

ELEMENTARY GIFTED BOYS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF  
SELF AND SCHOOL

By:

JESSICA A. WATTS

Bachelor of Science in Education  
University of Central Oklahoma  
Edmond, Oklahoma  
2000

Master of Administration and Supervision  
Texas Woman's University  
Denton, Texas  
2004

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
May, 2020

ELEMENTARY GIFTED BOYS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF  
SELF AND SCHOOL

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Erin Dyke

---

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Stephanie Hathcock

---

Dr. Adrienne Sanogo

---

Dr. Ben Bindewald

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to those who supported me throughout my five-year journey in the doctoral program. In many, many ways, we reached completion of this dissertation together.

My family has been understanding, loyal, and encouraging. I do not have words to express how I feel about their continuous love for me. My husband and my sons never complained about one night away from their mother while I went to class or took time to write. They are the motivation behind every step I take to do more and do better. My sons are the reason are why I wrote this dissertation. Thank you to the rest of my family for loving me and cheering me on.

My friends and colleagues listened to me on my best and worst days. They prayed for me in ways I will never know, and I bet they are relieved to no longer hear about the challenging journey of dissertation writing. Thank you to those who cared, worked alongside me all my professional years, helped with take care of my boys, and for being a sounding rock throughout all aspects of my life. I am blessed to have friends like them.

Thank you to my peers, my classmates, whom I also call my friends. We have shared this educational experience together, and I owe much of my personal and academic growth to them. I have learned so much through our deep conversations and long drives to and from classes. We have celebrated each other's successes and offered helping hands when someone needed one. Thank you for the advice, encouragement, hugs, and many laughs. I am proud to be among such a strong family of scholars.

Thank you to the Oklahoma State University College of Education, Health & Aviation, School of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Sciences, and to the Curriculum Studies department. Many sincere thanks to my advisor, Dr. Erin Dyke and my committee members, Dr. Adrienne Sanogo, Dr. Stephanie Hathcock, and Dr. Ben Bindewald. Thank you to the Curriculum Studies department chairperson, Dr. Hongyu Wang and STLES clinical instructor, Jill Metzger.

Acknowledgements reflect the views of the author and are not endorsed by committee members or Oklahoma State University.

Name: JESSICA A. WATTS

Date of Degree: MAY, 2020

Title of Study: ELEMENTARY GIFTED BOYS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND SCHOOL

Major Field: EDUCATION

Abstract:

This ethnographic study seeks to understand elementary-age boys', teachers', and parents' perceptions of giftedness and gendered ability construction. Utilizing the theoretical lens of Herbert Marsh's Frame of Reference theory, this study illuminates how young gifted boys developed academic and social self-perceptions influenced by gender and ability practices. It also explores how teachers and parents perceived giftedness, gifted boys, and their pedagogical and parental experiences. A review of literature explores young boys', teachers', and parent's perspectives on gender and ability, gender construction and the roles gender play in creating stereotypes, and the socially constructed notions of giftedness and its relation to gendered differences. Implementing ethnographic analytic methods, the findings discuss three central themes: conceptualizations of giftedness, the perceptions of gifted boys in classroom spaces, and the complexities of curriculum and instructional design for gifted learners. These findings led to conclusions and implications for educators that included exploring constructions of giftedness with children, understanding how schools influence self-concept formation, recognizing intersections of gender and ability, opening spaces for students' voices to be heard, and pursuing inclusive curriculum design. Further, the study irradiates how gifted and elementary education scholars can center the voices and perspectives of students in scholarship and practice.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Institutional Intersections of Boyhood and Academic Ability.....	3
The Gender Role in Education.....	5
The Relationship between Gender and Giftedness.....	9
Positioning Pedagogical Understandings of Gender and Giftedness.....	12
Study Overview.....	13
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	15
Framing the Literature.....	15
Frame of Reference Theory.....	17
Socially Constructed Notions of Giftedness.....	23
Influence of Gender Roles on Teachers' Perceptions.....	25
Teachers' Normative Conceptions of Giftedness.....	29
Parents' Perceptions of Giftedness and Gifted Services.....	35
Gifted Boys' Self-Perceptions with the Social and Academic Context.....	39
Conclusion.....	42
III. METHODOLOGY.....	44
Purpose of the Study.....	44
Lessons Learned from My Pilot Study.....	45
Research Design.....	46
Research Questions.....	49
Research Methods and Procedures.....	50
Participants and Research Sites.....	50
Data Collection.....	55
Classroom & Unstructured School-Time Observations/Fieldnotes.....	56
Individual Participant Interviews.....	57
Teacher & Parent Questionnaires.....	58
Data Analysis.....	59
Understanding My Positioning within Research.....	60
Establishing Trustworthiness.....	61
Strengths and Limitations of My Ethnographic Work.....	62

