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Overcoming the Odds: The Success Story of an African American Gifted Male Student

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OVERCOMING THE ODDS:
THE SUCCESS STORY OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN GIFTED MALE STUDENT

by

JHONDRA ANDERSON BARNES

(Under the Direction of Meca Williams-Johnson)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify how and why some African American students included in gifted programs maintain academic and social success. Data from semi-structured interview responses, behavioral checklists, and personality traits rating scales were coded and themed as a means to tell Elijah's story. Currently a 20 year old African American college student, Elijah was initially overlooked by his elementary school teachers for a potential gifted placement and subsequently referred himself. Participants of this study include Elijah and eleven of his former teachers, administrators, coaches, and mentors. Emerging themes from the research as sources of qualities to use in identifying African American students for gifted referrals included social skills, self concept/internal motivation, work ethics, and academic proficiencies. Elijah's strongest area of observed behaviors that may be indicative of potential success in gifted classes was social skills followed by self concept/internal motivation. Academic proficiency was the area least noted as having a strong correlation to Elijah's success in gifted programs. The need for a prevailing support system was also acknowledged through the findings from this research. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Cognitive Theory were used as the theoretical framework for this research. This research positions Elijah's story within a larger, structural context that acknowledges the interaction of internal and external factors that propel behaviors and actions. The complexity deepens as the research also addresses the systematic institutional policies, procedures and practices that covertly impede the recruitment and retention of African American students and gifted classrooms. The results of the study provide insight into a multi-faceted approach to identifying African American students for potential referrals to gifted programming and creating communities of accelerated opportunities.

INDEX WORDS: African American gifted male students, Identification of African American gifted students, Retention of African American gifted students, Critical race theory, Social cognitive theory, Behavior traits of African American gifted students

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AMERICAN GIFTED MALE STUDENT

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DEDICATION

To Corenza and Jhaycee, my inspiration and my pride. Thanks for traveling this journey with me. I appreciate the patience and the love you have shown me as I worked on this phase of my life. To my sister, Jacyndee, thanks for encouraging me to "think outside the box" and for challenging me to always complete what I start. To my parents, James and Cynthia Anderson, and my parents-in-law, Jimmy and Mary Barnes, thanks for your prayers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	9
LIST OF FIGURES	10
CHAPTER ONE	11
Introduction.....	11
Background to the Study.....	11
Nature of the Problem.....	14
Purpose of the Study	21
Research Methodology	23
Research Theory	24
CHAPTER TWO	28
Introduction.....	28
Characteristics of Gifted Learners	30
Underrepresentation in Gifted.....	33
Inherent Differences.....	35
Identification Procedures	37
Retention in Gifted Placement	49
Motivation and Social Relevance	50
Instructional Methodologies	52
Support Systems.....	55

Conclusion	57
CHAPTER THREE	58
Theoretical Framework	58
Methodology and Research Design	67
Participants	68
Design	71
Summary	81
CHAPTER FOUR.....	82
Results and Data Analysis	82
Elijah’s Story – Academic Achievement.....	83
Testing Requirements	83
Struggles in Middle Grades	84
Elijah’s Self Assessment/Self Concept.....	87
Sense of Belonging/Social Skills.....	89
Perception of the Teachers (or Support)	90
Participants’ Responses	95
Social Skills	95
Work Ethics	97
Academic Proficiency	98
Self Concept/ Internal Motivation	100
Support Systems.....	101

Identification of Gifted Students.....	103
Behavioral Traits Rating Scale	109
Personality Traits Ratings	116
Summary	118
CHAPTER FIVE	122
Overview of the Study	123
Responses to Research Questions.....	126
Personal Challenges.....	132
Discussion	132
Implications for Current Educational Practices	133
Implications for Future Research.....	138
Conclusion	139
REFERENCES	142
APPENDICES	
A “STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS”	150
B “STUDENT SELF ASSESSMENT”	152
C “TEACHER/COACH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS”	155
D “DESCRIPTIVE QUALITIES”	157
E “ENROLLMENT IN GIFTED PROGRAM BY SCHOOL AND ETHNIC GROUP”	160

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Pseudonyms of Participants.....	70
Table 2: Correlation of Items on Behavioral Traits Rating Scale And Categories/Themes.....	78
Table 3: Behavioral Traits Rating Scale - Subject.....	93
Table 4: Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – All Participants.....	110
Table 5: Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – Elementary.....	113
Table 6: Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – Middle.....	114
Table 7: Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – High School.....	115
Table 8: Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – Coaches/Mentors.....	116
Table 9: Descriptors Selected by Subject and Participants.....	117

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Georgia’s Eligibility Requirements.....	42
Figure 2: Academic Intervention Pyramid.....	44
Figure 3: Georgia’s Student Achievement Pyramid of Intervention	45
Figure 4: Sample Student Talent Search Flowchart	47
Figure 5: Percentage of Gifted Education Growth by Race and Ethnicity	49
Figure 6: Longitudinal Data of Enrollment in Gifted Programming By Ethnicity	73
Figure 7: Hierarchy for Potential Gifted Referrals	135

Overcoming the Odds: The Success Story of an African American Gifted Male Student

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) legislative reform movement, more and more focus has been placed on the performance of subgroups- designated populations of students who share a common list of characteristics. Performance data are routinely reported on various ethnic groupings of students—Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asian American, Indian. Additionally, data reporting includes descriptive qualities such as students with disabilities (SWD) and socioeconomic status (SES). Unfortunately, Black students tend to rank in the lower levels of performance in comparison with other ethnic subgroups as well as when examining the descriptive qualities of the academically and/or economically disadvantaged.

Background to the Study

Gifted and talented students are those learners who, because of their outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance and who require differentiated educational programs/services beyond those afforded to traditional students in a regular educational program (Purdy, 1999; Marland, 1972). The methodology for identifying and servicing gifted and talented students has altered overtime. However, according to Purdy (1999), deciding how to educate gifted students is “both a moral and educational question” (p. 314). Consequently, it is both morally and educationally correct to ensure that those

students who have exhibited gifted characteristics are afforded the best quality educational experiences, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Issues germane to racial disproportionality and disparity in gifted education have been the topic of much recent research (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008). The foci of both qualitative and quantitative research on this topic has centered on the present dilemma of underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, particularly African American students, in gifted classes at all school levels and especially in advanced placement classes at the high school level. Even though to be young, gifted, and Black seems to be a rare occurrence, there are success stories that exist.

For decades, researchers have sought to explain the causes of the black-white achievement gap (Begley, 2009; Hammond, Hoover, & McPhail, 2005; Milner & Ford, 2007). Thompson (2004) has divided these causes into two categories--research that blames the victim and research that blames the school. From the standpoint of blaming the victim, Thompson cited research involving a group of 175 pre-service educators where 34% said they “believed African American parents and guardians were mainly responsible for African American students’ underachievement” (p. 33).

The second category of causes of the black-white achievement gap purported that teacher expectations and attitudes and instructional strategies often support an educational system of inequity. Findings from Thompson’s same research group revealed 10 percent of the participants indicated they believed most African American students did not want to succeed academically and often used such words as lazy,

unmotivated, and apathetic when describing African American students. Oftentimes, lowered expectations on the part of the teachers resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy. “When administrators and teachers set low standards, they fail to equip students with the skills and knowledge that they will need to compete for high-paying jobs and admission to four-year colleges and universities (Thompson, 2004, p. 29).

All too often, educators, because of misconceived notions and/or low expectations, allow ethnicity to be used as an excuse for failure or low performance. Rather than look at the research on successful approaches for teaching African American students or completing case studies or longitudinal research on African American students who succeed even under adverse situations, many educators blame the victim and proffer pathologic reasons for poor achievement and then implement ineffective remedies as a cure for a misdiagnosed illness (Hammond, et.al, 2005). Consequently, the learning gap between African American and white students, especially in gifted programming, is expanding as opposed to decreasing.

However, Blacks have traditionally displayed a history of survival and excellence, even under the odds of economic, social, mental, and political disparities or depression (West, 2001). “The genius of our black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the threats of nihilism, to equip black families with cultural armor, to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaningless, and lovelessness” (West, 2001, p. 23). These buffers, according to West, fostered a sense of community among and throughout neighborhoods whose boundaries extended beyond streets and towns and included the Black race as a whole. These buffers embraced a spirit of service and shared the importance of education (West, 2001). Within the Black community of long ago,

these buffers produced such academically gifted scholars as George Washington Carver, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King, Jr. However, current trends in student academic performance tend to indicate that this vibrant blood line of intelligence among Blacks has dried up—that Black students are either not able or not willing to perform at high levels (King, Kozleski, & Lansdowne, 2009; Morris, 2002). According to West (2001), “Black people have always been in America’s wilderness in search of a promised land. Yet, many Black folk now reside in a jungle. . .” (p. 25). This may be especially true in education and even more so in gifted education where the jungle is made of entangled vines of low performance and academic failures. The combined qualities of being young, gifted, and Black seem to be a rarity in today’s educational arenas (Toldson, 2008; Lewis, 2003). However, there are success stories and these are the stories that need to be told.

Nature of the Problem

Elijah, according to his mother, always displayed a strong will and determination. She proudly spoke not only of his pleasant personality, but also his eagerness, even as a young boy, to think outside the box. Elijah enrolled in school and easily mastered all of the kindergarten assessment standards. His elementary teachers recorded notes about Elijah’s reading fluency and comprehension skills, his ability to perform math operations at a higher level than his grade level peers, and the depth of his thinking. School staff constantly selected him for special roles at school—performing lead speaking parts in the class plays, making announcements on the intercom, and serving as an office helper. However, no one ever acknowledged Elijah’s level of performance as a possible indicator

of giftedness. Initially, none of his teachers or school administrators ever completed the referral for Elijah's possible placement in gifted programming.

While enrolled as a third grade student, Elijah referred himself for gifted placement. In his words, "I figured I understood all the work and didn't need the teachers' help to complete my assignments". Elijah continued, "I wanted to do something more challenging".

After being placed in the gifted classes, Elijah continued to be successful in school, both academically and socially. While in high school, he successfully completed challenging coursework including courses such as AP English and Honors US History and Physics. Elijah was not only involved in extracurricular clubs such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Bogarsuns Service Club, but he also started on the high school football team. As a junior, Elijah was inducted into the Beta Club, earning this prestigious honor based on his grade point average. At the time of graduation, Elijah's GPA was 3.431 resulting in offerings of both academic and athletic scholarships from various colleges and universities. After graduation, he enrolled in a university in Alabama as a mechanical engineering major.

Elijah was selected for this study because, even though he fit the profile, he went against the grain. Elijah is an African American male, a subgroup that almost meets the definition of an "endangered species" (Gibbs, 2010) when it comes to representation in gifted programming. Elijah met all of the requirements for admission into Program Challenge, the school district's special offering for students who meet established state criteria for gifted services. Why did this placement come only as a result of a self

referral? Do teaching practices, perceptions, and promises overlook the advanced capabilities and performance of certain subgroups, specifically African Americans?

Research continuously portrays the plight of the African American male student (Gibbs, 2010; Ascher, 1991; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). Analyses of data on student achievement of African American students repeatedly portray a scenario of obvious achievement gaps in comparison to the academic performance of students in other subgroups. These data sources also tend to reveal a rapid increase in identification of Black students in programs for low performing students, especially special education. According to findings from the U.S. Department of Education's *Elementary and Secondary Civil Rights Survey* (2008), African American students make up approximately 40% of the students placed in special education, even though African American students comprise only 17% of the US public school students. On the opposite extreme, the appearance of Black students in gifted and/or advanced placement classes has decreased over the years. According to Ford and others (2008), African American students, especially culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) males remain poorly represented in gifted education and seldom enroll in advanced placement classes. In both programs, 2002 statistics reveal "underrepresentation at 50%--well beyond statistical chance and above Office of Civil Rights' (OCR) 20% discrepancy formula stipulation (Ford, et.al, 2008, p. 290). Recent data reporting systems indicate that only 3% of the students placed in gifted and talented programs are African American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

African American gifted males are often exposed to barriers that hinder successes in schools. Often viewed negatively by their teachers, African American males are

consistently associated with lowered expectations and negative behaviors. Media also often portrays African American students as excelling in sports but failing in academics. Due to the views, many African American males have difficulties adjusting socially and academically when they do not meet or display these stereotypical behaviors.

Parham and McDavis (1987) noted alarming factors concerning African American males revealing that this student group is behind their peers in academic achievement and the development of positive self concepts. Additionally, these researchers noted that African American males are suspended from school three times as often as their peers. Parham and McDavis' studies reported that African American males have lower rates of college eligibility and college attendance than others. These grave statistics paint a bleak future for African American male students, especially those that are gifted.

Much research has focused on the disproportionality of minority students in gifted programming. Much of this research has focused on identification and referral strategies (McBee, 2006; Nicely, Small, & Furman, 2001; Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995). However, as the achievement gap between African American and White students widens, research has broadened to look at other factors including inherent intelligence, social implications of peer groups and support entities, and instructional delivery models.

When educators consciously or unconsciously deny students the educational opportunities warranted by the presence of specific skills, talents, abilities, or gifts, then potential for negative consequences increase (Henfield, et.al, 2008; Harmon, 2002). In this case, students, particularly African American students, suffer. Ford and others

(2008), described the concept of deficit thinking, “negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) groups that result in discriminatory policies and behaviors or actions” (p. 292). This foundation of deficit thinking rests on an over reliance on IQ scores as the measure of giftedness, an inclusion of policies and practices that negatively discriminate based on culture, and insufficient support to enhance teachers’ knowledge about gifted education and diverse learners (Ford, et.al, 2008). A combination of these factors can be detrimental to the learner.

Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman (2002) wrote that one of the worst outcomes of deficit thinking is when African American students choose not to participate in gifted education as a result of internalization of the deficit thinking concept. The result is children “questioning their own abilities and sabotag[ing] their own achievement” (p. 56). Students begin to think they cannot do the work—living up to the lowered expectations of the adults. Psychological and emotional issues that also come into play include the notion of “acting white”. Oftentimes, “gifted African American students may underachieve deliberately, refuse to be assessed for gifted education services, and refuse placement in gifted programs” (Ford, et. al, 2002, p. 57).

The connection between social acceptance and school performance has also been documented in research as having a connection to student achievement, especially the high achievement of African American students. Harmon (2002) listed nine cultural styles of African American students that are probably learned in the home but manifested in the classroom through behaviors, learning styles, and achievement levels. These cultural styles include “spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, oral tradition, expressive individualism, affect, communalism, and social time perspective” (p. 70). Harmon

continued by proposing that “in predominantly White schools where African American students are from predominantly African American neighborhoods, the cultural assets of African American students coupled with the characteristics of gifted students create additional challenges for teachers to understand their needs” (p. 71).

Excellence and equity in educational placement also has economic consequences. The National Commission on Excellence in Education once reported “the twin goals of equity and high quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice. To do so would deny young people their chance to learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities. It would also lead to a generalized accommodation to mediocrity in our society on the one hand or the creation of an undemocratic elitism on the other” (President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, 1992, p.13). In acknowledging the critical need for educational reform, Ford and Harris (1993) indicated that America could not afford to continue to overlook African American students. “Gifted African-American students, in particular, require a challenging curriculum that immerses them in rigorous and ecologically or culturally valid learning experiences, and in a curriculum that provides opportunities for frequent success, granting them individualized instruction and positive reinforcement” (Ford & Harris, 1993, p. 207). Educators, politicians, religious leaders, and community activists must accept the responsibility of developing, implementing, and evaluating such a curriculum to ensure that African American children are not being left behind.

Other stories similar to Elijah’s have been reported in research. Ferguson and Mehta (2004) publicized the plight of an African American female as a result of racial

perceptions, tracking, and ability grouping as reported earlier in an ethnographic collection written by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994). The story below, as shared through a student's perspective, is disheartening, but real.

“Because of a clerical error, I ended up in a ‘basic’ English class during the first grading period of my sophomore year. . . I was excited about the opportunity to be in a class where African American students were the majority. In my previous English classes, the emphasis was on literature and composition. We read Dickens, Hardy, and Shakespeare. But in this class we were drilled in grammar and spelling. Each time we took a spelling test. Each week I got 100. In fact, I got an A on every assignment given. Nevertheless, on the first report card my grade was a C. When I questioned the teacher about it, she smiled and said. ‘Why Gloria, a C is the highest possible grade in this class!’ After a quick trip to my guidance counselor, . . . I was returned to my rightful place in the college preparatory English class. The basic English teacher told me she was sorry to see me go and wished me well. I left that class confused and hurt. Why hadn’t the teacher recognized that I had the ability to move out of it? And more importantly why didn’t my classmates know that no matter how hard they worked, their efforts would only be rewarded with mediocre grades?” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 60).

Even though Gloria's plight occurred in the 1960's, many African American students in the 21st century still fall prey to similar situations. Oftentimes, African American students are still overrepresented in lower level classes where instruction is not presented at any degree of fidelity or rigor (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). This raises questions not only about instructional delivery, but also about ensuring student placements match their proficiencies and their potential.

Where are all of the gifted African American students? Have the buffers that served as strength, a communal spirit, and hope for our foreparents disintegrated? Or, do the teaching and learning processes of the 21st century foster identification and teaching methodologies that do not support the expression of giftedness—either inherent or learned- by Black students? When the true skills and abilities of students are not supported and nurtured throughout schooling, the eventual result is the loss of a generation of learners who should be destined to help lead the societies of the future, but because of an involuntary (or voluntary) crippling educational experience, end up being deployed to a status of dependence on those societies.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this study was to identify how and why some African American students included in gifted programs maintain academic and social success. The study included a review of root causes for underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs, and then expanded the thought processes to explore possible solutions through an in depth examination of one student's success story. In other words, this research extended the scope and relevancy of research on African American learners to hopefully

identify and establish guidance and recommendations to eliminate barriers in place in school systems that prevent the recognition, recruitment, and retention of African American students in challenging coursework. Subsequently, these barriers may impede the overall display of academic achievement among minority students. Additionally, this research attempted to capture, from the perspective of the student, reasons why potentially high performing African American students chose to over perform or underperform, demonstrating their actual level or ability or, conversely, failing to live up to their true potential.

The following research questions led this study:

1. How does one high achieving African American male student describe his experiences in gifted education?
2. What environmental impediments potentially threaten achievement that is described by the high achieving African American male student, his teachers and coaches?
3. What internal and external conditions serve as support factors in the continuous success of African American students in academic programs for advanced learners?

This research attempted to make contributions to the body of literature in the field of gifted education for African American students. The results of this investigative inquiry will provide insight, from the student's perspective, regarding the challenges as well as the rewards of being identified and served as a gifted student. Additionally, this research will provide educational institutions with both descriptive qualities and instructional

methodologies to enhance identification practices and programmatic delivery in gifted education.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research integrating critical case study served as the research design for this prospectus. Through a series of interviews and questionnaires, data were collected on the traits and behaviors displayed by Elijah, a gifted African American male student; that may have precipitated and supported his success in gifted program during his K-12 educational experiences. Participants, in addition to Elijah during the data collection phase included both regular education and gifted education teachers, coaches, and advisors of school based extracurricular activities, community mentors, and school administrators. Interviews included a series of open ended semi-structured questions as well as a behavioral checklist where participants were asked to rate the participant on a series of behaviors and personality traits that may have supported Elijah's success in gifted program.

Quantitative data on ethnic enrollment in gifted programming in Elijah's school district was collected and shared as part of this study. These data were used to identify any historical trends in the percentage of African American students being served in gifted programming in the district. In particular, these data helped derive conclusions as to the impact of the Response to Intervention process in increasing the number of African American students being served.

This multifaceted collection served as a triangulation of data from multiple sources while stories, beliefs, perceptions and thoughts were captured based on the study's centered focus. As responses were collected and coded, categorized, and themed, triangulation with specific information from participant responses were objectively compared to better ensure internal validity.

Research Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Cognitive Theory served as the theoretical frameworks for this study. According to Henfield and others (2008), CRT “posits that race, as well as the meanings attached to race, is socially constructed and that researchers cannot ignore it as a powerful aspect of human social life” (p.435). Eliciting people to be more aware of color coded ideas, CRT also challenges people to look at the hidden color blindness in their minds as a step in the movement toward equality. In the educational arena, CRT helps to uncover perception and biases that may be so deeply rooted that these judgmental factors serve as impediments in educators addressing the moral and ethical responsibilities of providing a quality education to all students.

According to Parker and Storall (2004), CRT argues that race is central in the making of our world. “Race has played a fundamental role in (1) the making of a nation – empire that evolves into a system of conquest and enslavement; (2)the creation of capital; and (3)the shaping of culture and identity; especially in the creating of subordinate racialized groups” (p. 170). In gifted education, the classroom often becomes the complex for realizing the impact of CRT as social systems and mores establish a clear distinction between groups of students based on ethnicity. The

comparative numbers of representative groups on gifted and advanced placement classes validate the presence of racialized groups on schools.

Learning is a complex process that involves the context, the student, and the content (Burney, 2008; Vaughn, Feldhusen, & Asher, 1991). Context provides the basis for social interactions and extensions incorporating the humanistic components within the environment. For this reason, this research encompassed the social cognitive philosophy as a theoretical framework underpinning possible reasons for the identification and the success of some African American students in gifted classes as well as the retention of African American students once identified and placed in gifted programs.

According to Varlas (2011), race and identity influence how students experience school - form relationships with peers and educators to how they respond to curriculum and instruction” (p. 2). Varlas continued his research and cited educational road blocks that Black students experience often appear in areas such as:

- Relationships – African American students are less likely than their white peers to have caring adult relationships at school.
- Expectations – A mismatch exists between African American students’ expectations of their own success and teacher expectations
- Instruction – African American students tend to think teachers do not explain instruction so they fully understand
- Discipline – African American students feel teachers are not being fair and they are the targets of most disciplinary actions, even though teachers say they are fair.

