Bright Eyes, Brown Skin: Perceptions of Gifted Education and the Black Male Child

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BRIGHT EYES, BROWN SKIN: PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED EDUCATION AND THE BLACK MALE CHILD

by

Tiffany Colvin Proctor

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education In Teacher Leadership In the Bagwell College of Education Kennesaw State University

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Dedication

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.” – Marianne Williamson

This work is dedicated to all gifted Black males, especially my son, Deshon Amir Proctor. Don’t be afraid to be brilliant, and let your talents shine.

Always remember to:
Walk in authority. Live your life without apology. It’s not wrong dear. You belong here. So they’ll just have to get use to you. – Inspired by Donnie McClurkin

You were destined for greatness. Go and be great!
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Gifted Education and the Black Male Child

Gifted education in public schools offers academic rigor, highly skilled teachers, equally skilled peers, and increased opportunities. However, if peers, teachers, and even the gifted students themselves do not see Black students as belonging in gifted education classes, it is understandable that many gifted Blacks will not benefit from the advanced learning opportunities. The current images of gifted education rarely value both genders equally, and often include few students of color (Ford & Whiting, 2010; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Reis & Morales-Taylor, 2010). Black students specifically are more often underrepresented in challenging courses compared to their peers (Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010), and high-ability students often become underachievers due to the lack of challenge at an early age. When students’ advanced abilities are not nurtured, those gifts and talents may ultimately be lost (Ford & Whiting, 2010; Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010). Consequently, students’ perceptions of equitable access, participation, and achievement for gifted Black males must be courageously entered into the conversation on the underrepresentation of Black males in gifted education. These student perceptions can influence self-efficacy, motivation, and achievement. They may also decrease the need to affirm negative stereotypes, and increase Black males’ desires to strive to appear intelligent, value nominations for gifted programs, and foster a sense of belonging in advanced classes.
Statement of the Problem

The disparity between the lived experiences of Black students and the equity expected as a result of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision has contributed to the achievement gap found between Black students and their White peers. Research has found the White middle-class students’ backgrounds are more likely to be congruent with the expectations of schools (Brown, Souto-Manning, & Laman, 2010). As a result, academic achievement has been labeled “acting White” while imitating the hip-hop culture has been deemed as “acting Black” (Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010).

As Ford and Whiting (2010) explained, acting White is equated with “(a) being intelligent; (b) speaking Standard English; (c) being a high achiever and caring about school; and (d) having mainly White friends” (p. 135). Interestingly, perceptions of acting Black included “(a) being unintelligent; (b) speaking non-Standard English; (c) showing disinterest in school and learning; low achievement; (d) being thuggish, and having “bad” behaviors and attitudes; and (e) showing a preference for hip-hop culture in dress and music” (p. 135). When related to gifted education, many researchers have found gifted students often must navigate between the two worlds (Ford & Whiting, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how nineteen gifted Black males perceived their placement in gifted education, family involvement, and peer relationships. This study aimed to understand the perceptions that existed based on personal experiences, expectations, and attitudes. These student perceptions can influence self-efficacy, motivation, and achievement. These perceptions may also decrease the need to affirm negative stereotypes, and increase Black males’ desires to strive to appear
intelligent, value participation in gifted programs, and foster a sense of belonging in advanced classes. Through an investigation of four research questions, this study adds to the limited research on the topic, and provides insight into the achievement, underachievement, and underrepresentation of young talented Black boys.

**Research Questions**

This research study examined the perceptions of gifted Black males in various elementary schools in one urban school system. Students’ perceptions on abilities, expectations, peer relationships, and the overall learning experience were investigated.

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of gifted Black male elementary students about gifted education?
2. How do gifted Black male elementary males describe their family involvement and peer interactions?
3. What motivates gifted Black male elementary males to succeed?
4. How do schools and the corresponding district support gifted Black male elementary males?

Through an investigation of these research questions using interviews, observations, document analysis, and journaling, I discovered the ways in which young gifted Black boys from various socioeconomic backgrounds view giftedness, support systems, issues with teachers and peers, and future goals. These findings offer the unique perspective of members of a highly underrepresented subgroup in gifted programming.
Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

Forming roots in law from the 1970s in the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, critical race theory (CRT) has emerged as a scholarly force to unmask the racism so embedded and prevalent in American society. Critical Legal Studies (CLS) began in 1977 with legal scholars who “challenged the limited way issues of race, class, and gender were taught in law school and written about in law review journals” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 110). CLS transformed to CRT when the researchers decided to make race the main focus of inquiry. Standing on the shoulders of Critical Legal Studies, feminism, and the civil rights movement, CRT strives to speak out against unfair rules and practices. It is used to expand on the critiques of White privilege, and challenges the idea that objectivity and colorblindness exist for persons of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Interestingly, critical race theory began in law, but spread through the years to include many disciplines. This expansion allowed for the critique of racism embedded in societal practices to stretch beyond the Black and White law-focused boundaries (Yosso, 2005). CRT found its way into the field of education in the mid-1990s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006), and addressed educational issues using CRT and a qualitative view of research (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Using this valuable tool to examine education and youth culture, many areas have been identified as having racist tendencies. Racism has been uncovered in curriculum, instruction, assessment, funding, tracking, and teacher expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2006).
Ultimately, a critical race theory lens offers insights to the hidden agendas in our educational institutions. Critical race theory (CRT) considers race, racism, and power as social constructs, which work to marginalize minority groups, perpetuate injustices, and obstruct meritocracy (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This qualitative study utilized Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to examine the perceptions of young Black males participating in gifted programs in schools with varying student populations.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

**Race**

For the purposes of this research study, race is defined as “the socially constructed meaning attached to a variety of physical attributes including but not limited to skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structures of people” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 39). The consideration of self-perceptions was framed by the students lived experiences based on belonging to the African American race. Membership in the Black race is thought to be a barrier young Black males face in the American society.

**Summary**

The education of Black males requires teachers to be aware of and address the disparity between the lived experiences of Black students and the promise of an equitable education. For high achieving Black males, if they are able to excel, new barriers and challenges arise. These students must navigate around the reality of underachievement, underrepresentation, and limited images that demonstrate their potential for greatness. This study found their school experiences, support systems, and peer relationships greatly affect their motivation and their confirmation of stereotypes within themselves as well as their peers.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The History of Gifted Education

The education of gifted learners began in the American colonies during the 1630s with the establishment of the Boston Latin Grammar School and Harvard College. For two hundred years, these schools served the gifted, and trained lawyers, ministers, and teachers. Others, who were allowed to be educated, were provided a basic education by the village church schools (Sisk, 1990). During the nineteenth century, that separate educational system was challenged by the introduction of the universal public school with a democratic focus on equality and opportunity (Sisk, 1990). The first attempt to address gifted learners in the public school setting occurred in 1868 when the superintendent of the St. Louis, Missouri public school system allowed advanced learners the opportunity for early grade promotions (Bhatt, 2011; Jolly, 2009). However, the evolution of gifted education as we know it today began in the 1920s with the pioneering work of Leta Hollingworth and Lewis Terman (Jolly, 2009; Sisk, 1990).

Hollingworth, a psychologist, became passionate about the psychology and education of gifted children. As a professor at Teachers College at Columbia University in New York, she introduced the first university course in the field of gifted education during the spring semester in 1919. She also became a prolific researcher in the field focusing on gifted and profoundly gifted children, and their cognitive and emotional needs (Klein, 2000). She completed a three-year longitudinal study from 1922 to 1925 entitled the Public School 165 Experiment. Much of her research was utilized to write
“Gifted Children, Their Nature and Nurture” in 1926 which was the first gifted education textbook. In addition, she used much of what she learned in her PS 165 study as a blueprint in her final venture. Hollingworth’s last research endeavor was the Speyer School Experiment from 1936 to 1941. Fifty gifted children throughout New York City were recruited to attend the experimental school, and Hollingworth personally ensured the student population was diverse. The gifted children were from economically diverse backgrounds with 23 different nationalities or racial groups including Black, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and West Indian. The school also taught and emphasized tolerance and respect for differences (Klein, 2000). Hollingworth died before she was able to follow the students into adulthood, but White and Renzulli (1987) extended the work by doing a 40-year follow-up study of the Speyer School’s accelerated students. The researchers found the experiment made “a significant positive difference in the lives of many gifted children” (Klein, 2000, p. 103).

Lewis Terman, the father of gifted education, developed the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, and also studied gifted children from 1925 to 1959. His seminal work entitled Genetic Studies on Genius was the result of the longest longitudinal gifted research to date (Jolly & Kettler, 2008; Sisk, 1990). The study included just over 1,500 gifted children, and produced six major findings. Terman found that “gifted differ among themselves in many ways; the stereotypes of the gifted child as puny, asocial, or pre-psychotic are unfounded; the most intelligent child in a class is often the youngest; superiority in intelligence is maintained through adulthood; instructional acceleration at all levels is beneficial; and mental age continues to increase into middle age” (Sisk, 1990, p. 36). Interestingly, Terman’s research was criticized due to the assumption that
giftedness is a single-faceted concept primarily focused on heredity, his lack of consideration of socioeconomic status with minorities, and his lack of recognition of creative abilities (Sisk, 1990). In addition, “because almost a third of the Terman children were drawn from professional, middle class families, giftedness was confounded with social class” (Winner, 2000, p. 163). Nevertheless, the work of Hollingworth and Terman laid the foundation for the field of gifted education (Jolly, 2009).

**The Federal Government and Gifted Education**

The federal government has had a very capricious relationship with gifted education. During the era of the seminal research on gifted students, the funding was primarily supplied by private grants, and the federal government never committed to allocate funds to any projects. However, the fickle support of the government changed in 1957 when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. In an attempt to “combat a perceived intellectual threat from the Soviet Union,” the federal government began to allocate resources under the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to develop the talents of gifted students (Jolly & Kettler, 2008, p. 428). The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was the federal government’s first national attempt to support the education of the country’s gifted and talented students. Over a decade later, the U.S. Department of Education issued the Marland Report in 1972. The Marland report highlighted the nation’s continued failure to appropriately educate and challenge America’s brightest students (Jolly & Kettler, 2008; Jolly, 2009).

The momentum behind gifted education slowed once again until 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued *A Nation at Risk*. National concern about how the gifted students in America compared to other students
internationally, brought educational reform to gifted programming (Jolly & Kettler, 2008). Additionally, the Javits Act was passed by Congress in 1988, and allocated money for gifted education research (Bhatt, 2011; Jolly & Kettler, 2008; Stephens, 2000; Winkler & Jolly, 2011; Wiskow, Fowler, & Christopher, 2011). However, the U.S. Department of Education issued *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* in 1993, which shared continued inadequacies for gifted students in American schools. It also showed how America’s gifted student continued to perform below their international counterparts (Jolly & Kettler, 2008). The report explained America did not nurture the talents of our brightest students, and this problem was most evident “among economically disadvantaged and minority students due to fewer educational opportunities” (Jolly & Kettler, 2008, p. 430)

**Giftedness Defined**

Giftedness has been defined in numerous ways throughout history, and even today there is not a consensus on what giftedness entails, how it should be assessed, or how it should be addressed in schools (Warne, 2009). Various definitions have been used throughout the century, and today, giftedness may be defined conservatively by relating it to a demonstrated high IQ, or liberally by considering multiple criteria including areas that cannot be measured using an IQ test (Sisk, 1990; Swiatek, 2007). As Sisk (1990) explains, many school systems define giftedness as a multifaceted phenomenon that includes several areas of talent, while others continue to view giftedness only when a high intelligence test score is achieved. This variance in definition is apparent when examining different state definitions of gifted. Florida, Kansas, and Tennessee’s conception of gifted simply recognizes those intellectually gifted, while Maryland and
Texas recognize those who are intellectually gifted, academically gifted, creatively gifted, as well as gifted in leadership, and performing and visual arts.

These varying definitions exist despite a formal definition of giftedness being issued in 1972 when the Marland Report was published. Within this report, it was estimated that 5% to 7% of school children were high performing and in need of services beyond what is normally provided by schools. The differences between state definitions also exist despite a current federal definition of giftedness. The current federal government’s definition of giftedness was modified from the definition in the Marland Report (Jolly & Kettler, 2008). Included in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, giftedness is now defined as: “Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (Bhatt, 2011, p. 561).

The National Association for Gifted Children defines gifted individuals as “those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g. mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports)” (http://www.nagc.org).

Opponents argue that defining giftedness contradicts the American value of equality, and creates a dilemma between “all men are created equal” and “be all that you can be” (Ward, 2005, p.48-49). Identifying giftedness is considered simply another form
of educational tracking, and is ultimately unnecessary because all children are considered to possess gifts in various areas, and those gifts equate to all children being gifted in some way (Ward, 2005). Ward (2005) counters those arguments by explaining the necessity of gifted programs for children who are “distinguishably gifted beyond others” (Ward, 2005, p. 50). Additionally, American schools must prepare the nation’s top-performing students to compete internationally with other top students around the world (Ward, 2005).

Although there is a federal definition for giftedness, there are no federal mandates regarding the identification process or educational programs for gifted students (Wiskow, Fowler, & Christopher, 2011). States may decide individually or allow local school districts and schools to decide if gifted services will be offered, how the students will be identified, and how the program will be funded (Bhatt, 2011; Russo, 1996; Stephens, 2000; Zirkel, 2005). Most states have legislation and regulations related to gifted education, but due to the lack of federal guidelines, there is much variation in gifted education across the country. From 2008 to 2009, 41 states had a definition of giftedness, but only 29 required districts to use the state definition. Twenty-eight states mandated schools identify gifted students, but only 26 states had a mandate to provide services for gifted students, and only six fully funded gifted education (http://www.nagc.org). The states that did not mandate services are scattered across the country, and include California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming (Bhatt, 2011).
What is a Gifted Student?

As Winner (2000) explained, “the topic of giftedness inevitably awakens the nature-nurture debate,” and it continues to be argued whether giftedness is a product of “inborn high ability” or “goal-directed hard work, or deliberate practice” (p. 159). Due to the delegation of responsibility to states and local districts for the identification of giftedness, there are many disparities across the states as to how gifted students are identified (http://www.nagc.org). Historically, students who scored 136 or higher on the Stanford-Binet IQ instrument were identified as gifted (Glass, 2004). However, the sole use of IQ has been highly criticized due to the exclusion of other areas of giftedness. Renzulli (1978) cautioned that a conservative definition of giftedness could limit consideration of areas favoring academic performance over music, art, leadership, and creative writing. He asserted the ingredients of giftedness included above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 1978). Consequently, many have argued for the implementation of alternative identification policies so that gifted and talented education will not represent “little more than privileged education for privileged students at public expense” (Glass, 2004, p. 26).