Chapter	Page
IV. ANALYSIS.....	66
Prepping the Data Analysis Landscape.....	66
School Contexts.....	70
Rizemore Elementary School.....	70
Mayfield Elementary School.....	73
Theme I: What Does it Mean to be Gifted?.....	75
The Boys’ Perspectives.....	75
The Teachers’ Perspectives.....	81
The Parents’ Perspectives.....	84
Theme II: Perceptions of Gifted Boys in Classroom Spaces.....	86
The Boys’ Perspectives.....	86
The Teachers’ Perspectives.....	91
The Parents’ Perspectives.....	94
Theme III: Complexities of Curriculum & Instructional Design.....	97
The Boys’ Perspectives.....	97
The Teachers’ Perspectives.....	100
The Parents’ Perspectives.....	103
Connecting Analysis to Theory.....	105
Shaping the Possibilities.....	108
V. CONCLUSION.....	110
Discussion about the Findings.....	110
Implications for Practice.....	121
Explore the Constructions of Giftedness with Children.....	121
Recognize Intersections of Gender and Ability.....	123
School Influences Self-Concept Formation.....	124
Open Spaces for Students’ Voices.....	126
Pursue Inclusive Curriculum Design.....	127
Significance of the Study.....	130
Recommendations for Further Research.....	131
Summary.....	131
REFERENCES.....	133
APPENDICES.....	152
Appendix A. Child Participants: Student Interview Questions.....	152
Appendix B. Teacher Participants: Teacher Questionnaire.....	153
Appendix C. Parent Participants: Parent Questionnaire.....	154
Appendix D. IRB Approval Page.....	155
Appendix E. Vita Page.....	157

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
3.1 Descriptors of Student Participants.....	53
3.2 Descriptors of Teacher Participants.....	54
3.3 Descriptors of Parent Participants.....	55
4.1 Methods of Ethnographic Analysis.....	68
4.2 Student Participants' Conceptions of Giftedness at School.....	77
4.3 Teacher Participants' Conceptions of Giftedness.....	81
4.4 Parent Participants' Conceptions of Giftedness.....	84
4.5 Student Participants' Feelings about the GT Program.....	97
4.6 Parents' Messages to Teachers.....	104

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
4.1 Who Am I?.....	76



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Listening to children has a longer history than those of us currently interviewing children are inclined to acknowledge. Moreover, we are still not good enough at hearing them, in the sense of taking full account of what they tell us. –Roberts, 2000, p. 225

During my professional experiences in public education, I carefully balanced three roles to serve every student I had the privilege of teaching and leading: teacher, administrator, and parent. I have learned through successes and failures that being an educator calls upon the professional commitment to engage theories and practices that enhance classroom instruction and provide rigorous learning and development opportunities. Being a parent of a gifted son has given me another level of insight into how classroom theories and practices affect gifted students as well as an even greater responsibility to seek understanding about their educational needs. These educational needs include the social and emotional well-being influences on academic achievement. As I describe in a related study that I conducted, “Because of my experiences, this study is an integral part of my professional and personal biography” (Watts, 2020, p. 46).

My 13-year-old gifted son demonstrated his high intellectual abilities as early as one and a half years old through his high vocabulary, memory, story-telling, and fine and gross motor skills. It was evident from observing him around other toddlers that he was advanced beyond average expectations for his age. As a first-time mother, I felt very proud of his intellect. Then

elementary school hit. He struggled in pre-kindergarten with social and emotional maturation that continued throughout his elementary school years. He experienced many social and emotional challenges, from getting into trouble for refusing to listen to the teacher read a story out loud to the class because he announced that he had already read the story (and thought it was boring), and drawing on the wall because he said he was finished with his work and needed something to do. His three outlets at school were when he had time to be with other students like him, creating comics, and performing stand-up comedy acts in music class. Like most parents, I experienced and felt those challenges with him. Even as a highly trained educator, I kept holding tight to the notion that he was not being academically challenged, but through his school years I learned I lacked sufficient knowledge about how to implement educational programs and services that are inclusive of the social and emotional aspects of many gifted children. I learned that I did not pay enough attention to the importance of connecting content to the social and emotional growth of gifted students, and that to just increase the academic rigor for students like my son was not enough. Previously, I believed that they, as highly intellectual individuals, took care of and regulated their own internal needs.

According to Morawska and Sanders (2009), I am not alone in my plight to understand the social and developmental needs of gifted children, as they state that these children's socio-emotional needs "are often not well-recognized" by educators or parents (p. 163). While I have also experienced the many joys that accompany my son's intellectual abilities, I value my responsibility as an educator and a parent to seek deeper understandings about how to improve instruction for students like him. Most importantly, I learned that the challenges my son faced in school were not necessarily behavioral issues, instead, represented his many academic and emotional needs that were (Arslan & Yüksel, 2018; Bailey, 2011; Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997).

My experiences and professional interests have shaped my research lens about how giftedness is perceived by boys within the school environment, and more importantly, of themselves.

