intelligences, societal and technological changes. Tomlinson (1997) insisted teachers need to be flexible and reflective in the classroom. Coleman (2014) along with Dixon et al. (2014) pointed out the need to modify lessons based on what happens in the classroom. Modifications to the curriculum help to create an environment conducive to the emergence of the optimal experiences for the learners (Coleman, 2014). Walden (2014) and Tomlinson (1997) continued to support teachers as facilitators for presenting appropriate conditions, curriculum, and instruction to all learners. Teachers with the essential education background may need additional training and support to meet the needs of gifted learners.

New teachers must receive proper training to understand the diversity of learning and the process of differentiated instruction (Berman et al., 2012, Brown & Garland, 2015, Brulles, 2016, Dixon et al., 2014, Troxclair, 2013). All teachers require practice and guidance to ensure success. Teacher preparation programs could provide an understanding of the complexity of teaching diverse populations. Walden (2014) declared that teacher training should include identification, acceleration, and differentiated instruction for gifted students. Dixon et al. (2014) offered that education programs provided the philosophy behind the process of differentiation. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) acknowledged teachers differentiate curriculum based on student needs. Walden's (2014) research supported that few preparation programs provide training in cultural and economic diversity, leaving teachers to speculate about distinct characteristics. Training programs alone cannot begin to support the diverse need of educators. The need for professional development opportunities led by consultants could help facilitate the

development of foundational understanding and instructional competencies for teachers according to Dixon et al. (2014). Professional development also opens the door to teacher self-efficacy. Dixon et al. (2014), Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014), and Walden (2014) all pointed out that a teacher must cope with teaching issues, overcome insecurities and have a firm belief in their skills. Gifted teachers should be viewed as the expert and be open and willing to assist the general education staff when working with diverse populations of gifted children.

Walden (2014) implied that teachers develop their concepts about gifted students based on their knowledge and training. Training could vary state-to-state as well as district to district. Teachers continued to have high enthusiasm, empathy, and a broad knowledge of gifted students. There were no specific traits or qualities of what the gifted teacher should possess (National Association for Gifted Children, 2015). According to the NAGC (2015), Wyoming does not require GT coursework for pre-service teachers. There was no state policy for in-service training of the general education teachers, yet the local education agency determined what training was needed. There was an endorsement program, but no degree offered, and credentials were required for professionals in the GT program. Wyoming does have available funding for the GT program, but the funding fluctuated year to year. Though NAGC's (2015) report indicated federal law on GT had not affected Wyoming, the federal policy could be beneficial. The benefits are increasing accountability, increasing the capacity of teachers to differentiate curriculum, increasing family engagement in the child's learning and school, and conducting research on best practices to disseminate to the local districts. Palincsar (1998) stated that the challenge of

social constructivism was as vital as promoting meaningful learning for all children including those who are linguistically and culturally diverse. The gifted teacher would undoubtedly have had some training along with certification, and yet most of what they possess comes from direct experience with the gifted students.

Project Description

My goal of the study was to gain insight into a solution of increasing the enrollment of low SES students for the GT program. The GT teachers explained the strengths of the program along with weaknesses, and they all had solutions along with ideas to make the program more accessible to all students in the Mountain district. Based on the data findings, I will present a summative white paper to the Mountain district. The paper includes the GT teachers' perceptions about the program along with the suggestions for enhancing the GT program. The GT teachers' perceptions include strengths and weaknesses in the identification process as well as an offering of their shared suggestions. The vision statement of the Mountain district reflects the desire to be "the premier district 'of learners for learners' in the Rocky Mountain Region where every student is successfully learning" (Laramie County School District #1, 2017b). The intent is not to point out deficits but to offer awareness and possible solutions for improving the GT program identification process. The focus of the project is to present the summative white paper which includes the findings of the interviews to the Mountain district assistant superintendent of instruction. After the initial presentation, a request to send other stakeholders an electronic copy will occur.