In response to this call to action, Texas and Georgia adopted guidelines that require the use of multiple criteria to identify students for gifted programs (Glass, 2004). However, not everyone supports the use of multiple criteria for identification of giftedness. Many gifted programs rely heavily on verbal abilities, and therefore the use of nonverbal measures of intelligence is thought to ignore necessary qualities that students will need for the gifted program (Warne, 2009).
To further highlight the diverse regulations between states in identifying gifted students, consider the following: Maine estimates 5% of the school population will be gifted academically or artistically, but only the top 2% will be considered highly gifted. California also recommends only the top 2% of the students will be identified as highly gifted, but they must also have an IQ of at least 150. Kentucky allows for peer nominations, while Indiana considers high ability in intellectual, creative, artistic, or interpersonal domains. Texas addresses dual exceptionality, and prohibits discrimination based on a student having a learning disability, but would otherwise qualify for the gifted program. Only Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Georgia have policies that prohibit racial, linguistic, or other discrimination in regards to the gifted identification process. And finally, only Arkansas’ law states that students nominated for gifted programming must be “representative of the entire student population in terms of race, sex, and economic status” (Zirkel, 2005, p. 65).

Teacher recommendation for gifted admission also plays a large role in the selection process. This heavy reliance on teacher nomination is quite disconcerting considering that out of the 50 states only Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Oregon, and South Carolina require general education teachers to have gifted and talented training (Bhatt, 2011). Consequently, heavy reliance on teacher nominations has been criticized when considering underrepresented minority populations.

As Moon and Brighton (2008) explained, Black and White teachers were found to see more academic promise in White students over Blacks or Latinos. Additionally, the teachers were influenced by their “perceptions of appropriate behavior and social adjustment” which led to more referrals for White students (Moon & Brighton, 2008,
p.450). Consequently, researchers have found that some teachers are more likely to recommend White students over Black students despite the students having similar aptitudes. Additionally, siblings whose families were associated with low socioeconomic status were less likely to be nominated by teachers, while students who had parents with high levels of involvement had increased chances of being nominated (Bhatt, 2011; Moon & Brighton, 2008). Ford (2010) recommended that teachers acknowledge their part in the underrepresentation dilemma, and correct any instances of deficit thinking when considering nominations of minority students for gifted programs.

In Georgia, gifted programming is mandated, and is also fully funded by the state. Georgia defines a gifted student as “one who demonstrates a high degree of intellectual and/or creative ability(ies), exhibits an exceptionally high degree of motivation, and/or excels in specific academic fields, and who needs special instruction and/or special ancillary services to achieve at levels commensurate with his or her ability(ies)” (http://www.gadoe.org). Students are evaluated in four categories, which are mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation (Krisel, Cowan, & Ruth, 1997; Zirkel, 2005). Students are identified as gifted based on two options. Option A requires students to have a qualifying score in the mental ability and achievement categories. Students in grades Kindergarten through 2nd must score in the 99th percentile, while 3rd through 12th graders must score above the 95th percentile on a nationally age normed mental ability test. All students in Kindergarten through 12th grades must score equal to or greater than the 90th percentile in Reading or Math on a nationally normed achievement test. For the Option B placement, students must qualify in three of the four categories which include the same requirements for mental ability and achievement in Option A in addition to a
90th percentile score on a nationally normed creativity test, rating scale, or product/performance, and a 90th percentile score on a rating scale or two year grade point average of a 3.5 (Krisel, Cowan, & Ruth, 1997; Zirkel, 2005). In 2010, 169,089 Georgia students were enrolled in the gifted program, which represented 10.4% of the student population (http://www.gadoe.org).

Gifted Education and Inclusion of Diverse Student Populations

Gifted education today can be a highly debatable issue. The three opposing views are that “supporters see gifted education as a right, the unaffected see it as a privilege, and opponents see it as superfluous” (Russo, 1996). As Glass (2004) explained, critics complain that students in these gifted programs are predominately middle class and White. In addition to appearing elitist, some also argue that gifted education requires schools to spend more money on the more capable students, and often give them the highest-quality teachers (Bhatt, 2011). Others see gifted education as the nation’s opportunity to develop the talents of our brightest children in an effort to compete internationally (Jolly, 2009). As the mother of gifted education, Hollingworth (1931) questioned:

Can American public schools identify, and recognize gifted children and make provisions for their education? Should the problem of appropriate work be solved by acceleration at a rapid rate through school grades? Should the problem be solved by enrichment of the prescribed curriculum without acceleration and without segregation? Should gifted children be segregated in special schools or classes, and be educated by combining enrichment with a moderate degree of acceleration? (1931, p. 196)
Interestingly, researchers and educators continue to struggle with answering the questions posed by Hollingworth 80 years ago, while simultaneously grappling with the gender, class, and race issues that have been added to the dialogue.

**Giftedness and Class**

The U.S. Department of Education published the “National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent” report in 1993 (Jolly & Kettler, 2008). The report examined gifted education in America, and found that many gifted students were not being challenged, and were being turned into underachievers (Jolly & Kettler, 2008; Reis & Renzulli, 2010). The report also highlighted the problem of minority and economically disadvantaged students’ limited access to advanced educational opportunities and underrepresentation in gifted programming (Jolly & Kettler, 2008). Some argue the assessments used to identify giftedness are culturally biased, and lead to minority underrepresentation (McBee, 2006). Others explain that narrow definitions of giftedness and state and district policies contribute to the exclusion of minority or low SES students (McBee, Shaunessy, & Matthews, 2012). Nomination inequalities have also been identified as a potential cause of the underrepresentation dilemma (McBee, 2006; Reis & Renzulli, 2010).

Lower SES students tend to have parents with lower education, and these students have been found to have difficulty attaining the high scores needed on academic achievement tests for gifted identification. Additionally, when SES is considered, minority students are still less likely to be labeled as gifted (Curby, Rudasill, Rimm-Kaufman, & Konold, 2008). Curby, Rudasill, Rimm-Kaufman, & Konold (2008) also found that differences between children based on SES could be attributed to differences
identified at the beginning of kindergarten. This difference was explained as the result of fewer resources being available to children from poor families prior to the start of formal schooling. In contrast, for the higher SES children, there appeared to be “factors other than cognitive ability and task orientation that lead to enrollment in gifted programs” (Curby, et al., 2008). Consequently, family factors and environmental resources can assist or hinder students’ access to the giftedness label. As Ford (2010) asserted, minority students are underrepresented in gifted education due to deficit thinking, colorblind ideology, and White privilege. Similarly, some researchers have even found that teachers tend to overestimate aptitude of students from higher SES backgrounds while underestimating the students from lower SES backgrounds (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). To address this issue of giftedness versus class, researchers recommend that teachers be given specific selection criteria based on gifted programming, behaviors, and traits, as well as be trained on the characteristics found in gifted children (Siegle, et al., 2010; Warne, 2009).

In the last decade, traditionally low SES students represented 9% of the gifted population while higher SES students represented 47% of the group (Burney & Beilke, 2008). As Latz and Adams (2011) explained, many children living in poverty “do not reach their cognitive potential due to inequitable allocations of resources, teacher bias, and educational structures that exalt middle-class norms, values, and behaviors” (p. 776). Poverty does not equate to lack of ability. For promising students living in poverty, teachers must be connected to all of their students, maintain high expectations, and be willing to provide extra support, reminders, and additional chances to perform (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Latz & Adams, 2011). Ultimately, “low-income students of academic
promise offer the nation’s best hope for reversing the trend of an increasing number of families living in poverty” (Burney & Beilke, 2008, p. 312).

**Giftedness and Gender**

The representation of the sexes in gifted education is also an area of concern due to the historical overrepresentation of males. Gender stereotypes have been found to negatively impact identification of giftedness, and affect females through the school years and beyond. For example, gifted women are underrepresented in math, science, and engineering fields, as well as in the highest levels of academia (Jacobs & Weisz, 1994). In school, females have been found to perform better on verbal ability tests, while males tend to perform better on mathematical ability assessments. Therefore, depending on the criteria for placement, one gender may be placed at an advantage (Curby et al., 2008; Holden, 1998). Also, some believe that girls are socialized into hiding their abilities instead of showcasing how bright they are. Girls are thought to be “overly socialized to fit in at the expense of their giftedness” (Silverman, 1991, p. 122). Teachers’ perceptions of giftedness can also be influenced by gender. Siegle, Moore, Mann, and Wilson (2010) found that teachers spent more time interacting with male students, and often had very different expectations for students based on gender.

**Giftedness and Race**

“Although 60 years have passed since Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) legally ended segregation in school settings, schools are now more segregated than ever before, including their gifted programs” (Ford, 2004, p. 26). America’s classrooms have become increasingly diverse over the years, yet gifted programs continue to be primarily middle-class White students (Grantham, 2012; Pierson, Kilmer, Rothlisberg, & McIntosh,
Mary Fraiser’s four As guidelines of attitude, access, assessment, and accommodation have been suggested as a good start to addressing the underrepresentation of minority students. The appropriate attitude will combat deficit thinking, the appropriate access will allow for more consideration for placement, the appropriate assessment will be culturally sensitive and include various domains, and the appropriate accommodation will support students’ needs and interests (Grantham, 2012).

To address the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted education, talent development or front loading programs have been implemented. In these programs, minority students who narrowly miss the criteria for gifted placement are given intervention to expose them to and prepare them for gifted programming. This intervention is thought to be critical to improving their chances for qualifying for placement, as well as retention once placed in the gifted program (Warne, 2009). This talent development also provides the support needed to advance those gifts when the home environment is unable to do so (Moon & Brighton, 2008). The use of multiple criteria for placement has also been thought to be an effective way to consider students typically overlooked (McGlonn-Nelson, 2005), and helps move primary teachers away from traditional conceptions of giftedness (Moon & Brighton, 2008).

When considering the racial composition of the gifted population, there is wide variability between the states. Based on the Office for Civil Rights Data Collection of Gifted and Talented students in public elementary and secondary schools in 2006, the states with the smallest population of minority gifted students included Alaska, Iowa, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming. In contrast, California had the most students identified as gifted.
and talented, with a total of just over 500,000. Of that number, 230,000 were White, 21,000 were Black, 147,000 were Hispanic, 121,000 were Asian, and 3,000 were American Indian. Texas had 344,000 gifted students, of which 175,000 were White, 28,000 were Black, 115,000 were Hispanic, 23,000 were Asian, and 1,000 were American Indian. In the Northern state of Maryland, there were 137,000 gifted students, of which 86,000 were White, 22,000 were Black, 10,000 were Hispanic, 17,000 were Asian, and 400 were American Indian. New York had 81,000 gifted students, of which 49,000 were White, 12,000 were Black, 8,000 were Hispanic, 10,000 were Asian, and 200 were American Indian (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_053.asp).

After analyzing the 2006 data for the Midwestern and Southern states, a very different gifted population appeared. Ohio had 120,000 gifted students, of which 100,000 were White, 13,000 were Black, 1,500 were Hispanic, 3,000 were Asian, and 100 were American Indian. Missouri had 33,000 gifted students, of which 28,000 were White, 2,000 were Black, 400 were Hispanic, 1,400 were Asian, and 80 were American Indian. Virginia had 160,000 gifted students, of which 116,000 were White, 18,000 were Black, 7,000 were Hispanic, 17,000 were Asian, and 500 were American Indian. Alabama had 40,000 gifted students, of which 31,000 were White, 7,000 were Black, 600 were Hispanic, 800 were Asian, and 400 were American Indian. Tennessee had 17,000 gifted students, of which 14,000 were White, 1,600 were Black, 200 were Hispanic, 600 were Asian, and 30 were American Indian. Florida had 132,000 gifted students, of which 81,000 were White, 13,000 were Black, 31,000 were Hispanic, 6,000 were Asian, and 400 were American Indian. Georgia had 150,000 gifted students, of which 110,000 were White, 26,000 were Black, 4,000 were Hispanic, 9,000 were Asian, and 200 were
American Indian. Interestingly, the most diverse gifted populations were found in California and Texas, which both had large numbers of gifted and talented students. States with smaller populations of minority students compared to the White population were primarily located in the Midwest and the South. Furthermore, the number of White gifted students far surpassed the number of gifted minority students combined in every state in the country except California (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_053.asp). To effectively address our growing diverse student populations, classrooms in general education as well as in gifted programs must employ culturally responsive teaching which includes a culturally responsive learning environment, a culturally responsive curriculum, culturally responsive instruction, and culturally responsive assessment (Ford, 2010). To summarize our charge, Grantham (2012) explained:

“Gifted education cannot move forward and have a positive image among the masses until we do a better job of communicating our message and more fully considering the pluralistic nature of our society and the importance of proactively striving to achieve excellence, and perhaps eminence, without continuing to neglect equity” (p. 219)

**Giftedness, Class, Gender, and Race in Georgia**

Many referrals for gifted education initiate with the general education teacher. In the state of Georgia, of the 100,000 Pre-K through 12 teachers, 90,000 are female, and 22,000 are male. The racial composition of the teaching force includes 82,000 who are White, 25,000 who are Black, and a little more than 3,000 who are Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. The average salary is $52,000 (http://www.gadoe.org). During 2010-
2011, there were 1,633,596 students in the state of Georgia. Within that student population, 44% were White, 37% were Black, 12% were Hispanic, and 3% were Asian. Additionally, 57% of the students qualified for the free and reduced lunch program (http://www.gadoe.org). Considering these statistics, many teachers in Georgia are quite different in terms of gender, class, and race from many students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted education.

In 2006, after analyzing teacher nominations for gifted programs in Georgia, McBee found teachers were “significantly less likely to nominate students from lower SES backgrounds” (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010, p. 342). To diversify gifted program enrollment in Georgia and nationwide, teacher bias must be addressed to ensure teachers are not failing to recognize gifted traits in “culturally, linguistically diverse students with high potential” (Reis & Renzulli, 2010, p. 309). In addition, an IQ score cannot conservatively define giftedness. Giftedness must also be considered in areas that cannot be measured by an intelligence test (Reis & Renzulli, 2010).

Educational policies enacted by states and districts should consider effective and appropriate ways to increase diversity in gifted programs. Some have even suggested that we move past the focus on testing and assessment issues to the impact of peer pressure and racial identity, and begin to focus on recruitment and retention (Ford & Whiting, 2010). There must be a deliberate intervention to ensure that culturally or linguistically diverse students do not have to struggle to gain access to gifted programs, and that they are given the resources and tools necessary to realize their full potential. In essence, the traditional picture of a gifted student must expand beyond the middle class White child, and include any and all students who legitimately qualify for the educational and lifelong
benefits afforded by appropriate placement in and supportive guidance through gifted education programming.

**The Black Male Child**

The education of Black males in America has been described as being surrounded by fear, punishment, and control. Black males are faced with realities such as underrepresentation in colleges, and overrepresentation in prisons (Baldrige, Hill, & Davis, 2011; Ferguson, 2001). Conversely, Black men can also be found “working and succeeding within every sector of society, including the presidency of the United States” (Brown and Donner, 2011, p. 18). However, despite these achievements, Black males continue to suffer from “unemployment, health-related deaths, incarceration, violent death and educational underachievement” (Brown & Donner, 2011, p. 18). Consider the following:

A family lovingly sent a precocious, inquisitive boy off to school for the first time. E. J. arrived with pride and joy, but - like so many young African American boys - he was greeted by a system that did not expect much from him, yet had already determined much for him. In two short years of formal schooling, E. J. has been labeled a failure, special needs, at-risk, and ADD. (Singleton & Linton, 2006, xiii)

Some researchers argue that Black boys are disengaged from school due to a low self-image and self-worth that stems from slavery (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011). Others feel that Black males identify academic success with acting White. Conversely, some researchers suggest Black males are disengaged due to a devaluing of their “unique style of knowledge acquisition” (Brown, 2011). Research has also shown
how some boys become labeled as bad through the use and misuse of power and
punishment. Institutions are thought to utilize their power to “create, shape, and regulate
social identities” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 2). E. J.’s story illustrates the heavy influence
cultural behaviors and expectations have on the educational experiences of Black male
students, and the perceptions of their teachers. These behaviors control access, power,
and choices. It is even crucial in the lives of the smartest children of color.