Currently, I pose that some teachers, “who emphasize gifted students’ intellectual potential without regard for their socio-emotional connections to learning, lack understanding about how students’ academic and social perceptions influence how they feel about themselves” (Watts, 2020, p. 46; Bailey, 2011; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). “Neglecting the emotional perceptions of gifted students can negatively influence their intellectual achievement, as self-perceptions are critical to the learning process” (Sword, 2001). The notion of giftedness becomes complicated when juxtaposing it with educators’ perceptions about the relationships between issues of ability and gender, and whether these complexities influence pedagogical practices and students’ self-concepts as learners. Matthews, Foster, Yamin, Neber, Linke, and Vidergor (2010) encourage educational awareness of integrating social-emotional needs into classroom spaces; a critical aspect for developing gifted students’ healthy self-perceptions. The following literature illuminates these institutional intersections of boyhood and ability and helps to capture the problems relevant to young boys, social constructions of giftedness, and self-concept development. Signifying such institutional intersections connects to the purpose of my study: to conduct in-depth field work designed to seek understanding about teachers and parents’ perceptions of giftedness and gendered ability construction, and most importantly, to understand how gifted boys perceive themselves and their school experiences so that their perceptions become critical to pedagogical decisions, classroom discourse, and gifted curriculum development.

### **Institutional Intersections of Boyhood and Academic Ability**

Bailey and Graves (2016) have analyzed through their literature that the ways that conceptions of gender in education have changed over time, specifically as socially constructed,

in response to the growing knowledge about teaching practices for both boys and girls. Crotty (2010) terms social constructed ways of knowing as “meanings that are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world” (p. 43). Traditional educational research seeking to understand the social constructions and instructional implications of gender and ability have created various studies that continue to evolve in the field of education. Throughout such studies, Bailey and Graves (2016), Kohen-Mass (2016), Kerr, Vuyk, and Rea (2012), and others have sought to understand the intersectional relationships between socially constructed theories of gender and ability. Their aims have been to not only understand how both conceptions influence each other, but also how gender and ability create institutional, complex realities of teaching and learning for both students and teachers. Widely researched topics on how male and female students socially and academically negotiate classroom spaces have sparked numerous inquiries spanning from assumed gendered-specific intellectual talents and effective pedagogical and curriculum practices to institutional stereotypes and perceptions about gender and ability, academic underachievement, and lack of diverse curriculum. Researchers’ beliefs about gender and ability and whether they are or are not static or biologically determined may have complex implications that transform how educators grapple with these enduring issues (Bailey & Graves, 2016). From a social constructivist standpoint, studying the complicated binaries of gender and ability lead one to inquire about how they relate and/or influence pedagogical practices, teachers’ perceptions or stereotypes about gendered learning and development, and how girls and boys learn to situate themselves within the social and academic school contexts in which they must learn to thrive, or survive.

Having specific interests in the relationships and influence between academic abilities and potentialities of elementary-age students, my dissertation study discusses how some educational scholars have engaged in conversations about the social and institutional understandings and

practices of gender and ability, namely boys and giftedness. It is important to set the stage for my dissertation by first exploring gender construction and the role gender plays in creating institutional stereotypes about boys. Next, I examine the notion of giftedness as a social construct and its relation to gendered differences. Lastly, I seek to understand how gender and giftedness influence pedagogical implications for diversity and equity in classroom spaces.

### **The Gender Role in Education**

According to Bailey and Graves (2016), scholarship on gender in education has traditionally focused on "women/girls and men/boys... as if the categories captured relatively static, biological, and binary designations" (p. 688). I found their argument on gendered categorization supported through numerous efforts to uncover how, historically, education has situated gender in the curriculum, academic potential and achievement, and behavioral expectations for students. The notion of gender threads itself in educational literature as either 'boy or girl' presuming there are tensions and dividing ways about how to teach them differently, have different expectations for them, and rely on varying stereotypes about how they learn and function in schools. Traditional pedagogy clings onto the practice of categorizing students as if to assume their academic needs can be prioritized so that teachers can fit them into tidy, institutional identity-labeled boxes (Vrikkunen, Newnham, Nleya, and Engelstroöm, 2012). Bailey and Graves (2016) and Vrikkunen et al. (2012) would somewhat disagree with using static or essentialist notions of gender to help design curriculum and instructional approaches. However, they do suggest that there are tensions around gender differences in education that influence some pedagogical outcomes such as curriculum interests and extracurricular pursuits. These tensions have to do with certain brain functions and biological factors that have been determined by numerous studies to influence different intellectual competencies in girls and boys. However, the same could be said about other tensions such as sociocultural factors,

gendered stereotypes, and presumptions about learning differences that may also situate the ways in which some educators design and/or implement some instructional practices (Bergold, Wendt, Kasper, & Steinmayr, 2016). Until the last two decades, sustaining literature focused on the presumption that boys were viewed as more academically competent than girls, especially in the math and science fields. However, research has taken a more equitable shift in the direction of increasing opportunities for girls in subject-specific school settings in which they were not demonstrating similar academic strides (Bergold et al., 2016; Daniels, Creese, Hey, Leonard, & Smith, 2001). Increased attention on girls' academic achievement inadvertently caused dramatic concerns as to whether boys were continuing to make adequate academic gains or if they were, in fact, underachieving as compared to their previous standardized performances (Bergold et al., 2016; Hamilton & Jones, 2016; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007). Inspired by these concerns, studies sought understanding about the gendered tensions coined as the "boy crisis" or the "boy turn" in education (Bailey & Graves, 2016; Orr, 2011; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Specifically, what was happening in educational institutions that progressed, or regressed, notions of boyhood and curriculum practices?