By placing the student as the central focus of the instructional arena, social cognitive theory purports that student mastery of the content correlates strongly to the context of instructional delivery. This context incorporates critical attributes as relationships, self esteem and self efficacy, motivation, cultural issues and peer influences. Effective classroom teachers incorporate these constructs in planning and implementing practices that support both the academic and social growth of all students. Social cognitive theory is of particular importance in gifted education also because of its direct implications in planning teaching and learning experiences for students.

The implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) has served as a catalyst to gifted procedures that may enhance the identification procedures that support the placement of African American students in gifted programming. Following a tiered process, RTI seeks to ensure the academic needs of all students are met. In doing so, the RTI addresses the precepts of CRT and social cognitive theory by incorporating a team approach in identifying and planning to address individual student needs. The team utilizes a problem solving cycle that helps members understand the students' academic strengths and/or concerns and design strategies that specifically target student needs (Shores, 2009). Initially, the team collects data on student performances within the context of the regular classroom – often identifying how the students' performance is different from his/her peers. As data are carefully analyzed and discussed by the RTI team, interventions are identified and implemented as needed. These interventions may involve the student moving through various tiers and subsequently being enrolled in special programming such as gifted classrooms.

All too often, however, the RTI examines only student academic performance data such as standardized test scores, benchmark assessment results, and classroom grades. However, a more comprehensive approach for identification of gifted students may include overlaying the RTI process with a listing of identified behavioral constructs of African American students, specifically those students that have been successful in gifted programming. These behavioral constructs may serve as the impetus for critical conversations in identifying African American students for challenging curricular programs.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The United States Office of Education, in 1972, published a very comprehensive definition of “giftedness” in hopes of providing both guidance as well as clarification for identifying students for placement in gifted programming. The definition read:

Gifted and talented children are those, identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. High performance might be manifested in any or a combination of these areas (1) general intellectual ability, (2) specific academic aptitude, (3) creative or productive thinking, (4) leadership ability, (5) visual and performing arts, and (6) psychomotor ability (Marland, 1972, p. 10).

The definition encompassed not only the characteristics of the gifted, but also the process for identifying giftedness, the manifestation of special services for gifted learners, and the overarching purpose of education—to contribute to self and society. However, even with this all inclusive and comprehensive definition, statistics and data revealed numerous

potentially qualified students may not have always received equal access to gifted services.

Over twenty years later, in 1993, the U. S. Department of Education presented a more culturally inclusive definition of giftedness. This revised definition read:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capacity in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (U. S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 26)

The new, reconceptualized definition acknowledged in print format, that the quality of giftedness is not reserved to only the rich and the famous, the blonde and the blue eyed, nor just the inheritors of a specific genetic blueprint. In its revised definition, the Department of Education included comparative descriptors as well as a statement that giftedness transcends all races, creeds, colors, cultures, and socioeconomic levels. As in all legislative dictates, however, the implementation of the definition did not always mirror the wording. The historical saga of African Americans not receiving same or equal giftedness treatment seemed to prevail in research as well as in practice.

Characteristics of Gifted Learners

Research studies on the characteristics of gifted learners have revealed a number of common traits, especially in the area of cognitive skills and descriptors (Sheely & Silverman, 2000; Gottfried & Gottfried, 1996; Freeman, 1994). According to Davis and Rimm (2004), “gifted children differ from one another not only in size, shape, and color, but in cognitive and language abilities, interests, learning styles, motivation and energy levels, personalities, mental health and self concepts, habits and behavior, background experiences, and any other mental, physical, or experiential characteristics that one cares to look for” (p. 32). However, even with all of these apparent differences, research studies suggest a variety of characteristics that seem to be common to the group of students identified and labeled as gifted.

Terman’s (1925) landmark study of over 1528 gifted and talented students revealed that this student group overall was “not only more intelligent, they were better adjusted psychologically and socially, and were even physically healthier than the average person” (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 32). Terman (1925) found that the majority of the students in his case study group demonstrated superior performance in reading, language usage, mathematical reasoning, science, literature, and the arts.

From the standpoint of cognitive behaviors, Song and Porath (2005) revealed five common characteristics of gifted learners. These included: “unusual curiosity, unusual creativity, unusual intensity, unusual retentiveness, and unusual comprehension” (p. 237). Sub-categorical listings included under these major headings included such descriptors as highly efficient in planning and decision making, high ability to identify relationships,

and intense ability to reason or rationalize (Song & Porath, 2005). Winebrenner (2007) identified a short list of characteristics of gifted children. This listing included (p. 9):

1. Learns new material faster, and at an earlier age, than age peers
2. Remembers what has been learned forever, making review unnecessary
3. Is able to deal with concepts that are too complex and abstract for age peers
4. Has a passionate interest in one or more topics, and would spend all available time learning more about that topic if he or she could
5. Does not need to watch the teacher to hear what is being said; can operate on multiple brain channels simultaneously and process more than one task at a time

Additional common behaviors of gifted learners have been identified in the areas of motivation, social skills, personal adjustment, and self concepts. “One of the single most recurrent traits of productive gifted students and eminent adults is high motivation and persistence” (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 36). According to VanTassel-Baska (2006), children of high ability see themselves as competent and thereby have greater achievement motivation. Continuous experiences of success often breed more success and a higher level of motivation to work harder to succeed at higher levels.

Research on affective characteristics of gifted learners (social skills, personal adjustment, and self concept) has revealed mixed results often based on the IQ level of the student. Students with IQs in the 140-160 range, as noted by Hollingsworth (1942), tended to be more socially well adjusted meaning they tended to have a wide circle of friends and were involved in numerous activities, both curricular and extra-curricular.

However, students with IQ levels above 180, according to Hollingsworth, tended to be more loners because they were often seen as being different.

Kunkel, Chapa, Patterson, and Walling (1995) conducted a study that included 85 gifted seventh and ninth grade students who were attending a summer program in math, technology, business, and engineering. When presented the question “What is it like to be gifted?” positive survey responses included such descriptors as being talented and creative, getting good grades, and feeling happy and proud. However, the negative responses included characteristics such as being different, being embarrassed, and being an outcast.

Home environment and support systems served as the focus of research of Bloom and Sosniak (1981) when examining characteristics of giftedness among accomplished pianists, mathematicians, research neurologists, and sculptors. These researchers concluded that the home environment often served as the nurturer of the skills and talents demonstrated by the participants in the study. Initially, parents provided this stimulus for development, but eventually, in practically all cases, the support system expanded to include specific teachers or mentors in the field.

“Identifying characteristics of gifted students is important because it helps teachers and parents recognize and understand gifted children” (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 49). Gifted learners, like all other students, have their differences that make them individually unique. However, the research and literature have revealed noteworthy early behaviors that may serve beneficial in the education arena in terms of early identification.

Underrepresentation in Gifted

Issues germane to racial disproportionality and disparity in gifted education have been the topic of much recent research (Henfield, et.al, 2008; Ford, et.al , 2008; McBee, 2006; Whiting, 2006). The foci of both qualitative and quantitative research on this topic have centered on the persistent dilemma of underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, particularly African American students, in gifted classes at all school levels and specifically in advanced classes at the high school level.

African American students and other students of color are often absent in gifted education programs (Milner & Ford, 2007). Black and Hispanic students, according to Callahan (2005), are less than half as likely to be in gifted programs as White students. According to Milner and Ford (2007), “Black students, particularly males, are three times as likely as White males to be in a class for the educable mentally retarded, but only half as likely to be placed in a class for the gifted” (p. 167). Even though the landmark decision rendered by the Supreme Court in *Brown vs. The Board of Education, Topeka , Kansas* (1954) supported the quest for equity in school, the rays of this equity apparently still have not fully extended into gifted education. Ironically, the “identification and retention of African American students in gifted education programs in predominantly white schools declined during the implementation of desegregation” (Harmon, 2002, p. 69).

According to Kunjufu (2005), many African American male students often display behaviors or personality traits that indicate giftedness but are mistakenly

interpreted as behavioral issues that should be addressed in special education classrooms.

These characteristics include (Kunjufu, 2005, p. 4):

1. Keen power of observation
2. Sense of the significant
3. Willingness to examine the unusual
4. Questioning attitude
5. Intellectual curiosity
6. Inquisitive mind
7. Creativeness and inventiveness
8. High energy levels
9. Need for freedom of movement
10. Versatility
11. Diversity of interests and abilities
12. Varied hobbies

The display of any combination of these otherwise gifted and talented characteristics often results in African American males being reported as disrespectful of authority, arrogant, unruly, uncontrollable, or hyperactive.

“Despite advancement in education reform efforts, to this day, African American students continue to experience inequities within the educational system” (Elhoweis, Mutua, Alisheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 25). Major court cases such as *Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* (1954) and legislative reforms such as *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* have sought to eradicate these inequities. However, as the public lens began to shed light on segregated facilities, inept resources, and oftentimes lowered

learning expectations, limited efforts were initially extended to ensure minority students who possessed high levels of intelligence were properly identified and served in educational institutions across the country. Gifted education has become the latest recipient of criticism regarding addressing the needs of all students, as in the area of gifted education, African American students are often the subgroup that is “left behind”. According to Ford and others(2008), African American students, especially culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) males remain poorly represented in gifted education and seldom enroll in advanced placement classes. In both programs, 2002 statistics revealed “underrepresentation at 50%--well beyond statistical chance and above Office of Civil Rights’ 20% discrepancy formula stipulation (Ford, et.al, 2008, p. 290). To address these issues, research has focused on topics related to possible inherent differences in mental ability, the processes and procedures for identifying and retaining African American students in gifted programs, motivation and social relevance, teaching methodologies, and cultural and psychological implications.

Inherent Differences

Heredity took the forefront in much early literature as researchers attempted to legitimize minimal numbers of African Americans in educational tracks for the gifted and talented. As early as 1865, Sir Francis Galton began printing articles on the topic of hereditary genius basing his conclusions on observations and inquiries that suggested outstanding academic abilities ran in families (Kirk & Gallagher, 1983). More recent proponents of such a debate include Arthur Jensen, a University of California at Berkeley professor who authored an article which stated “IQ scores that tended to show that the gap of 15 points between the blacks and white tested did not result from cultural or

environmental factors, but was of genetic origin” (*National Review*, 1979, p. 1279).

According to Jamieson (1990), Jensen’s research theorized that genetic factors were the cause of 80% of the differences in intelligence among humans. This philosophical idea and body of research sought to perpetuate the belief that the intelligence levels of blacks and whites would never be equated simply because of inherent variables. An ongoing race-IQ debate was initiated claiming that blacks, on the average, were genetically inferior to whites (Holloway, 1999).

Contradictory and compelling research emerged to denounce the Jensen theory. James Flynn, currently a professor at the University of New Zealand, posed a controversial claim concerning the “preponderant influence of the environment over genetic inheritance in determining intelligence” (Restak, 2007, p. 133). Flynn’s research, best known as the Flynn effect, concluded that “the direct effect of genes on IQ accounts for only 36 percent of IQ variance, with 64 percent resulting from the indirect effect of genes plus environmental differences uncorrelated with genes” (Restak, 2007, p. 134). In other words, heredity did have an impact on intelligence; however, the strongest, most prevalent determinant of intelligence was the environment. A rich environment can compensate and enhance modest intellectual capabilities especially when combined with such values as ambition and effort. According to Begley (2009), the Flynn effect concluded that increased IQs over time as noted in collected data “reflects generational improvements in abstract problem solving, a product of a more complex, mentally stimulating modern world” (p. 53). The main essence of the Flynn effect in relationship to ethnicity is that underrepresentation of African Americans in accelerated academic programs is not due to any form of genetic inferiority. The result, according to Kirk and

Gallagher (1983) is “an interesting mix of genetic and environmental influences that combine in some not-well-understood way to yield the final product identified in our educational programs as giftedness. It is, as has been said, native ability married to opportunity that represents the giftedness” (p. 86). After reviewing the work of Flynn as well as outstanding works such as Herrnstein and Murray’s 1994 text entitled *The Bell Curve*, Gallagher (2008) concluded that the assumption that IQ is genetically based is definitely flawed.

Identification Procedures

To a large extent, African American student underrepresentation may be a result of both gifted recruitment and retention barriers (Ford et.al, 2008). The initial entry point for the pathway to placement in the gifted program is the referral process, which according to McBee (2006) is an “obvious potential source of unfairness in the entrance process” (p. 103). This researcher stated that “even if teachers are effective at nominating students from middle-class majority-culture background, as some more contemporary research suggests, a significant question remains regarding their ability to detect students with high academic potential who come from other backgrounds, especially those backgrounds that are underrepresented in programs for gifted students” (McBee, 2006, p. 104). Referral, or nomination, is the phase of the placement process when students are designated as having gifted potential and most often is done by the teacher. The nomination process, however, can include automatic referrals based on students scoring at a designated high percentile on standardized tests, parent referrals, self (student) referrals, or other referrals that come from sources other than the aforementioned.

McBee's (2006) research sought to determine how the various sources of referrals for gifted programming compared in terms of racial equity. After examining a dataset that consisted of over 700,000 records of Georgia students enrolled in grades kindergarten through five during the 2004 school year, McBee found that "the quality of teacher nominations for Black students was especially poor in terms of the phi coefficient and accuracy" (p. 107). McBee (2006) even concluded that students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds were under nominated.

Even though, with culturally and linguistically diverse students, teacher nomination is prime concern for researchers, there exists only a limited number of empirical studies that focus on student ethnicity and teacher referral and placement decisions for gifted placement. By utilizing a series of vignettes, Elhoweris, et al., 2005, sought to investigate the effect of student's ethnicity on teachers' referral and recommendation for placement in a gifted and talented program. The methodology in the study included a Scheffe analysis, which revealed that "teachers were found to refer students of unspecified ethnicity at a slightly higher rate than African American students" (p. 29). In conclusion, Elhoweris and others (2005) boldly stated "stereotypical notions on the part of teachers about what an African American student is likely to be capable of may be effectively barring some African American gifted youngsters from participating in gifted and talented programs (p. 29).

Problems with identifying students for gifted placement go beyond the referral or nomination phase and often extend to the evaluation and data interpretation components of the process. According to Frasier and others (1995), the primary reason for underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programming is the absence

of adequate assessment procedures and programming efforts. VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) stated that “it is logical that the underrepresentation in gifted programs may be attributed to traditional methods of identification that do not effectively capture the knowledge level or talents of minority or rural students, nor recognize environments or social structures that encourage value systems different from middle-class structures”(p. 254).

Definitions of giftedness traditionally rely heavily on IQ scores which tend to also be an area of much confusion and debate. These debates entail issues such as what IQ tests actually measure, whether racial differences and biases exist within the actual tests, fairness in the analysis of results of testing, and even political and social implications of IQs (Holloway, 1999).

Conclusions drawn from the Flynn study have an intense connection to the argument regarding the use of standardized testing in the identification of students for programs based on IQ scores. In essence, the Flynn effect “described a systematic and considerable rise in intelligence test scores in more than 20 countries, including the United States” (Resing & Tunteler, 2007, p. 192). This rise over time is due mainly in part to continuous environmental influences and exposure. Consequently, IQ scores from the same test of intelligence would increase with each generation tested by virtue of environmental exposure as opposed to higher academic ability.

According to Russell (2007), even though intelligence gradually increases over time, “as an environment becomes optimal, a plateau occurs when general growth becomes largely determined by genetics” (p. 262). Russell predicted that the plateau in

the Flynn Effect would have been reached in 2004. To address the impact of the Flynn effect, testing companies renorm tests periodically. However, this renorming may have a drastic impact in the educational arena, especially in areas such as gifted education where decisions are made primarily on the basis of IQ scores. “The admission of students to special education classes either for superior ability or for the mentally handicapped is dependent upon IQ scores. A child one year might not be eligible for special education class but in the next year with a renormed test the same child would be eligible although his ability remained the same” (Russell, 2007, p. 263). If tests are not renormed, the results of administration may foster an “overestimation of the intelligence of tested individuals and has therefore consequences for individual diagnostic interpretations and decisions of the diagnostician using the tests. This not only applies to individuals with test scores within the normal range of the intelligence score distribution, but also for children with scores at both the lower and higher end of this distribution” (Resing & Tunteler, 2007, p. 206). Even though tests should still be renormed, not because of the Flynn Effect, but in order to provide more accurate data, Russell (2007) suggested that testing companies “could provide corrections or adjustments to their general norms for certain segments of a population, whose intelligence might vary from the national average” (p. 266). This conclusion seems to revert back to age old philosophy that some populations, either ethnically, culturally, or even by gender, may not be as smart as others, especially when a standardized test is used to measure the level of intelligence.

Because giftedness is not a unitary construct, the identification process for programs designed for the gifted and talented should be multifaceted in nature and should be reviewed carefully (Renzulli, 2004, Georgia Department of Education, 2010). The

identification criteria should void the prevalent stereotype that a gifted person is someone with just a high IQ (Renzulli, 2004). The review process for gifted programming should include the periodic collection of data on the success of students identified as a means of supporting arguments regarding the validity and reliability of the testing instruments.

Initially discussed at a 1994 meeting of the Georgia Association for Gifted Children (GAGC), educators examined how national initiatives had become more focused on helping “address equity issues in the identification of minority and economically disadvantaged children, while yielding the diagnostic information needed to promote excellence in programming and curriculum for all gifted students” (Krisel & Cowan, 1997, p. 3). What developed from this discussion was the transition from a single IQ score as the sole identifier of giftedness to a rich, multi-criteria profile that portrays the strengths, interests, and abilities (Krisel & Cowan, 1997).

Georgia’s gifted identification process includes multiple assessments. Data on recommended students are collected in the areas of mental ability, achievement, motivation, and creativity. “Mental ability is generally determined via psychometric assessment, achievement is generally determined by standardized test scores, creativity is generally determined by the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking-Figural, and motivation is generally determined by grades” (McBee, 2006, p. 105). Included in the state department’s procedural guidance are two options or avenues to determine gifted eligibility which include:

Option 1-psychometric option uses a composite mental ability test score and

Achievement data; or Option 2- three out of four multiple criteria eligibility option (Georgia Department of Education, 2008 p .67).

Local school systems should give children opportunities to qualify in both ways.

Georgia's Eligibility Criteria for Gifted Programs Rule 160-4-2-.38-multiple criteria (Georgia Department of Education, 2008) is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Determination of Eligibility	
<p><u>Option A/ Psychometric:</u> After assessing the student in all four area, the student must meet eligibility requirements in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Mental Ability:</u> 96th percentile (3-12) or 99th percentile (K-2) on a norm reference test of mental ability-composite score • <u>Achievement:</u> 90th percentile in total battery, total reading, or total math section of a norm reference test. 	<p><u>Option B/ Multiple Criteria:</u> A student must meet eligibility requirements in three of the four following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Mental Ability:</u> 96th percentile on a norm reference test of mental ability-component or composite score. • <u>Achievement:</u> 90th percentile in total battery, total reading, or total math section of a norm reference test achievement battery. • <u>Creativity:</u> 90th percentile/90th percent on a creativity assessment • <u>Motivation:</u> 90th percentile/90th percent on a motivation assessment.

Figure 1. Georgia's Eligibility Requirements obtained from Georgia Department of Education, 2008.

Ten years after Georgia's move to a multi-criteria eligibility guideline for determining gifted inclusion, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) promoted a clearer pathway for identifying eligible students for special programming, including gifted. Response to Intervention (RTI) is now integrated into district improvement initiatives as a more robust format to raise the achievement of all students. "RTI provides a strong curriculum and instruction for all students within the school, target interventions for students who continue to exhibit learning and behavioral problems, and intensive interventions for students with the most significant needs" (Shores, 2009, p. 2). The initial RTI process included three tiers of interventions that followed a process of moving from mild interventions to a more intense focus based on the severity of the need. According to Johnson, Smith, and Harris (2009), "high quality research-based general education instruction and targeted interventions that increase in intensity depending on student need are the hallmarks of an effective RTI system (p. 5). The three tiers are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Academic Intervention Pyramid

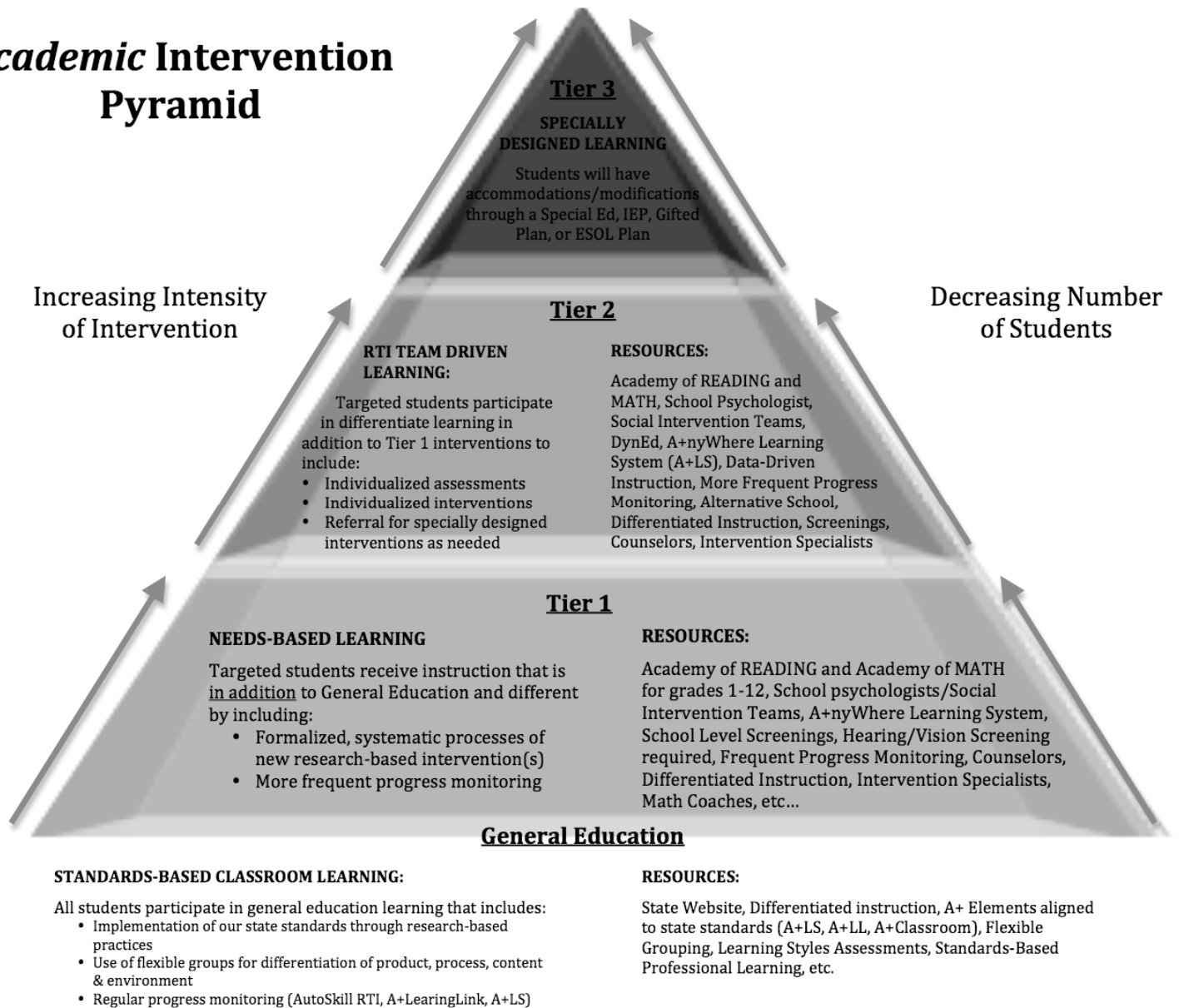


Figure 2. Pyramid of Intervention obtained from Backbone Communications, 2010.