There are potential barriers associated with the project. Due to the budget cuts within the Mountain district, the reduction of the GT program locations could hinder the increase of low SES children's enrollment as well as limit the number of gifted teachers. The Mountain district's progress monitoring tool also changed, which may affect one of the qualification components. The teachers want children scoring in the 90th percentile or higher to receive a notification letter from the Mountain district about the GT program along with the invitation to apply. The initiation of the letter would require someone at the Mountain district level or each building to monitor student scores to generate a parent letter.

Upon project completion, I will emailed the project with a request for a meeting with the assistant superintendent of instruction. A formal presentation of the summative white paper will be made and along with an open discussion about the ideas that arose from the gifted teacher interviews. The intention is not only to increase awareness in the Mountain district and community about the GT program but also to increase enrollment of low SES students into the GT program using some of the gifted teachers' ideas.

Project Implications

This project study has the potential to create social change by building a robust identification process that focuses on equity of all children no matter what the SES. When teachers and administrators look at the potential of every student, then they forget that social backgrounds matter. Education is for all children regardless of background, ethnicity, and cultural differences. As educators or administrators, the focus should be on how children advance during their educational journey. The Mountain district's high

expectations for teachers focused on generating high-quality instruction leading to the creation of compelling, productive, college prepared learners. The Mountain district continues to determine the best path for preparation and fulfilling the learning blocks for all students.

The information provided in the summative white paper is for future decision making about gifted programming. The document offers ideas to help strengthen the program as well as increase enrollment for low SES children through awareness of the program. The Mountain district stakeholders could use the information to continue building an active program with a possibility to seek further financial support through grants or private organizations based on the current research findings.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The primary goal associated with providing a position white paper is to offer the insight of the GT teachers about appropriately identifying low SES children in the Mountain district's gifted program. The information provided in the summative white paper will be electronically distributed to the Mountain district's assistant superintendent of instruction; a hard copy will also be provided. The Mountain district could then choose to make the paper available to all stakeholders and apply the information to the gifted and talented program. According to Brulles (2016), GT programs take time to develop and change over time. The establishment of a sustainable service requires continuous modification to respond to numerous factors, which could include educational trends, policies, student demographics, and a Mountain district initiative.

There are potential limitations associated with this project as well. One limitation to consider in this study is that there is no randomization. For the project study, the use of one district yielded outcomes that may not apply to other districts in the state or surrounding areas and limits generalizability and identification processes for gifted programs, as noted by in Sullivan and Bal's (2013) research. The project also yielded a small sample size. The sample size was nine gifted teachers, which limited the number of participants. While I intended to interview all nine GT teachers in the Mountain district, only six volunteered to assist in the project. As a result, the project was limited to the six participants from the GT program. Therefore, the information gathered is a narrow view of perceptions. Although the Mountain district had the program housed within two

schools, the overall perception is not favorable. With constraints on the budget, the need to cut part of the GT program is inevitable. The program still exists even though there is only one location remaining, and this could limit the number of opportunities for children who come from a poverty background.

Another limitation is access to data. FERPA (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) limits what data are accessible by individuals (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2006). Since socioeconomic data were unavailable and teachers did not have direct knowledge, the ability to determine how many students are of low SES was limited. The knowledge of students' backgrounds would allow for a balance of students enrolled in the GT program.

A third limitation is the risk of the data going unused. With the Mountain district looking into the upcoming school year, there has been mention of further cuts that may need to occur. The cuts most likely would be a reduction of programs.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Although I focused on the GT teachers' perceptions about identifying low SES students to the Mountain district for consideration, the GT teachers had additional ideas as well. One of the other ideas is to obtain a universal screener. By using an existing universal screener, the high-achieving students are located, and an opportunity is provided to children who could benefit from advanced classes. When students score in the top percentile of a standardized test, GT teachers want a letter about the GT program opportunity to be sent out to parents.