Weaver-Hightower (2003) categorizes scholarly literature precluding various etiologies about boys and learning. Specifically, he includes: "popular-rhetorical, theoretical, practice-oriented, and feminist" types of literature that characterizes boy-like traditions of teaching and academic assumptions about their achievement in school (Weaver-Hightower, 2003, p. 474). Like Orr (2011), Weaver-Hightower (2003), and others examine literature about boyhood construction in schools that presumes classrooms are more socially inclusive for girls than for boys because of the essentialist ideologies that female teachers unintentionally, or unconsciously, design more feminine classroom spaces. Specifically, Weaver-Hightower (2003) suggests that orienting literature that suggests classrooms are too feminine and ignores some boys, neglects to

point out that these studies fail to seek boys' personal points of view when attempting to understand why they seem to be at a disadvantage in classrooms led by female teachers. On the other hand, Weaver-Hightower (2003) also notes that pedagogical-oriented literature shows a lack of training for teachers to improve instruction for boys; also suggesting that training based on theories about how researchers think boys learn best may do more harm than good because such training can be largely based on traditional masculine stereotypes. For instance, traditional masculine stereotypes place boys as the dominant gender having characteristics of strong personalities, independent thinkers, and even at times labels them as troublemakers (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

These traditional masculine stereotypes present often one-sided approaches to curriculum and instruction, leaving Weaver-Hightower (2003) to pose questions about what really describes masculine curriculum and what constitutes the understanding of such curriculum so that it helps all boys rather than alienates them or boxes them into a one-way-fits-all type of curriculum. He poses that masculine curriculum contains “practice oriented approaches addressing classroom-level interventions relations historically rooted in method for boys” (p. 479). Based on his review of literature, masculine curriculum is mainly influenced by the stereotypes about boys instead of asking them directly what they need from institutional spaces. Grappling with the tensions about masculine curriculum becomes problematic because not every boy experiences schooling in the same ways (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Connell (1996) suggests that masculinity construction exists because it is produced by educational spaces that structure nearly everything schools do around gendering. If gendered structures exist within schools in which boys and girls must reside, then how are boys or girls able to negotiate different spaces than the ones in which they must transact (Connell, 1996)?

Alongside Weaver-Hightower's (2003) theoretical positioning of literature, Farrells' (2016) ethnographic studies imply that the lack of interrogated spaces in masculine curriculum causes concerns for designing equitable approaches for boys to learn. Further studies about practice and curriculum suggest that teachers socially construct stereotypes about how boys do and should learn. Kerr et al. (2012) contend that the ways boys socialize with peers demonstrate more aggressive and immature interactions than girls. They also argue that boys' lack developmental readiness for school at early ages may interfere with their potential to learn, thus triggering needed academic or social interventions or the potential for academic underachievement later in their school years (Hamilton & Jones, 2016; Kerr et al., 2012). Berekashvili (2012) argues that boys' abilities and traits such as those mentioned by Kerr et al. (2012) can lead to gendered expectations that present inequities in classroom instruction and treatment towards boys. For instance, she found that teachers gave more physical attention to boys' behaviors and their ability deficits than they did to girls' behaviors. Berekashvili (2012) concluded that gendered stereotypes largely influence teachers' levels of tolerance and different reactions for certain behaviors, such as referring boys to the principal's office for infractions in which girls would receive only verbal reprimands.

Lastly, articulated feminist approaches, such as those mentioned by Weaver-Hightower (2003) and other studies like Bristol (2015) and Smith's (2010), focus on differences in achievements between genders and what these differences may be telling educators and research about how to adequately address boys' academic and social needs. Smith (2010) found that the nature of curriculum practices favors girls' interests and learning styles while ignoring boys' dominant learning preferences, such as oral storytelling, masculine-type literacy selections, and the need for more physical movement. Interestingly, Smith (2010) also questions that with all the existing research posing gendered deficits such as those she mentioned, is it even realistic to



suggest that school curriculum should be gender neutral? Along those lines, Bristol (2015) found there is a need for teachers to increase their “instructional capacity” for including more equitable resources and curriculum for both boys and girls, but reference equitable in terms of meeting students’ individual needs rather than basing them on gendered stereotypes (p. 58). Bristol (2015) contends, "It is in the early years in formal schooling where teachers attempt to acculturate boys to the social mores of school that boys begin to be classified as disobedient and underperformers" (p. 59). As a result, teachers’ stereotypes about genders, especially for boys, influence their potential for academic achievement and social development that can eventually influence academic inequities in social and academic achievement (Bristol, 2015).