**Black Male Achievement**

The 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown versus Board of Education was
thought to be the great leveler for the education of all children of color. However,
decades later, segregation continues to exist within the desegregated school buildings. As
Brown, Souto-Manning, and Laman (2010) explained, White middle class students enter
these schools with the speech, knowledge, and interaction skills valued in these
institutions of learning. The resources and opportunities are often privileged to those
students who possess these White middle-class skills. When these skills are lacking,
students of color are tracked, and never receive the same opportunities as the White
students. Consequently, success and opportunities are placed on the scale of Whiteness.
In education, critical race theory aims to challenge these notions that White student
behavior should be the norm (Stovall, 2006).

Besides having to value and be judged by the cultural experiences of middle-class
White America, many Black students also face other injustices in education grounded in
racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Often, Black students are not given a curriculum focused
on critical thinking or creativity. Instead, schools utilize scripted programs to manage the
students and to prepare for testing. A ‘teach to the test’ mentality becomes the norm,
which leaves no opportunities to truly teach these students of color. Instead of focusing on improving cognitive capabilities, schools become more focused on simply managing students to maintain order and discipline (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Conversely, Bell (1983) has argued that all Black schools do not have to equal failure. There are many instances where segregated Black schools due to locations and sometimes choice, have successfully educated students of color in the culture of power. For example, Marva Collins found success in “teaching ghetto children to read the classics” (p. 296). Consequently, research suggests that the racial mix of the school is not nearly as crucial as the explicit and hidden educational practices.

**The Education of Black Boys**

Noguera (2008) explained the general state of the education of many Black boys:

For African American males, who are more likely than any other group to be subjected to negative forms of treatment in school, the message is clear: individuals of their race and gender may excel in sports, but not in math or history. The location of Black males within schools – in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside the principal’s office – and the roles they perform within school suggest that they are good at playing basketball or rapping, but debating, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in the science club is strictly out of bounds. (p. 31)

This constant pressure to affirm the social stereotypes may limit many males from achieving their highest potentials. Black males have the lowest test scores and the highest dropout rate compared to White males and Black females. Black boys are often overrepresented in special education classes, and underrepresented in gifted education
classes. They are more often tracked into vocational careers than the college preparatory or academic track. Black males are punished more harshly and frequently in schools, and have lower graduation rates than their Black female counterparts (Whiting, 2009).

Despite these negative experiences and outcomes, many Black males are able to succeed in school. This success has been attributed to several characteristics. To overcome the need to affirm limiting and negative stereotypes, Whiting (2009) suggested that Black males must develop a scholar identity. The components of the Scholar Identity Model include “self-efficacy, future orientation, willing to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, strong need for achievement, academic self-confidence, race pride, and masculinity” (Whiting, 2009, p. 55-56). This scholar identity was found to empower Black males to accept and utilize their intelligence in ways not often expected or allowed by alternative agendas in the hidden curriculum.

**Critical Race Theory, Stereotype Threat, and the Gifted Black Male**

Over 30 years ago, Phillips (1976) examined the need for reform in the sole use of IQ and achievement tests to identify gifted children. It was believed that more students could be identified with a broader definition of giftedness. Children today are evaluated for gifted programs in a variety of ways. However, for minority students, the ability to benefit from this process becomes dependent on the teachers’ expectations and subjective evaluations (Curby et al., 2008). When White teachers encounter growing populations of students of color, they are meeting with different cultural experiences, knowledge bases, and specific expectations within and outside of school contexts. This difference in backgrounds may make it difficult for White teachers to relate to the students of color, which may “serve as a roadblock for academic and social success in the classroom”
Additionally, research has determined that practices can vary in schools based on race and class, and can include instruction, assessment, as well as the process for identification and placement in gifted programs (Bell, 1983). All of these areas are crucial components that can influence the educational experiences of all students including high achieving Black males.

As Michael-Chadwell (2010) asserted, “there is an underrepresentation of culturally, linguistically, ethnically diverse students in gifted programs in comparison to their over-placement in educational services for students with learning challenges throughout the U.S.” (p. 99). Even with mandated desegregation on the law books, gifted programs continue to be segregated. The problem has been identified in the identification procedures that place heavy emphasis on mathematical skills, linguistic abilities, and IQ test scores. To increase the number of culturally diverse students represented in gifted programs, assessment must move beyond the skills of the White, middle class child (Michael-Chadwell, 2010). Ford (2011) suggested that teachers raise their expectations for lower income students, and that talent development programs be implemented. In addition, assessments for gifted identification must be modified to ensure they are valid and reliable, and the policies and procedures must be equitable (Ford, 2011).

Once placed in gifted programs, Henfield, Moore, and Wood (2008) found that Black gifted students had many issues to navigate. While many gifted students struggle with this labeling, based in race and racism, Black students find their experiences complicated even further. This gifted label forced the students to standout from their peers. While some students may enjoy the recognition, others prefer to blend in the crowd, or befriend nongifted Black students through extracurricular activities (Ford &
Within the contexts of the activities, the gifted learners could conceal or reveal their intelligence, as they desired to do so.

Even after being placed in gifted programs, some teachers still interacted with the Black gifted students as if they had doubts they belonged. This fear of being considered unworthy kept some students from even requesting assistance with difficult schoolwork. Some teachers even lowered their expectations of culturally diverse males despite their high abilities and potential (Milner, Tenore, & Laughter, 2008). Besides dealing with the uncertain teachers, these gifted students also had to deal with being viewed as “acting White” for participating in the rigorous and challenging curriculum (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008, p. 440).

Considering the negative influence of perceptions developed by broad societal views of an entire group of people, there is a need to revisit the possibility of its influence on academic gaps of achievement. Learning is a complex, multi-faceted process. There cannot be a universal explanation as to the problems faced by some groups of learners. However, while far from perfect, research on critical race theory has given us some data that warrants our attention and consideration of stereotype threat as an overlooked barrier to improved academic performance, increased motivation, and the development of positive self-identities for many Black male learners. These barriers created by race, class, and gender can compromise a student’s educational experiences.

**Gifted Education and Case Study Research**

Most case studies investigating Black male achievement have been conducted on the middle, high, or college levels (Feldhusen, 1997; Hebert, 1998; Hughes, 2010; Jolly
Furthermore, although research in the area of gifted education continues to increase, certain areas remain neglected. In an examination of gifted research, Jolly and Kettler (2008) found 36% related to aspects of giftedness, 13% investigated traits, 12% focused on the differences between gifted and nongifted, 11% researched practices, 8% focused on program evaluation, 5% dealt with the aspects of teachers, 4% related to perspectives of parents, 4% compared perspectives, 2% looked at the perspectives of students, 2% related to advocacy issues, 2% examined state policies, and 1% investigated the perspectives of teachers. Despite the increase in gifted education research, student and teacher perspectives remain limited, and the experiences of economically disadvantaged students are “virtually nonexistent” (Jolly & Kettler, 2008, p. 439).

When researchers focused on students’ perceptions and experiences, again the context was usually middle or high school (Ford & Harris, 1996; Hansen & Toso, 2007; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010). To address the underachievement in regular education and underrepresentation in gifted education, researchers have recommended mentoring, counseling, and improve teacher training as viable solutions (Granatham, 2004; Henfield, 2012; Milner, Tenore, & Laughter, 2008). However, the Black males who are living in the midst of the phenomenon are rarely asked to share their stories. Special attention must be given to the educational experiences of gifted Black males to increase the recruitment, achievement, and overall success of this underserved population (Milner, Tenore, & Laughter, 2008). It is imperative that we “get into the mind of these students and attempt to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be them” (Henfield, 2012, p. 186). To explore the experiences of Black males in
gifted education, this research study will use a critical race theoretical view to explore the perceptions of some of the participants in gifted programming, as well as share the personal stories of some gifted Black males.

Summary

Gifted Education has been researched for decades, and has been the topic of much debate. However, certain populations such as Black males have received limited attention, and the research available to share their experiences, and explain their continued underrepresentation rarely includes the perspectives of young students, or of those dealing with giftedness in conjunction with living in poverty. This study provides a glimpse into the lives of a group of Gifted Black males as they navigate barriers in their attempts to achieve academically in the face of constant negative imagery and social injustices.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions

This qualitative research study examined the perceptions of gifted Black males in various elementary schools. The students all resided in the same metropolitan area. This study occurred over a three-month period, and researched the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of gifted Black male elementary students about gifted education?
2. How do gifted Black elementary males describe their family involvement and peer interactions?
3. What motivates gifted Black males to succeed?
4. How do the district and the schools support gifted Black elementary males?

Through an investigation of these research questions, new insights have been revealed about how school experiences and the gifted label intersect. These personal stories of the nineteen young gifted Black males add to the literature by using the unique perspective of members of a highly underrepresented subgroup in gifted education.

Research Design

This research study utilized qualitative research methods. These qualitative methods have been found appropriate when inquiring about the experiences of those being studied (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research allows for data collection in the natural setting with observation and in-depth interviewing, and multiple sources of data can be used to make meaning of a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009;
Case studies are one type of qualitative research approach. A case study is a “detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). Researchers decide to use case studies when the goal is to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular condition or lived experience. It is not concerned with generalizability, but with discovery and insight. The story of the particular case is shared using thick description, and “it is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51).

Case studies can be historical and observational in nature, or can be intrinsic, instrumental, or collective based on the interests of the researcher (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The researcher becomes the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 52). As a result, researchers must be aware of their own positionality and bias to ensure they do not compromise the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Wiersma, 2009). Case studies have been used to investigate the complex phenomenon of Black male achievement. However, the majority of the research was conducted on the middle, high, or college levels (Feldhusen, 1997; Hebert, 1998; Hughes, 2010; Jolly & Kettler, 2008). To address this gap in the literature, this collective case study examined how participants are “bounded” by race and the gifted label (Glense, 2011, p. 22).

**Context of the Study**

This research study occurred in an urban school system in the southeastern part of the United States. The school system serves 48,000 students, 75% of which are economically disadvantaged, 9% are students with disabilities, 4% are English Language
Learners, 24% qualify for the Early Intervention Program (EIP), and 10% are gifted learners. The city’s population is 61% Black, 33% Caucasian, and 6% Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian. The research sites are as diverse as the population of the city. The schools range from serving a population of 99% Black with 98% qualifying for free and reduced lunch to 58% White with only 13% qualifying for free and reduced lunch (see Table 1). The diversity found within the sample population allowed this study to include the perceptions of Black males who attend predominately Black and White schools. Additionally, students from affluent as well as low-income neighborhoods shared their successes, challenges, and goals. Therefore, the experiences of gifted Black males in numerous environments were represented.

Table 1

Demographics of Research Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>Student Demographics</th>
<th>Gifted Program</th>
<th>EIP (Remedial Program)</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Participants (3rd, 4th, 5th graders)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>River Brook Elem.</td>
<td>371 students</td>
<td>99% Black; 1% Hispanic; 1% Hispanic</td>
<td>&lt; 10 students 1 T – pt</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>98% Free &amp; Red. Lunch</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Elem.</td>
<td>413 students</td>
<td>98% Black; 1% Hispanic; 1% Multiracial</td>
<td>&lt; 10 students 1 T – pt</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>97% Free &amp; Red. Lunch</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillside Academy</td>
<td>365 students (3rd – 5th)</td>
<td>98% Black; 1% Hispanic; 1% Multiracial</td>
<td>4.7% 1 T – pt</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>100% Free &amp; Red. Lunch</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negotiating Access

As a teacher in the urban school system, I negotiated access to the schools using my social capital (Spillane, 2006). Through experiences with little league sports, gifted trainings, and church membership, I am familiar with several families of gifted Black males and/or their teachers. I used these acquaintances to negotiate access to conduct the research. Where I was unfamiliar with staff or students, I utilized colleagues (teachers, instructional coach, assistant principal, and principal) to identify helpful contact persons to assist with negotiating access to the school.

Participants

To examine the perceptions and experiences of gifted Black male students, nineteen gifted Black boys from five different elementary schools in one urban school system served as participants. Nineteen students volunteered to participate in the study, which allowed for a powerful representation of each school environment, and the diversity in the schools within the system (see Table 2). The research sites included school with large and small gifted populations, and the majority of the schools were predominately Black Title 1 schools. The boys ranged in age from eight to eleven, and resided in the same metropolitan area. Therefore, the students were selected using
purposeful sampling based on gifted identification, location, and principal and parental consent. Purposeful sampling has been found to be necessary when the researcher needs a specific population that will “best help the researcher to understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). It allows for participants to be selected based on predetermined criteria by the researcher (Merriam, 2009). For this study, Black males placed in the gifted program were selected based on current grade, school assignment, and interest.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Years at School</th>
<th>Years in Gifted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>River Brook Elem.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayden</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>River Brook Elem.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalil</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Grant Elem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorian</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Hillside Academy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Hillside Academy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamarcus</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Hillside Academy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Hillside Academy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derrick</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TyShawn</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darius</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efrem</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Pebble Elem.</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Richmond Elem.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sammy</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Richmond Elem.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Richmond Elem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Richmond Elem.</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Richmond Elem.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Perceptions of Gifted Education and the Black Male

Two years prior to the start of this research study, gifted teachers from four of the five research sites shared with me their perceptions of gifted education and Black males.
Four major themes emerged as a result. *Giftedness Starts at Home* resulted from experiences with how giftedness appeared to be related to class, and the desire to prepare for future schooling. *Understanding the Gifted Black Child* related to teachers’ understanding that every child has a story that influences that school experiences. *Finding the Golden Key* examined the differences in how stakeholders value gifted programming, are aware of benefits, and are able to soar with resources. *Mission Impossible* highlighted the need to refine the search for all-stars.