The idea of seeking out funding to support the expansion of the GT program in each building is another step toward creating additional awareness and opportunity for the program. Another plan would be to have the teachers complete a brief survey on how to improve the current program. An additional strategy would be to ask the GT teachers to develop an informational brochure that could be used at open house nights and given to all parents. Building awareness for the program could be the key to helping identify all SES levels of children who may need gifted and talented services.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

When the journey first began with writing a paper and completing a project, it appeared to be simple. As time moved forward, the task was not so simple. The discovery of the vast array of information and numerous directions that the research could go led quickly to learning not to rush the process. As the study grew and the roadblocks occurred, my ideas needed to shift. Through the guidance of the committee, the problem I chose to research had become more significant than anticipated. The issue of gaining information from the Mountain district shifted the project into a new direction. Not only was the lack of gaining access to data one problem, but producing a written document with the appropriate wording had slowed the process down. The hours, days, months, and years spent reviewing, rethinking, and rewriting each piece of information led to even more profound learning and exploration for me. The committee and staff provided coaching and guidance through the rough moments, and the project soon emerged.

The information and knowledge gathered from the six interviews left a powerful message. It was clear; overall, those teachers were not finding all the children who need a

challenging curriculum. The fact that some teachers and principals do not support the GT program limits the opportunity to identify all children. One goal is to report the recommendations that grew from the interviews to the Mountain district and how they could make these changes at little additional cost. The first suggestion is to create a letter informing parents about how their child scored. While this might be a small step, to begin with, another recommendation is to place a program in all buildings. Bringing the program to all buildings would be more difficult to accomplish due to the funding and available space.

With a finished project presented to the Mountain district stakeholders, there is a feeling of accomplishment toward a task that could create a difference in the Mountain district for children coming from all background types. The document could ultimately give life back to the program through the suggestions of the participants. Even though the paper is presented by myself, the information provided to the Mountain district can bring intentional conversation toward how all children should receive the opportunity for challenging curriculum and instruction. Assessment of students happens throughout the school year; the paper will provide teachers with a wealth of information that could be used to meet each student's needs adequately.

The task of research and writing is not simple; it is a task that required many hours of dedication, strength, and determination. This endeavor created growth not only as a person but also as a researcher and leader to others. The journey can make a difference for others who may travel that same path of furthering their education and changing the world. As a scholar-practitioner, I have been affected by this completed

project. I feel that analyzing education data has assisted me as a classroom teacher. This project has affected my understanding of how to work with students. I am equipped to make the curriculum, instruct, and create assessments for the students I work with and to lead other teachers in social change through observing, analyzing, and working with children.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

GT programs are not mandated and only partially funded in Wyoming. According to the Davidson Institute (2017), in the 2014-2015 school year, there were 92,218 public school students with 2.63 million dollars allocated to fund GT programs. Strauss (2017) highlighted many areas including educational budget cuts and eliminated programs. One of the 22 programs on the elimination list for 2018 includes the Javits Gifted and Talented. Furthermore, a 12 million dollar budget cut is slated for the GT program because it focuses on research and students who need these services, and the government said the money should instead focus on students who are disadvantaged. Strauss also stated that the funding of GT services should come through the state, local, or private funding. If funding is the key to success, then the state and the districts may need to work to find alternative sources of money to support the gifted program.

A moment of reckoning is upon everyone. There is an urgency to figure out how to support the needs of all children. Otherwise, a path of destruction may prevail. The goal of education is the preparedness for college, yet the removal of funding and programming continues. This project can enlighten the stakeholders with concepts that can get information to all parents about the GT program, find all students in need of GT

services regardless of SES background, and create programs within all schools. In moving forward, changes need to occur, which includes providing appropriate education to all children.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The implications for future research should be interviewing or surveying general education teachers, parents, and students regarding their perceptions about GT programs, as well as the coordinator's role in the process of identification. Participants could include a random sampling from the K to 6 level across the Mountain district. The continued effort of future research would enhance knowledge on additional levels. Interviewing or surveying the general education teachers could provide information about what they know about the GT program and how to access and identify possible candidates. Since the program is now in one building, many new teachers, as well as seasoned teachers, may not be aware of the GT program. Questions for the general education teachers could come from Neumeister and Burney's (2007) handbook and Szymanski and Shaff's (2013) article. In addition to these questions, some categorizing questions could be asked such as how many years the teacher had taught as well as how many years in the Mountain district. The information could help to determine if program awareness is an issue in finding the low SES children.