My literature review on the social conceptions of gender positioning in schools and gendered assumptions about learning sheds light on the complexities of tailoring instruction based on gendered approaches. It appears children’s gendered experiences are being left out of these discussions, limiting one’s understanding of these pedagogical complexities.

### **The Relationship between Gender and Giftedness**

Several scholars have attempted to respond to the illuminating questions of whether giftedness is perceived differently in boys than in girls; and, whether educational institutions promote or inhibit social constructions of giftedness that align more with different genders. My research on the intersections between giftedness and gender led me to three significant tensions in which these intersections present differences for boys’ and girls’ intellectual capacities. In my pursuit to understand these tensions, I began by reading studies such as Kohen-Mass’s (2016) research that shed light on ways of knowing for gifted children. Based on Belenky’s (1986) research on procedural knowledge, Kohen-Mass (2016) explored whether gifted students’ procedural knowledge skills are constructed in gender ways. Belenky (1986) posed that many gifted children conceptualize their academics and school environments through ways of

knowing, or procedural knowledge. According to Belenky (1986), students who consider themselves internally connected to learning are empathetic and intuitive and able to learn through more collaborative approaches in which they can internalize situations. Kohen-Mass (2016) found that boys' ability to utilize procedural knowledge skills were lower than girls' ability to internally connect, she but posed inquiry as to whether these limited differences were attributed to their social preferences for learning. For example, she found that boys preferred competition rather than collaborative work efforts, while girls preferred academic endeavors that utilized empathy, connection, and various points of view (Kohen-Mass, 2016; Cleveland, 2011; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007). Critical to social understanding is a heightened awareness of gendered instructional differences such as these mentioned in their studies.

The implications for such research in the field of gifted education leads to understanding how highly intelligent boys relate to the curriculum and, in some cases, why gender gaps exist in gifted education. For instance, Falch and Naper (2013) sought to understand why gender differences in evaluation measures exist, and to what extent might they influence student-teacher interactions and biases. They found that male participants in their study earned better test scores on comprehensive exit-type exams than the female students because of the inherent nature of competition embedded within the testing culture (Falch & Naper, 2013). Based on their results, they emphasized that since high stakes tests are prioritized in many school settings, it stands to reason why boys would presumably be targeted for more rigorous curriculum and school programs than girls (Falch & Naper, 2013). Generalizing these results helps one to understand why teachers are significantly more likely to refer boys for gifted programming than girls (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011).

Educators' and researchers' social conceptions of gender and ability are also observed through boys' and girls' classroom behaviors. Studies show that boys demonstrate the need for

more physical activity during school than currently offered to them (Cleveland, 2011; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007). Combine boys' lack of physical activity with high levels of intelligence and they can become easily bored with their classwork, as evidenced by their teacher-perceived off-task behaviors and even their shared responses in studies in which they have participated (Kerr et al., 2012; Acee, Kim, H., Kim, H. J., Kim, J-I, Chu, Kim, Cho, Wicker, & The Boredom Research Group, 2010). Acee et al. (2012) found that academic boredom was highly correlated with loss of motivation, self-regulation, and overall school achievement. They emphasize that boredom can lead to other unwanted behaviors and negative emotions that may result in students' lack of engagement in the entire educational process. As Carvalho (2016) points out in his study, "boys, compared with girls, are prone to inattentive and restless behaviors and aggressive and oppositional behaviors," especially when they feel disconnected to school (p. 55). He argues that some gender differences in academic achievement may be explained by understanding certain personality traits such as behaviors; and, educational systems should be aware of them and proactive about helping boys remain engaged in school.

Thirdly, gender preferences for certain subjects highlight a priority for discussion in numerous scholarly literature. Skelton and Francis (2012) and Neu and Weinfeld (2007) assert that boys, traditionally, do not perform as well as girls in language arts subjects because they lack interest or connection to the content; and, showing outward interest in language arts may not be perceived as popular or masculine by their peers. However, Roznowski, Reith, and Hong (2000) and Benbow (1988) contend that boys prefer math and science courses because these subjects are perceived as more masculine than others. While trends in female achievement in math are changing, they argue that gender differences in math giftedness may be attributed to the notion that students perceive math as a masculine discipline (Roznowski et al., 2000; Benbow, 1988). They also found that gifted boys prefer other subjects, such as science, physical

education, and sports because they felt confident and connected to their curriculum, but their achievement levels were strongly linked to how their peers perceived them in those classes (Van Houtte, 2004). Gifted boys consider the social context of the school to be as important as the academic context, and Van Houtte (2004) and Francis (2000) argue that social considerations may be a source of achievement differences among boys and girls.