As Mr. Richards explained, “Giftedness reaches out to class as much as it does IQ.” Many of the teachers characterized giftedness as being heavily influenced by class and status. Mrs. Washington also stated the “socio-economic thing is a huge piece.” Many of the students serviced by my participants were identified during the primary years, and came from middle class families. Considering his many years as a gifted teacher of students in schools with low gifted populations, Mr. Richards asserted, even schools with lower SES serviced by the central cluster school, “we tended to have more of the middle class kids that would go to those schools than the underprivileged kids.” Burney and Beilke (2008) also noted, “The lowest income group produces 9% of the students identified as being gifted and talented, whereas the highest income group produced 47% of those identified” (p. 307). After more probing, it became apparent through the experiences of all the participants, the more affluent students came to school with more of the school knowledge deemed valuable and desirable. These students tended to have educated parents with high expectations, and as a result, the parents expected them to be identified and placed in the gifted program.
Interestingly, more racial and class concerns were revealed when considering the demographics of all participants’ school environments. The lower the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch and the greater the White population, then the greater the number of children identified as gifted. Mrs. Miller explained that gifted program typically serve the top 5% of the total population. However, in predominately Black schools with greater than 90% eligible for free and reduced lunch, the percentage in gifted is much lower while the percentage in gifted at the predominately White school is significantly greater than the typical 5% (Burney & Beilke, 2008). The teacher participants explained that when highly trained teachers are used, class and background experiences are not the primary sources of gifted potential (Curby, et al., 2008; Ford, 2010; Michael-Chadwell, 2010; Moon & Brighton, 2008; Ward, 2013).

Based on the experiences of my teacher participants, achievement and retention in gifted education were highly related to motivation and support. Motivation was considered a key factor to the success of Black males in gifted education. This motivation was thought to come from several different areas including parental influences, encouragement from teachers, and school support. When considering family involvement, the gifted teachers found that the more educated the parents were, the more involved they were. The peer interactions were also influenced by home situations. More affluent families had children who blended in and had no problems. Poorer children tended to have more social issues in dealing with peers. Their self-esteem was challenged by the increased expectations when an adequate support system was absent. Ultimately, the achievement of the Black males was compromised when their basic needs were not met.
When examining the state of Black male students, the lack of awareness of the value of gifted education by parents and students was cited as a top reason for the underrepresentation of Black males in gifted education. Parental involvement, along with an encouraging atmosphere, and nonbiased nominations and identification can help to form “a coherent and unified program to help gifted and disadvantaged students” (Ward, 2005, p. 63). In addition, the misunderstanding of teachers on giftedness and appropriate referrals was also discussed as an issue. Often teachers refer students primarily based on certain student behaviors (Michael-Chadwell, 2010). Curby, et al. (2008) further state that appropriate social skills may be driving teacher nominations more so than cognitive aptitude or talents. Traditionally, there have been limited opportunities to showcase various talents, and a limited focus on specific types of giftedness. Creativity specifically as an element of giftedness cannot be overlooked in favor of IQ (Jolly, 2009). As Michael-Chadwell (2010) explained, “The overrepresentation of White students, as opposed to historically underserved students, in gifted programs exists because of traditional characteristics associated with gifted children versus gifted behaviors attributed to cultural differences or experiences” (p. 101).

**Background and Role of Researcher**

Considering a background that includes being a female member of the African American race, a public school teacher, and the mother of a young gifted Black male, I have recently developed an increased interest in the education and barriers to the success of Black males. As an educator, I have always been concerned with the overrepresentation of Black males in special education, but it was not until I received my Gifted Endorsement that I began to become aware of the limited numbers of Black males
in gifted education. After researching Critical Race Theory as a graduate student, the relationship between race, privilege, and access was worthy of my attention and consideration in this underrepresentation epidemic.

Throughout my school years, I have always been considered bright. I attended kindergarten at the age of four, and my mother excitedly registered me for the Minority to Majority program at the age of six to ensure I remained cognitively challenged. After spending five years at the predominately White school where I was bused across town, I began to notice I made great grades, but whenever the “smart” children left to go to their special class, all of them were White with the exception of one Black girl. Tasha’s report card always looked just like mine, except she had all Es in conduct, and I did not have one. After those early years, I simply considered myself a hard worker in school, not gifted in any way, which must have been why I made those good grades.

Years later as a mother, I soon saw my son follow right in my footsteps. He always made straight As, but often needed to work on conduct. To my surprise and delight, his first grade teacher recommended him for the gifted program. He was placed, and then bused once a week to the district’s cluster school that served schools with low populations of gifted students. The following year, I transferred my son to a nearby school with a large gifted population and an on-site gifted teacher. I began to wonder how two schools only five minutes apart could vary so drastically in the number of gifted students identified and served.

After considering the findings of my pilot study two years prior, and speaking with family members and other parents of bright Black boys who had not been referred for gifted testing in various school environments, I wondered if my child’s placement or
perception of his intelligence might have been different if he attended a different school with a different student population. Consequently, my experiences as a mother, a student, a researcher, and a community member have inspired this research study on perceptions of gifted Black males in various school environments. For this research study, I served as the primary instrument (Merriam, 2009). I collected the data through classroom observations as an observer as participant. I also collected data as an interviewer, and I analyzed public and researcher-generated documents (Merriam, 2009).

**Data Collection**

Case studies allow researchers to examine the unique aspects of a phenomenon in order to gain insight on the topic. They tend to require in-depth examination “through participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and document collection and analysis” (Glesne, 2011, p.22). Specifically, data collection in this study utilized classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with students and the gifted coordinator of the school system, completion of student journals, and analysis of gifted education artifacts such as teacher comments from student annual reviews, documents disseminated by schools, and information shared through the school websites. All of these forms of data collection have been identified as beneficial in examining significant issues in the lived experiences of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Merriam, 2009).

Interviews have roots in psychology and sociology, and seek to investigate the attitudes, perspectives, and opinions (Scheurich, 1995). Interviews have also been shown to allow for a more detailed analysis of more complex thought processes that are not as easily obtained using large-scale surveys, or when unable to observe behaviors or
feelings (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004; Merriam, 2009). This data from the open-ended interviews provided insight into the participants’ perceptions of their lived experiences. I conducted one semi-structured interview with additional time allocated for needed follow-up interviews. The interviews were video-recorded and transcribed. The interview questions were developed based on the research questions of the study. In the interview, students were asked questions related to their gifted placement, family involvement, and their schools experiences in terms of challenges, rewards, and acceptance. The gifted coordinator was asked to describe the gifted population, family involvement, plight of Black males in gifted education, how the district supports gifted Black males, and how current practices might be improved. To implement acceptable qualitative methods, the interviews occurred in the participants’ natural school settings.

To complete the class observations, I visited the gifted class of each school site at least once during the study. I observed and recorded observations. Documents were collected and analyzed. Archived and current documents from the district’s Gifted and Talented Education Department, and archived and current documents related to gifted education and academic clubs and activities from each school site were collected.

Additionally, the participants received personalized journals (see Figure 1.1). The boys appeared to really appreciate the journals, and were excited to share their stories. Ms. Williams, the gifted teacher at Richmond Elementary, shared after an observation that the boys there were so excited, and felt so special. She explained they were rarely singled out for unique projects at the predominately White school. As part of the journal component of the study, each gifted Black male was asked to respond to two prompts (see Appendix D). They were also given permission to free write about anything else on
their minds, or that interested them. The journal entries were collected periodically throughout the study.

Figure 1.1

*Student Journals*

Front Cover

Inside Cover

**Data Management**

The data was collected from interviews, documents, and field observations, and was stored in an electronic and hard copy form in a locked file cabinet. An iPad was used to take pictures of documents, and to create field notes following observations. Interview transcripts were also saved on a flash drive, and stored in the locked file cabinet. To ensure effective organization and management of my data throughout my study, I utilized coding for my field notes and documents. As Merriam (2009) explained, “coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data (p. 173). I differentiated between activity, event, strategy, social structure, and narrative codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These identification codes assisted me as I worked to create an inventory of my
data set (interviews, field notes, documents, observer comments, and memos). I ultimately utilized a manual and computer management approach to ensure I was organized and prepared throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is how researchers make sense of their data by “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). Researchers can assign codes to the data pieces to place them into categories and subcategories, which assist with interpretations, connections, and meaning making (Glesne, 2011). Due to the large amounts of data that can be generated during the research process, computers have become extremely resourceful companions in data analysis.

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is the label given to the process of a researcher utilizing a computer to assist with organization and categorization of data. These programs simplify the storage, sorting, retrieval, and displaying of the data. However, the actual analysis is still left in the hands of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). CAQDAS is advantageous due to its ability to store the researcher’s data, reflections, and ideas in an organized filing system, allow for quick recoding, and can place data pieces in multiple categories simultaneously. CAQDAS can also allow researchers to delve deep into the data categories, and can also assist with providing a visual map or model of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Limitations of CAQDAS have been listed as cost, and time required for training and identifying the best program for the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Computer programs
available to assist with the data organization include MS Word, Atlas.ti, NVivo, HyperRESEARCH, HyperTRANSCRIBE, Scolari, and C-I-SAID (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Despite the impressive capabilities of CAQDAS programs, the researcher must still make the decisions and interpret the data. The computer is simply a “tool that can help make the researcher’s work less tedious, more accurate, faster, and more thorough” (Glesne, 2011, p. 207). In addition to a CAQDAS program, I also utilized thick description. Once I analyzed all data, a thick description of the themes of the perceptions was finalized. Created by Geertz (1973), thick description allows for powerful detailed accounts and interpretation of the contexts of experiences and lived realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Through these thick descriptions, the participants’ narratives revealed their experiences and offered their perspectives on the plight of the gifted Black male.

**Confidentiality and Ethics**

I ensured confidentiality and ethics throughout my study by following the ethical issues checklist recommended by Merriam (2009). Specifically, I explained the purpose of and methods used in my study to all participants, and explained the benefits to the participants as well as the researcher (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). I ensured confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms, and I obtained informed consent from all participants (Creswell, 2009; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Wiersma, 2009). In addition, my goals were to avoid utilizing “research sites where informants may feel coerced to participate,” “treat informants with respect and seek their cooperation in the research,” and “tell the truth” when I report the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 49-50).
Trustworthiness

This research project was triangulated utilizing several ways to collect data including student interviews, observations, document analysis, and student journals (Goodman & Goodman, 1996; Wiersma, 2009). Member checking was also used to ensure the findings and apparent themes are accurate according to the participants (Glesne, 2011). The researcher utilized thick, rich descriptions in the findings to ensure accurate and appropriate descriptions to “contextualize the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). I engaged in “critical scrutiny” and “active reflexivity” (Carcary; 2009, p. 13). Consequently, I maintained a balance between the participants meaning and my interpretation (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Finally, I utilized peer review and examination to discuss the process, findings, and interpretations with appropriate colleagues (Glesne, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation, member checking, rich, thick descriptions, peer review and examination ensured the trustworthiness of this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Limitations

This qualitative study was limited by time. This time limitation was ultimately due to the lengthy process of obtaining IRB approval from the school system, and each individual principal of a potential research site. In addition, this study was limited by location. This study of the experiences of Black male gifted students was limited geographically to one city in the southeastern part of the country. Additionally, this study was limited by the availability of students in the target population, the willingness of principals to open their schools, and parental consent given. The researcher attempted to gain access to students and gifted teachers of one school district based on employment.
Although the researcher met with the coordinator for gifted and talented education for the urban school system in an effort to identify participants and gather related documents, the participants and documents available were dependent on interest and lawful access.

**Summary**

In the education of gifted Black males, teachers must begin the process of change by openly and honestly addressing their perceptions and ideas about intelligence and race. Educational leadership must also play an active role in the reform process. Administrators must monitor and correct any hidden school-wide practices that may deny minorities’ access to advanced learning opportunities. Schools must work to affirm belongingness and potential in any stereotyped threat areas. Black males must also be given proactive words of encouragement, and exposure to role models. Class must not be used as an excuse to overlook high achieving Black males. We must find ways to level the playing field so all children, regardless of home environments, can perform to their highest potential. Perhaps then, the presence of Black males in gifted programs will be valued, encouraged, and even sustained.
Chapter 4: Findings

The education of gifted Black males must be discussed in conjunction with racial identity, support systems, and expectations. This marginalized group must contend with constant negative imagery often focused on their high incarceration rates, low attendance in college, and underachievement that contributes to the achievement gap (Billings, 2011). Schools are often preoccupied with controlling instead of educating Black males, which leads to increased suspensions and placement in special education programs (Billings, 2011; Ferguson, 2001; Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

To ensure high achieving Black males can find success in the public school system, educators must be aware of their experiences, and how to address their needs (Whiting, 2008). This study was conducted to examine the perceptions and experiences of gifted Black males in various elementary schools. Despite having different school environments and varying amounts of time spent in gifted programming, several interesting themes from the participants’ experiences emerged regarding social dynamics, self-image, support systems, and motivation.

Nobody knows me better than me showcased the specific information the participants shared about themselves. When examining School life, the males explained their academic achievement was identified during their early school years. The majority enjoyed attending their present schools, and the available extracurricular activities were highly valued. In Attitudes about giftedness, intelligence was considered a key
component of gifted identification. Participation in gifted education was pleasant, and the boys shared the challenges they faced in gifted programming. They also noted what they considered necessary to succeed in the demanding classes. **The more we get together** assessed the boys’ experiences with their peers and teachers within and outside of gifted classes. They also discussed their friends, and their candidacy for gifted programming. **It takes a village** inspected the boys’ support systems, their family involvement, their motivation to succeed, and their role models. **My future is bright** explained the participants’ future goals, and how they planned to obtain them. **District level approaches and solutions** highlighted student and family engagement, increased access to gifted teachers, a renewed focus on creativity, targeted professional development for gifted teachers, and ongoing reevaluation of the curriculum and engagement opportunities.

The findings revealed the participants held quite traditional views of giftedness. Intelligence, social skills, teamwork, preparation, and support were all part of the foundation needed to ensure success and retention. Social interactions enhanced the learning experience for some, while peers became obstacles for others. Despite having above average intelligence, few participants had considered future occupations that were not athletic in nature. The experiences of these gifted Black males indicate the need to expand the views and support of Black males and giftedness. Additionally, the experiences of these participants with their peers demonstrate how powerfully these interactions can affect the gifted Black male child in positive and negative ways.
“Nobody knows me better than me”

Although research has indicated that Black males face image concerns in regards to gifted programming (Baldridge, Hill, & Davis, 2011; Whiting, 2009), most of the participants in this research study had positive self-images. They saw their uniqueness in various ways based on physical size, academic achievement, personality traits, athleticism, or participation in school activities. For example, Darius explained in detail how he is special.

Tiffany: So tell me about yourself. What makes you special?

Darius: Um, hmmm. I think what makes me special is the thing[s] that I do, like…like, some things that I do other children here can’t do.

Tiffany: Like what?

Darius: I do a whole bunch of things. I’m a wellness ambassador. I help Coach. I’m on the jump rope team, uh basketball team, robotics team, chess team, um… if I go here I might be on the debate team if they have one.

Tiffany: You are a busy little boy.

Darius: Yeah, I do a lot of things some of the kids don’t get to do.

Darius explained that due to the changing demographics of the school population during the last school year, he and his mother were considering private and charter schools as possible options for his future education. Although Darius was unsure if he would attend this same school during the next school year, he clearly felt his uniqueness came from his involvement in many school activities, and wanted to continue with that trend.

For a few students, identifying a reason why they should consider themselves special proved challenging. Thomas especially struggled with his answer.