Georgia's interpretation of RTI resulted in a four tier approach outlined in a Pyramid of Interventions illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Response to Intervention: The Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions



*"We will lead the nation in improving student achievement."
 Kathy Cox, State Superintendent of Schools*



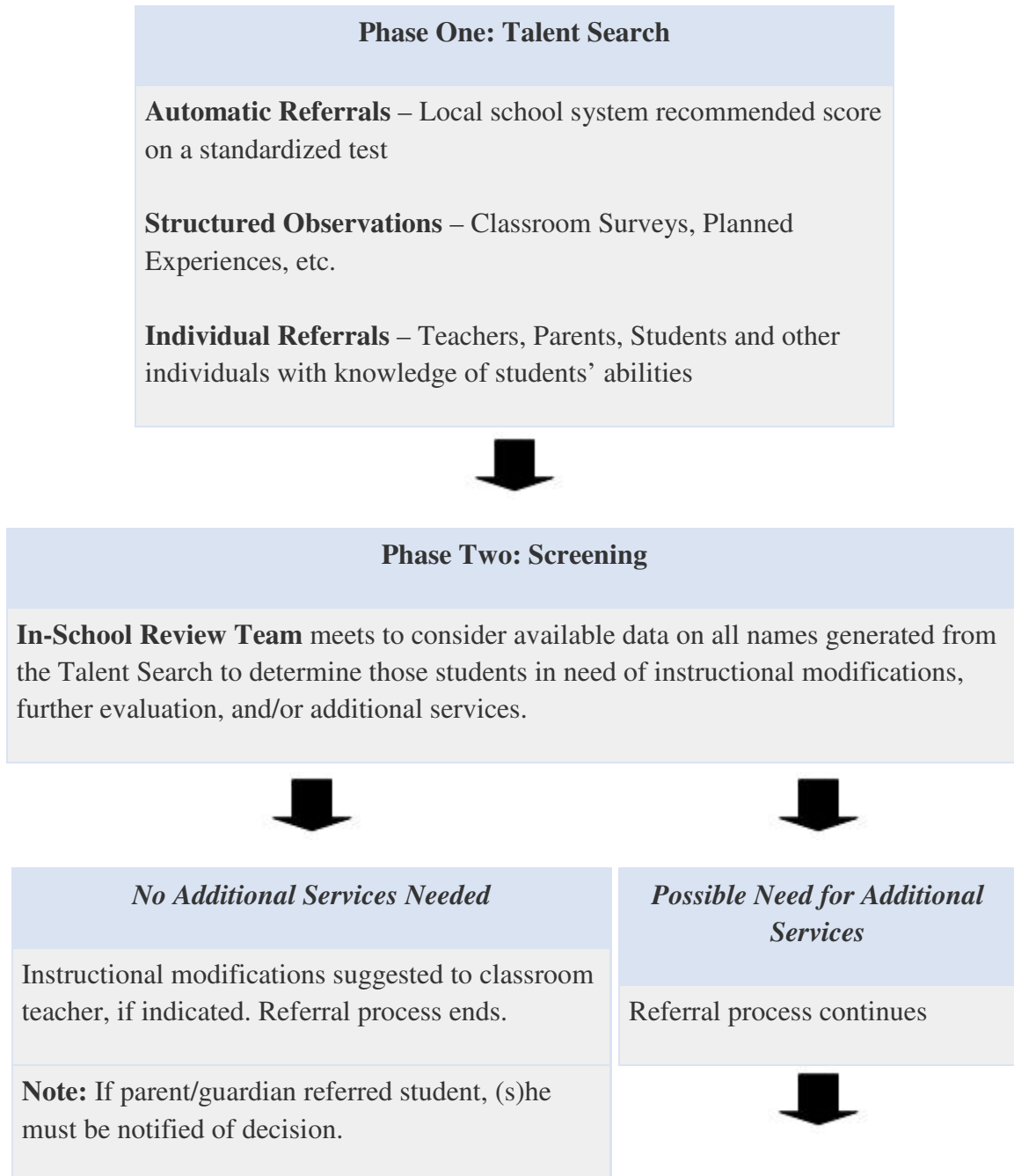
Figure 3. The Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions obtained from the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE).

Since the ultimate purpose of RTI is to restructure how teachers respond to the individual needs of students in their classes, there are direct implications for using the process to identify gifted students and to ensure the needs of this population are also met

through school programming. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2008), “by documenting instructional interventions, the RTI process allows high achieving students access to differentiated curriculum, flexible pacing, cluster grouping, and other universal interventions” (p. 50). However, teams of teachers should look for the additional interventions needed to meet the individual needs of students whose performance documents a focus on acceleration. The GDOE further explains that “if there is compelling evidence that instructional modifications have not met a student’s need, local school districts should establish a decision-making process that allows professional staff members to consider all information available during the student search/nomination stage of the process and determine whether it is appropriate to proceed with a formal referral and further assessment” (p. 65). In essence, RTI should be a defined component in the identification process for gifted placement after Tier 2 and Tier 3 options have been implemented and evaluated. The process also encourages teachers to look at multiple sources of data, both performance data and observed behaviors in making decisions regarding gifted referrals. Examples of instructional strategies that may be implemented prior to referrals include compacting where students are allowed to demonstrate proficiency in units or courses and then progress to more appropriate challenging instruction; cross-age grouping where students are combined with multiple grades or ages for a part of the instructional day; tiered assignments where tasks are designed for varying ability levels of students within a classroom; and independent studies where students participate in approved courses in a specific area of interest and involving intense research.

Through its studies, the GDOE proposed a sample tiered model for identifying and placing students in gifted programming. This tiered model is illustrated in Figure 4 below:

Referral and Eligibility Flowchart



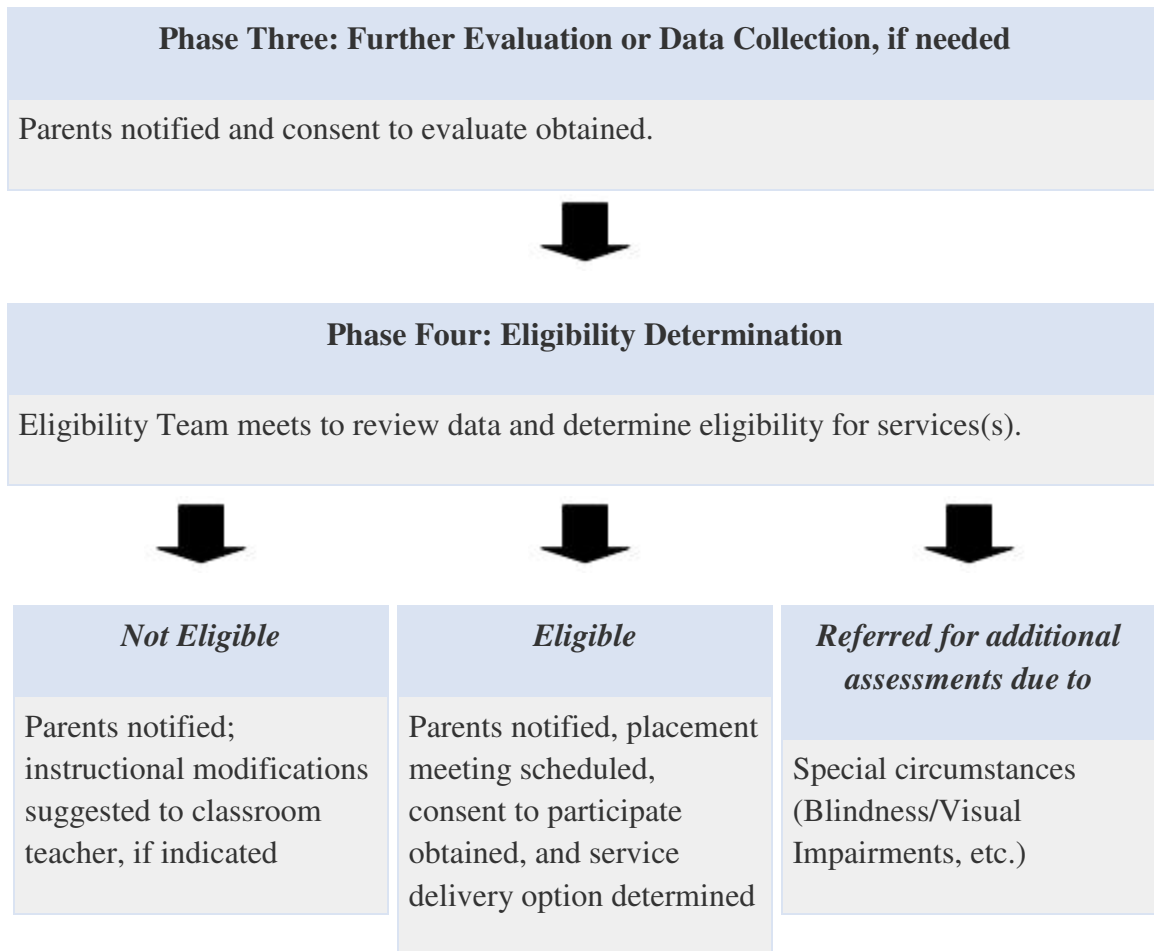


Figure 4. SAMPLE STUDENT TALENT SEARCH FLOWCHART obtained from Georgia Department of Education, 2008, p. 69.

Georgia school systems are dedicated to promoting the cognitive and affective growth of gifted and high-ability learners (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). The implementation of a robust system of identifying potentially gifted students that includes tiers of support and acceleration have resulted in an increase in the number of students, specifically African American students who have qualified for gifted placement. Recent statistics released by the GDOE indicate that between 2005 and 2010, the percentage growth by race and ethnicity among African Americans has increased by 15% (see Figure 5). In the state of Georgia, a student may be referred for consideration for gifted

educational services by teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, or guardians, peers, self and other individuals who have knowledge of the student's abilities. Once the initial referral is made, the pathway to placement is clearer, more concise, and less suspect to ambiguity or ethnic biases.

2005 to 2010 Gifted Education % Growth by Race & Ethnicity

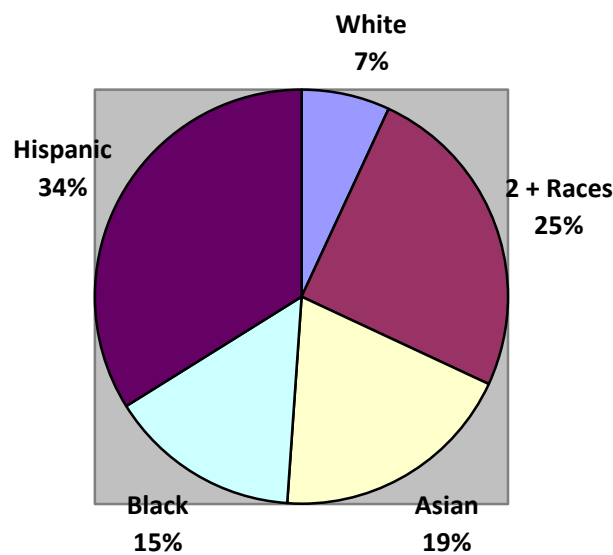


Figure 5. Percentage of Gifted Education Growth by Race and Ethnicity obtained from Eger, 2010.

Retention in Gifted Placement

Once identified as gifted, attrition or retention of African American students in gifted programming becomes another factor in the underrepresentation dilemma.

According to Henfield and others (2008), African American students who have been identified and placed in gifted programs often underachieve or perform poorly.

Numerous research reports have highlighted issues such as motivation, social contexts,

and self efficacy as having profound impact on the continuation (or discontinuation) of high levels of achievement among African American gifted students (Worrell, 2007; Graham, 2004; Ford, 1996). Racial identity may also have drastic psychological ramifications for academically talented African American students in gifted education programs (Henfield et.al, 2008).

Motivation and Social Relevance

According to Whiting (2006), the extent to which students see themselves as learners and intellectual players in the school setting strongly correlates to how well they achieve in the academic setting. Self-efficacy involves a perception that a person has belief in himself or herself and the belief that he or she is capable of performing. Those students who have strong feelings of self efficacy also tend to have a strong identity with the school setting and typically perform accordingly. According to Whiting (2006), many noted researchers have found “resilience is a noticeable characteristic of high-achieving or gifted Black males” (p. 224). Karnes and Beam (2005) described an internal motivational force among high achieving students that helped in the maintenance of a drive to succeed even within the context of an urban environment. All too often, this internal force is absent in African American students who have the potential to be high achievers.

Two variables that tend to impact student achievement and motivation include the absence of a strong racial identity and the internal need for peer acceptance. Retention issues for African American learners in gifted programs often relate to the need for relationships between students and their classmates as well as a sense of belonging (Ford

et.al , 2008). Whiting (2006) concluded that students who lack confidence and perceived support in school tend to become unmotivated and unengaged. This disengagement from academics is often an attempt to gain acceptance from peers (Henfield et.al, 2008).

African American gifted students in a study by these researchers repeatedly talked about “standing out” or being looked upon as being different because they were gifted. These same students talked about race as being a stronger identity variable over gender and reported that “in middle school, racial identity was of the utmost concern, however, they predicted that in high school, their giftedness would present a larger challenge because they would have to interact more often with non-gifted African American students and others might ridicule them for standing out” (p. 440). The student participants in the research spoke of being accused of “being white” by non-gifted African American students and indicated occasions when they had purposefully “acted black” as a means of fitting in. Masculinity also became a concern especially among African American males as being intelligent, studious, or talented was sometimes equated with being feminine or “unmanly” (Whiting, 2006a). Consequently, repeated occurrences of mixed messages and false pretenses may result in psychological and academic relevance as identities and connections eventually become diverted from schooling to other areas such as sports and entertainment and outward behaviors may become manifestations of negative, antisocial, or self-defeating attitudes (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986). This diversion may in essence be a means of coping. The end result of the absence of positive social and contextual opportunities may be lower incidences of academic performance. Whiting (2006) indicated that Black male students tend to comprise the highest percentage of students who become disengaged from the academic setting. In a correlating report, research by

Whiting (2006a) denoted the end result of this disengagement when he cited “Black males comprise 8.37% of school districts nationally, but only 3.54% of gifted placements” (p. 47).

According to Nicely and others (2001), “the more teachers know about gifted students and gifted programs, the more likely it is that they will be positively disposed to having students removed from their classrooms to participate in gifted programs” (p. 12). Professional development must be a critical component of any educational reform program as teachers need to be knowledgeable about their students—their backgrounds, their value systems, their cultural heritage, their learning styles, their abilities, talents, and skills – as well as be knowledgeable about the content and programs of study they are responsible for teaching. Instructional strategies must acknowledge differentiation based on ability as well as talents, skills, interests, and learning styles to address the diversity of students in the gifted classroom and to foster a sense of belonging and a positive social context for learning. Counselors also play a major role in the instructional program for African American students, especially African American male students and should “broach social issues (e.g., peer pressure, peer relationships and social supports), cultural issues (e.g. family and community values and circumstances), and psychological issues (e.g., fears, anxieties, worries, and stresses) with gifted students” (Ford & Harris, 1993, p. 8).

Instructional Methodologies

Instructional delivery by teachers in the classroom in a reconceptualized gifted program should also include multicultural education. Students must see themselves

positively reflected in the resources and materials utilized in the classroom. Ford and others (2002) offered instructional recommendations that included: modifying teaching strategies so as to accommodate learning styles that may be culturally- based, integrating social and cultural topics into the curriculum, providing opportunities for students to examine issues from varying perspectives, and fostering a spirit of excellence and equity grounded in the policies and practices throughout the school setting.

To counteract the negative impact of deficit thinking and the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and advanced placement opportunities, many schools and community service organizations have instituted comprehensive programs that focus on self esteem, racial identity and recognition of the innate, learned and/or developed talents, skills, and gifts of minority and diverse learners. Ascher (1991) identified components that need to be evident in such programs in order to enhance the effectiveness, especially in supporting the developmental needs of African American males. These components include:

- 1) Appropriate male models/male bonding-Effective programs “offer positive images of African American male adulthood through African American male teachers, mentors, advocates, and other role models, in an all-male classroom” (Ascher, 1991, p.2).
- 2) Identity / Self-Esteem-Effective programs “attempt a kind of consciousness-raising, by teaching the bi-continental history of African Americans and making clear the achievements and contributions of blacks in both Africa and America” (Ascher, 1991, p.2).
- 3) Academic Values and Skills-Effective programs “attempt to combat the ‘fear of acting white’ that hinders school achievement and to develop an alternative system of African American values and social skills that will facilitate success” (Ascher, 1991, p.2). Key evidence of this feature include mandated attendance policies, conflict resolution skills, and clear expectations for making age appropriate decisions regarding sexual involvement.

- 4) Parent and Community Strengthening- Many successful programs strongly encourage parental participation and community involvement through activities such as mentoring and classroom presentations (Ascher, 1991).
- 5) Transition to Manhood-Formal and informal initiations or Rites of Passage are programmatic elements that provide dignity to the transition to manhood upon the successful completion of specific developmental phases of life serve as a major part of support programs for African American males (Ascher, 1991).
- 6) A Safe Haven- Effective programs “often protect students from the street by extending the school day and adding a Saturday component (Ascher, 1991).

Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown (2008) especially focused on Rites of Passage programs when detailing opportunities to foster success among African American male students. This researcher focused on this initiation ceremony as a means “to address and circumvent this cycle of underrepresentation” (p. 93) by fostering leadership ability. According to Bonner and others (2008), “given the importance of leadership ability in definitions of giftedness, it is critical that the leadership potential of African American male students be recognized and developed as part of the secondary educational experience” (p .97). Rites of Passage programs celebrate meaningful events as young boys make appropriate decisions, participate in positive activities, and make the transition into becoming young Black men who possess and contribute skills that can enhance their lives and the lives of others in the communities in which they live. Of key importance in these programs is the emphasis on understanding Black history as well as understanding societal challenges African American males constantly face.

Project STREAM is another example of curricular projects that foster the development of underrepresented gifted populations. Developed as a means of identifying gifted minority students and to provide in school support to meet the educational needs of these students, Project STREAM promotes three basic premises. These include (Clasen, 2006, p. 57):

- Talents and abilities are distributed equally without regard to gender, race, or ethnicity;
- Multiple kinds of talents exist, and identification and programming must correspond according; and
- Forces working in collaboration are more likely to effect change than forces operating independently.

Providing instruction during the regular school year, a Saturday program, and during a summer residency program, Project STREAM focuses on academic as well as non-academic areas.

The curriculum of the project includes communication, math, science, research, and technology as well as art, theater, and design. Differentiation of the curriculum is an essential component of Project STREAM as lessons and instructional support opportunities are specifically geared toward the abilities, talents, skills, and learning styles of the participants. The success of Project STREAM was recently measured and reported through a longitudinal study and revealed “sixty-eight percent (n=107) of the 158 students in the sample graduated from high school, 47 males and 60 females” (Clasen, 2006, p. 60). Additionally, “60% (n=64) of the 107 high-school graduates (40.5% of the 158) were enrolled in an institution of higher learning or already had graduated with an advanced degree” (p. 60).

Support Systems

The role of support systems such as family structures, mentoring programs, and community organizations appear to be especially important in relation to high academic performance (President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, 1992).

Consequently, many school districts, local communities, and college campuses have

birthed programs that extend the support provided at home or fill the void when that home support system is absent. The University System of Georgia, in 2002, established an African American Male Initiative. Through the initiative, 25 programs are active parts of life on the campuses of 19 colleges and universities across the state. Such initiatives as the “*Gentlemen on the Move*” program at the University of Georgia provide middle and high school students with tutoring in college-preparatory classes and test preparation in a highly structured environment. The *Call Me Doctor* program at the Medical College of Georgia offers high school juniors and seniors an introduction to medicine, mentoring by medical students and college field trips” (Schmidt, 2008, p. A-7). Other post secondary institutions across the country have also initiated such outreach programs to identify and support intellectually talented, yet often not recognized African American males students.