### **Positioning Pedagogical Understandings of Gender and Giftedness**

Gender and giftedness influence educational implications for diversity and equity in classroom spaces. Evans (1995) posits, "To treat people as equals may require that they not be treated the same way" (p. 4). This statement could be said of how teachers design curriculum, create an inclusive classroom environment, and engage students in academic and social discourse. It has been shown that how teachers communicate with boys and girls is different, so it is critical to consider their awareness of diverse participation in classroom dialogue (Read, 2008). Communication also plays important roles in how the curriculum is presented in the classroom. VanTassel-Baska (2003) considers how communicating these instructional strategies can specifically address gifted male students and their learning potential,

The learning strategies that are the most beneficial for gifted students, especially gifted males, are those strategies that relate the instructional purposes, curriculum, and setting; are diverse; are generative in nature; provide a balance among active and passive activities; mesh with cognitive styles of both the teacher and the learners; and are subordinate to the educational purpose (p. 2–3).

Since teachers are generally responsible for designing curriculum and providing diverse instructional delivery, Kanevsky (2011) maintains that gifted students benefit from differentiated pedagogy that considers their personal learning preferences. Kanevsky (2011) provides some important implications for gifted students: a) reading ability affects the types and complexity of

literature they wish to devote their time reading, b) allowing students to have a voice in the ways they engage with the curriculum promotes greater motivation for learning, and c) the impetus for creating a balanced curriculum that involves learning interests and preferences lends itself to more diverse and equitable teaching and learning opportunities.

### **Study Overview**

Addressing the rarity of in-depth studies that center elementary age male students as participants (Pinxten, Wouters, Preckel, Neipel, De Fraine, and Verschueren, 2015), I conducted an ethnographic study with gifted male students who were enrolled in grades 3–5 in two public urban elementary schools. Drawing on in-class observations, formal and informal interviews with students, and parent and teacher surveys, I examined 22 male gifted students’ personal perspectives about themselves and school that provided me with deeper insights into their social and academic wellbeing in the classroom.

Using the Frame of Reference theory, I sought to understand how the boys in my study developed academic and social self-perceptions influenced by gender and ability practices. I explored gender construction and the role gender stereotypes play in shaping boys’ classroom experiences. Next, I examined the notion of giftedness as a social construct and its relation to gendered differences. Through prior research, I found Herbert Marsh’s (1986) Frame of Reference theory an especially helpful lens because it emphasizes self-concept construction in institutional spaces.

To add richness to my study, I also surveyed six teachers and 15 parents of the participants to capture their perspectives about giftedness and male learners, positioning their perceptions with contemporary studies (Hamilton & Roberts, 2017; Preckel, Baudson, Krolak-Schwert, & Glock, 2015; Händel, Vialle, & Ziegler, 2013; Bailey, 2011) on teaching elementary gifted male students in public schools. Written recordings of participant observations, interview

transcripts, and printed surveys served as my main methods for data collection. My dissertation study aimed to explore whether students' self-perceptions influence boys' social and emotional health; and, explore whether parents' and teachers' perspectives on gifted construction in males influence how they address or engage with issues of social and emotional learning for these students.

Further, literature has created critical dialogue among scholars and educational practitioners about how to address children's academic and social learning needs. Arguably, institutional discourses on giftedness and its manifestations in boys and girls may be helpful for consideration of self-awareness about gender-inclusive practices. Understanding how girls and boys differ in thinking preferences and interests can improve teacher-designed methods of diverse curriculum and instruction. However, it is important to understand that teachers may do a disservice to students if they position a classroom cultural discourse that solely relies on their socially constructed labels and stereotypes of genders and levels of ability rather than create opportunities for all students to flourish in ways that fits their needs. O'Connor (2012) warns educators that while current institutional policies and pedagogical practices heavily influence ways of teaching, teachers should not constrain students to labels and limit their individuality. Schools should be spaces where students can identify with each other and feel valued as diverse participants in the collective learning process. One must attempt to uncover the social conditions that create, or not, opportunities for gendering outcomes and behaviors so to understand whether these behaviors are inherent to the individual's gender or encouraged based on the classroom climate or stereotypes about how boys and girls learn. For this reason, I chose to discuss the complexities of diversity in relation to the social constructions and instructional implications of the male gender and the conceptualizations of highly intellectual abilities.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. –*Unknown*

#### **Framing the Literature**

Czeschilik and Rost (1994) articulate the foundation for examining the relationships between institutional constructions of giftedness and gender by stating, “research taking into account concurrently both gender and intelligence is scarce; (and), the question is whether gender influences the relationship between giftedness and personality” (p. 2). For my research, I situate literature on engaging issues of male students’ academic abilities and self-perceptions through the theoretical lens of the Frame of Reference theory, juxtaposing whether teachers’ conceptions of giftedness and gendered assumptions about gifted boys influence their instructional pedagogy through a transactional framework. I also explore how parents’ perceptions of giftedness have contributed to the field of gifted education. Further, I examine Mega, Ronconi, and De Beni (2013), Chan (2002), and other scholars’ contentions that gifted students’ socio-emotional needs affect their self-perceptions as gifted students. Existing literature suggests these needs may manifest themselves differently in males than do females, and more studies ought to examine the intersection of the gender diversity of academic and socio-

emotional needs (Daniels et al., 2001). Specifically, Weaver-Hightower (2003) argues that more research should focus on boys and the relationship between gendered assumptions about males and their influence on academic achievement. Orr (2011) and Weaver-Hightower (2003) also suggest that boys' concerns about their school experiences have traditionally been ignored, which leads to consideration of the following inquiries: a) will careful examination of how gifted boys perceive themselves as learners within the classroom context lead to understandings about intersections of gender and ability, and b) how do teachers' assumptions about this student group influence, or not, their academic and social expectations of them? Berekashvili (2012) suggests studies should focus on such guiding questions to help educators understand possibilities and potential approaches for contributing to the field of education and engaging in rigorous curriculum development gifted students.