Tiffany: Okay. Tell me about yourself. What makes you special?
Thomas: Um, um…[10 sec. pause]…hard.
Tiffany: What? It’s a hard question?
Thomas: Uh huh.
Tiffany: Okay. Let me ask you something else. What have you achieved? What have you accomplished in your long, long life?
Thomas: Uh, um…I achieved a lot of stuff. Um…
Tiffany: Well tell me about any honors or awards.
Thomas: Oh yes. I achieved, uh…I was like one point closer to getting um, honor roll.
Tiffany: Wow.
Thomas: I had an 89, and that was in social studies.
Tiffany: Um hum.
Thomas: But I’m really not good at math.

Thomas initially appeared to be a very confident well-spoken third grader, but verbalizing his uniqueness was a task for which he was not prepared.

Historically, Black males have been poorly represented in the media, and have been identified as academic underachievers (Henfield, 2012; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012; Whiting, 2009). However, for these 19 gifted Black males, most have proven to be high achieving students. Nine of the students earned all As which qualified them for placement on the Principal’s List, while four earned As and Bs for Honor Roll recognition. Jayden excitedly described how he has made Principal’s List every year for five years. Elijah proudly exclaimed that he has made Principal’s List since second grade. Derrick was sure to explain he previously made Principal’s List for several years,
but was a bit disappointed this year to have only made Honor Roll. Terrence was also disappointed at the end of the school year, and even voiced his feelings in his journal.

Illustration 1.1 Terrence’s Journal Entry

Terrence followed-up by explaining he did win citizenship and special area (music, art, library) awards, but he felt the boy who won the coveted ‘Best All Around’ award got in trouble. Terrence also felt he deserved Honor Roll recognition. He stated, “They think I got a C in Science or Math, but I didn’t.”

Thomas, Lamarcus, Xavier, Joshua, and David did not share any experiences with Principal’s List or Honor Roll recognition. When Thomas noted his accomplishments, he referenced having his picture on the district’s website under the student spotlight section. He was very aware of his weaknesses citing his struggles with math and science. Lamarcus’ crowning achievement was his participation in the state level science fair. Xavier explained he’s a good writer, reader, and singer. However, when discussing his grades, he stated he has earned “A’s, B’s, and a little bit of C’s.” Joshua recognized his talents to be jump roping, dancing, tennis, and basketball. When asked about his accomplishments, he explained, “I actually achieved nothing. I just be good in school. My goal is to pass my grade.” David was proud of his improvements in social studies,
and recognized his work in his gifted class as instrumental in the change. However, he explained he continued to struggle with math. Just as David and Thomas were aware of their strengths and struggles, this awareness was evident with the other participants. As Darius pondered one of my interview questions, and initially started to answer “I don’t know.” Then he smirked and said, “Well, no one knows me better than me!” True to form, with a bit of encouragement and wait time, all of the boys proved to be aware of their own abilities and limitations.

**School Life**

When the participants remembered the first time they felt academic success, many of the boys stated it was during their primary years due to the ease of learning. Thirteen boys were placed in gifted education during this same time period. Four participants entered the program during their intermediate years, with one explaining that he was tested in kindergarten, but he was not placed at that time. For two others, participation in and transitioning from the talent development program gave them access to gifted programming prior to and after placement. Twelve boys were placed at their current schools, while seven were placed at their previous schools. Interestingly, only one Black male out of the five participants was actually placed at the predominately White elementary school.

Despite certain dislikes related to peer interaction and behavior, the majority of students liked their present school. When asked about achievements or things they really liked about their school, only five boys expressed enjoyment in various school activities. Lamarcus explained he played on the school’s basketball team, while Khalil played several instruments in band and orchestra. Khalil felt his school was special due to his
ability to “have violin.” Warren also participated in orchestra, and was a member of his school’s championship winning basketball team. Jaylon also played on the Pebble Elementary School’s basketball team, participated in the Chess and Robotics Clubs, and served as a Wellness Ambassador. Jayden was a member of the River Brook’s basketball team. Interestingly, Jayden shared that he was a member of the Jr. Beta Club, but it was through his gifted teacher’s comments that I learned he also served as president!

More participants shared experiences about school activities in their journals. However, the activities included in the entries were primarily related to athletic functions.

Illustration 1.2 Jayden’s Journal Entry

Jayden clearly enjoyed this end of year activity. He goes into great detail about the events during the field day, as well as the food provided.

Illustration 1.3 Isaiah’s Journal Entry
Isaiah tried out for his school’s basketball team, but was cut. Nevertheless, he continued to support his school and the team by attending the game. He maintained a positive attitude regarding the entire situation, and valued the experience enough to write about it in his journal.

Illustration 1.4 Warren’s Journal Entry

Warren was one of the few participants who chose to write about an academic activity experienced at his school. Interestingly, the athletic event was discussed prior to the academic recognition.

Information related to school activities was also included on some school websites. For example, River Brook’s website listed information about the 4H Club and a
basketball and cheerleading tournament. Pebble Elementary School’s website showcased an art contest winner, pictures of the Black History Month Program, and a chess tournament. Hillside’s website also included pictures of chess games with fifth graders playing some local college students. Grant’s website simply listed the basketball tournament schedule, while Richmond’s website included information on a chorus concert, the school’s foundation, and the IB program. None of the participants were showcased on any of the school websites where academic activities were included.

**Attitudes about Giftedness**

Although there is not a consensus on the definition of giftedness in the world of academia, these gifted Black males had very concise understandings of what it means to be gifted. All of the boys recognized that being gifted requires some level of intelligence. The majority of the participants stated that gifted students are smart, talented, and special. Lamarcus not only considered intelligence to be a primary characteristic of gifted students, but also felt that one should exceed in “everything that you try, and succeed in everything that you do.” Thomas appeared concerned about how considering himself smart might be perceived. He explained that although you’re smart, “you still gotta help people with their struggles ‘cause you’re not no smarty pants, and you know everything.” For some students social skills and behavior were equally important for the gifted. Students placed in gifted were thought to be “good students” who were friendly with good behavior, and able to get along with others (Interviews with Derrick, Terrence, Tyshawn, and Darius).

Everyone enjoyed being a part of the gifted program, but had various reasons for the enjoyment. For the majority of the participants, gifted classes were fun and exciting.
Lamarcus, Isaiah, and Jeff explained they enjoyed the activities, while Efrem looked forward to the “cool trips.” David felt his peers were able to understand and relate to him, and Tyshawn enjoyed the treats he received after completing his work. For some students like Khalil and Terrence, gifted classes became a safe haven from their classmates. As Terrence emphatically stated, gifted classes offered an opportunity to “get away from the crazy kids.” Thomas agreed and added that his gifted class days were special for several reasons. As he stated, “I can talk to people. I can let loose a little bit. I can learn but have fun.”

Although the participants could explain what giftedness looked like, and how they felt about participating in gifted classes, they could only give general explanations about their own journey to giftedness. When initially asked why they were placed in the program, several boys looked quite puzzled about the question. The majority explained it was because they were smart, while Thomas and Tyshawn added they also got along with others. Other reasons for placement included grades, passing the gifted test, creativity, or being a good student all around.

Jayden hesitated to stand out amongst his peers when considering why he felt he was placed in the gifted program. He insisted, “I don’t feel a different type of way. I don’t brag or nothing. I just know that I’m challenged.” Elijah and David both initially explained they really did not know why they were placed. Elijah stated, “Maybe I have been smart,” while David explained “I don’t want to say ‘cause, like you’re smarter than everyone else ‘cause you’re not.”

Once the students reflected for a few seconds, they were all able to explain the most rewarding and challenging areas of gifted programming. For most of the
participants, gifted classes allowed them the opportunity to learn more, and provided
them with exposure to learn new and unusual things. As Elijah explained, the class “gives
your mind a bigger chance and opportunity.” Xavier elaborated by detailing how “it’s fun
because they teach you other things beside your classroom like Greek mythology, and
law and order.”

Illustration 1.5 Dorian’s Journal Entry

Although he had the opportunity to study law and order and showcase his knowledge at
an academic extracurricular event, Xavier was especially bothered that other gifted
students were not well prepared for their Mock Trail Exhibition.
Illustration 1.6 Xavier’s Journal Entry 1

Xavier clearly had higher expectations for the opposing team. Perhaps this was due to the role he was assigned. Consider the following field notes recorded during an observation of his gifted class:

Mrs. Jeffries asks everyone to help set up the room for the trial. Xavier leans on the table, and watches all the other students move chairs. Then, he starts to help when Mrs. Jeffries asks him to move a specific table. Another boy comes over to Xavier, and asks him if he needs some help. Then they move the table together. Afterwards, Xavier walks to the jury area, and starts to count the chairs. He pulls one chair out, and then another. Xavier starts to walk around, and then two girls put the chairs back, and the teacher adds more. She explains that will be the area for the audience. Xavier goes to the front of the room to move the podium. He tries by himself, but struggles to move it. A smaller White boy comes over, and they move it together. Xavier sits down at the table for the prosecutor. When Mrs. Jeffries announces they are about to begin, another boy comes over and takes Xavier’s seat. Xavier goes to sit at the other table, and puts his head down waiting for Mrs. Jeffries to finish getting everyone together. After a few minutes pass, he starts clapping his hands like patty cake, and hitting his chest. A few more minutes go by, and they begin. Xavier sits with his hands folded as he plays the defendant.
Xavier wrote that he was clearly excited about participating in the Mock Trial Exhibition, but his journal entry and behavior during practice indicate his desire for a more important position.

Although the boys enjoyed participating in the gifted program, they also discussed the challenges they faced. Almost all of them explained how gifted classes came with more demanding work that contained harder questions which required one to think more. Jayden recognized the work “challenges you to think in a different way.” Xavier explained “you have to do extra stuff, and that it’s hard to learn what they’re trying to teach because… what they’re trying to teach… is totally different from what you’re used to doing in your class.” Although Derrick spoke positively about participating in the gifted program, he disliked having to stay in gifted class “all Monday, and miss stuff in his regular class.” Projects were a concern for Jordan and Dorian, while Tyshawn had issues with remembering his homework. Khalil even explained how some boys ended up leaving gifted class for these very reasons.

Khalil: One of them was, use to be in [gifted]…two of them use to be in [gifted], but it was too hard for them, so they left earlier this year.

Tiffany: Oh, okay. Why did they think it was too hard? Were they boys too?

Khalil: Yes.

Tiffany: Why did they leave?

Khalil: Well, the first one, he had um, he never packed. He had his lunch box, but his mom always forgot to bring his lunch, and he…it was hard for him to do his homework.

Tiffany: Oh, okay. It was hard for him to do his work for [gifted]?

Khalil: Uh huh.
Tiffany: Okay.

Khalil: And the same thing with the other one, except for the lunch. He always brung his lunch.

Tiffany: But he didn’t have his work?

Khalil: Not his homework, but he did all his work in class.

Tiffany: So do you always have your homework for gifted?

Khalil: Most of the time. One day I forgot it.

Tiffany: You forgot to do it?

Khalil: Yeah.

Tiffany: Is it hard to remember to do?

Khalil: Uh huh. Especially, if we’re on break.

Khalil’s classmates and his personal experience with homework highlight how one aspect of gifted education can influence some students to label it too hard, and as a result, no longer participate.

For Khalil, David, and Jeff, group work became unpleasant when partners preferred to play, or did not complete their fair share of work. Lamarcus found “not being perfect” the hardest part of being in the gifted program, while Efrem felt there was an expectation to always “do your best.” For Darius, he acknowledged it was difficult to juggle all of the work between all of his classes – “the special areas, homeroom, and gifted,” but felt it was great preparation for what he would encounter in middle school. Interestingly, Terrence and Warren found nothing difficult about their participation in gifted programming.

All of the participants were able to identify attributes that make them successful in gifted classes although their priorities varied amongst the group. The majority of the
boys explained a strong knowledge of the core subjects such as Reading and Math was crucial to success in gifted. For Warren, to be successful in gifted meant you “know how to “do all subjects.” Others explained that you must be able to be a good listener, and follow directions. For Jeff success in gifted class meant that you definitely had to be a good listener “because we learn a lot of stuff, and we have a lot of projects so you have to be able to pay attention and focus. There’s a lot of trial and error.” Displaying good teamwork ability, and the ability to get along with others made all the difference for David, Efrem, and Warren. David described one situation in his journal where he not only had to display good teamwork, but they had to also make up to efforts of a missing team member.

Illustration 1.7 David’s Journal Entry

Terrence, Tyshawn, and Isaiah explained the need to be prepared for each class, while Elijah and Joshua felt it important to be ready to work hard. Xavier and Tyler most concisely summarized success in gifted programming. Xavier explained you must know “how to process information, and how to learn things quickly,” while Tyler noted how students must be “open-minded so they can bring in the information, and analyze it,” and
“principled so they can work on their projects, and complete them at a certain time.”

Other skills listed by the participants include earning good grades, having good behavior, and maintaining self-control.

**The More We Get Together**

The social aspect of the participants’ experiences was very interesting. They shared information about their friends as well as the trials and tribulations of dealing with peers on an everyday basis. The majority of the participants had friends who were also in the gifted program. Warren explained that not only were all of his friends in the gifted program, but they even helped each other with projects. For Elijah, Thomas, Terrence, and David, they explained they had friends who were and were not identified as gifted. Elijah felt some of his nongifted friends were smart, and were “maybe coming soon.” Thomas explained that some of his friends were not in gifted because “they kinda get in trouble.” For Dorian, Lamarcus, Derrick, TyShawn, Isaiah, and Joshua, most of their friends did not participate in the gifted program.

When considering nominating friends for placement, all of the boys explained they would nominate some friends. Sammy’s nomination would be based on the fact that the friend is a good speaker, while Joshua’s nomination would be due to their friendship. Isaiah explained on days he attends gifted class, only three students are left in his homeroom class. He stated, “I want them to get in so…it can be more people learning about more stuff…’cause I don’t want people just to sit out and think like…they’re not special, and like they can’t be in this class.” Jeff explained that a few of his friends already possess gifted attributes but they are not in gifted due to the fact that they “base it off a test, and some people might not be good test takers.” Dorian felt his friends “play
too much” to be placed, while Thomas said his friends “kinda get in trouble, but [he] blocked that out, and they [are] still [his] friend.” Xavier noticed several problems with his friends. He explained “they need to catch up on the reading a little bit more, and...others on their math, and sometimes they don’t go beyond, and they don’t follow some of the rules.” Xavier quickly mentioned that despite these faults, he’s “still friends with them because of their personality, [and] not of what they’re learning.”

When examining the participants’ interactions with teachers and peers not considered friends, experiences were quite specific to the school environment. At River Brook Elementary, they boys found the teachers and their classmates to be extremely encouraging. When Jayden returned to his homeroom class, one of his male friends would always ask, “What ya’ll learn today?” He also explained that if he did not understand something after he returned from gifted class, his classmates were always ready to assist. “They help me out, and they tell me what’s going on.” Despite the majority of the social interactions being positive for Jayden, the fair skinned Black male found occasional difficulty with peers when some would pick on him or his brother, and question his race by calling him White. He explained that was the only issue he had with peers because as he stated, “I know what my color is.”