“A number of long-standing organizations, including the Boy Scouts of America, 100 Black Men of America, Inc, and the Urban League have offered mentoring activities for young men throughout the country. African American fraternal organizations have offered mentoring programs targeting African American males for several decades” (Bonner, et.al, 2008, p. 98). Recently, in addition to fraternities, Greek letter sororities have also acknowledged the importance of fostering the academic, social, psychological, physical, and emotional development of African American males and have initiated signature projects and summits to support these efforts. The major concern about the innovative programs and projects being developed and implemented is the lack of research to document effectiveness and efficacy. Freeman (1999) wrote that “most programs for the talented are North American; and although their organizers do indeed follow up the many thousands of children they select, they neither compare their

programs with any other, nor do they research the outcomes of equally able children who do not apply for their programs” (p. 187). This leaves the door for additional follow up research to determine program effectiveness in relationship to supporting the academic, emotional, social, and psychological development of African American students underrepresented in gifted programs in schools throughout the country.

Conclusion

Black males and females are consistently underrepresented in programs for gifted learners (Whiting, 2006). According to Ford, and others (2002), “the persistent and pervasive underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education is a tragedy” (p. 59). The collection and analysis of data on African American underrepresentation in gifted programs and the subsequent identification of root causes of this underrepresentation should then lead to planning for change. Since research (McBee, 2006; Elhoweris, et al, 2005) has revealed concerns about the ability of the teacher to effectively, efficiently, and equitably identify and refer African American students for gifted placement, the initial source of improvement could revolve around the teacher. According to Ford and others (2008), “few teachers have formal preparation in gifted education, leading us to question the extent to which teachers understand giftedness, are familiar with characteristics and needs of gifted students, are effective in referring students for gifted education screening and placement, and whether they can teach and challenge such students once placed” (p. 300). Enhancing this knowledge may also help all teachers “see beyond assumptions, biases, and stereotypes in order to ensure that the next generation reaches their fullest potential” (Steen, 2010, p. 10).

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Cognitive Theory are two theoretical frameworks that embrace research studies on correlations between race and achievement. CRT began in legal studies because of criticism for not looking at the needs of people of color when it comes to law. Critical race theorists hold the belief that society has a hidden color coded law in which race plays a big role in legal decisions. This makes it difficult to have a color blind ideology when examining and implementing American philosophy.

Originally proposed for educational implications through the research of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), CRT was presented as a framework for examining the role of race and racism. According to Dixson and Rousseau (2005), Claudia Harris originally wrote of whiteness as a property. “Although the popular conception of property is in terms of some tangible object—a home or car—the position held by many theorists is that historically within US society, property is a right rather than a physical object (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.8). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) expanded this definition and connected white privilege based on the concept of property rights. One such right granted to whites described in the research was the right to exclude. In the educational setting, exclusion means consciously or unconsciously structuring identification procedures so that it becomes harder for certain groups to be included in selective programming. Historically, in schools, this has often been named tracking—according to

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), one of the “means through which the property right of whiteness is asserted in education” (p. 52)

Delgado and Stefania (2001) identified four major tenets of CRT. These include (p. 37):

1. Racism is commonplace, and colorblind conceptions of equality will only address the most egregious forms of individual-based racism, rather than structural inequalities between social groups.
2. “White-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes” via the notion of *interest convergence*. Most anti-racist reforms are expected to only happen incrementally, and only when they also serve the interests of white elites.
3. Race is socially constructed and historically embedded.
4. In contemporary American society, the unique voice of color serves important purposes. This is a controversial point. Alongside its firm stance against notions of racial essentialism, CRT contends that the social realities of people of color nevertheless give them experiences, voices, and viewpoints that are likely to be different from mainstream, dominant narratives. It therefore becomes imperative that people of color advance their own counter-narratives, often via story-telling model that fall outside the usual confines of academic discourse.

One of the major components of CRT is voice-“the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of colour as sources of knowledge” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 10). CRT asserts that educators and policy makers should listen to the personal stories of African

Americans and use these stories in addition to quantitative data when making decisions. Serving as an argument for the absence of equity in education, CRT researchers indicate that racism encompasses collective experiences of people that have been victims of discrimination. Therefore, these stories should be considered a valuable data source when determining the true effectiveness of educational programming, reform models, and improvement initiatives that purport to close the achievement gap between ethnic groups.

In conducting a qualitative study involving 12 African American students, Henfield and others (2008) sought to identify the meaning, context, and process by which students formulated perceptions of their experiences in gifted programming. Using semi-structured, biographical questionnaires and interviews, these researchers utilized CRT to identify three emerging themes: “(a) critical issues facing gifted African American students; (b) ways that students navigate the perils of gifted education; and (c) the benefits of gifted education” (p. 433). Based on the findings, Henfield, and others (2008) rendered several recommendations for teachers, principals, and parents in terms of how they can individually and collectively help improve educational practices for African American students in gifted programs.

CRT can be used to help study the absences of African American males in gifted and/or advanced placement courses. Morris (2002) sought to determine “how race and culture, as structural forces, affect the extent to which African American students are equitably represented in the field of gifted education” (p. 59). Noting that race is a social construct as opposed to a biological feature, this author purported that race and racism may be variables that determine which students are selected for gifted programs and even which students after selected will stay. From the standpoint of CRT, Morris’ (2002)

research gave rise to the questions “should these students hold in abeyance their cultural identities and become raceless so that they can participate in gifted education programs without fear of rejection from their African American peers? Or should schools and gifted education cease to maintain White dominant cultural frameworks so that African American students would feel not just tolerated, but welcomed” (Fordham, 1988, p. 67).

Using the premises of CRT, Rousseau and Tate (2003b) sought to examine the beliefs of high school math teachers about equity in their classrooms. The teachers in this body of research were questioned on how they addressed the needs of an increasingly diverse population in their schools. The most apparent and consistent response was that all students were treated equal. In essence, if they did the same thing for all students in the classroom, results were not a correlation to instructional practices but instead to the student’s willingness and/or ability to perform the task. When achievement gaps were demonstrated, these math teachers did not view performance results as a reason to reflect on themselves or to listen to the stories of students of color in the classroom in terms of why they may not have been successful. In essence, this study about color blindness revealed the teachers denied the race-related differences in achievement in the classroom. The teachers’ color blindness hindered them from seeing their role in underachievement of students of color in the classroom. According to Dixson and Rousseau (2005), “the distinction between equality of process and equality of outcomes can call into question many of the practices of teachers in schools. In particular, a focus on achieving an expansive vision of equality would render problematic the ideal of color-blindness” (p.14).

Oftentimes, community agencies and organizations develop programming with the intended purpose of helping African American students be more successful in schooling. However, CRT analyses have been used to expound upon whether or not these support agencies fulfill their intended purpose. Su (2001) conducted a research project involving five ethnographic case studies of community agencies that work on education reform in the South Bronx, an area that suffers from underfunded and overcrowded schools, lack of affordable safe housing, high African American populations, and intense poverty. The agencies included in the study were: Communities for Change Bronx, Faith and Neighborhood Network, Neighborhood Parents Together, Parents in Action, and Youth Power. The expressed aim of all five groups was “to make the public school system more accountable to parents, namely the overwhelmingly low-income communities of color that serve as the organizations’ core constituents. They do this by forwarding public policy proposals, and pressuring elected officials and civil servants to heed these proposals through organized meetings, petitions, rallies, and protests” (Su, 2007, p. 535). After examining the mission and practices of these grass root community organizations, and collecting data via archival research, direct observations, and semi-structured interviews, Su concluded that “the narrative of colorblindness is often so pervasive that surfacing counter-narratives is difficult even in education organizing groups” (p.545). In essence, many of the groups studied never truly broached the relevant issues in conversation or in action often ignoring “nuanced and systemic, institutionalized racism” (p. 545). According to Su (2007), CRT demands that community activists’ and organizations’ everyday practices match the rhetoric for social change.

The vast majority of mission statements of schools and districts focus on providing a quality education to each or all students. However, an examination of achievement gaps between ethnic groups and longitudinal data on placement by ethnicity in special programming gives rise to the thought that many educational entities may not be fulfilling their mission. Milner (2010) in his research refers to the notion of color blindness and states, “in their own relevant and responsive ways, [effective] teachers rejected color blindness (and diversity blindness) and understood the salience, relevance, and permanence of race and racism in the fabric of society and therefore in schools” (p. 180). People often accept the notion of whiteness as being normal, therefore any person who is not white is abnormal. Within the everyday culture it is not polite or nice to be attentive to people who are not normal. Thompson (1998) acknowledges that “politely pretending not to notice students’ color makes no sense unless being different colors is somehow shameful” (p. 524). Students quickly become aware of the shame and internalize these substandard feelings.

Delgado’s (1996) CRT analysis described a sense of false empathy that teachers feel for students. This occurs when “a white believes he or she is identifying with a person of color, but in a fact is doing so only in a slight superficial way” (Delgado, 1996, p. 12). This sense of empathy can block teachers’ views and understanding of students. Duncan (2002) described this same sense of false empathy in research involving undergraduate students enrolled in a methods class who had assignments working with African American students during a field experience. The students who were all White saw their work as “helping a group of unfortunate, underprivileged children take advantage of the offerings of a fundamentally just society” (p. 91). The students basically

saw their being in the school as a service to the students and stopped short of reflecting on their own instructional practices or to learn more about their students-their talents, learning styles, or abilities.

Juan (2005) incorporated CRT within his discourse on “whiteness” proposing that in the job market, “white workers enjoyed ‘public and psychological wage’ regardless of position in the social hierarchy” (p. 342). This white privilege status evolved into the educational arena and ultimately supported the underrepresentation of minority in gifted programs and coursework as white students appear to have a visible advantage during the identification and placement process.

“The country has been dealing with its hypocrisies on the race issue for the last 50 years” (Lewis, 2003, p. 259). No longer can the issue of race be avoided in hopes that it will go away. Professional dialogues based on clear, succinct research is needed to help policymakers, school officials, community activists, parents, and even students collaborate in eliminating race as an invisible, but powerful and pervasive determining factor in gifted placement. Hopefully, this research will play a credible role in this dialogue.

CRT raises the question of whether underrepresentation may be a conscious or unconscious result of perceptions of particular races with these perceptions manifested through the identification, referral, evaluation, and instruction processes in gifted placement. “In analyzing education policy, scholars have suggested that CRT could be useful in articulating the ways in which incremental reform, such as increasing school funding in this year’s federal budget, often inhibits anti-racist social change, such as

altering national funding formula in a way that guarantees adequate resources for poor communities of color” (Su, 2007, p. 533).

According to Burney (2008), social cognitive theory “ascribes a central role to cognitive processes in which the individual can observe others and the environment, reflect on that in combination with his or her own thoughts and behaviors, and alter his or her own self regulatory functions accordingly” (p. 130). The theoretical framework addresses the importance of the social environment in predicting the success of students. Of key importance in social cognitive theory are the concepts of self-efficacy and social influences. In other words, the social cognitive theory asserts that success occurs when an individual believes he/she is capable of performing a task and intermingles in a socially positive construct that motivates the person to engage in learning. Peer group relationships support the level of class participation and acquisition of learning. The teacher plays a major role in ensuring the delivery of quality, unbiased instruction in the classroom. The teacher’s perception of African American students, the teacher’s knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of students in the classroom, and the teacher’s appreciation of diversity serve as affective and cognitive variables that have an impact on the success of all students in the classroom. Also, of equal importance is the relationships and interactions between the students and the teachers. These variables have been evident in much research on the cause of underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs and advanced content classes (Ford, et.al, 2008; Henfield, et.al., 2008; Nicely et.al, 2001).

Bandura’s (1989) research on social cognitive theory indicated that “cognition plays a role in people’s capability to construct reality, self-regulate, encode information

and perform behaviors” (p.1177). From a theoretical perspective, social cognition involves a triad incorporating personal factors (cognition, affective, and biological events), environmental factors and behavior (Pajares, 2002). This triad model examines the integration of internal factors (motivation) and external factors (environment) and the resulting behaviors. In human growth and development, the social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of motivational factors in increasing behavioral competencies. In the classroom, teachers can utilize the percepts of social cognitive theory to increase academic performance by altering a student’s habits of mind, self efficacy and self belief. The impacts of environmental factors are acknowledged but not over emphasized.

According to social cognitive theory, “individuals are social agents with goals for the future” (Bembenutty, 2010, p.5). Actions and behaviors are goal driven decisions. Persons who possess a deep sense of self efficacy believe they can successfully perform the behaviors needed to reach a goal. Self efficacy often determines the amount of effort an individual puts towards completing a task. If a sense of deficit thinking or doubt regarding the ability to reach a goal exists, then failure often times results unless environmental structures or support systems are in place to nurture or strengthen feels of self efficacy or self belief.

Social cognitive theory is particularly relevant in gifted education because of its implications for the theoretical extensions in planning curriculum and instructional experiences. Burney’s (2008) research sought to examine several gifted service models in terms of how well they align with and address what is known to be relevant to student learning. Central themes that evolved through the research included: self-efficacy, vicarious learning, social influences, feedback and effort, and task value. Of particular

relevance to noted research on the learning styles and behaviors of African American students, social cognitive theory implies that the social environment is part of the learning context. Within the gifted classroom, “strong social networks that are supportive and accepting can influence adjustment and achievement” (Burney, 2008, p. 135).

According to Pajares (2002), social cognitive theory posits that factors such as economic conditions, social economic status, and educational and family structures do not always affect human behavior directly. These are environmental factors that may impact a person’s aspirations and self efficacy. One essential factor in enhancing self efficacy is event processing. “Events that are positively interpreted and confirm one’s expectations and beliefs will enhance task engagement and will generate greater effort to pursue long-term goals” (Bembenutty, 2010, p.6). Within the classroom, the teacher should assume the responsibility of establishing events that support a positive culture of high expectations, mutual respect, and trust. Such events will subsequently foster a higher sense of self efficacy among the students in the classroom.

Methodology and Research Design

The primary purpose of the study was to examine the life of an African American male student who was a self referral for gifted programming. The study captured the thoughts, experiences, behaviors, and personality traits that may have contributed to his success in schooling. This study attempted to confirm how misrepresentation of minority students in gifted programming is linked to under identification of students. More importantly, this study closely examined the role self concept, support systems, and

motivation play in ensuring African American students demonstrate their full academic potential in school. The following research questions were addressed through this study:

1. How does one high achieving African American male student describe his experiences in gifted education?
2. What environmental impediments potentially threaten achievement that is described by the high achieving African American male student, his teachers and coaches?
3. What internal and external conditions serve as support factors in the continuous success of African American students in academic programs for advanced learners?

Participants

The main subject in this study was a student named Elijah, a 19 year old African American student currently enrolled in college in Alabama pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering. Elijah attended three vastly different elementary schools. In kindergarten and first grade, he was enrolled in a school where the population was 90% African American and where almost 95% of the students, including Elijah, qualified for free lunch. During the second grade, he transferred to a public charter elementary school where almost 90% of the students were White and the free lunch rate was less than half that of his former elementary school. Later, he returned to his first elementary school. Elijah excelled academically in both school programs. However, none of the teachers at either of the elementary schools recommended him for gifted placement. At the end of third grade, Elijah nominated himself for gifted programming—an option afforded all

students. He eventually met all gifted criterion and was subsequently placed in the school system's program for high achieving students.

A total of eleven participants provided data for use in this research. Three of the participants worked with the subject while he was in elementary school; two worked with the subject while he was in middle school; two worked with the subject while he was in high school; and four served as coaches/mentors and worked with the subject during multiple phases of schooling. The participants interviewed in the study along with their relationship to Elijah are included in Table 1. Pseudonyms are used in the chart as well as in the data reporting and analysis.

Table 1

Pseudonyms of Participants

Name	Position	How long teaching Elijah	Date of Interview	Length of interview
Elijah	Main participant	n/a	4-10-2011 4-27-2011 5-5-2011	45 minutes 40 minutes 55 minutes
Mrs. Avery	Administrator	2 years	4-28-2011	60 minutes
Mr. Bunn	Elementary Gifted Teacher	2 years	4-13-2011	45 minutes
Mrs. Jackson	Elementary Teacher	3 years	4-25-2011	45 minutes
Coach Smith	Coach	3 years	4-14-2011	30 minutes
Mrs. Sanders	Middle School Teacher	3 years	4-14-2011	40 minutes
Mr. Martin	Middle School Teacher	3 years	4-13-2011	30 minutes
Coach Avery	Coach	3 years	4-26-2011	40 minutes
Mr. Bowens	Mentor	12 years	4-20-2011	50 minutes
Mr. Mathis	Mentor	11 years	4-19-2011	40 minutes
Mr. Starks	Administrator	4 years	4-15-2011	60 minutes
Mrs. Hamm	High School Teacher	3 years	4-27-2011	35 minutes

Design

This study included a qualitative research design that integrated features of critical case study. According to Glesne (2006), by examining patterns and various interpretations of the norms, qualitative research seeks “to make sense of personal narratives and the ways in which they intersect” (p.1). Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as “real work setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 579). Milner (2010), states “qualitative research allows researchers to construct stories of participants that are grounded in the participants’ reality” (p. 205). This research gives voice to Elijah, the main character, and presents findings from his reality as well as the stories of Elijah’s teachers and mentors.

Case study protocol strives to present a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Tellis, 1997). Even though case studies present a multi-faceted analysis of different perceptions, this research model tends to be selective placing the primary focus on a small number of issues pertinent to an understanding of the problem and powerful enough to draw valid conclusions based on the findings.

Data in this research were collected through a multifaceted approach. Historical and longitudinal data on the participant’s academic achievement were captured through a review of grades, transcripts of courses completed, and standardized test results. Demographic data were presented by providing descriptive information on the schools and the communities where the participant received his formal and informal education.

Additionally, this research included a review of five years of referral trend data for the school district. These data included the following categorical headings:

- Ethnicity of students referred for gifted programming
- Ethnicity of students who met gifted criteria and were subsequently placed in the program
- Percentage ethnicity of students with external referrals (not referred by school officials).

With the exception of one year when he moved to another county for a short period of time, Elijah attended school in a middle sized suburban school system with an average student enrollment of approximately 10,500 students in grades Pre-K -12. Even though the district experiences student transiency, the ethnic breakdown of the student population has remained stable over the past ten years. At the time of his graduation in 2009, the district had an ethnic enrollment breakdown of 47% White, 46% African American, and 7% other. An examination of data over a four year period of time revealed a somewhat stagnant student population in terms of overall student enrollment but progressively changing statistics in terms of enrollment by ethnicity. In 2006-2007, the ethnic breakdown of students enrolled in the district was 48% White, 45% African American, and 7% other.

Enrollment in gifted programming by total number as well as by ethnicity during this same time span revealed a decrease in overall enrollment but a slight change in terms of racial representation. The overall gifted enrollment in the district was 797 students in 2006-2007 versus a figure of 750 students served in gifted programs in 2009-2010. An examination of the racial breakdown during this time indicated a slight

increase over time in the percentage of African American students served in gifted programs and a small decrease in White students. In 2006-2007, 18% of students served in gifted were African Americans while 77% were White. In 2009-2010, these data changed to 19% African American and 75% White. Ironically, during the 2009-2010 school year, the Response to Intervention (RTI) program was implemented in the school district and included a process for utilizing RTI to identify students for gifted programming. The high school that Elijah graduated from in 2008-2009 had an ethnic breakdown of students served in gifted programs of 11% African American and 83% White. The longitudinal data on enrollment in gifted programs in the district is displayed in Figure 6 below. Appendix E reflects the ethnic breakdown by school over time with this data revealing an even greater discrepancy at certain locations warranting a more extensive study of identification practices at these sites.

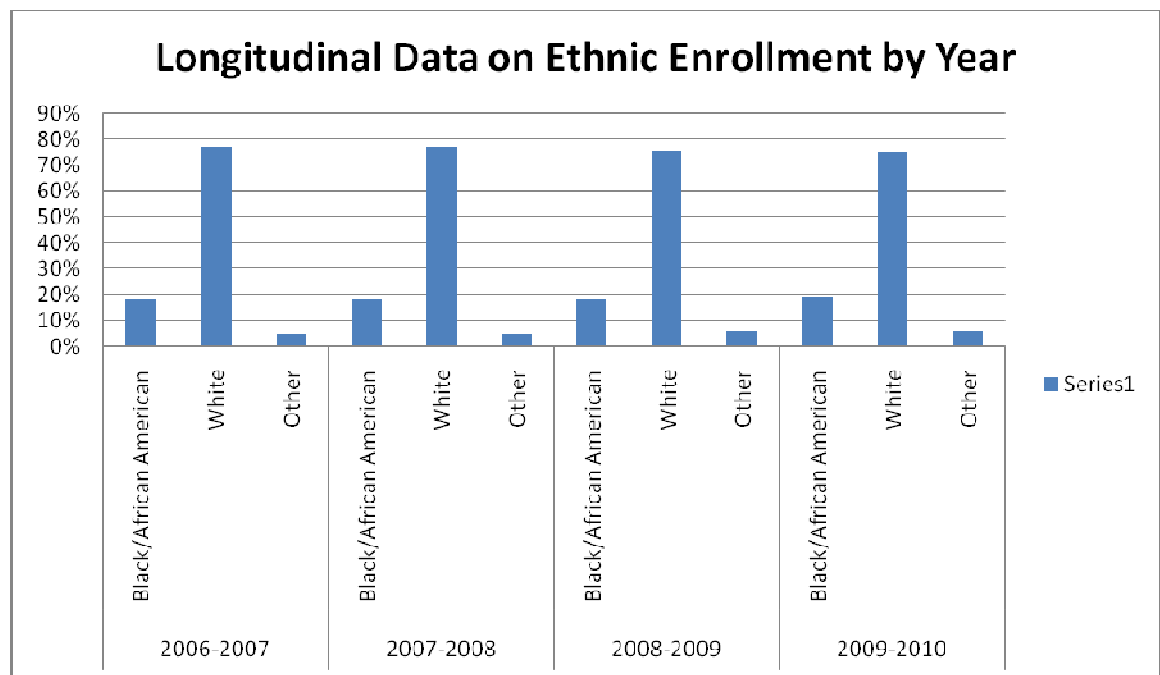


Figure 6. Longitudinal Data-Enrollment in Gifted Programming-By Ethnicity

Perception data for this research were collected through interviews with selected elementary, middle, and high school teachers and administrators at schools where the participant attended. The teacher group included a representation of both regular education and gifted education teachers who instructed the participant. Additionally, to capture data on the social implications of gifted placement, the interview included responses from the subject's extracurricular activities' coaches and mentors. Lastly, the subject was interviewed in three phases as part of this research to gain retrospect from the student's perspective. All interviews included a series of questions as well as a Behavioral Traits Rating Scale and a Personality Traits Rating Scale where the subject and the participants were asked to rate the subject on a series of behaviors and personality traits that may have supported his success in gifted programming. This multifaceted collection of data provided an opportunity to capture stories, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts.