Additional permissions from the IRB would be required to gain access to the parents and students since it would involve children as well as the Mountain district's help in distributing surveys to all schools to be sent home. Accompanying the survey could be a letter containing the purpose of the research along with permission for them to

participate. Neumeister and Burney's (2012) handbook has surveys designed for parents and students, which would allow for consistency in the data gathered. A goal could be to have at least 75% participation. This additional research would be beneficial in providing information about what parents and students do and do not know about the GT program along with any of their beliefs. A survey taken by a participant in the GT program could answer follow-up questions as well. The information gathered may be a factor in how the program evolves over the next couple of years.

The last implication involves the coordinator's role. The information given by the coordinator would link all the processes of identification to programming for the GT program. The coordinator would be able to supply the backbone of how the program is structured. With the insight of the coordinator, an understanding of the process can be made clear. This piece would then connect all the additional components: teachers, parents, and students. Furthermore, the coordinator would be able to provide the history and pacing that has occurred since the inception of the GT program. The conversation with the coordinator could provide reasons for strengthening the identification process.

Conclusion

During the early stages of research, it became evident that there was a more in-depth issue at hand. The study led to discovering a low enrollment of socioeconomically disadvantaged children in the GT program. The interviews with the GT teachers allowed insight into their perceptions toward the program and understanding the identification procedures. Through phone interviews, the information and ideas evolved and provided the means to produce a summative white paper for the Mountain district. The white paper

will supply the Mountain district with information from those interviews and offer ideas, which were discussed during the Mountain district GT team meetings and shared during the interview process.

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Appendix A1: Commonly Used Assessments

Test	Purpose	Age range
The Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children Second Edition (KABC-II)	Measure of cognitive abilities and processing skills	3 - 18
The Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (K-TEA)	In-depth assessment of key academic skills	4 - 25
The Test of Written Language-Fourth Edition (TOWL-4)	Comprehensive diagnostic test of written expression	9 - 17
The Test of Early Written Language Third Edition (TEWL-3)	Measures basic and contextual writing abilities	4 - 10
The Test of Early Reading Ability Third Edition (TERA-3)	A measure of early reading abilities	3 - 8
Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT)	Measure abilities related to success in school, testing critical thinking and reasoning skills	Pre-K - 12
Slosson Intelligence Test, Revised (SIT-R3)	Measures six cognitive domains: Information, Comprehension, Quantitative, Similarities and Differences, Vocabulary, and Auditory Memory	4 - 65
Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI) or Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)	Measure of intelligence in clinical, educational, and research settings	6:0 – 89:11
Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test, Second Edition (KBIT-2)	Measure both verbal and nonverbal ability	4:0 - 90:0
Stanford Binet	Measures five factors of cognitive ability: Fluid Reasoning, Knowledge, Quantitative Reasoning, Visual-Spatial Processing, and Working Memory	2 - 85+

Appendix A2: Code Frequency

Codes	Subcategories	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
Demographics	Experience level	2	1	5	3	2	2
	General Ed GT knowledge	3	0	2	0	4	0
	Trainings	2	4	5	3	6	5
Ethnicity	Diversity	6	6	7	10	7	10
	Socioeconomic Status	3	5	2	4	2	3
Procedural	Identification	8	10	7	6	9	7
	Procedure	7	3	0	1	1	2
	Referral	2	6	5	5	1	1
Testing	Student motivation	3	1	1	0	0	0
	Tests	7	3	4	1	3	6
	Unbiased materials	1	1	1	2	1	1
Views	Awareness	2	7	5	3	7	6
	Bias	4	9	4	2	2	3
	Perception	7	4	11	2	10	7
Program structure	Communication	3	0	0	0	4	1
	Recommendations	9	9	8	4	5	5
	Strengths	5	9	5	2	2	4
	Weaknesses	2	3	5	3	2	6

Note. Frequency of code occurrences from each participant during the interview process

Appendix B: Interview Questions

*Note: Questions are not in the order as presented to participants.

These questions come from the following source: Szymanski, T., & Shaff, T. (2013).