For Khalil, a small, soft-spoken boy and the only participant at Grant Elementary, interactions with his teachers and peers became the makings of true social pains. Khalil immediately shared that his classmates often made “inappropriate” comments about him and his best friends. When asked to explain, Khalil hesitated, but eventually explained that he was often told they must “like” each other in a homosexual way because they were always around one another. This subject really bothered Khalil because as he
explained he has two younger sisters, and he’s “not around boys a lot.” Consequently, the boys and their families would get together outside of school to go to the movies, or “pick muscadines.” Khalil further discussed how his social problems would often result in him getting into physical altercations. One example he shared was when, “recently, in class, someone just threw their shoe at [him] for no reason.” When asked about the teacher’s assistance, Khalil explained, “She was doing her makeup.” Khalil included other examples in his journal.

Illustration 1.8 Khalil’s Journal Entry 1

Illustration 1.9 Khalil’s Journal Entry 2
When questioned about his parents’ reaction to his problems with peers, Khalil simply stated, “Well, my parents want me to defend myself.” For Khalil, gifted classes became an escape from his trouble with his peers.

Terrence, a heavy set average looking boy, felt his schoolmates were a problem because “they mess[ed] up the school.” He went on to explain they “draw on the wall and cause destruction.” Also a student at Hillside Academy, Thomas, a slow talking young man with an old soul, found that twenty percent of his classmates were smart and focused even though all of them were not part of the gifted program. The rest of his classmates were less than desirable as they were seen as “trying to mess up [their] education.” Although his school appeared to have some activities geared towards encouraging the students academically and behaviorally, there were still issues such as fighting during the CRCT administration. Terrence even discussed this situation in his journal.

Illustration 1.10 Terrence’s Journal Entry

Glad CRCT is over. I know I passed so no sweat. Math and reading was easy. So there is a chance for me. But 5th grade is so crazy. They probably failed. Well, that is only some but who knows. Looking toward to field day and awards. That is for the future to know and for me to find out.

For Thomas, he recognized early on that his schoolmates’ misbehavior affects him and his learning as well. Consequently, he is already convinced that a private school would offer him a better school environment.
Dorian, a small, bright-eyed happy boy, also found issues with his peers at Hillside Academy. He explained his dislike for how “kids leave trash on the floor,” how it “gets really loud in the cafeteria,” and how they “get…in trouble because of somebody else’s actions.” Lamarcus, a tall, stylish student also at Hillside Academy, did not have any issues with peers at his school, but found that he preferred the young, energetic teachers at his school more than the old teachers who could not keep his attention due to their old way of teaching. Although Lamarcus did not have any personal issues with peers, he was aware of some problems that existed. He explained that some students skip class by going to the library with a “fake note saying that the teacher said they can get on the computer.”

As members of the Pebble Elementary student body, the majority of the boys did not have any issues with their peers, and liked their teachers. Efrem explained, “Most of the students want to learn,” and although Xavier had had no personal problems with his classmates, he disapproved of “how some of the students act, and how they talk, and how they use language and body movements.” Derrick had a few problems with peers. Although he felt “all the teachers [were] nice,” and “all the students [were] very smart,” he also admitted that some of the students had “anger problems.” TyShawn said some classmates “get on [his] nerves” because “they [were] tryin’ to start problems.” Darius found that making friends was pretty easy for him, but he recalled that he has been teased for his good grades. He explained, “I know I’ve been called nerd before.” He explained his rebuttal would be, “I know I’m a geek and nerd because who’s the people that’s creating all this new technology and everything that you’re using.” Then the bullies would turn quiet. Xavier did not have any personal issues with schoolmates, but felt the
teachers were extremely nice, and offered the students too many chances to improve behavior. Xavier even included more thoughts about his peers in his journal.

Illustration 1.11 Xaiver’s Journal Entry 2

![Image of Xavier’s Journal Entry 2]

Illustration 1.12 Xaiver’s Journal Entry 3

![Image of Xavier’s Journal Entry 3]

Xavier clearly had no patience for dealing with the misbehavior of his classmates.

At Richmond, similar to Pebble Elementary, the majority of the participants had no social issues, and enjoyed their teachers. David felt the teachers were nice, and “let you open up in any way possible.” However, he did have issues with two of his peers. One issue was with a third grader. David explained, “He’s got anger issues so I actually see him more often than I should.” Although David explained that most of the students in gifted are friends, he also had problems with one of the boys in his gifted class. David shared that this boy can be “on and off” so “he’s somebody to keep an eye out for.”

Tyler excitedly explained he appreciated how the gifted teachers let you “just say what’s on your mind.” There were no limits imposed on thinking. “There’s no wrong
answer,” and you “do not have to worry about an answer being A, B, or C.” Joshua had one problem with a female classmate. The girl “stole my stuff when I was gone” in gifted class. “She messed up all my desk,” and “she got suspended …for vandalism.” When asked why she would do that to only him, he replied “Jane is just Jane…I don’t know why.” Ford and Whiting (2010) explained Black students in predominately White gifted classes may feel “alienated from and rejected by White classmates” (p. 134). However, for the majority of the participants, the peer interactions were mostly positive. More investigation into the peer issues involving Joshua and David may reveal similar patterns to those found by Ford and Whiting.

When discussing the composition of the gifted classes, the majority of the participants were not concerned about the gender representation. Specifically, the older boys appeared to have more positive outlooks on being outnumbered. As Jayden explained, having class with more girls was not a problem because he “has girls as friends.” Terrence shared that because there were only three boys in his gifted class, they often chose to work together as they were “very competitive.” He also explained he liked this arrangement because the “men [get] together well more than the girls. Sometimes it takes a long time for the girls to get together” due to their talking. Lamarcus found that everybody in his gifted class simply “got along,” and there was not fighting or arguing which made it possible for them to “have a good time.”

For younger Khalil, he was bothered by the fact that there are fewer boys in the gifted class, and when the fifth graders did not attend due to CRCT preparation, there were only two boys present in the class. As a result, when they had to partner up, he often ended up with a female partner he did not care for. Dorian felt the gender difference in
gifted was due to the fact that “girls listen more than boys,” and “boys like to play more.” Despite this observation, he still felt “there just should be like…a[n] equal amount of boys and girls.”

Illustration 1.13 Dorian’s Journal Entry

Dorian saw the increased opportunities for the girls to be group leaders as discrimination. He understood there were more girls than boys, but still felt the need for equality.

TyShawn also felt the pressure of being in the minority. He explained that he felt “lonely” until two other boys joined the class, and were allowed to sit at his table. When asked why he chose to sit alone previously, he stated, “you get peace and quiet instead of all that noise” that comes with girls. Tyler acknowledged there were more girls than boys in his gifted class. To combat this, he simply explained “the boys that are in there, you’re close to them, or you know them, and if you don’t you pretty much get close to them quickly since there’s less boys.” This type of camaraderie amongst peers was most evident at River Brook, Pebble, and Richmond Elementary Schools.

It Takes a Village

All of the participants described specific people who served as members of their support system. Parents were mentioned for every participant as sources of encouragement and assistance. In describing his parents, Efrem definitively explained, “They help me a lot [by showing] me what I need to improve on.” For ten of the boys,
that support system reached beyond their parents, and included school staff members, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, and even friends.

    Jayden not only received constant encouragement from his mother to do better, but he also explained that his teachers “encourage [them] and they do a lot for [them].” Derrick, TyShawn, Isaiah, and Jeff also identified teachers as their personal supporters. Thomas found encouragement to succeed in the lives of his dad, uncles, male homeroom teacher, and the president of the nation. Dorian and Derrick also named schoolmates as members of their support systems. This support system also extended to include encouragement within and beyond school walls. For example, several of the boys attended the basketball tournament game for Pebble Elementary despite being cut from the team.

    The participants also described their family’s involvement in their academic success. The family involvement primarily consisted of assistance with studying, and completion of homework and projects. Words of encouragement were the second most shared form of family involvement, followed by offering money as an incentive, making sure basic needs were met, and attendance at school functions. Jayden’s stepfather encouraged him by reminding him “you can always be better,” and to always “reach for the stars.” Darius was repeatedly reminded by his parents to be aware of his school record with the understanding that it “follows you all the way.” His had an understanding with his father that he would be rewarded for his success. Terrence’s father believed if you “do good,” you “earn money.” This philosophy encouraged Terrence to always try his best in an effort to increase his financial gain. David was the only participant who mentioned a parent often volunteers at his school.
The boys were highly motivated to achieve. This motivation stemmed from different areas. Sammy, Jeff, and Terrence received motivation from their families, while family and friends motivated Tyler. Jeff stated, “I wanna make my parents proud. I wanna play in the major leagues before I’m twenty-five, and so that means I have to do good in college. My dad always tells me he wants me to buy him a yacht when I grow up.” Ultimately, this dream gift, and the desire to please his parents were great motivators for Jeff.

Even Lamarcus, who was being raised by his grandmother, still identified his parents as his motivation. He explained they “try to keep me in school, and not doing other stuff…like skipping class.” Teachers and classmates motivated Jayden, while Derrick’s father also inspired him. Derrick explained, “My dad wasn’t really that much educated when he was little, [and] that’s why he wants me to be smart.” Joshua, David, Khalil, TyShawn, and Isaiah were all aware of the consequences if they did not perform well. Khalil was motivated by testing anxiety, and explained, “I don’t want to flunk the CRCT.” Joshua also remarked how he did not “like the consequences for your actions” such as if you have to get “expelled, or suspended, or you just have to redo the grade.”

Elijah, Thomas, Darius, Warren, and Xavier were concerned for the future, which motivated them to succeed. Xavier explained, “[I want] to try to live up to my parents, and try to do better…to exceed past them.” Reginald knew his goal was to “get [his] education, and block everything that’s around [him].” Lastly, Dorian and Efrem enjoyed doing work and learning, which led to a strong work ethic that motivated them.

In addition to sharing the sources of their motivation, participants also shared information about their role models. Fifteen of the boys identified their parents as role
models. Dorain and Tyler looked up to male and female classmates. Lamarcus considered “Black African Americans” like Tyler Perry his role models, while Thomas named his dad, uncles, and male teacher to be his role models. TyShawn had plenty of educational role models. As he explained, “I look up to my gifted teacher, my regular teacher, my mom who is a teacher, and my dad who is a teacher.” Similarly, Xavier explained he considers his mother a role model because she has her doctorate, as well as his aunt because she is a teacher. Despite the educational backgrounds of their families, all of the participants have been able to identify a successful person to serve as a role model for them.

**My Future is Bright**

All of the participants valued school, and the majority excelled academically. However, when discussing future goals, all of the boys except six already had their eyes fixed on a career as a professional athlete. Nine of the future professional athletes had alternative choices for careers, leaving four without a backup plan. Additionally, all of the boys were aware of what they felt it would take to accomplish their goals.

Elijah, Jayden, Isaiah, Joshua, David, and Tyler all aim to make it into the NBA. Elijah is also considering being a scientist, while Jayden’s backup is game designer. Isaiah is contemplating being part of the FBI. David explained that due to lots of unique experiences in his gifted class, he is considering being a director. Tyler’s backup choices include working in the government, or being a doctor. If Joshua does not become a player in the NBA, then he would like to be a tennis star.

Jeff only wants to be a professional baseball player, but Terrence mentioned being a baseball player or a wrestler. TyShawn, Warren, and Sammy all shared thoughts about
being professional football players. Moreover, TyShawn explained that he could be a coach, or work in a pharmacy so he can “get that money.” Warren also has plans to have a restaurant, but may change that plan due to the lack of availability of the program required at his chosen college. Sammy has even more ideas beyond the NFL. He would also like to be a professional skate border, a professional snow border, or a professional surfer. Dorian has aspirations to be a soccer player or an artist. The participants without professional athlete goals include Khalil, Thomas, Lamarcus, Derrick, Darius, and Xavier. These gifted Black males are dreaming of being a scientist or a firefighter, a police officer, fashion designer, a police officer or doctor, a jet pack engineer, and a math professor, respectively.

All of the participants had a general idea of what was needed to accomplish their goals. They all explained they had to work hard, stay focused, and do well in school to succeed. Khalil, Lamarcus, and Xavier had even more specific understandings of how to attain their goals. Khalil knew participating in more science fairs would assist him in becoming a scientist. Lamarcus recognized business tips would be assets to any future entrepreneur, and Xavier had a surprisingly clear understanding of the education needed for him to be a math professor. As he explained, “I need to get good grades in school, and then I would have to go through college multiple times. [I would] go through all the master’s, doctor’s, and bachelor’s, and all that stuff to get to a professor.”

**District Level Approaches and Solutions**

To help students become “good” enough, one must examine district level involvement in this process. In order to represent that perspective, the gifted coordinator for the school district of the five research sites shared her experiences in
regards to parental involvement, talent development, the state of Black males in gifted education, what is working well in the district in terms of supporting Black males, and the district’s initiatives to improve their support of gifted Black males.

Mrs. Michaels, the Black gifted coordinator for the district, explained the parental involvement in the gifted population is “budding” due to newly implemented programs that involve families. One of these new programs is entitled Gifted Parent University. As Mrs. Michaels explained, “Gifted Parent University…[provides] various programs to families to help support them in their knowledge and understanding of their gifted learner.” There are two sessions per year, and for the upcoming school year, the office elected to target “special populations.” Parent U has had a wide variety of topics to appeal to a wider range of parents and their needs. The course topics have included games with young children, service learning, underachievement, sibling rivalries, and social emotional needs of gifted students. By engaging the families, the coordinator hopes to create “talent catalysts” who are really able to “support the learning of those students” at school as well as “at home [to enrich] their lives even further.”

Prior to Mrs. Michaels coming into the coordinator’s position, talent development in this particular district was only at select schools, with most schools with low gifted populations having to transport their students to a central cluster school. Mrs. Michaels’ arrival as coordinator brought about the closing of the central cluster school, and the appointment of a full or part-time gifted teacher at every school. The talent development program was also implemented at all of the schools with low gifted populations. The gifted office tracked the progress of this bold move, and found positive outcomes. Mrs. Michaels explained, “Even just this past season, we were able to identify 75 students who
were...before talent development, and now they're gifted.” She went on to exclaim, “That's awesome because we're able to cast that net, and really not only identify students who are eligible for gifted, but also those who have that promise and that potential.”

Mrs. Michaels described the state of Black males in gifted education as “under-identified for many reasons.” She further explained that Black males typically have lots of labels, but not often Gifted and Talented due to the need to address the achievement piece of the puzzle. She stated that in the general education classroom, teachers often “ditto to death that creativity.” This type of educational atmosphere goes against “the natural composition of a male, and then definitely an African American male in an urban environment,” and ultimately produces behavior that “goes against what is the traditional makeup or the perception of a motivated child.”

Mrs. Michaels’ recognized that creativity again gets stifled and “just drops for that African American male because they are learning for achievement purposes there's only one right answer.” So although they may be capable of “thinking in multiple possibilities,” they are constantly told “but there's only one right answer.” Therefore, Mrs. Michaels’ admitted, teachers are “conditioning [them] to not be creative.”