“Questionnaires and interviews are used in educational research to collect information that is not directly observable such as feelings, motivations, attitudes, accomplishments, and experiences of individuals” (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 122). During the data collection phase of this research, interviews served as a means to obtain detailed information relevant to the objective or purpose of the study. However follow up questionnaires were used to examine personality traits. Both questionnaires and interviews served as viable resource tools in collecting closed and open-ended data.

According to Bulputt and Mann (2010), “all research needs to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the researcher and the credibility of the methodology (p. 37)”. As part of data collection, during the qualitative interview process, specific procedures were

taken to limit biases in interpretation of information. These procedures were intended to make the process transparent.

For the purposes of this research study, prior to beginning the interviews, a research protocol using open-ended questions based on the study's central focus was developed so as to obtain specific information that enabled comparison among responses between different participants. To prevent disruptions in the effectiveness of communication between the interviewer and the participants, the interviews were audio recorded and observation notes were written. According to Huseyin (2009), the use of tape recorders "reduces the tendency of the interviewers to make an unconscious selection of data favoring biases, provides complete verbal record which can be studied much more thoroughly than data in the form of interviewer notes, speeds up the interview process, and two or more trained persons can analyze the data independently so that the reliability of their frequency counts or ratings can then be determined" (p.205).

Interviewing, for the purpose of this research, involved posing a series of questions and then probing to obtain additional information. Recordings were transcribed with transcripts being read and reviewed multiple times to promote accuracy of content.

Data from the behavioral and personality assessment charts were collected and analyzed to determine the correlation between how Elijah perceived himself and how other respondents who played a critical role in his education perceived Elijah. The data from these comparative analyses were utilized to determine ongoing themes in terms of observable behaviors and personality traits that may serve as predictors when identifying students who may potentially be referred for gifted placement.

Triangulation was used to ensure internal validity during the research process. This collection of data from multiple sources validated conclusions drawn from research. The combination of notes, interviews, ratings, and site documents supported triangulation of the data. Triangulation was utilized to capture and compile qualitative and perception data for use in this research project. Often used in research to control biases, triangulation enhances both the validity and the reliability of a study.

After collecting interview notes and other archival data, all materials were coded, categorized, and themed. Coding, according to Glesne (2006), is a “progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e. observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to the research process (p. 152). Each major code in the process will signify a recursive concept or central idea that could prove relevant in addressing the research questions posed in this study. Codes were strategically placed to see what patterns emerged from the data. These patterns, or similarities in discussions from the participants, helped formulate the themes that are described as part of the research findings.

Analyses of responses from interviews and rating scales revealed four recurring themes which included social skills, work ethics, academic proficiency, and self-concept/internal motivation. Responses were coded to fit the most appropriate category/theme. The four categorical areas are described below:

- **Social Skills**-This theme involved the subject’s interactions, both positive and negative, with peers and adults. Social skills ratings reflected the

subjects' ability to establish sound positive relationships and not to succumb to negative peer pressure. This category also acknowledged the interacting structures that supported or opposed the subject's success in schooling.

- Work Ethics-This category measured the subject's display of skills that helped ensure success in schooling and at work. This category measures the possession and display of an intrinsic desire to do the right things and the best work possible.
- Academic Proficiency-Recurring responses in this category tended to reflect the subject's mental aptitude to perform at or above expectations for his grade and age group as measured by classroom grades and performance on standardized measures of mastery of objectives and standards included in the state mandated curriculum.
- Self Concept/Internal Motivation- Self efficacy involves a perception that a person has belief in himself or herself and the belief that he/she is capable of performing. This category addressed the degree to which the subject had a strong self identity, a sense of resiliency, and an internal drive to succeed.

Table 2 below indicates the items from the Behavioral Traits Rating Scale that categorically correlate with each of the identified recurring themes.

Table 2

Correlation of Items on Behavioral Traits Rating Scale and Categories/Themes

CATEGORIES	Behavior Traits Rating Scale Item
Social Skills	#7-Cooperates with other students #8-Cooperates with other adults
Work Ethics	#1-Exhibits dependability #2-Reliable and prompt with tasks/assignments #3-Accepts evaluation of performance #9-Promptness, neatness, accuracy of work #10-Exhibits good attendance/punctuality #11-Exhibits productivity #12-Effective in pursuing task to completion #13-Ability to work independently #17-Ability to organize responsibilities and tasks
Academic Skills	#5-Ability to learn, understand, assimilate knowledge #15-Ability to express self in writing; uses correct grammar #16-Ability to express self orally, using standard English #20-Ability to think critically, to problem solve
Self Concept/Internal Motivation	#4-Exhibits a positive attitude #6-Exhibits tact and self control #14-Demonstrates willingness to learn and grow #18-Degree of flexibility and ability to adapt #19-Handles stressful situations

As the three research questions were investigated, the data collected from the behavioral and personality traits surveys as well as the interviews were analyzed to determine correlations of responses of the different participants. A Likert scale was included on each of the surveys utilizing the following criteria:

Excellent – observed 90-100% of the time

Good –observed 80-89% of the time

Average –observed 70-79% of the time

Below Average – observed 60-69% of the time

Poor –observed less than 60% of the time

Not Observed/ Not Applicable –

According to Markusic (2008), Likert scales are often used in educational research that involves questionnaires, surveys, etc. This psychometric scale provides participants an opportunity to select a response based on a descriptive quality combined with a numerical value.

Mean scores of the ratings on each behavioral trait were used to identify the relationship between the variable and the participant's success in gifted programming. Mean scores were calculated by tallying the ratings of each participant on items grouped by categories (i.e., social skills, work ethics, academic skills, self concept/internal motivation) on the scale. Tallies were totaled based on the criteria (excellent, good, average, etc.) on the Likert scale. To obtain the percentage, the number of markings for

each criterion was then divided by the total number of markings for that theme or category.

The crux of the study focused on identifying why some African American students have been successful in gifted programming. Capturing personality traits that have been displayed by successful gifted students as identified through self evaluation as well as through external ratings may help in determining behaviors that support success in identifying, placing, teaching, and retaining high achieving African American students in gifted programming. Building on the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Cognitive Theory, findings will be reported focusing on three major ideas, but not limited to only these ideas. These include: giving voice to Elijah as he shares his feelings, thoughts, and ideas about being a minority in a program for which he had to identify himself for inclusion as opposed to being recommended by adults in his educational life; providing comparative analyses of behaviors exhibited by an African American male student that may have warranted referral for gifted services especially as school districts fine tune the RTI process in reference to giftedness; and drawing informed conclusions about what this information means in the bigger world of providing equity as the academic, social, and emotional needs of minority students are being met in the educational system of today and of the future.

Summary

“The language of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* reiterated the role that federal government plays in enhancing the educational experience of every student regardless of race or socioeconomic status” (Toldson, 2008, p .2). The research and subsequent findings should elevate the discussion on the engagement of Black students in schools, especially in programs for the gifted and talented. Research is rampant on the topic of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Instead of examining why Black students are not represented in gifted programming, the change process may be better ignited by identifying the reason why some Black students are included in gifted programming and have been effective in this placement. This body of research seeks to be that impetus for change. Recommendations from these findings may suggest policy solutions and instructional practices that can support the level of academic success of Black students. These solutions and practices may mean revamping procedural guidance included in such processes as RTI that may add behavioral checklists to the identification documentation for gifted services. From a deeper perspective, CRT promotes incorporating the stories or voices of minority students as part of a deeper analysis when truly uncovering abilities and talents. Additionally, implications may also identify the role and responsibilities support entities such as community organizations and mentoring groups can perform as true partners in the educational success of all children. To this end, the stories of students such as Elijah should then “move us to action and the qualitative and material improvement of the educational experiences of people of color” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 13).

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Data Analysis

The overarching purpose of this study was to identify how and why some African American students included in gifted programs maintain academic and social success. Through an intense examination of the role of self concept, support systems, academic proficiency, and motivation in ensuring student success in higher level classes, this research found that academic proficiency was the least effective initial indication to use when identifying potentially gifted African American learners. The strongest predictors included recurring observations of behaviors related to social skills, internal motivation, and work ethics. The research also expands the conversation by including participants concerns and solutions to ensuring increased recruitment, retention, and overall effectiveness of minority students in gifted programming. Elijah's story and the details from those that work with him as a student give voice to the journey of one African American gifted male student.

A compilation of the data collected in this research and an analysis of these data are described in this chapter. The study consisted of data collected through a multifaceted approach and included longitudinal and historical data on the participant's academic achievement captured through a review of grades, transcripts of courses completed and standardized tests results. Perception data for this research were collected through interviews with elementary, middle, and high school teachers and administrators as well as coaches/mentors who worked with the subject during his schooling. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Additionally, to gain a perspective from the vantage point of the student, the participant was also interviewed. To further validate research

findings, all respondents, including the subject, were asked to complete a Behavioral Traits Rating Scale identifying a rating of the subject's level of display of specific behaviors. These traits were then coded and grouped in four themes/categories including: social skills, work ethics, academic skills, and self-concept/internal motivation. Last, all research participants and the subject selected from a comprehensive listing of adjectives including on a Personality Traits Rating Scale, descriptive qualities that characterized the subject. This multifaceted data collection provided the opportunity to capture stories, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts as part of the documentation on variables that enhanced the success of the subject in schooling.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How did one high achieving African American male student describe his experiences in gifted education?
2. What environmental impediments potentially threatened the achievement that was described by the high achieving African American male student, his teachers, and his coaches?
3. What internal and external conditions serve as support factors in the continuous success of African American students in academic programs for advanced learners?

Elijah's Story-Academic Achievement

Testing Requirements – Academic Proficiency as an Entry Way into the Program

A review of Elijah's school transcript revealed a history of medium to high academic performance based on class grades culminating with a grade point average of

3.431 on a 4.00 scale. Elijah initially completed a self referral for gifted programming when he was enrolled in 4th grade. A subsequent examination of his test results from the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)* assessment completed while in 3rd grade revealed he had scored in the 90th percentile in Language which would not have qualified him for an initial placement. Mental abilities were subsequently measured through an administration of the *Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (KTEA)* where he scored in the 95th percentile band in reading. Comments written by the school district's Gifted Assessment Coordinator on the district's Program for the Gifted Referral/Eligibility Data/Consent for Placement form revealed "Student request-- Teacher stated that he is very curious about topics in science and excels in math and problem solving". Additional comments written by the teacher included: "Elijah requested he be considered for Program Challenge placement. Elijah is a very capable child [who] often shows remarkable insight with any topic we are studying. He is very curious about topics in science, and excels in mathematics and problem solving". Before he was deemed eligible for gifted placement, Elijah was administered the *Renzulli Motivation and Creativity Scale* for motivation and creativity where he scored in the 90th percentile on both components. His gifted eligibility was validated in June of his 4th grade and he subsequently began participating in Program Challenge classes at the beginning of 5th grade.

Struggles in Middle Grades

Elijah's academic performance dropped during the time he was enrolled in middle school indicated on performance on the *Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)*- an assessment that measures student performance on objectives and standards taught as

part of the state mandated curriculum. Standardized tests completed by Elijah during elementary, middle, and high school were all scored on a scale of does not meet, meets, and exceeds grade level standards. Even though he tended to score in the meets category on his middle school administered CRCTs, Elijah had several scores that were in the does not meet category in certain domains including reading for locating and recalling information and geometry and measurement. Even though the middle schools did not calculate an actual GPA, Elijah's classroom grades in academic content areas tended to be in the 70-80's range. On the *Middle Grades Writing Assessment (MGWA)*, a state mandated test administered in eighth grade, Elijah's performance was "not on target" meaning his performance level in the area of written communication did not meet grade level standards.

The middle school years represent a pivotal transition time frame in the lives of young adolescence. According to Wormeli (2011), "high school success, navigating the larger world, and discovering the direction we want our lives to take all have roots in young adolescence" (p.49). During the middle school years, belonging becomes one of the primary concerns of adolescents. Combined with the emerging need for connectivity is the need to find a personal identity while struggling with physical changes due to maturation. "Middle schoolers are fiercely curious and independent, yet almost paradoxically, they crave social connection" (Wormeli, 2011, p.51). During what is probably the most tumultuous time of their lives, adolescents struggle with balancing their physical development, their emotional psyche, their mental abilities – all while trying to be themselves while still being connected to others.

Elijah's academic struggles during this time may have been the result of internal conflicts between his abilities (or capabilities) and the drive for social acceptance. The added label of giftedness may have complicated Elijah's life even more so during these transition years. According to Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008), the success of African American learners in gifted programs often relates to the need for relationships between students and their classmates as well as a sense of belonging. Disengagement from academics is often an attempt to gain acceptance from peers (Henfield, Moore, and Wood, 2008). During these transition years for many students, academic relevance submerges and the focus often turns to other areas such as sports and entertainment and outward behaviors become manifestations of negative, self-defeating attitudes (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986).

Honors level classes that Elijah completed while in high school included Biology, World History, and Physics. With the exception of his Algebra I *End of Course Test (EOCT)*, on each of the academic standardized tests completed while in high school, Elijah scored in the meets category, or in the middle range of performance. In Algebra I, he scored in the Exceeds category. On the *Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)*, Elijah's combined score from math and reading was 960. According to the College Board (2010) the mean score of students taking the SAT in 2008-2009 (the year Elijah completed the test) was 502 in Critical Reading and 515 in mathematics for a combined score of 1017. Elijah's performance on this standardized assessment measure was somewhat lower than the mean score of all students taking the test at that time.

Elijah's Self Assessment / Self Concept

During the interview session, Elijah indicated his social skills may have caused his teachers to initially overlook his academic abilities and not refer him for gifted placement. He responded, "I think my teachers never referred me because of my behavior. I was never a problem child, but I was very funny and loved to laugh and finishing my work before everyone else left me with 'free time' to showcase my talents". Eventually, after he inquired about wanting to be in the gifted program, Elijah indicated his teachers started paying more attention to him and "noticing that I was always finishing my work first and never really had trouble understanding the work". Elijah indicated he told his 3rd grade teacher he wanted to see where he stood in comparison to other students who were already labeled as gifted.

As an elementary student, Elijah attended three different schools. He stated the one thing all three schools had in common was "they were all places where I tried to better my education". However, he indicated the major difference was the teachers at the schools that were predominantly African American in terms of student demographics seemed to care more than the teachers at the school where he was in the minority. Elijah further explained caring as meaning talking with students about non school related topics, knowing their family members, making you feel like you were part of a class family, fussing at you when you did wrong, and praising you when you did right. At the predominantly African American schools, Elijah felt these things happened. However, at the predominately white schools, he felt alone, left out and excluded.

Elijah, during the interview acknowledged that middle school was the time when he struggled more than at any other time in his schooling. He responded,

“At first I struggled more in middle school because I hung around immature people who couldn’t understand my gift of learning. This was the time in my life when I would often ‘play dumb’ and joke around in class and not do my work because I was young and just wanted to be with my ‘real friends’ that I was slowly losing because I was always doing something with my gifted program. I was hoping they would kick me out so I could just be normal”.

The transition to middle school represents a time period of both environmental and psychological changes. Researchers report that following the transition to middle grades, students in urban districts were found to have significantly greater achievement losses, larger decrease in grades point averages and a greater dislike for school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Elijah’s academic performance supported these research findings. However the reference to his desire to disconnect with gifted programming supports the research of Henfield, Moore and Wood (2008) where African American gifted students repeatedly discussed “standing out” or being looked upon as being different. Ford, et al (2008) referred to an “attitude-behavior discrepancy” where African American students connected high academic achievement to “acting white”. Whiting (2006) indicated that Black male students tend to comprise the highest percentage of students who become disengaged from the academic setting. Ironically, Elijah did not want to quit gifted classes. Instead, he wanted to be kicked out. These words and actions indicate the thought pattern of a child who knows his capabilities but struggles so intensely with the

need to be socially connected. The struggling was to the point where Elijah wanted the adults in his life to make a decision that would stifle his current as well as future academic group so that he could intermingle more with students who may not have had his same ability to perform. However, in Elijah's mind, he probably realized that educators or caring adults would not have done what he articulated in the interview.

Sense of Belonging / Social Skills

While in middle and high school, Elijah became actively involved in the athletic programs participating in football, wrestling, track and field, and weightlifting. He also expanded his extracurricular activities by participating in several organizations including the BETA Club, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the National Honor Society, and the Bogarsuns Civic Club (a fraternal type organization that stressed public service). According to Elijah, being actively involved in clubs and organizations gave him a sense of belonging and something to do to keep him out of trouble. During this time of his life, Elijah said his coaches and club advisers also served as mentors and spiritual advisors to him.

“I was able to hang out with a group of men who were positive and successful and very influential to me in a positive manner, at a time in my life when a male's influence was needed more than ever, and my knowing that anytime I was in need of anything and everything that there was a higher power that I could go to and that he would never put more on me than I could bear”.

Elijah found refuge in support from adults he interacted with in extracurricular activities such as clubs and sports. These adults provided emotional as well as spiritual guidance for Elijah during a critical time in his life. This statement by Elijah provided insight into the importance of mentoring. According to Toldson (2008), “policies that emphasize mentoring programs and other means to reduce isolation among school age African American males are likely to improve academic progress (p.4).

Perceptions of the Teachers (or Supports)

In retrospect, Elijah acknowledged major differences between his regular classes and his gifted classes. “They were like two different worlds. They [gifted classes] were more peaceful, had less students-which meant more individual time with the teacher if needed-and the students came with the motivation to learn and the desire to want to be the smartest”. Likewise, Elijah perceived differences between gifted and regular education teachers. Comments during the interview included:

“My gifted teachers always seemed to have a different type of swagger about them when it came to us. They were always happier and you could tell that they really cared about us. They would always tell us that we were special and they always said that we would be very successful one day. It was always positive things that were said to us. This made me want to learn even more than before. But with some of my regular teachers, you could always tell that they didn’t really care and that they were there only for their pay check. My gifted teachers taught me how to think”.

Elijah described a profound difference between his gifted teachers and his regular education teachers and the quality of instruction that happened in each classroom. Teaching and learning in his gifted classes seemed to have been grounded in positive relationships between the teacher and the learner. These types of relationships are crucial in any instructional setting. However, Elijah witnessed these positive relationships more so in one setting than the other.

Wormeli (2008) discussed the importance of effective student-teacher relationships. Even though the focus of his work was middle school, Wormeli's findings captured the essence of quality teaching. In discussing the best transition programs, Wormeli described a setting where "faculty members are in touch with their students' major worries: homework, demanding teachers, bullying, and getting lost" (p.51). Effective teachers focus on teaching the student and not merely teaching the content. Toldson's (2008) extensive scientifically based research concluded "teachers who were perceived to treat their students 'as a person' produced the highest levels of academic achievement among black males" (p.40).

Parent involvement in the educational process expands the notion of relationships by offering the idea that supports formed through biological relationships such as parenting, can be strengthened if parents are also involved with the child in schools. "Parents can contribute insight and knowledge that complement the professional skills of schools' staff in ways that strengthen academic and social programs" (Comer & Haynes, 1991, p. 274). Absent in the interview process were Elijah's parents. At no time during the conversation did Elijah reference them in his upbringing. Elijah was raised by his mother in a single parent relationship. His mother, at the onset of this research, stated

how proud she was of Elijah's accomplishments but felt she did not always possess the academic proficiencies herself to assist Elijah with homework assignments and other tasks at school. She trusted the teachers to make the right decisions for her child.

Elijah's mother was present at sports activities in which he participated but, otherwise did not take an active and visible role in his schooling.

Elijah concluded the interview by sharing his concern for other African American students and shedding insight into how to increase the presence of minorities in gifted programs. He responded by saying:

“When I was in school, more African Americans were in special education than gifted classes. I wouldn't even say that they weren't smart enough to be in gifted classes because truly they were. I just think that we as African Americans sometimes become complacent in our situations and sometimes never really try to better ourselves or to show how smart we truly are in a positive manner.”

He ended by saying that “even with complacency, if there is a caring adult who is willing to spend time challenging and supporting young African American students, particularly male students, then more would probably show their giftedness”.

In compiling Elijah's rating of himself on the various traits included on the Behavioral Traits Scale, mean scores of the ratings on each behavioral trait were used to identify the relationship between the variable and the participant's success in gifted programming. Mean scores were calculated by tallying Elijah's rating on items grouped by categories (i.e. social skills, work ethics, academic skills, self concept/internal motivation) on the scale. Tallies were totaled based on the criteria (excellent, good,

average, etc.) on the Likert scale. To obtain the percentage, the number of markings for each criterion was then divided by the total number of markings for that theme or category.