1. Tell me about any experiences and training that you've had regarding gifted students.
2. How does the whole identification process work with the teachers? Do the teachers nominate kids first, do you look at the test scores and then ask them to look at the students?
3. Have you noticed any differences as far as gender, race, school interest, economic status, extra-curricular for the kids that are in your program or that you work with? Differences amongst the kids who participate?
5. What about from a racial make-up? Do you have about the same number of Hispanic and non-Hispanic students?
6. Is the percentage of kids in the district at the poverty level pretty much the same with the kids who participate in your group?
7. How do you think background influences whether or not a kid participates in gifted programming?
8. Are there barriers that either prevent kids from being identified or prevent kids from participating once they've been identified?
9. Is there anything that would help me understand the teachers' attitudes and perceptions about gifted students, effects of students in the classroom and how they interact with the students?

10. What about the teachers' understanding of gifted students? Do they understand and know about the needs of gifted students?

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1. What is your definition of “gifted”? What exactly are the qualifications for being labeled “gifted”?
2. Please describe your identification process (at each building level)?
3. What are the strengths of the district’s identification process?.
4. What are the weaknesses of the district’s identification process?
5. Do you have any suggestions for improving the identification process?
6. To what extent does the identification process for your grade level find students who need gifted services?

My own question that will support the RQ2 subquestion

1. What types of assessments are used in identifying gifted children? Are these unbiased?

Explain

Appendix C: Permission to Use Materials

From: "Teresa Clark-Massey"
Subject: permission to use materials
Date: Sun, 29 May 2016 11:00:13 -0600

Hello Ginny,

I hope that you are the right person I need to contact. I purchased the book *Gifted Program Evaluation* by Kristie Speirs Neumeister, Ph.D., and Virginia H. Burney, Ph.D., Authors and seek permission to use the "Master List of Structured Interview Questions" in my research project for my doctoral degree at Walden University.

I am looking at pulling some of the interview questions to provide the best set to look at the underrepresentation of low-socioeconomic students being enrolled into the gifted program in my district. My paper is entitled *Living Beyond Poverty: The Underrepresentation of Low- Socioeconomic Status Children in Gifted and Talented Programs as Perceived by Teachers*. Full credit will be given on the use of any material.

Any assistance on this matter would be great, I appreciate your time on this matter.

Teresa Clark-Massey

From: Katy McDowall
Sent: Wednesday, June 1, 2016 7:49 AM
Subject: Re: permission to use materials

Hi Teresa,

Thanks so much for your inquiry. I handle Prufrock's permissions requests.

This e-mail grants you permission to use the Master List of Structured Interview Questions from *Gifted Program Evaluation* (pp. 141–143), as described in your e-mail, provided that you (a) indicate that each question was reproduced with permission from Prufrock Press Inc. and (b) include the full book title, author name, page number(s), and copyright notice according to APA style.

Best,

Katy, Editor and Permissions Coordinator

On Sun, May 29, 2016 at 11:51 AM,
Teresa Clark-Massey wrote:
Hello Toni,

I accessed your article *Teacher Perspectives Regarding Gifted Diverse Students*, and was wondering if I would be able to use some of the questions from your Appendix B. I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University working on a Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment degree. My research project is entitled *Living Beyond Poverty: The Underrepresentation of Low- Socioeconomic Status Children in Gifted and Talented Programs as Perceived by Teachers*. I am currently at the IRB stage and trying to develop my questions for interviews. I believe that many of the questions you have could be utilized in the process I am working on. Full credit would be given for the use of the material.

I would appreciate any response on this matter. Thank you kindly for your assistance in the matter.

Teresa Clark-Massey

From: Toni Szymanski
Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2016 10:21 AM
To: Teresa Clark-Massey
Subject: Re: permission to use questions from article

Hello Teresa,

How lovely that you would contact me wanting to use some of my questions. Please feel free. I am very curious in your work. I just completed gathering data for a project I am working on exploring the attitudes and understanding of high school students, teachers, and counselors of high ability students living in poverty to see what barriers and supports they have for taking advanced coursework. I haven't even started transcribing my data yet but I could see how our work could intersect. Good luck with your project.

Dr. Antonia (Toni) Szymanski
Assistant Professor, Gifted Studies