Due to this stifled creativity, Black males may score high on the nonverbal mental ability test, but the achievement category would be too low, or their teachers would rate their motivation on the low end. Mrs. Michaels goes on to explain, “but that's the power of talent development because we can still expose those students to the pedagogy because they have the potential, and if they're not identified as gifted, what does that really truly mean for the child?” So ultimately, for these unidentified students, talent development seems to be key to either confirm an appropriated placement in gifted, or to identify a
high achieving, but not gifted child. This knowledge is crucial considering educators should aim to identify giftedness during the primary years in economically disadvantaged children (Ford, 2010). As Moon and Brighton (2008) asserted, “Failure to identify and develop talent in very young children has been linked to subsequent negative outcomes in cognitive, academic, social, and affective development” (p. 449). Consequently, talent development becomes a secret weapon in the fight against underrepresentation as well as heavy reliance on teacher nominations.

Black males may often be perceived as unmotivated, but the lack of demonstration of motivation can be for reasons unrelated to education. As Mrs. Michaels’ questioned, “Is it that you're worried about your racial identity, or how you will be perceived by the others in your family, the others in the classroom, [or] the others on the school bus?” Mrs. Michaels’ insisted that collaboration between gifted teachers and general education teachers can help students with potential improve their achievement. Additionally, automatic referrals are now eliminating teacher bias on the motivation component.

When considering what is working well in the district in terms of supporting Black males, Mrs. Michaels explained that talent development and engaging students are certainly helping to improve achievement and motivation. Last school year, the gifted office incorporated a theme entitled “Engaging through Enrichment,” which allowed the gifted teachers to really focus on engaging gifted and talent development students outside of the classroom. As a result, teachers implemented Science Squad, a local version of Odyssey of the Mind, Mock Trial competitions, and an academic bowl.
The district has also started to consider “multicultural pedagogy and training in [their] curriculum development.” The gifted office assessed the curriculum, and ensured it was aligned to the common core and the “tenants of multicultural gifted pedagogy, [which is] based upon the work of Donna Ford” (Ford, 2010). Mrs. Michaels looked to see “where is the debate, [and] where is the perspective through various lens?” Addressing these questions helped the district consider the needs of all its gifted learners.

The gifted office has also worked to support Black males in the district through professional learning. The theme designated for the upcoming school year was “ESP - Embracing Our Special Populations,” and the kick off included four major speakers including Donna Ford. Consequently, Mrs. Michaels’ is ensuring the district makes a special effort to focus on improving the state of special populations in gifted education, including gifted Black males. The gifted office provides professional development monthly, and appears to recognize and value the impact of gifted teachers making a difference with those special populations. Mrs. Michaels acknowledged through her office’s concerted efforts, they are “really able to enrich the lives of [the] gifted teachers because they are the greatest advocates in the building.”

The district had several initiatives to improve the support of gifted Black males. First, the district was changing the nonverbal assessment. This was a surprising move due to Mrs. Michaels’ statement that Black males typically did well on the nonverbal portion. They were also implementing a new tool call TOPS to assist teachers with observations of potential. Finally, Mrs. Michaels’ explained they were “always evaluating [the] curriculum to make sure that it is um, really doing what I want it to do, which is to
develop the potential of … all of our special populations including that gifted African American male.”

**Summary**

To improve identification and retention, special attention must be placed on culturally diverse gifted students (Milner, Tenore, & Laughter, 2008). Additionally, their experiences can help to identify barriers and solutions for their continued underrepresentation in gifted education (Grantham, 2004; Henfield, 2012). The experiences of these nineteen participants showcased their beliefs, accomplishments, and concerns in regards to their educational journey as gifted Black males.

They were clearly aware of their abilities and limitations, although some hesitated to appear to be greatly above average compared to their peers. In addition, more boys participated in athletic activities than academic ones, and the peer interactions had a strong impact on the quality of school life experienced by the participants. The advanced curriculum was enjoyed and appreciated by the boys, although some struggled to find the support needed to complete the project and homework requirements. Notions about giftedness were quite clear, and were heavily influenced by not only intelligence, but behavior as well. The students all had support systems, although some were larger than others. Finally, despite their academic success, future goals were quite limited by dreams of fame and fortune.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

The education of Black males is often researched and discussed in terms of labeling, motivation, underachievement, overrepresentation in special education, or underrepresentation in gifted programming (Billings, 2011; Ford & Whiting, 2010; Garibaldi, 1992; Kenyatta, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Romanoff & Algozzine, 2009). When gifted Black males are the focus of research, the populations generally consist of middle, high, or college level students. The perspectives of the younger members of the gifted population are rarely investigated, and there is limited research on high achieving economically disadvantaged students (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Ford, 2011). Therefore, this research study intended to add to the limited body of knowledge by examining the perceptions of gifted Black elementary students in terms of their achievement, expectations, and relationships.

Review of the Findings

Question 1: What are the perceptions of gifted Black elementary students about gifted education?

Most boys had a strong sense of self, but some struggled to recognize their accomplishments and special place in their world. Families and schools must partner to showcase their talents, and encourage them to value their own uniqueness. The boys felt intelligence, good behavior, and adequate social skills were essential for placement and success in gifted education. The students were able to identify some benefits from participating in gifted education. They valued their highly skilled teachers, special
curriculum, and smart, well-behaved gifted peers. The gifted Black males felt the increased pressure and challenge of gifted placement. Some were able to adjust and cope, while others needed much support. The participants often did not understand how or why they were placed, and they appeared hesitant to embrace the above average intelligence that placed them in gifted. Others viewed giftedness as achieving in every way possible. This view of giftedness as perfection was especially curious because many of the male participants did not fit this description. There appears to be a need to expand their young minds, and correct that misconception about giftedness.

Some have questioned if teachers’ heavy reliance on social skills for gifted nominations was a sign of a strong need for teachers to be provided additional training for gifted identification (Curby, et al., 2008). However, the participants in the study had very traditional conceptions of appropriate behavior for gifted placement. They strongly recognized a need for students to have some level of social competence to gain access and to succeed in gifted programming. This however does not give educators permission to ignore talents based on social deficits. Jeff explained that he felt too much of the decision for placement was decided by a gifted test. This may have been influenced by his having to take the test twice before being placed. Jeff even explained in his interview how some children are just not good test takers. Consequently, it is evident that Jeff is aware of how becoming nervous when academic ability is being tested, perhaps due to stereotype threat, can deny an truly gifted child access to gifted education (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Even young minds can recognize that it is time to “question and change the test to avoid unfairness, bias, and underrepresentation (Ford, 2010, p. 35).
For the nineteen participants, Black males remain underrepresented in gifted education for three main reasons. First, some Black males do not demonstrate the ability to think and behave correctly. As Elijah explained, “Some Black boys don’t think right. They do bad stuff, and they just don’t care, and drop out of school.” Lamarcus expanded the thought by explaining that “some boys think it’s all about being bad and not gettin’ A’s, [and] they think they’re havin’ a good time.” Terrence’s experiences have shown him that most Black males have “behavior problems, maybe physical problems, and ADD.”

Secondly, some Black males may not be qualified for the program, or ready to do what is necessary to succeed in the demanding world of gifted classes. Isaiah explained, “Most boys think they’re too cool for school.” Based on Dorian’s experiences, “Girls listen more than boys. Boys like to play more [and] they don’t try their best. They don’t pay attention that much, [and] they keep drawing in class.” TyShawn has found that some Black males “don’t want to do work,” or as Warren explained, they “don’t really want to do gifted.” Khalil stated, the boys may “think about other stuff like sports,” and Warren in agreement added “music and drawing” to the list. Sammy found that the situation was directly related to effort. He explained, maybe “they didn’t work as hard as others, they didn’t read as much as others, [or] they didn’t achieve as much as others did.” General education teachers were also mentioned as contributors to the underrepresentation problem. As Jeff stated, “My teacher sometimes says that there are some kids that need to be in [gifted] that aren’t, but then there are some kids that are in [gifted] that aren’t suppose to be in [gifted] because they don’t do their work.”
Thirdly, others may not want to see Black males enter or achieve in gifted programming. David explained, “There aren’t a lot of Black boys like me. I try to be committed and determined, and try to get things done.” He went on to explain that most Black men are in jail, and because he had school experiences at both predominately White and Black schools, he felt that some Black students are not “getting the education [he] believe[s] they should be.” Darius felt that because “most of the rappers are Black, [and] they cuss and stuff like that,” some may “think most Black people are ghetto.” David also explained, “There are some White people who still think Black people are a ‘lil crazy.”

To assist with the underrepresentation dilemma, the participants felt Black boys should be taught well, encouraged to work hard and behave, and allowed to mix the learning with the fun. Social interactions should be used to produce alliances, and respect is a nonnegotiable. As Joshua explained it, “You have to earn it to be in the gifted program, so if [they] do like better in school, [they] might become good.”

In the search for talented Black males in the state of Georgia, the multiple criteria process for gifted identification is a helpful step to address the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. However, all stakeholders must be clear on the characteristics of gifted children. Although gifted children possess many talents, perfection in not one of them. Giftedness does not disappear due to living in poverty, behavior issues, lack of a quality education, lack of support, teacher bias related to race, or other exceptionalities (Ford, 1998; Fyre & Vogt, 2010; Hargrove, 2011; Morris, 2001; Stormont, Stebbins, & Holliday, 2001).
Question 2: How do gifted Black elementary students describe their family involvement and peer interactions?

Families were the first stop for support and motivation. Empowering, educating, and embracing them will directly affect the gifted Black child. However, community and school members must always be willing and able to offer support if families fall short. Although many researchers have documented the tendencies of Black males to identify performance in school with the perception of acting White, and misbehavior with the perception of acting Black (Ford & Whiting, 2010; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008), that was not evident in the participants in this study. Some of the young males described behavior that seemed more concerned with their appearance not in terms of race, but more of a general self-image focused on being cool as they navigate their way through the social perils of elementary school. They appeared to have overcome the negative images society constantly presents about Black males, but many were hesitant to state they were intelligent, or felt the need to down play it. Additionally, many participants seemed to embrace the stereotype that Black boys are great athletes. The numbers steeply declined when looking for demonstrations of great debaters, mathematicians, scientists, or inventors. The schools were quick to provide opportunities for athletic competition, but opportunities for academic extracurricular activities were limited or nonexistent.

The social component of the participants’ lives significantly affected them in positive and adverse ways. Encouragement from not only teachers but peers as well can help gifted Black males avoid “being caught between high achievement and social acceptance” (Lovett, 2011, p. 56). Some of the participants were able to create a support network amongst gifted and nongifted friends, while others struggled to find peace
outside of their gifted class sanctuary. For many of the students, they have yet to develop coping strategies that will help them remain resilient through all of the negative social circumstances (Burney & Beilke, 2008).

Some of the participants were unclear that everyone is not gifted, and that standing out from their friends to gain the benefits of advanced learning could be extremely beneficial to their futures. It appeared okay to form friendships with gifted and nongifted peers. The peers in some environments served as motivators and supporters of their highly intelligent classmates. For schools with more difficult peer interactions, district, school, and class level interventions can help support gifted Black males so safe havens exist beyond their gifted classrooms.

Question 3: What motivates gifted Black elementary students to succeed?

The boys were motivated to achieve in several ways. Motivation stemmed from themselves, as well as from families, teachers, and friends. Some students did not want to deal with negative consequences for failure, while others were concerned with ensuring good futures. Role models also influenced the participants. Most of the boys saw their parents as models to emulate for a number of reasons including their work ethic, words of encouragement, or educational backgrounds. Some males looked to famous African Americans as role models such as Tyler Perry and T.I. All of the participants were able to share the ways in which they were motivated, and identify a successful person to serve as a role model for them.

Overall, the students were motivated, but their academic confidence and the perception of the quality of school life were contingent upon gifted placement, standardized test scores, grades, and peer interactions. Athletic activities appeared to be
enthusiastically anticipated and highlighted more than the academic extracurricular opportunities that would be beneficial to and enriching for high achieving Black males. Despite cognitive ability and advanced curriculum opportunities, the future goals of many of the Black males were heavily influenced by the desire for fame and fortune. While many of the participants were children of educators, most of the boys gravitated towards goals of being professional athletes. They did not seem interested in connecting their academic achievement to future possibilities that included a college degree (Lovett, 2011, p. 58). Garibaldi (1992) suggested that academic achievement should be given similar accolades to athletic accomplishments. Why not give lettermen jackets for academic extracurricular activities?

Mrs. Michaels and Tyler spoke about the stifled creativity and way of thinking due to an A, B, or C mode of teaching and answering. This is quite unfortunate not only for gifted access, but also for society at large. Creativity is not only a component of giftedness, but it is also essential for the innovation needed in the business sector (Jolly, 2009). Perhaps if creativity were valued beyond the gifted classroom, maybe young talented Black boys could creatively see futures that included more than a field, court, or rink.

Question 4: How do the district and the schools support gifted Black elementary students?

District response to underserved populations such as gifted Black males must be strategic and intentional. This urban school district made a number of efforts to support their minority populations. They have provided appropriate professional development for teachers, evaluated their gifted curriculum, and collected data on their initiatives. Their
efforts are right in line with research recommendations for effective gifted programs (Zirkel, 2005). Interestingly, the school level support was extremely lacking. Ford (2010) recommended that data on Black students be disaggregated by race to appropriately identify and address the “specific barriers, issues, and needs” (p. 34). However, this task proves impossible when school districts are not willing to publicize disaggregated gifted data. As Mrs. Michaels explained, the district did disaggregate the data on gifted and nominated students, but was not required to make it available to the public. How can all stakeholders be a part of the needs assessment if only the gatekeepers are privy to that information? Ford (2010) questioned if the representation of a group of students in a district that accounts for half of the student population, but only 10% of the gifted population, can be considered “acceptable, defensible, and equitable” (p. 34)? Perhaps this type of questioning is why this disaggregated data is not shared with the public.

The majority of the schools did not offer any specific approaches or initiatives to support gifted Black males beyond the regular expectations of a traditional public education. Some schools offered extracurricular academic activities, but most of the participants did not take advantage of those opportunities. Consequently, accomplishments outside of the school became as valuable and in some instances more valuable than what had been accomplished through school opportunities. Interestingly, the most supported and available opportunities for the gifted learners within and outside of school were athletic events.

**Significance of the Study**

This research study shared the experiences of a marginalized group from the perspectives of the youngest members. The findings show the participants held traditional
beliefs about giftedness, but most were not aware of why they were placed in gifted. Friendships were formed with gifted and nongifted peers, but some students also worried at an early age about standing out, bragging, or acting as if they were more intelligent than their peers. The findings indicate the need for all stakeholders, even members of the group, to recognize and celebrate all demonstrations of giftedness. The findings also present the need to support and encourage gifted Black males beyond their athleticism.