The mean scores of Elijah's self assessment on the Behavioral Traits Rating Scale as indicated by percentages are included in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale (Self Assessment Completed by Subject)

CATEGORY	RATINGS					
	Excellent (observed 90-100% of the time)	Good (observed 80-89% of the time)	Average (observed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (observed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (observed less than 60% of the time)	Not observed (never observed or not applicable)
SOCIAL SKILLS	100%	---	---	---	---	---
WORK ETHICS	33%	56%	1%	---	---	---
ACADEMIC SKILLS	33%	67%	---	---	---	---
SELF CONCEPT/ INTERNAL MOTIVATION	60%	40%	---	---	---	---

Adjectives included on the Personality Traits Rating Scale that Elijah selected as descriptors of his personality and qualities and that helped foster his academic and social success included: outgoing, aggressive, cooperative, confident, dedicated, cheerful, friendly, and dependable. Overall, Elijah described himself as a student who knew what

he wanted to do and life and felt he was capable of accomplishing his goals. However, during adolescence, Elijah admitted he lost focus, succumbed to peer pressure, and did not always display those skills, talents, and characteristics he knew he possessed. “Life was an internal struggle for me at that time because I now realized I was not being true to the person I was and instead trying to be the person others wanted me to be”. Responses from the interview revealed Elijah felt that in high school and now in college, he is being his true self. According to Elijah, the adjectives he selected were determined based “on the person I truly am”.

According to Vaugh and others (1991), the complex processes of learning involves the context, the student, and the content. The system can only be perfected when these three components are balanced. Elijah’s story focused on the inner thoughts of the student – the center of the learning process, as he attempted to master the context and the content of his schooling. Social cognitive theory acknowledges the center role of the student and purports that student mastery of the content correlates strongly with the context of instructional delivery. Within this context are attributes that have a pervasive impact on success in schooling. These attributes include relationships, self esteem and self efficacy, motivation, cultural issues, and peer pressure.

Burney (2008) revealed that social cognitive theory stressed cognitive processes support settings where individuals can observe themselves and others in a learning environment and reflect on the environment through personal thoughts and behaviors, altering behaviors accordingly to be successful. Elijah’s interview revealed his retrospective thoughts of schooling during each phase of his educational career. He identified how his mastery of the content was often based on the context of the delivery

and especially on the relationships that existed within and outside that contextual setting. Adults and peers had a profound impact – both positive and negative – on Elijah’s academic performance. Fortunately, the positive relationships provided a stronger life line so as to support Elijah’s successful continuation in gifted programming, in schooling, and in life. His story revealed the triumphs and the tribulations of his journey. Similar stories were outlined by adults who were a part of Elijah’s journey.

Participants’ Responses

Eleven participants completed interviews, the Personality Traits Scale, and the Behavioral Checklist to provide descriptive details about the subject. Interviews were conducted over a period of two months and captured data from adults who had played a critical role in Elijah’s life at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. To assist in organizing the data for this research, participant responses were coded, themed, and categorized in the following four areas: social skills, work ethics, academic skills, and self concept/internal motivation. Responses were first captured from the standpoint of all participants in the research study. Next, responses were compiled through a disaggregated analysis based on the relationships that existed while the subject was in elementary school, middle school, and high school. This disaggregation provided perspectives regarding behavioral traits and qualities observed over time.

Social Skills

Respondents in the research described Elijah as being “a big muscular guy who was viewed as a true student-athlete”. Because of this, Coach Smith indicated Elijah fit in well with the academic and social crowd and was well-liked. However Mrs. Sanders, another one of his middle school teachers responded “Elijah fit in on the football team

with all the players. I seem to remember that he acted differently when with other African-American students. Elijah seemed to succumb to the peer pressure he felt from other African-American males by being silly and clowning around”. When asked the question do you think Elijah’s peers treated him any differently because he was gifted, Mr. Martin responded “No, I’m not sure that they knew he was gifted as he never made that fact known”. In essence, according Mrs. Sanders, “He didn’t always show his giftedness”. Elijah seemed to navigate through dual worlds so as to address his needs for peer acceptance while also displaying his giftedness – in a selected manner.

Elijah’s elementary experience was, however, very different. Mrs. Jackson, Elijah’s elementary teacher commented, “If I can remember correctly, he did not have any problems fitting in with the other students. In first grade, they all seemed to want to help each other. The classroom environment was a learning community”. For Elijah, the sense of community may have also resulted in a sense of belonging.

Another respondent who worked with Elijah during middle school voiced his concern about peer pressure not just for Elijah but for many African American students. He said, “In many social situations within some groups, it is not acceptable to be who you are. Many African American males think that it is not cool to be gifted. I posit that this is partly caused by lack of a positive male role model. This is not inclusive to only African Americans males-but Elijah did fall victim to this scenario while in middle school”.

Henfield, Moore, & Wood (2008) discussed the racial impact on learning success. Students in the research discussed race as being a stronger identity variable and reported that in middle school, racial identity was of the utmost concern. Phrases often referenced

by students in the study included being accused of “acting white” and also cited situations where they had purposefully “acted black” as a way of “fitting in.” Whiting (2006a), however added the dimension of gender as a extenuating variable and noted that among African American male students often viewed being intelligent, studious, or talented was sometimes viewed as being feminine or unmanly.

Elijah was a victim of both variables – being African American and male. As a means of coping to address internal perceptions of unchangeable genetic features, students often masks other skills, talents, and abilities, in an attempt to fit in. Varlas (2011) noted four educational roadblocks that Black students often encounter and that potentially could derail them on their journey to success. These hurdles include a) the lack of caring adult relationships, b) mismatches between student and teacher expectations of success, c) perceptions that teachers do not fully explain content, and d) feelings of unfair treatment during disciplinary actions. The presence of positive social and contextual opportunities including mentoring may often divert negative coping skills. Elijah had the support of adults during his schooling that helped to buffer some of these potential hardships.

Work Ethics

During elementary school, participants saw Elijah as “always on task and doing his assigned work ahead of other students”. Mr. Starks indicated, “Elijah always worked on his class assignments in spite of his peers choosing to play around in class or during leisure time. He took his class studies serious”. Even though he became easily bored, Mrs. Hamm indicated Elijah still completed all assignments. “He was always on task, and when doing his assigned work, he was always ahead of the other students”.

His work ethics somewhat took a negative turn during the adolescent years. Teachers who knew his potential had to stay on top of Elijah to make sure he worked to that potential. However, in high school, Elijah seemed to regain focus. Mr. Starks, the high school administrator said, “he took his class studies seriously, always wanting to do a great job and always eager to learn how he could do things even better”.

A stronger sense of self efficacy, self esteem, and determination emerged and became more evident during high school. Class grouping tended to place Elijah in several classes that contained identified gifted and/or high achieving students. A renewed focus on academic performance was evident in this interview response.

Academic Proficiency

Early in his schooling, Elijah demonstrated he was academically able to perform without much assistance from the teachers. His elementary principal stated, “Elijah learned to read very quickly and was able to increase his reading level above grade level. The words seemed to come fairly easy to him”. One participant who worked with him in elementary school shared memories of one time where she was particularly impressed with Elijah’s memorization skills.

“In preparing for a Black History Program, all of the students had been assigned mini parts, speeches, or roles. After the first practice, Elijah has memorized every student’s speaking part, including the vast majority of Dr. King’s *I Have a Dream Speech*. While other students were still reading their lines from a scripted blue lined tablet, he was reciting their parts—as well as his own. And he did it with feelings as if he was truly a part of the Civil Rights Movement”.

Interview responses, however, indicated that even though, Elijah was an academically bright student, he did not always perform at extremely high levels in the classroom. During middle school Elijah's intelligence was masked by his need for social acceptance. Therefore, grades and performance scores did not always parallel with his academic ability. "I think he struggled in academics because he felt that no one recognized his ability, therefore, he decided to give up on excelling and just do the minimum", replied Mrs. Sanders, one of Elijah's middle school teacher. Elijah existed in dual worlds during his middle school years. These split scenarios served as a challenge for him as his academic achievement was adversely impacted during this phase of schooling.

During high school, Elijah's academic skills became more overtly displayed. "He was one of the strongest members of the BETA Club and often took a leadership role especially when we attended workshops and conferences with other students" replied Mrs. Hamm, a high school teacher. Another remarked, "Honors level Biology is not an easy course. Elijah performed quite well in the class and received high marks based on rigorous and often totally new content". Jokingly, Mr. Mathis, a mentor responded, "It's like his brain was like a sponge—he just sucked things up. Whether it was a new football play or a problem in Algebra III, Elijah would either memorize the steps and/or figure it out-easily". Schooling during high school seemed to take on a different meaning for Elijah as he no longer masked his academic abilities. As Mr. Starks, a high school administrator explained, Elijah's learning skills extended beyond the classrooms. Along with this learning seemed to be a combined desire to always do his best.

Self Concept/Internal Motivation

Acknowledging that one of the key requirements for success is having the internal drive to succeed, his elementary teacher, Mrs. Jackson responded, “Elijah had the confidence and maybe believed that he could do what the gifted students could do. He worked hard in first grade and learned to read and seemed to love school”. “He wanted to exceed and wanted to show others that he could do the same level work as the students who were being challenged through the gifted classes”. “Real learning requires that students take risks, persevere despite setbacks, and maintain confidence in their ability to succeed” (Tiedt & Tiedt, 2010, p.26). Elijah, during elementary school, demonstrated the qualities needed to engage in real learning.

Elijah wanted to perform – for himself and for his teacher. He knew he had the capabilities and the skills to be successful, indicated Mrs. Hamm, his high school teacher. This interview response implied a deepened sense of self efficacy or Elijah’s perception that he was capable of performing and wanted to expound a sense of personal gratification by pleasing himself and his teachers.

Mr. Starks, Elijah’s high school administrator, did not realize the gifted referral process was initiated by Elijah. When this was shared during the interview, he replied, “I’m not surprised. He did have that internal drive and was also quite competitive.” As a high school administrator, Mr. Starks had only observed the Elijah who was engaged in the learning process and who was self-driven to achieve success. Mr. Starks ended the interview by saying, “Elijah probably thought, if others could do something, then he could too.” Ironically, these words were almost identical to Elijah’s reasoning for

completing a self referral for gifted programming. The strong sense of identify that was prevalent during the early school years returned during high school.

Mr. Bunn, one of Elijah's elementary gifted teachers, as he reflected on the classroom experience indicated, "Elijah didn't think he was different when he got in the gifted classes. He knew he was capable of doing the level of work and when he was in the classes with other gifted students, he demonstrated that level of work. He was happy with what he was doing and that drove him to work even harder". Elijah's initial referral was based on the fact that he felt competent and capable to compete with the group of students in his class who were identified as high achievers. He wanted to be successful and possessed the internal motivation to succeed. In many cases, a sense of competition drives students to work harder. Elijah displayed that competitive drive to be challenged.

Support Systems

Participants reflected on the support role they played in Elijah's life. "The role I played in Elijah's success was to educate him academically, give him encouragement, and help him to think positively about his future. Another seriously replied "I hope I inspired him to believe in himself and what he could do. I made sure he found success in the classroom. I hope I helped him to gain confidence". Coach Avery who served as a teacher and later a coach/mentor stated "My role in Elijah's success was one part academic and the other part life skills. I would tell Elijah that he needed to always think positive in life and to take advantage of all of the positive opportunities". Lastly, Mr. Bowens, one of Elijah's mentors, said his role was "to stay on him. I knew what he was capable of doing and wasn't about to allow him to be a failure". An example was given describing an experience with Elijah as a high school senior.

“High school seniors are known to sometime drag their feet when it dawns on them that they will soon be out of school and in a bigger world. This scares some students and I think it really scared Elijah. Therefore, he was very slow about taking actions toward making a decision about what he was going to do after high school. I insisted he stop by my house so we could plan for a post-secondary life with options of college, the military, or a job. Staying around his hometown and hanging out was not an option. We struggled at first, but I stuck with him, helping complete college applications and even completing financial aid forms. At midnight on the eve of the deadline for submitting an application to a particular school, Elijah and I were traveling to a 24 hour post office to make sure his application had the required postmark date. Elijah and I had traveled to the school to look at the campus and he really liked what he saw and heard while there. I think he hesitated to mail the application because he feared he would get accepted. When he received his acceptance letter, we celebrated (and almost cried) together! His first question was what do I do now? I responded, start packing. He smiled”.

Mentors push students because they realize the potential for greatness and, consequently, will not allow student to short-change themselves. To overcome barriers associated with single parent and/or disengaged households, schools and communities must embrace the relevance of ongoing mentoring programs. In Elijah’s case, the presence and involvement of a mentor helped maximize his success/achievement in school. Activities such as preparing college applications, visiting campuses, and

submitting applications on time are traditionally joint responsibilities of the student and the parent. In the absence of a parental driving force, it is easy for the student to drop the ball in handling these responsibilities. However, strong mentors can fill the void of a parent who because of unwillingness or inability, does not exhibit the support needed. One salient aspect of student success is the presence or absence of a support system. In Elijah's case, his relationships with his mentors were pivotal to his success. Elijah's mentoring relationships supports Hebert and Reis (1999) studies of urban youth that revealed the significance of supportive adult relationships in nurturing resilience and in shaping a belief in self within culturally diverse teenagers.

Identification of Gifted Students

During the interviews, participants shared interesting and relevant insight into the possible solutions to ensuring the identification and ultimately success of African American students in gifted programming. "Early identification and intervention is a must-using multiple sources of data for the decision making process" was the response by Mrs. Jackson, an elementary teacher. Teachers need to be trained in identification of gifted traits-especially among African American students".

Participants revealed the need for students to have a strong support system-both internal from family and external through schooling and community life. "What one teacher may see as a discipline problem may actually be a cry out for more challenging instruction and emotional support" continued Mrs. Jackson. Another participant provided a tri-fold explanation of support encompassing the student, the parents, and the schools. Mr. Martin stated,

“Being average needs to be seen as not acceptable. A number of African American students are content with “getting by” because that’s what their African American peers are doing. Identify those gifted students at an earlier age. Parents are more hands on the Pre-K-5th grade years with their child. Once they reach middle school, they aren’t as engaging. If the parents are made aware early that their student exhibits the skills to attend gifted courses, they will be more willing to work with them. Parents need to be more aggressive not only in supporting education but also in ensuring teachers and schools continue that support system by challenging and encouraging students to always excel. Support for students is a shared responsibility. We all must do our parts”.

Coach Avery, who served as both Elijah’s teacher and his middle school football coach placed a major responsibility on the shoulders of teachers and schooling and stated,

“Educators need to be more aware of a student’s talents. Educators need to do everything in their power to let parents know of the opportunities for their children. Every parent sends to school the best child they have and sometimes, because of home issues, they may not be aware of their child’s talents. Of course, there are many socio-economic factors that exist that add to the problems of African-Americans’ lack of enrollment in gifted services”.

Critical Race Theory was presented as a framework for examining the role of race and racism and can be used as the basis for studies on the absence of African American in gifted and/or advanced programming. Morris (2002) indicated that race and racism may

be variables that determine which students are selected for gifted programs and which students remain in the program after initial placement. As Morris' research reflected on African American students feeling not just tolerated, but welcomed in gifted classes, the role of the teacher in establishing that feeling of welcomeness emerged. This comment by Elijah's middle school teacher and coach implied there are factors beyond academic abilities that determine gifted placement. CRT purports that those factors include deeply rooted perceptions and beliefs of the property of whiteness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because of these often unacknowledged and sometimes biases, non-majority students do not always receive comparable acknowledgement of skills and abilities.

The teacher/coach also, through his responses, implied that impact of other variables such as socioeconomics that often become problematic in identifying students for gifted programming. Giftedness is not solely regulated to the rich and famous. However, assumptions are often made that wealth means students have more background experiences that tend to invigorate their learning.

Payne (2001) outlined the definition of poverty to include a person's ability to live and sustain in the absence of certain resources. In explaining the correlation of poverty to student achievement, Payne delineated eight different types of resources. These included (Payne, 2001, p. 16):

- Financial-having the money to purchase goods and services. Even though most persons see poverty as the lack of money, the absence of this resource has little direct impact on the success or ability in schooling. In other words, just because a student is poor does not mean he/she cannot learn.

- Emotional resources-being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self destructive behaviors. Identified as the most critical of the tools, emotional resources help students develop resiliency as they learn how to withstand difficult and emotional situations while learning how to change bad habits.
- Mental resources-having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life. Being able to acquire, process, and retain information leads students to a greater level of self sufficiency.
- Spiritual resources-believing in divine purpose and guidance. Possessing spiritual resources helps students refrain from being hopeless or useless and provides the impetus for feelings of worth and value. Spiritual resources provide a reason for living.
- Physical resources-having physical health and mobility. Having physical resources means having a body that is in sufficient shape to do work.
- Support systems-having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need. This resource means being surrounded by or having access to a plethora of people to go to if help is needed.
- Relationships/role models-having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, who are nurturing to the child, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior. According to Comer (1995), no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship. In supporting students from poverty, it is critical these relationships be nurturing and positive. These relationships can help foster the internal development of emotional resources.

- Knowledge of hidden rules-Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group. “Hidden rules are about the salient, unspoken understandings that cue the members of the group that this individual does or does not fit” (Payne, 2001, p. 18). All socioeconomic groups, cultural groups, and ethnic groups have their hidden rules. Conflicts exist when students come from a value structure different from the teacher or other members of the class and consequently do not know or understand the hidden rules of the majority culture in the classroom.

The profound statement made by Mr. Avery, Elijah’s middle school teacher/coach, addressed the void of several of these resources in the lives of African American students, particularly male students. The reference to role models indicated that many African American males coming from poverty situations do not have “significant others” in an adult role in their lives to help them develop the emotional resources needed to display their true academic abilities while also sustaining success in traditionally middle class environments—the classroom as well as the community.

CRT contends that “the social realities of people of color, never the less, give them experiences, voices, and viewpoints that are likely to be different from mainstream, dominant narrative” (Delgado & Stefonic, 2001, p.37). Highly effective teachers validate these different, yet valuable experiences and use this background knowledge as a springboard for challenging instructional frameworks in the classroom regardless of the socioeconomic status of the students.

Ironically, even though all participants voiced the necessity of having both family and external support systems, no one could identify any such organized support efforts in the community where the subject was born and raised. During his interview,

Elijah identified churches in the African American community as being a safe haven for children. When asked the question “Are there any programs outside of school that support the achievement of gifted and talented African American students in your community, the vast majority of the participants responded “Not that I am aware of”. One participant, Mrs. Sanders, a middle school teacher however, did state that “We have a new gifted private high school that supports diversity in their population. I know two African American children who attend this school”.

Interestingly enough, the teacher acknowledged ignorance of specific community programs that support the achievement of gifted and talented programs for African American students but did not initiate the willingness to formulate such a program. Instead she referenced a private school that supports diversity and has two African American students.

Schooling, should serve as the first source for mentoring and support of the achievement of each student enrolled in the educational program. CRT focuses less on diversity and more so on the premise that society has a hidden color code law in which race plays a major role in all decision making. Therefore as opposed to merely quantifying the number of minorities in a program to justify support of diversity, CRT identifies the need to “acknowledge the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.10).

As a summation of the collective thoughts, perceptions, and stories that were articulated during the interviews, Mrs. Jackson, Elijah’s elementary teacher stated, “Teachers need to know that gifted doesn’t have a certain look, that any child regardless of their socio-economic status, their appearance, or behavior could be gifted. They

should also know that sometimes you have to look beneath layers to see that a child is gifted' they are not always the ones that get their work done or get it done correctly".

According to Marland (1972), high performance can be manifested in multiple areas including a) intellectual ability, b) academic aptitude, c) creative or productive thinking, d) leadership ability, e) visual and performing arts, and f) psychomotor ability. All too often educators put blinders on and only see giftedness through a lens of wealth and/or color. Davis and Rimm (2004) noted high motivation and persistence as recurrent traits of truly gifted students. Elijah's competitive drive during elementary school to be challenged demonstrated this level of motivation and persistence that had initially been ignored by his teachers.

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale

The respondent data from the Behavioral Traits Rating Scale were also categorized into the following four themes: social skills, work ethics, academic skills, and self concept/internal motivation. The mean scores of participant responses were calculated by tallying the participants' rating of each behavioral trait in the themed category and then determining the percentage of each score. These data results are indicated by percentage ratings in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – All Participants

CATEGORY	RATINGS					
	Excellent (observed 90-100% of the time)	Good (observed 80-89% of the time)	Average (observed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (observed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (observed less than 60% of the time)	Not observed (never observed or not applicable)
SOCIAL SKILLS	59%	39%	---	---		2%
WORK ETHICS	47%	38%	3%	---	---	12%
ACADEMIC SKILLS	47%	28%	3%	3%	---	19%
SELF CONCEPT/ INTERNAL MOTIVATION	54%	32%	5%	---	---	9%

Overall, the adults who had served as teachers, administrators, mentors/coaches indicated Elijah's strongest behavioral traits were in the areas of social skills where 98% of the ratings indicated he were excellent and/or good meaning these traits were observed 80% to 100% of the time when they worked with the subject. When examining Elijah's second highest behavioral strength from the perspective of the participants in the research, internal motivation and work ethics received 86% and 85% markings respectively in the criteria of excellent and good. Ironically, the area rated the lowest was academic skills leading to the possible observation that Elijah's giftedness may have been expounded more through his ability to interrelate with others and work habits and ethics as opposed to his academic skills. Nineteen percent of the respondents indicated they had not had the opportunity to observe Elijah's academic performance. However, interview

results to certain more information on this rating revealed that some participants viewed this area as actual observations of Elijah in a classroom setting as opposed to the fact that he possessed the skills and knowledge needed to effectively and efficiently communicate, to think critically, to problem solve, and to perform at an academic level that far exceeded his peer age group.