While I cannot claim to have exhausted all research about the field of gifted education, gender and pedagogy, and the socio-emotional needs of young boys, I have worked to review scholars who have made significant research in these areas of education. Since Marsh's (1990a; 1990b) Frame of Reference theory has been widely situated in gifted research pertaining to self-concept development, I synthesized several works on these topics using this lens. In the following, I articulated three themes pertinent to my proposed study. First, examining constructions of giftedness, I reviewed Strang's early discussions (as cited in Henry, 1958; Krongberg, 2014) and Pfeiffer's (2012) more recent research surrounding the socially constructed definition of giftedness and compared it to other scholarly contributions to gifted identification. I deepened this discussion by engaging in early and contemporary research about teachers' conceptions of giftedness. I then explored Bailey's (2011) discussions about teachers' assumptions to investigate gender influences on academic functioning. Challenging the classroom spaces through the lens of transactional theory (Fecho, 2004), I discussed some



scholars' work on teachers' perceptions about the gender role on achievement versus misconceptions they may unintentionally produce from lack of understanding the socio-emotional aspects of learning. Specifically, I sought to understand how the intersections of gender and ability inform teachers' decisions about the ways that giftedness is constructed among students' peers, the curriculum, and within the classroom environment.

Second, I reviewed research about how parents' perceptions of giftedness have influenced how they conceptualize their child's intellectual abilities. Finally, I explored whether gifted boys' self-perceptions are influenced by the social and academic contexts of their school settings. My efforts to seek knowledge and reflect on critical discussions surrounding gender and ability paved my journey towards understanding how gifted boys perceive themselves and their school experiences, potentially illuminating their self-perceptions as integral components to designing instructional delivery inclusive of social-emotional development skills for gifted children.

### **Frame of Reference Theory**

Marsh (2007) and Williams and Montgomery (1995) articulate that self-concept development has long been linked to potentialities of academic achievement and their relationship to educational considerations for high-ability students. Along those lines, Bernard, Vernon, Terjesen, and Kurasaki (2013) recognize that schools play critical roles in formulating children's healthy self-perceptions. Drawing from the disciplines of psychology and education, Marsh, Shavelson, Stanton, and Huber produced multiple studies to explain the juxtaposition of students' self-concept development and academic performance (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). They engaged in vast amounts of psychological research that described the notions of self-concept through a constructionist perspective; specifically, defining self-concept as "a person's perceptions of him- or herself" and articulating that these perceptions are formed through experiences with and interpretations of one's environment (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985, p. 107).

Namely, students are required to negotiate daily school environments consisting of numerous academic subject-specific classes/times and socially constructed contexts (i.e., lunchrooms, playgrounds, hallways, restrooms, and bus transportation). Marsh, Shavelson, Stanton, and Huber's quest for research about self-concept development, how to measure such a subjective notion, and how to apply their models for explaining it illuminated theoretical gaps for interpreting self-concept construction (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Hau, 2004). Crotty (2010) contended that since meanings, or interpretations, can be constructed in various ways by different people, it is essential to continue the search for understandings of self-concepts as they emerge from one's environment. For students, their school environments weave cultures and dialogues together, creating meanings that influences personal and academic self-concepts. These socially constructed meanings created by personal comparisons made about one's self in regarding their peers' influence on how students feel about their abilities and positions within school contexts (Williams and Montgomery, 1995; Marsh, 1990). Hence, Marsh & Shavelson argued that there should be a theoretical lens through which to situate its influence on academic achievement and to understand and inform methodological approaches to research about self-concept development in educational spaces (Marsh & Hau, 2004). Understanding self-concept formation through a social constructivist theoretical lens provides more insights about the influence self-perceptions may have on educational outcomes for gifted students.