Furthermore, the disparity between economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools in terms of the gifted population compared to the EIP population, and the problems with social interactions at schools with large populations of students living in poverty were also noticed. White privilege was also apparent not only in the numbers of students placed in gifted, but even in the school culture and expectations. Ultimately, even the nongifted peers were presented with opportunities for enjoyable classes, and were expected to be scholars. Through the stories of nineteen gifted Black males, attitudes about the rewards and challenges of gifted education were revealed. The experiences related to inequities in peer interactions, support systems, and the quality of the general education were also presented. Ultimately, this study highlights the need for educators, parents, and community members to be committed to celebrating, supporting, protecting, and encouraging all underserved groups, including gifted Black males.

**Implications for Gifted Education of Black Males**

Black males need awareness, encouragement, and assistance to improve their presence in gifted programming. As Lovett (2011) explained, “increasing the identification and placement of underrepresented minorities in gifted and talented programming does not automatically create equitable access, participation,
achievement for diverse gifted students (p. 56). This was evident in several of the participants’ stories. From lack of home support for homework and projects, to a desire to participate and value gifted placement, several Gifted Black boys had already left the gifted program prior to the start of this research study. However, as Romanoff and Algozzine (2009) found, minority children appropriately placed in gifted classes will meet the higher expectations, and outperform their peers left in general education. However, the support and encouragement must be supplied. While speakers were used to provide professional development to gifted teachers, there was no attempt on the part of the district or the schools to utilize speakers or mentors to “highlight the scholarship and contributions of diverse groups of people” (Lovett, 2011, p. 57). Additionally, early identification has been recognized as a necessity to ensure children living in poverty due to the families’ lack of ability to provide enrichment activities outside of the regular school experiences (Burnery & Beilke, 2008; Ford, 2010; Moon & Brighton, 2008). Therefore, early learning programs must be added to the dialogue of how to appropriately identify and challenge high achievers from low-income families.

**Reflections and Limitations**

This research study examined the lived experiences of a group of gifted Black elementary aged males. The participants were found to value the gifted placement, and all appeared to rise to the increased demands. Interestingly, some had trouble identifying their accomplishments in school. Celebrations for academic achievement must be incorporated into the school environment to inspire others, and to help the gifted Black males identify their own amazingness. The limiting visions of future possibilities, and the social dynamics at some sites were especially surprising. Additionally, the lack of the
boys’ participation in academic extracurricular activities was also unexpected. Educators must encourage the males to try out for the Science Olympiad Team just as enthusiastically as they approach the boys for the school’s basketball team. Overall, the boys’ stories gave informative data about the best and the worst gifted Black males can experience in an inner city public school.

I was especially impressed when the gifted coordinator explained the district’s initiative to ensure the gifted curriculum included culturally responsive instruction. This culturally responsive instruction would consider each student’s “development, needs, interest, culture, characteristics, and learning styles” within the “curriculum, instruction, learning environment, assessment, and philosophy” (Ford, 2010, p. 51). However, Tyler’s gifted teacher explained in her comments that he was an underachiever, a follower, and performed more productively when he worked independently. Based on my observations, Tyler, who was placed at another school, appeared to be a highly interpersonal learner with an extremely caring heart. After this observation, I wondered how the gifted teachers were truly embracing the culturally responsive pedagogy, especially at the predominately White schools.

This study dealt largely with interactions and experiences of gifted Black males. The findings of this study were limited by time, and opportunities for observation. More classroom observations with gifted and nongifted peers would develop a better understanding of the social interactions in different school environments. The data collection occurred closer to the end of the school year. If data collection were to occur at the beginning or middle of the school year, perhaps the school experiences would not have been as consumed by concerns about high stakes testing, and end of year
excitement. Finally, to explore deeper into the support systems of the gifted Black males, the perspectives of the parents could be included.

**Future Research**

Although this research study addressed the perceptions of young gifted Black males in regards to experiences, interactions, and placement in gifted education, additional research is needed. The talent development program was implemented with the expectation it would expose promising students to gifted curriculum in an effort to assist them with placement. Research on the perspectives of the talent development students could yield interesting information on their self-efficacy and motivation. They are placed in classrooms with gifted labeled students, but are generally identified as talent development. Does this separation in identification affect these visitors to gifted programming, or are they inspired to rise to the occasion? How are these students functioning in that gifted classroom? Gifted students who are living in poverty and have been identified in the primary grades can be followed through middle and high school living to offer longitudinal data on how they overcome barriers, and manage to succeed. As Latz and Adams (2011) explained, “The twice oppressed child may struggle with both poverty and giftedness” (p. 773). We must continue to identify the most effective ways to develop these students of promise.

All of the students enjoyed participating in the gifted program. Beyond the lack of a support system, more research is needed to determine ways to bridge between that eagerness found in the early years of schooling, with the underachievement or lack of desire to continue participation in gifted programming during middle and high school. Finally, more research would be beneficial in examining the early learning experiences of
gifted Black males who were placed during their primary years. This information may shed light on any connections between those early learning experiences, and early identification and placement in gifted education. Any and all data on how daycares, schools, and families can effectively collaborate to enrich the lives of young high achievers, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, would be beneficial for the students, schools, and communities.

**Conclusion**

The voices of Gifted Black males need to be heard. They have earned their place in gifted education, but must still contend with many issues on their educational journeys. Throughout this research study, the boys shared how they view giftedness, and how their school and life interactions shaped their experiences. White privilege was extremely evident when comparing the gifted population to the EIP remediation population. At the predominately White school site, the gifted population was four times greater than the EIP population. In contrast, the predominately Black school sites all had EIP populations that were two times to ten times greater than their gifted population. At the school site where 100% of the school population qualified for the free and reduced lunch program, almost half of the students were placed in EIP program.

Additionally, the students at the predominately Black school viewed gifted education classes as their opportunity to experience quality education, while the students at the predominately White school viewed all of their classes as excellent. The students were expected to behave and succeed whether they had a gifted and talented label or not. Educators need to be mindful of the possibility of stereotype threat as high achieving Black males fail to perform on the gifted screeners. Although not every child will be
gifted, we must ensure the students are not removing themselves from the possibility of gifted placement. This is especially true for talented Black males living in difficult urban environments.

Noguera (2003) stated:

To the degree that we accept the idea that human beings have the capacity to resist submission to cultural patterns, demographic trends, environmental pressures and constraints, bringing greater clarity to the actions that can be taken by schools and community organizations to support the academic achievement of African American males could be the key to changing academic outcomes and altering the direction of negative trends for this segment of the population. (p. 433)

To extend this further, schools and communities must support gifted Black males to ensure they are given every opportunity to live up to their fullest potential. If their schools offer socially harmful environments, we must incorporate effective strategies to empower students and families to improve the culture and climate of the school. If we continue to fail in that manner, public schools will continue to lose our best and brightest students as they flee to charter and private schools. All stakeholders must listen to these voices of our young gifted Black males as they cry out for us to nurture them, protect them, and value them in ways that utilize all of their gifts and talents regardless of their racial or economic backgrounds. We must let them hear us proclaim they are smart, unique, special, accomplished, extraordinary, and powerful in their own right. They are gifted, and they can change the world.
References


district-level efforts to increase the identification of underrepresented learners. 


Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What’s race got to do with it? Critical race theory’s conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 7-22.


doi:10.1037/0003066X.60.3.271


doi:10.1080/00098651003653030


(http://reducingstereotypethreat.org).


people determine when they will be negatively stereotyped. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*(2), 349-362.


Appendix A

Parental Consent Form

**Title of Research Study:** Perceptions of Gifted Education and the Black Male Child

**Researcher's Contact Information:** Tiffany C. Proctor (cell) 404-423-4122 (email) tproctor10@yahoo.com

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Tiffany C. Proctor of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions if you do not understand.

**Description of Project**

The purpose of the study is to investigate how twelve gifted Black males perceive their placement in gifted education, family involvement, and peer relationships. This study will seek to understand what perceptions may exist based on personal experiences, expectations, and attitudes. These student perceptions can influence self-efficacy, motivation, and achievement. They may also decrease the need to affirm negative stereotypes, and increase Black males' desires to strive to appear intelligent, value participation in gifted programs, and foster a sense of belonging in advanced classes.

The study aims to increase awareness of the experiences of Black males in gifted programming. By sharing their unique perspectives, these Black males may inspire other Black male students and elementary teachers to address the untapped potential in this underrepresented population. If identification and placement are increased, more Black males may be given the opportunity to work to their fullest capabilities, thereby assisting in the closing of the achievement gap.

**Explanation of Procedures**

Students will meet with the researcher to participate in the one-on-one interview, and receive their personalized “My Story” journals. The students will write in the journals weekly to respond to journal prompts provided by the researcher. The students will also be allowed to complete ‘free writes’ in the journals. The researcher will check in with participants weekly to allow them to share their stories from the personal journals.

**Time Required**

Students will participate in a 20-minute interview, and one gifted lesson observed by the
researcher. Students will also respond to two journal prompts weekly (10 minutes) for two months. The journal prompts are as follows:
1. Describe the most rewarding events that occurred during this week.
2. Describe any challenging situations that occurred this week.

When the researcher analyzes this data, the perceptions of these students' experiences in gifted education will be shared.

**Risks or Discomforts**
There are no known risks or anticipated discomforts in this study.

**Benefits**
This research study will allow participants an opportunity to do self-reflection and evaluation of gifted programming and the Black male population. Through their lens, we can help build understanding of what some gifted Black males may encounter as they strive to succeed personally, intellectually, and socially. This knowledge can be used to begin dialogue on how these self-perceptions may contribute to the presence and absence of Black males in gifted programs. Through this investigation, new information can be added to the existing body of knowledge from the unique perspectives of members of a highly underrepresented subgroup in gifted programming.

**Confidentiality**
The results of this participation will be anonymous. Pseudonyms and general demographic information on schools will be used to ensure confidentiality.

**Inclusion Criteria for Participation**
The students will be selected for participation based on gifted identification and location. Black males placed in the gifted program will be selected based on current grade (3rd-5th), school assignment, and interest.

**Consent to Participate**
I give my consent for my child, ___________________________________________________________, to participate in the research project described above. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I also understand that my child may withdraw his/her assent at any time without penalty.

__________________________________________
Signature of Parent or Authorized Representative, Date

__________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date
PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Address questions or problems regarding these activities to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, #0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.
Appendix B

Student Assent Form

**Study Title:** Perceptions of Gifted Education and the Black Male Child

**Researcher:**
Tiffany C. Proctor
Email: tproctor10@yahoo.com  Cell: 404-423-4122

My name is Tiffany Proctor. I am from Kennesaw State University.

- I am inviting you to be in a research study about the experiences of young Black males in gifted education.

- Your parent knows we are going to ask you to be in this research study, but you get to make the final choice. It is up to you. If you decide to be in the study, I will ask you to talk with me about 20 minutes to answer some questions about school. If you give me permission, I will record our conversation to help me remember everything you say. I will also ask you to write in a journal made just for you. I will give you two prompts to answer about your school life that week, and you will get to write or draw in it during other times that you feel like you just want to share what is happening or how your are feeling. You do not have to write a lot, and it will probably only take you five or ten minutes to tell me about your experiences. By sharing your story, I hope you will inspire other boys and teachers to value the intelligence found in Black boys.

- If anything in the study worries you or makes you uncomfortable, let me know and you can stop. There are no right or wrong answers to any of my questions. You don’t have to answer any question you don’t want to answer or do anything you don’t want to do.

- Everything you say and do will be private. I won’t tell your parents or anyone else what you say or do while you are taking part in the study. When I tell other people about what we learned in the study, I won’t tell them your name or the name of anyone else who took part in the research study.

- You don’t have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say no now or you can change your mind later. No one will be upset if you change your mind.
• You can ask me questions at anytime and you can talk to your parent any time you want. I will give you a copy of this form that you can keep. Here is the name and phone number of someone you can talk to if you have questions about the study:

Name: Tiffany Proctor    Phone number: 404-423-4122

• Do you have any questions now that I can answer for you?

IF YOU WANT TO BE IN THE STUDY, SIGN OR PRINT YOUR NAME ON THE LINE BELOW:

• Put an X on this line if it is okay for us to record you. __________

____________________________________  __________________
Child name and signature    Date

Check which of the following applies:

☐ Child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

☐ Child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_______________________________________________
Name of parent who gave consent for child to participate

_______________________________________________
Signature of person obtaining assent
Appendix C

Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your school.

2. How long have you attended this school?

3. What are things you really like about it? What are things that you dislike about it?

4. Tell me about yourself. What makes you special? What have you achieved? How would you describe your conduct? What are you really good at? What do you really struggle with?

5. What does it mean to be gifted?

6. How long have you participated in the gifted program? Who referred you for the program? How do you like being in the gifted program?

7. What do you think is the best reason to be in the gifted program?

8. What is the worst or hardest part about being in gifted?

9. Why do you think you were placed in the gifted program?

10. What skills do you think you need to be successful in your gifted class?

11. Tell me about when you first started to excel in school.

12. Who are your models for how to be successful in school? Who are your models for how to be successful in life?

13. What motivates you to do well in school?

14. Tell me about your family. How do they get involved to help you be successful?
15. Tell me about the other students who also participate in the gifted program with you.

16. Tell me about your friends. How do they feel about you being in the gifted program? Would you nominate any of your friends for the gifted program? Why or why not?

17. Research says Black boys are not well represented in gifted education. Why do you think more Black boys may not be placed in the gifted program? How could we fix that problem so that more smart Black boys like you are placed in the gifted program?

18. What do you want to do or be when you grow up? What do you think you need to do to accomplish that goal? How do you think school can help you accomplish your goals?

Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to share?

* Thank the participant for his participation.
Appendix D

Gifted Coordinator Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in gifted education? Coordinator?

2. How would you describe the gifted population in this district?

3. How would you describe the family involvement of the gifted students in this district?

4. How would you describe the state of Black males in gifted education in general? In this district?

5. Have you observed any practices or had any experiences that might explain or relate to the underrepresentation of Black males in gifted education – from your perspective as a coordinator?

6. What is working well in this district in terms of supporting gifted Black males?

7. How might things be improved?
Appendix E

Journal Response Prompts

_Students will respond in journals for a two-month time period._

Students will respond to the following prompts.

- Describe the most rewarding events that occurred during this week.
- Describe any challenging situations that occurred this week.
Appendix F

Dates of Site Visits

*All Names are Pseudonyms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Dates Visited</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>River Brook Elem.</td>
<td>Elijah, Jayden</td>
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<td>Khalil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richmond Elem.</td>
<td>David, Tyler, Jeff, Sammy, Joshua</td>
<td>4/1/14</td>
</tr>
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Appendix G

Code List

Accomplishments
Behavior in class
Behavior in general
Being heard
Birth of academic excellence
Black male underrepresentation in gifted
Caring heart
Classmates
Classroom environment
District reaches out to parents
District reaches out to underserved populations
Enrichment at home
Family involvement
Feelings about gifted education
Friends
Future goals
Future schooling
Gifted life and perks
Gifted peers
Gifted population in district
Giftedness defined
History at school
History in gifted education
How to succeed in gifted education
Interaction with classmates
Interaction with teacher
Learning in gifted
Motivation for success
My school, my feelings
Role models for life
Role models for school
School life – activities
School life – social pains
School staff makes a difference
Strengths
Support system
Unique and special me
Weaknesses
Work Habits