The traditional process for identifying potentially gifted students includes a heavy reliance on data on academic performance gained from standardized tests. Many accusations have arisen over time as to racial biases that may exist in the actual standardized test as well as the fairness in the analysis of the results of testing. Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) stated that it is logical that the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted programs may be caused by identification processes that do not capture the knowledge and talents of minority students and do not acknowledge environments and social structures that operate on a value system different from middle class.

Elijah possessed an internal drive that served as a motivating factor for success. Along with this drive he was persistent, had an intense sense of self-efficacy, had a strong external support system and had positive work ethics. Even though some of these exemplary traits were not displayed throughout his schooling, and particularly during his adolescent years, they were still embedded in his personality. The combination of those qualities served as an impetus for his success in gifted program as opposed to his academic performance. Data from standardized tests did not support an academic strength worthy of a traditional gifted placement. Yet Elijah was successful because of these other factors. Renzulli (2010) acknowledged that the identification process for

gifted programming must be multifaceted and should evade the traditional thought pattern that a gifted student is someone with a high IQ.

Extrapolation of the data garnered from the Behavioral Traits Rating Scale by grade level revealed the results illustrated in the Tables 5, 6, and 7 below. Since the mentors/coaches were involved in working relationships and support roles that covered a series of years in Elijah's life, the ratings from this group of research participants are not captured in these tables but are reported separately in Table 8. Elementary respondents rated social skills and work ethics highest with 100% indicating they observed the Elijah displaying positive behaviors in this area 80-100% of the time. Middle school participants ranked social skills, work ethics, and academic skills the highest when examining those behaviors observed 80-100% of the time. However, when examining those behaviors the subject displayed 90-100% of the time, academic skills received the lowest rating (37%). High school respondents ranked social skills the highest overall. However, when reviewing the rating of behaviors observed 80-100% of the time (a combination of excellent and good ratings), high school respondents gave equal markings to all four categories indicating the subject displayed all of these behaviors during a significant amount of time they worked with him.

TABLE 5

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale - Elementary

CATEGORY	RATINGS					
	Excellent (observed 90-100% of the time)	Good (observed 80-89% of the time)	Average (observed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (observed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (observed less than 60% of the time)	Not observed (never observed or not applicable)
SOCIAL SKILLS	50%	50%	---	---	---	---
WORK ETHICS	33%	67%	---	---	---	---
ACADEMIC SKILLS	32%	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%
SELF CONCEPT/ INTERNAL MOTIVATION	74%	13%	13%			

TABLE 6

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale - Middle

CATEGORY	RATINGS					
	Excellent (observed 90-100% of the time)	Good (observed 80-89% of the time)	Average (observed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (observed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (observed less than 60% of the time)	Not observed (never observed or not applicable)
SOCIAL SKILLS	100%	---	---	---	---	---
WORK ETHICS	94%	6%	---	---	---	---
ACADEMIC SKILLS	37%	63%	---	---	---	---
SELF CONCEPT/ INTERNAL MOTIVATION	88%	---	12%	---	---	---

TABLE 7

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – High School

CATEGORY	RATINGS					
	Excellent (observed 90-100% of the time)	Good (observed 80-89% of the time)	Average (observed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (observed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (observed less than 60% of the time)	Not observed (never observed or not applicable)
SOCIAL SKILLS	100%	---	---	---	---	---
WORK ETHICS	56%	44%	---	---	---	---
ACADEMIC SKILLS	67%	33%	---	---	---	---
SELF CONCEPT/ INTERNAL MOTIVATION	75%	25%	---	---	---	---

Table 8 depicts the performance rating of research participants that served as mentors/coaches in Elijah's life. These results reveal the strongest category reflected was social skills were 100% of the participants indicated they had observed Elijah's positive display of these behaviors 80% -100% of the time they worked with him. Very close in the rating was self concept/internal motivation where 94% of the respondents felt this was a driving force in Elijah's behavior 80%-100% of the observed time.

TABLE 8

Behavioral Traits Rating Scale – Coaches/Mentors

CATEGORY	RATINGS					
	Excellent (observed 90-100% of the time)	Good (observed 80-89% of the time)	Average (observed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (observed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (observed less than 60% of the time)	Not observed (never observed or not applicable)
SOCIAL SKILLS	25%	75%		---	---	---
WORK ETHICS	25%	42%	33%	---	---	---
ACADEMIC SKILLS	17%	50%	---	---	---	30%
SELF CONCEPT/ INTERNAL MOTIVATION	6%	88%	6%			

Personality Traits Ratings

All eleven respondents, as part of this research, reviewed a listing of adjectives that served as descriptors of personality traits and were asked to select any words that specifically was characteristic of Elijah observed during the time they worked with the subject. Calculations were done to determine the percentage of participants that selected each descriptor. These percentages are depicted in Table 9 below. On the table, the ‘y’ axis reflects the adjectives that Elijah selected during the self assessment while the ‘x’ axis represents the percentage of participants who selected those same descriptors.

TABLE 9

Descriptors Selected by Subject and Participants

Elijah's Selections	Percentage of Participants who selected each descriptor
Outgoing	100%
Cooperative	90%
Mature	40%
Aggressive	10%
Leader	40%
Confident	80%
Creative	20%
Friendly	100%
Trustworthy	50%
Energetic	50%
Enthusiastic	60%
Serious	30%
Dependable	70%
Initiator	10%
Loyal	40%
Motivated	70%
Assertive	30%
Thorough	10%
Dedicated	50%
Determined	70%
Caring	20%
Cheerful	50%

Davis and Rimm (2004) stated that identifying characteristics of gifted students is important because it helps teachers and parents recognize and understand gifted children”

(p.24). Oftentimes, some personality traits such as being assertive when displayed by African American students are viewed as acts of disrespect or behavioral problems (Kunjufu, 2005). A comprehensive listings of traits can serve as discourse on habits or behaviors that support giftedness.

Elijah and all of the participants were in agreement with descriptors such as outgoing and friendly indicating high correlation of descriptors that support social skills. Selections by Elijah and the participants in the research also had a strong level of agreement in cooperative, confident, dependable, motivated, and determined. However, Elijah described himself as being aggressive, being an initiator, and being thorough while the vast majority of respondents did not see these as being of among his descriptive qualities. Additionally, 60% of the respondents described Elijah as being competent. However, he did not include this on his selection list. Competent implies the ability to perform assigned work more often in the academic arena. An overall selection of this descriptor by only 60% of the adult participants in the research tends to imply that Elijah's major strength was not in the academic area but in other behavioral personality traits that supported his success in all phases of schooling. He learned to utilize these qualities to reach his goals.

Summary

The data collected in this research represent a plethora of information that spans the K-12 schooling of the subject. These data provide a story –qualitative in words and quantitative in statistical averages. In many ways, Elijah represents the typical African American male student. He is very athletic, very outgoing, struggled at times with finding his own identity, and, at times, struggled academically. What makes him

different from the African American male students who consistently are included in negative statistical reports on dropouts, crime, and joblessness is that he overcame the obstacles and maintained success. Additionally, even though he had to refer himself, he was identified as gifted. The purpose of this study was to find out what led to this success.

Elijah's self assessment of behaviors displayed on a regular basis (80—100% of the time) revealed a preponderance in the areas of social skills (100%) and self concept/internal motivation. Research participants concurred with these ratings noting that they denoted efficacy in social skills as receiving the highest percentage of excellent ratings (observed 90—100% of the time) with an earned rating of 59% followed by self concept/internal motivation with an overall percentage rating of 54%. When combining the excellent and good ratings from all participants, the theme of work ethics also emerged with high scores.

These ratings differed slightly when analyzing the scoring by participant group—elementary, middle, and high. As the subject moved through his schooling, academic skills gained higher ratings. When examining the participant ranking in the academic skills theme, the percent of all participants rating this area excellent (being observed 90-110% of the times) was 47%; while the elementary was 32%; the middle school rating in the excellent category was 37% and the high school rating was 67%. As a current college student, Elijah gave himself 60% in the excellent category.

Interview responses provided valuable information regarding Elijah's development as he grew older and matured in his schooling. Academically and socially, Elijah struggled during middle school. This struggle is not just an African American

concern or just typical of African American. Adolescence marks the developmental stage when students undergo numerous physical changes—growth spurts, development of body hairs; and voice changes. During a search for self identity, students during adolescence will often turn to friends instead of adults for support, advice, and conversation.

Schooling becomes more a social than an academic experience. Many students falter during this phase, but most, especially those with strong support systems, bounce back. Responses from those interviewed revealed Elijah had that strong support system.

Based on the data collected from interviews, behavioral checklists, and personality rating scales, Elijah, academically, was an average performing student—average as measured by standardized testing. All too often, the major source of documentation for a student's referral and subsequent placement in gifted programming is standardized testing—an area where Elijah, like many other African American students, are not as successful.

As the responses were categorized, and themes emerged and the results collectively paint the picture of a student's life and the behaviors, personality traits, and support systems that helped ensure his success in schooling that help to shape his success in life.

Triangulation of data from multiple sources allowed the researcher to identify common themes that emerged even though the data reflected perceptions and thoughts from respondents who worked with the subject during different phases of his life. The data from the research revealed that qualities such as social skills, work ethics and self concept/internal motivation were the more pervasive themes that helped ensure Elijah's success. Data analysis from responses from different groups who worked with the

subject at different times in his life consistently indicated these three themes had a more pervasive influence on Elijah's success than the academic proficiency. The evidence of a support system throughout his life coming from teachers, coaches, and mentors provided an extra foundation or strength to ensure Elijah demonstrated the skills and talents he possessed. This support structure even helped the subject when he struggled through adolescence. The resounding replication of selection of characteristics such as outgoing, motivated, and determined by independent assessors also reflect recognizable qualities that may predict hidden talents and skills.

CHAPTER FIVE

The identification and placement of African American students in gifted programs have received increased attention in recent years (Heinfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Pierce, et.al, 2007; Daniels, 1998; Ford, 1994). Much of the more recent focus of this attention is due to requirements of federal legislature such as the *No Child Left Behind* Act that mandates schools be held accountable for monitoring the academic performance of all subgroups of students enrolled in the school. Even though heightened accountability has increased awareness of the plight of groups that have traditionally been overlooked in the educational system, much work still needs to occur in the particular area of performance of African American students, specifically, performance in gifted programming. “A long standing concern of researchers and practitioners has been the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs, namely those with high intelligence test scores who were not formally identified as gifted” (Ford & Grantham, 2003, p. 217). Despite advancements in education reform efforts and changes that have occurred in our educational infrastructure over the past several decades, inequities still exist in assessment, diagnosis, placement, and instructional practices in programming. All too often, these inequities negatively affect minority students (Daniels, 1998).

Although a number of studies and reports have provided rationale or reasons for low representation of African American students in gifted programming, limited research exists on the stories of African American students who have successfully maneuvered through the hallways of gifted and advanced classes. This research attempted to gain more insight as to why Elijah, one particular African American male student who witnessed success in gifted classes even though he referred himself for the program and

even though he faced numerous challenges that customarily have halted the progression of many African American students.

Three research questions were investigated through this study. These questions included:

1. How did one high achieving African American male student describe his experiences in gifted education?
2. What environmental impediments potentially threatened achievement that is described by the high achieving African American male student, his teachers, and coaches?
3. What internal and external conditions serve as support factors in the continuous success of African American students in academic programs for advanced learners?

This chapter presents a brief overview of the study including a summary of the findings; provides conclusive responses to the research questions; identifies personal challenges that emerged during the study; outlines implications of the findings for current educational structures; and provides recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

The primary subject in the study was Elijah, an African American male student who referred himself for gifted placement. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, behavioral traits rating scales, and personality traits checklists, qualitative data were gathered from Elijah and eleven other study participants who had relationships

with Elijah as teachers, school administrators, coaches, and mentors. Triangulation was used to ensure internal validity during the research process by collecting data from multiple sources.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Cognitive Theory provided the theoretical framework for this research study. CRT, originally outlined in the research of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) provides a framework for examining the role of race and racism in society. Originally grounded in legal scholarship, CRT has moved beyond the courtroom to the classrooms as proponents of CRT have used the ideology to “critique the ways in which ‘colorblind’ laws and policies perpetuate existing racial inequalities in education policy” (Su, 2007, p. 531). The basic premise of the theoretical framework is that, in education, there exists a sense of property right in whiteness. These perceptions and rights of whiteness often place blinders when looking at the skills and abilities of persons of color. “It is still possible for White people to refuse to recognize the racism that surrounds them because for them, being White is the norm, the standard against which others are measured and defined as ‘different’. We call this assumption ‘White privilege’, and learning to live in a multicultural world requires that all of us examine critically exactly what that means: the benefits that accrue to those who are White, the privileges that only White people, as members of the dominant group, can take for granted” (Tiedt & Tiedt, 2010, p.19). In the area of giftedness, CRT proposes that many African American students may be overlooked in the identification process because of deeply embedded perceptions of non-white students that support mores that establish a clear distinction between groups of students based on ethnicity.

CRT also validates the “importance of the personal and community experiences of people of colour as sources of knowledge” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.10). This research gave voice to Elijah as he reflected on his past experiences in schooling and supported his story as well of the stories of other adults in his life as valuable data sources when making decisions about educational placement.

Social Cognitive Theory supports the perspective of self efficacy as a major contributing factor in cognitive development and performance. “The theory ascribes a central role to cognitive processes in which the individual can observe others and the environment, reflect on that in combination with his own thoughts and behaviors, and alter his own self-regulatory functions accordingly” (Burney, 2008, pp.130). Social Cognitive Theory’s relevance in gifted education is the intermingling of the student with the context and the content in the classroom as teachers plan curricular structures to address the needs of the pupils being served. From the standpoint of retention of African American students in gifted programming, Social Cognitive Theory measures the alignment of instructional practices with the learning styles as well as the establishment of positive relationships that support self worth and self esteem.

The data collected in this research were coded and categorized to determine common themes from the responses. Analyses of responses from interviews and rating scales revealed four recurring themes which included social skills, work ethics, academic proficiency, and self-concept/internal motivation. Overall, the adults who had served as teachers, administrators, coaches, and mentors indicated Elijah’s strongest behavioral traits were in the areas of social skills where 98% of the ratings indicated positive display of these behaviors 80% to 100% of the time when they worked with the subject. The

second highest area revealed by an analysis of the data was in the area of self concept/internal motivation with 86% of the adults observing these behaviors during the majority of the time. Next was work ethics earning an 85% ranking. The behavioral trait that ranked the lowest was academic skills leading to the possible conclusion Elijah's giftedness may have been expounded more through his ability to interrelate with others and his work habits and internal motivation as opposed to his academic skills. Interview responses consistently reflected on Elijah's determination to be placed in gifted programming, his confidence in his abilities, and his ability to fit in well with the social crowd. One hundred percent of the adults who completed the personality traits scale described Elijah as outgoing and friendly while 90% selected cooperative as a descriptor of Elijah's personality. Elijah also selected these same qualities as part of his self assessment.

Responses to Research Questions

Responses to the three research questions are outlined in the following section. These responses were generated after an intense review of all data collected during the study.

Research Question #1

How did one high achieving African American male student describe his experiences in gifted education?

Through a self referral process, Elijah acknowledged his desire and determination to be in gifted programming. He described distinct differences between the teachers and the instruction that occurred in his regular education classes and his gifted classes. He

remembered gifted teachers who always had a happier demeanor and who always challenged, but encouraged the students. On the other hand, he perceived many of his regular education teacher as not really caring or “only being there for the pay check”.

Social Cognitive Theory explicitly states that gifted education service models should align with what is known to be integral to student learning. Retention issues for African American learners in gifted programs often relate to the need for relationships between students and the teachers and students and their classmates as well as a sense of belonging (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The absence of such relationships oftentimes is deficit thinking where students question their own abilities to perform the level of work necessary, sabotage their own achievement, and subsequently choose not to participate in gifted programming.

Much of the work in the gifted classes involved group activities or team projects that fostered the sense of belonging and the establishment of relationships where students worked collaboratively to solve problems. Regular education classes tended to be more independent learning situations where students were covertly pitted against each other and to individually work toward mastery of skills. Much of Elijah’s regular education instruction involved traditional teaching methodology, oftentimes where teachers would merely give the notes and test for memory of the content as opposed to application of the content to real life. Elijah indicated his gifted teachers “taught him how to think”.

Research Question # 2

What environmental impediments potentially threatened achievement that is described by the high achieving African American male student, his teachers, and coaches?

Elijah struggled with peer pressure, particularly during the time he was in middle school. While this is not a new phenomenon for adolescent learners, Elijah operated in dual worlds. Because of peer pressure, or his need to be accepted by other students, particularly African American students, Elijah often tried to mask his giftedness by “playing dumb”. At one point in the interview, he stated, “I was hoping they would kick me out so I could just be normal”. Elijah’s teachers and his coaches also observed these behaviors.

The connection between social acceptance and school performance has also been documented in research as having a connection to student achievement, especially the high achievement of African American students (Harmon, 2002). Students have reported being accused of “being white” when they were recognized for high academic performance and going out of their way to “be black” so as to be accepted more by their peers. Elijah’s desire to be “kicked out” of gifted programs implied that he knew he was qualified for the program, realized he could do the work, and really wanted to be in the program. Underneath his mask, Elijah believed that his teachers would not kick him out, but instead would provide the encouragement he needed to stay in his gifted classes.

Race and gender overall also served as environmental impediments that potentially could have threatened Elijah’s success. African American males are often associated with lowered expectations and negative behaviors. Consequently, because of views explicitly and implicitly held by many and often expounded through the media, many African American males have difficulties adjusting socially and academically especially when they do not display stereotypical behaviors.

CRT posits that race is a social construct that cannot be ignored as a powerful aspect of human social life (Henfield, Moore & Wood, 2008). Morris (2002) described race as a social construct as opposed to a biological feature and purported that race and racism may be variables that determine which students are selected for gifted programs and even which students remain in the program after being selected. Initially, the assumption could be made that the teachers overlooked Elijah's giftedness because of race or racism which subsequently resulted in Elijah referring himself. Elijah's response however was that he felt he was overlooked because of his behavior. "I think my teachers never referred me because of my behavior. I was never a problem child, but I was funny and loved to laugh and finishing my work before everyone else left me with 'free time' to showcase my talents". Kunjufu (2005) discussed behaviors often displayed by African American students that are erroneously identified as behavioral problems as opposed to indicators of heightened academic abilities. One such characteristic is having a high energy level which is often displayed through the ability to entertain, to tell stories, and to have a sense of humor (Payne, 2001). Elijah's determination prevented his talents from becoming a detriment to his academic success.

One additional environmental impediment that was not overtly acknowledged but still potentially threatened Elijah's achievement was the limited involvement of his mother in his educational journey. Elijah lived with his mother in a single parent household. Even though being raised by a single parent does not conclusively imply failure, research does often connect single family household situations to other paralleling factors such as poverty that may impact achievement.

Research has revealed that “material shortages in home and poor environmental conditions severely affect parental child rearing methods” (Wilson, 1974, p. 241). Elijah did come a single family household and Elijah, throughout his schooling, did qualify for free lunch services. Even though coming from poor backgrounds can hamper a child’s development, it does not have to halt it. Involvement of parents in the process of learning can provide for learning. The more parents participate in schooling, in a “sustained way, at every level – in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fundraisers and boosters, as volunteers, and paraprofessionals, and as home teachers, the better for student achievement” (Williams & Chavkin, 1989, p. 19).

Elijah’s mother was present; however, she did not take an active role in the academic of his schooling. Active role includes activities such as attending parent teacher conferences, volunteering at the school, and contacting the teachers if there were questions. However, she did attend Elijah’s sports activities and provided support by cheering from the stands. Even though the comment was not included in the narrative from the interview, the coach who took Elijah to mail his college application said Elijah had told him that his mother could not help him complete the application and would not take him to the 24 hour Post Office located 35 miles from their home to make sure the application was postmarked in time for consideration for admission.

Research Question # 3

What internal and external conditions serve as support factors in the continuous success of African American students in academic programs for advanced learners?

Elijah's internal motivation served as a support factor in his continuous success in gifted programming. He possessed a distinct level of determination to be successful, even in the midst of struggles. This determination was first recognized through his self-referral for placement in gifted programming and subsequently led to his subsequent long range success in the program.

The role of support systems such as mentoring programs is critical in relation to sustaining high academic performance particularly in African American communities. Elijah's interview responses indicated the major role his mentors played in his life. A support system that was evident throughout Elijah's life include a cadre of teachers, coaches, and mentors. This support offered an extra foundation for success to ensure Elijah continuously demonstrated the skills, talents, and abilities he possessed. The presence of this support system was even more critical when Elijah was in middle school and served. Payne (2001) defined support systems as "friends, family, and backup resources that students can access in time of need" (p.90). In Elijah's case, the members of his support system served as a listening board, a driving force, and even spiritual fortitude.

During adolescence, Elijah struggled the most in school as young teenagers begin to explore their identity. "Ethnic identity development is important to students' overall growth and it links to their psychological adjustment, decision-making ability, problem solving, and sense of belonging (McMahon & Watts, 2002, p.413). During this time, students seeking peer approval often turn to adults for validation of their strengths and for help with their weaknesses. During his middle school years, Elijah's teacher and athletic coach as well as mentors in the community fulfilled this role. Through the mentoring

relationships, Elijah's support system maintained a focus on academic, personal, and social issues relevant to his life. Even though the group had no formal training, they still understood the scope of their volunteer involvement with Elijah and possessed the willingness, the skills, and the attitudes to make a difference in his life as they guided him to success.

Personal Challenges

Elijah was well liked by all of his teachers, administrators, coaches and mentors interviewed as part of this research. Therefore the imposed challenge during the research was for them to admit he was not perfect. Several participants in the student were hesitant to describe situations that did not paint Elijah as an ideal student; times where he did not always apply his best effort; times where he misbehaved; times when he did not perform at extremely high levels academically. Yet, during the discourse, these situations finally came out but were strongly connected to the woes of negative peer influence. A sense of trust first had to be instilled during the interviews as several of the respondents wanted to ensure the preponderance of these writings did not imply that Elijah exemplified the many negative attributes often assigned to African American students, particularly African American male students. This may be due partially in fact to the protective nature of Elijah's mentors.

Discussion

Poor representation of African American students in gifted programming is the result of several complex reasons. Ford (1994) revealed students may complain of "1) being a minority within a minority because they are often the only or one of a few

African American students in the gifted program. These feeling may be more likely when students attend predominately White schools and gifted programs; 2) feeling isolated from White classmates; 3) experiencing intense and frequent peer pressures from African American youth not in the gifted program; 4) feeling misunderstood by teachers who often lack substantive preparation in multicultural education; 5) feeling misunderstood by teachers who do not understand the nature of giftedness especially among culturally and racially diverse students; 6) feeling misunderstood by family members who do not understand the nature of giftedness” (p.1). Although a number of studies and reports have provided recommendations or proposed solutions, so far no statistically significant changes have occurred in minority representation in gifted programs (Daniels, 1998). There still exists a major gap when comparing the number or percentage of African American students enrolled in gifted programming to the number or percentage of White students in the same programs. However, some African American students have successfully negotiated the highways of gifted classes. Their stories need to be told and heard as frameworks for solutions to bridge these gaps.

Implications for Current Educational Practices

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations for identification and retention can help improve educational standard practices and policies for African American student in gifted programming.

- 1. School districts should develop identification practices that call for using multiple sources of data to determine potential students that may qualify for gifted services.** All too often states and school districts rely heavily on one

structure, typically a numerical value from an IQ test, to determine potential giftedness. Research has repeatedly noted the inappropriate use of IQ testing for student placement and the inherent biases of many of these tests. Some states have embraced multi-testing programs including assessments of students' academic achievement and creativity/motivation. To address the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted program, the results from the research on Elijah's story reveal specific behaviors that could serve as clues to potential giftedness. The Response to Intervention (RIT) framework promotes a pyramid of interventions whereby students are "sifted out" to receive needed services. A possible similar identification pyramid may also serve to cue teachers to specific students noteworthy of further examination for gifted services. Assessments through observations and/or checklists in the areas of self-concept/internal motivation, social skills, and work ethics could be components of the hierarchy for teachers to examine before turning to academic skills for potential referrals for gifted programming. Figure 7 depicts a possible hierarchy that can be utilized, based on the results of this research, to identify students for potential referrals for gifted programming.

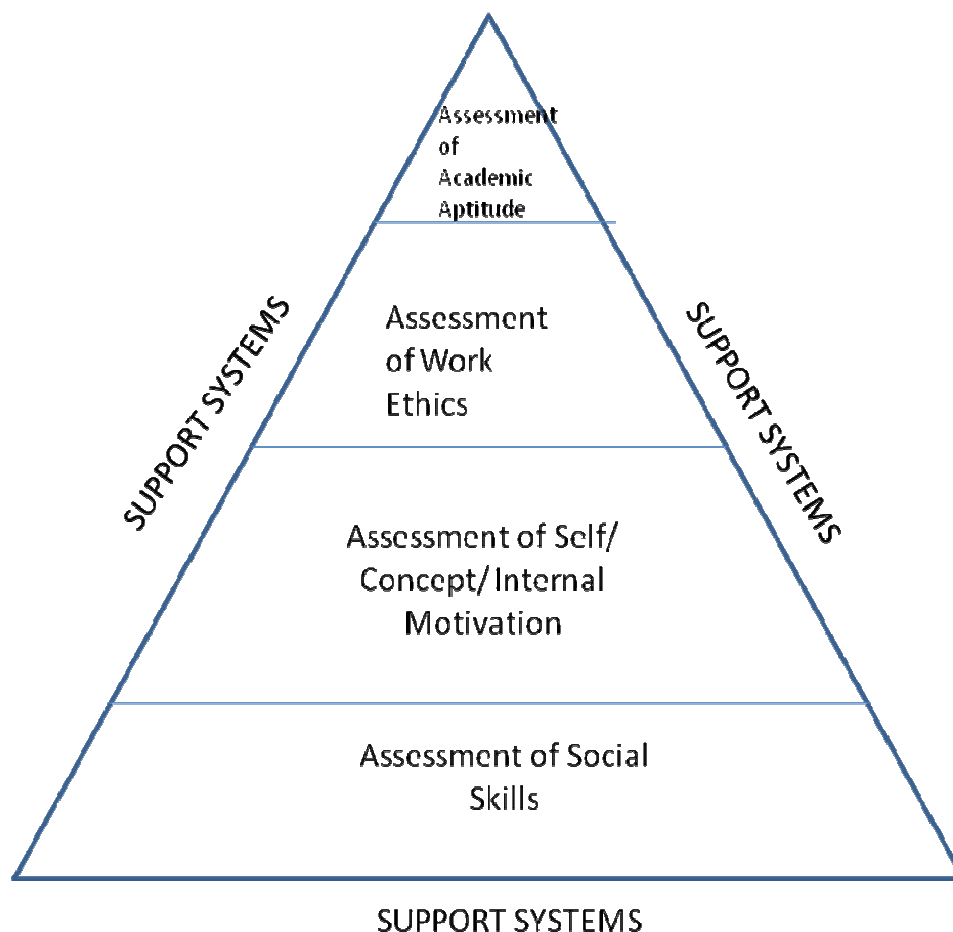


Figure 7. Hierarchy for Potential Gifted Referrals

The pictorial depicts behaviors that, through observations and checklists, can serve as predictors of potential gifted success. The model is embraced by prevailing support systems, both external and internal to schooling, to offer a foundation and encouragement to students throughout schooling.

2. **To better ensure the retention of African American students in gifted programs, instructional delivery should include on-going opportunities for students to engage in authentic instruction involving real life problem solving through collaborative networks that foster positive relationships between the**

students and the teacher. Educators, both gifted and regular education teachers should be trained in both effective strategies for gifted instruction as well as multicultural education. A comprehensive professional learning program for teachers should include courageous conversation on the implications of “whiteness” in the classroom and the detrimental effects deeply embedded biases may have upon students in the classroom. Classroom instruction should always promote rigor, relevance, and relationships.

3. **To better ensure the retention of African American students in gifted programs, more credence should be given to the importance of listening to the stories of students in the classroom.** Schools should tap into opportunities for students to tell their stories as well as to give feedback on the challenges and needs they are experiencing inside and outside the school. Students’ personal narratives can serve as a tool to legitimize the lives and culture of African American students in a society that often negates or discriminates against that culture. Schools and school districts should also develop a systematic and systemic way to poll students to obtain feedback on organizational and instructional effectiveness. Demographic options should be included in the surveys so that results can be disaggregated by subgroups such as ethnicity, gender, and grade level to determine if issues are widespread throughout populations enrolled in the building or of concern to only particular groups.
4. **To better ensure overall student success in gifted programming, and particularly African American students, schools and communities need to organize ongoing mentoring programs that support the development of**

- positive adult-student relationships.** Oftentimes, African American students, particularly male students struggle with the idea of giftedness because of the concern of “acting white” and being disengaged from their own ethnicity. Additionally, typical growing pains of developmental stages such as adolescence often trigger the impetus for negative behaviors. It is at this time that the presence of caring adults can help refocus students on their capabilities and provide academic, emotional, and spiritual support as they transition through schooling. Addressing the sense of belonging may involve expansion of clubs and extracurricular activities at the school where activity sponsors realize their role is multifaceted. Programs similar to Big Brothers/Big Sisters or guidance support programs offered through fraternities and sororities can be effective community thrusts that serve as support mechanisms especially in small suburban communities such as Elijah’s where there may exist only a limited amount of positive social opportunities for teenagers in the area.
5. **Education policies should incorporate a more holistic measure of teacher effectiveness looking beyond mere student content mastery levels as measured by standardized tests.** Teacher evaluations should measure affective qualities such as the teacher’s ability to make students feel supported and respected, the teacher’s willingness to be involved with students beyond the 55 minute class period possibly through club and activity sponsorship, and even the teacher’s willingness to receive constructive feedback from students.
6. **Parental involvement programs must be strengthened.** Oftentimes, structures exist in schooling that discourage parents from seeking an active role in the

educational lives of their children. Teachers create the notion that many parents don't care. However, this statement is far from the truth. Schools must seek and implement ways to eradicate the walls or barriers that prevent collaborative partnerships with parents as a critical format for student and school success.

Student discourse may provide opportunities for ideas on how this can happen.

Implications for Future Research

There exists an abundance of research on the absence or underrepresentation of African American students, especially African American male students, in gifted programming (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Todlson, 2008; Milner & Ford 2007). This critical case study highlights a need to listen to more stories and experiences of African American students who have been successful in gifted programs. Such research may shed insight into how to increase the percentage of high performing minority students identified for and retained in gifted programs. Subsequently, such research could add to the body of knowledge on effective ways to close the overall achievement gap between majority and minority ethnic populations in schools.

The essence of this current research, Elijah's story, could be further enhanced by expanding to include interviews with college professors and other adults involved with the subject during his post secondary experiences. Such research would provide additional implications of the overall success of the academic, social, and emotional preparation for college and career readiness. The critical case study of Elijah presents the beginning of such a longitudinal study as it identified behavior qualities and personality traits that may have attributed to his success in gifted programming.

Lastly, an adaptation of the current study may include the cross examination of data accumulated based on the ethnicity of the respondents in the study. Of particular correlation to the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) would be a comparative analysis of the responses of White teachers, coaches, mentors, etc versus African American teachers, coaches, mentors to see if there existed any significant differences in perceptions. Results of such analyses may provide insight into the impact of race and racism in drawing conclusions and developing opinions about specific students in the classroom.

Conclusion

Every black community, regardless of economic resources, contain shining examples of young black men who achieve in school, regardless of immeasurable social disadvantages (Toldson, 2008). Exploring the spectrum of various personality traits, behaviors, and recurring themes, as well as academic performance provides a greater level of depth and insight into identifying factors associated with African American students who may qualify for a more rigorous curriculum as outlined in gifted programming. A comprehensive review of the literature on educational research on the plight and achievement of African American students in gifted programming combined with a keen analysis of the data results compiled and analyzed in this research are indicative of a need for a student based inquiry approach in acknowledging minority student giftedness. The findings presented in this report adhere to a directive among contemporary educational scholars and practitioners to expand the scope of identification tools and methods for placement in gifted programming as well as to expose the theoretical assumptions many still hold regarding the abilities and capabilities of students

of color. This exposition must also acknowledge the “presence of white privilege and its contributions to the achievement gap” (Toldson, 2008, p.9).

Elijah’s story represents personal efficacy and achievement as well as social barriers and support. It is the story of a young man toiling with whether to academically achieve or whether to be accepted. It is a story of a young man who was bold enough to request what he wanted; but so docile at times he questioned his own capabilities. All too often, these inner struggles exist in young, adolescent students, particularly African American male students. Sometimes the struggles overtake the successes and the result is underachievement in school and throughout life. However, Elijah was different. A strong sense of self belief or internal motivation propelled him to challenge the status quo, to set high goals, and work to achieve those goals. At times when he struggled, external factors provided nurturing and support through mentoring and coaching. The climax of the story was the positive addition to the research based data on the success stories among African American male learners. “Much of the research and scholarship on black males has been rooted in a ‘cultural’ or ‘deficit’ model in which disparities are attributed to black males” (Trammel et.al, 2008, p.7. Elijah’s story breaks the mold of reporting the deficit mentality. Instead, this story is a real life incidence of overcoming the odds by infiltrating and thriving in what Ford (1996) described as the segregated environment known as gifted education.

Woodson (2008) cried out that now is the time to “break over the unnatural barriers and occupy higher ground” (p. 108). This research provided insight into a how educators, parents, and community leaders can plot a path to academic success for African American students rather than continuously spotlighting their failures as this

subgroup forges to higher ground. Elijah's story was grounded on success and outlined the social, emotional, and academic factors that contributed to the success of one African American male student. This same success many other African American students can experience if provided the opportunity and the support in our schools and in our communities.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This could be broken into 3 interviews with the Elijah

NOTE: The following questions will be presented to Elijah during an oral interview. The entire interview will be recorded and later transcribed into text.

Opening Statement:

Hi Elijah. Thanks for taking time for this interview in support of my research topic. My study is really an opportunity to tell your story. As educators continue to try to figure out why there are so few African American students, especially male students, in gifted classes, I wanted to share the story of one African American male who has been successful in gifted programs—even though you had to initiate that success. Even though there are lots of questions, I really would like for this to be more a conversation than an interview. When we complete the conversation, I would like for you to then complete a quick self assessment identifying the qualities or characteristics you possess. The entire process should only take about 30 minutes. Thank you for sharing your story.

1. Describe the process you went through in being identified and placed in the gifted / advanced content program. Who initiated this process?
2. Why do you think your teachers never referred you for gifted classes?
3. Did you have educational opportunities as a gifted student that you didn't have as a non-gifted student? Explain your answer.
4. Are gifted/advanced content classes different from regular education classes? Explain your answer.
5. Did you continue in gifted/honors/advanced placement classes throughout middle and high school? What are some of the high school classes you took?
6. Tell me about your academic experiences while in school?

7. What extracurricular activities did you participate in during high school?
8. What made you successful in your gifted / advanced content classes?
9. How are gifted teachers different from non-gifted teachers?
10. Describe the best experience you had in gifted / advanced content classes.
11. What support factors (i.e. people, values, characteristics) did you have in your life that helped ensure your success in gifted/advanced content classes?
12. How do you think Black students perceive intelligence?
13. What do you think needs to happen in order to have more Black students enrolled in gifted / advanced content classes?
14. At the high school you attended, how did the number of Black students in gifted programs compare to the number of Black students in special education programs. Explain this comparison.
15. Have you participated in any other programs outside of school that support and encourage the achievement of gifted and talented Black students? If so identify these programs.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SELF ASSESSMENT

Please complete the following section by checking in the appropriate column indicating a self evaluation of your ability in each area.

BEHAVIORS	Excellent (displayed 90-100% of the time)	Good (displayed 80-89% of the time)	Average (displayed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (displayed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (displayed less than 60% of the time)	Not Displayed
1. Exhibits dependability						
2. Reliable and prompt with task/assignments						
3. Accepts evaluation of performance						
4. Exhibits a positive attitude						
5. Ability to learn, understand, assimilate knowledge						
6. Exhibits tact and self control						
7. Cooperates with other students						
8. Cooperates with other adults						
9. Promptness, neatness, accuracy of work						
10. Exhibits good attendance/punctuality						
11. Exhibits productivity						

12. Effective in pursuing task to completion						
13. Ability to work independently						
14. Demonstrates willingness to learn and grow						
15. Ability to express self in writing; uses correct grammar						
16. Ability to express self orally, using standard English						
17. Ability to organize responsibilities and tasks						
18. Degree of flexibility and ability to adapt						
19. Handles stressful situations successfully						

Please check the behaviors below which best describe you.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outgoing | <input type="checkbox"/> Serious | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complacent | <input type="checkbox"/> Follower | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mature | <input type="checkbox"/> Competent | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concerned | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiator | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive | <input type="checkbox"/> Shy | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerant | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inquisitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Probing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-centered | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative | <input type="checkbox"/> Congenial | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy | <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reserved | <input type="checkbox"/> Thorough | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Dedicated | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Determined | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Caring | |

APPENDIX C

TEACHER /COACH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NOTE: The following questions will be presented during an oral interview. The entire interview will be recorded and later transcribed into text.

Opening Statement:

Hello. Thanks for taking time for this interview in support of my research topic. As educators continue to try to figure out why there are so few African American students, especially male students, in gifted classes, I wanted to share the story of one African American male who has been successful in gifted programs even though he had to initiate that success. That person is Elijah. Even though there are lots of questions, I really would like for this to be more a conversation than an interview. When we complete the conversation, I would like for you to then complete a quick assessment identifying the qualities or characteristics you observed in Elijah. The entire process should only take about 30 minutes. Thank you for participating in this research project.

1. What was your relationship with Elijah while he was enrolled in public schools?
 Elementary teacher
 Middle School teacher
 High School teacher
 Athletic coach
 Instructional coach
 Mentor
 Other (please specify) _____
2. How long did you work with Elijah?
3. As a third grader, Elijah referred himself for gifted programming. Why do you think this process had to be initiated by the student?

4. Describe a situation, while working with Elijah that you really realized he was more advanced than other students in his peer group?
5. How did Elijah fit in with other students—especially other African American students?
6. Did you ever feel Elijah struggled socially and/or academically while in school? If so, explain.
7. What role do you think you played in Elijah's success?
8. Do you think Elijah's peers treated him any differently because he was gifted? Explain.
9. What do you think needs to happen in order to have more African American students enrolled in gifted / advanced content classes?
10. Are there any programs outside of school that support the achievement of gifted and talented African American students such as Elijah in your community? If so, what are these programs?

APPENDIX D

DESCRIPTIVE QUALITIES

Please rate Elijah on each of the personality behaviors listed below based on your knowledge of characteristics he possessed and that may have helped him be successful in gifted programs.

BEHAVIORS	Excellent (displayed 90-100% of the time)	Good (displayed 80-89% of the time)	Average (displayed 70-79% of the time)	Below Average (displayed 60-69% of the time)	Poor (displayed less than 60% of the time)	Not Displayed
1. Exhibits dependability						
2. Reliable and prompt with task/assignments						
3. Accepts evaluation of performance						
4. Exhibits a positive attitude						
5. Ability to learn, understand, assimilate knowledge						
6. Exhibits tact and self control						
7. Cooperates with other students						
8. Cooperates with other adults						
9. Promptness, neatness, accuracy of work						
10. Exhibits good attendance/punctuality						
11. Exhibits productivity						
12. Effective in pursuing task to completion						

13. Ability to work independently						
14. Demonstrates willingness to learn and grow						
15. Ability to express self in writing; uses correct grammar						
16. Ability to express self orally, using standard English						
17. Ability to organize responsibilities and tasks						
18. Degree of flexibility and ability to adapt						
19. Handles stressful situations successfully						

Please check the behaviors below which best describe Elijah.

Outgoing

Complacent

Cooperative

Mature

Concerned

Aggressive

Leader

Confident

Inquisitive

Creative

Friendly

Innovative

Trustworthy

Reserved

Energetic

Sensitive

Enthusiastic

Serious

Follower

Dependable

Competent

Initiator

Shy

Tolerant

Loyal

Probing

Self-centered

Motivated

Congenial

Assertive

Thorough

Dedicated

Determined

Caring

Cheerful

Quiet

Relaxed

APPENDIX E

Enrollment in Gifted Program

By School and Ethnic Group

2006-2007

TOTAL GIFTED ENROLLMENT=797

School	Total # Gifted Students	Blacks	Whites	Other
ELEMENTARY				
A	17	13	2	2
B	12	10	---	2
C	27	----	26	1
D	21	4	14	3
E	79	5	68	6
F	78	7	66	5
G	24	2	22	0
H	14	8	6	0

I	4	4	---	0
J	33	3	27	3
K	22	5	16	1
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
L	37	14	19	4
M	53	13	35	5
N	12	8	4	0
O	100	12	82	6
HIGH SCHOOLS				
P	103	21	79	3
Q	161	14	144	3

Enrollment in Gifted Program

By School and Ethnic Group

2007-2008

TOTAL GIFTED ENROLLMENT=782

School	Total # Gifted Students	Blacks	Whites	Other
ELEMENTARY				
A	11	9	1	1
B	11	7	2	2
C	25	----	24	1
D	24	6	16	2
E	71	2	65	4
F	69	5	59	5
G	21	2	18	1
H	14	4	9	1
I	6	6	---	0
J	32	4	25	3
K	21	4	16	1

MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
L	36	9	25	2
M	50	15	32	3
N	13	4	9	0
O	99	16	74	9
HIGH SCHOOLS				
P	112	27	81	4
Q	167	19	143	5

Enrollment in Gifted Program

By School and Ethnic Group

2008-2009

TOTAL GIFTED ENROLLMENT= 746

School	Total # Gifted Students	Blacks	Whites	Other
ELEMENTARY				
A	10	7	3	0
B	5	3	1	1
C	28	----	27	1
D	24	5	15	4
E	59	----	56	3
F	69	3	60	6
G	21	3	16	3
H	18	7	10	1
I	4	4	----	0
J	27	4	20	3
K	22	8	13	1

MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
L	42	8	31	3
M	41	10	26	5
N	28	13	13	2
O	104	14	86	4
HIGH SCHOOLS				
P	92	26	62	4
Q	151	17	126	8

Enrollment in Gifted Program

By School and Ethnic Group

2009-2010

TOTAL GIFTED ENROLLMENT= 750

School	Total # Gifted Students	Blacks	Whites	Other
ELEMENTARY				
A	7	4	2	1
B	9	7	1	1
C	17	----	16	1
D	18	2	15	1
E	54	1	49	4
F	65	4	57	4
G	24	3	20	1
H	15	6	7	2
I	4	4	----	0
J	31	4	25	2
K	29	11	16	2

MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
L	34	4	28	2
M	36	9	25	2
N	36	14	18	4
O	131	23	103	5
HIGH SCHOOLS				
P	91	25	62	4
Q	149	18	120	11