Marsh and Shavelson posed a theoretical lens for explaining academic self-concepts grounded in more of a transactional approach, meaning that students may develop positive or negative self-perceptions based on how they interact with others, the curriculum, and their academic outcomes (Marsh & Hau, 2004). Their early research focused on a multidimensional model that divided students' self-concept development into two constructs: academic and non-academic, or social-emotional constructs (Marsh & Hau, 2004). Attempting to measure self-

concept in elementary-age students, this model looked at factors that might have contributed to students feeling successful in general academics, specifically, their math and verbal self-concepts. Shavelson, particularly noted for creating a hierarchical structure to this early model of self-concept development, suggested that students' academic achievements (in certain subjects) are largely due to their high self-concepts in that subject (Marsh & Hau, 2004). While this came as no surprise that students' achievements positively affected their self-concepts in that subject, Marsh, Byrne, and Shavelson (1988) and Marsh & Craven (1997) further debated these results to delve into possible comparisons between self-concept development and other subjects as well as the social domains at school. Simply put, there must be more to how students develop positive or negative self-concepts based on, not only their own performances, but specific to comparisons with their peers in similar educational settings, or frames of reference. The three researchers tested the existing self-concept model and found the participants' verbal self-concept scores uncorrelated with their math self-concept outcomes, meaning that when the participants' responded to positive feelings of self-concept in verbal skills, they most likely did not respond similarly in math skills. These revised findings led Marsh to investigate further how internal and external comparisons influence students' self-perceptions with math and verbal abilities (Marsh, 1990). Marsh also believed that accounting for how students make internal and external comparisons within frames of reference may help educators better understand how students' self-concepts are formed within normative contexts; thereby illuminating issues in the curriculum, classroom environments, and social settings that cause negative self-concept formation (Marsh & Hau, 2004; Williams & Montgomery, 1995).

According to Parker, Marsh, Lüdtke, and Trautwein (2013), the field of education recognizes the significance of research on self-concepts, especially regarding the critical role self-perceptions play on students' academic outcomes, social development, and emotional

growth. From such research, Marsh (1990) focused on the role of social comparisons and frames of reference, leading to the construction of the Frame of Reference theory. Adapted from his prior work with Shavelson on self-concept constructs, Marsh (1990) developed a model explaining two comparisons students often make to define their self-concepts as learners among their peers within similar frames of reference. To explain these comparisons, Marsh (1992) administered questionnaires to over 500, seventh through tenth-grade boys that contained six scales aimed to examine aspects of self-concept related to 15 subjects: English, history, math, science, and foreign languages were among the core academic subjects. The scales included question strands such as, “Compared to others my age, I am good at...”, and “I’m hopeless when it comes to...” (p. 6). Analyzing the boys’ responses along with their school grades, Marsh (1992) and Swiatek (2004) found strong correlations between the boys’ academic performances and subject-specific self-concepts. According to this theory, “Students concurrently compare both their individual academic achievements across subject areas (internal comparisons) and their ability levels relative to others within their learning environment (external comparisons)” (Williams & Montgomery, 1995, p. 401). The development of internal and external comparisons was found to be common between math and verbal skills and consisted of students’ feelings about their potential to perform well in math as compared to their abilities in other subject areas; thereby, influencing students’ academic and social dispositions (Pinxten et al., 2015; Shaalvik & Rankin, 1990). For example, students who believed they performed poorly in math, most likely believed they were good readers. Shaalvik and Rankin (1990) and Marsh, Smith and Barnes (1985) found that students compared their self-perceptions as learners to their peers within a similar frame of reference to judge their own academic abilities, and that “they use this relativistic impression of their academic ability as one basis for forming their academic self-concept” (p. 546).

Gifted students, though self-knowingly have high intelligence scores as compared to their peers who are not identified as gifted, make similar comparisons within school frames of reference. Swiatek (2004) described Marsh's Frame of Reference theory in this way:

how a student might have a poor self-concept in a particular academic area despite strong academic performance in that area. For an achieving gifted student, external comparisons are likely to strengthen self-concept, as the student's academic performance compares favorably to the performance of others. Internal comparisons, however, are expected to weaken self-concept in areas in which the student perceives himself or herself to be relatively weak (p. 104).

These comparisons could prove to be problematic for gifted students, as suggested by Swiatek (2005), because even though they demonstrate high intellectual abilities, they may negatively perceive or avoid challenging subjects or tasks if they have a low self-concept in those content areas. On the contrary, gifted students may excel and pursue more challenging content in specific subjects based on their perceptions of their superior abilities as compared to their peers.

Interestingly, Marsh (1990a; 1990b) argued that students who believe they possess low academic skills may also perceive themselves to have high social self-concepts. Understanding this notion may have important implications in terms of how gifted students externally demonstrate their actual and/or perceived abilities.

A study by Pinxten et al. (2015) analyzed their findings of academic self-concept in relation to Marsh's internal and external frames of reference. They found that the social comparisons rooted in school contexts were strong determining factors in academic self-concept development (Pinxten et al., 2015; Seaton, Marsh, & Craven, 2010). Using Marsh's (1986) frame of reference model, Pinxten et al. (2015) sought to explore whether young students made similar comparisons about their academic abilities as did the adolescent students who participated in

many of Marsh's (1990a; 1985) previous studies. Pinxten et al.'s (2015) study was a significant one because it involved elementary-age children who are a scarcely tapped population for this kind of research. Their study presented findings that young students also engage in internal and external comparisons which play integral roles in forming their self-concepts as learners (Pinxten et al., 2015). Furthermore, they concluded, "Teacher educators and other professionals in the school context should be made aware that even younger students in elementary schools are making both internal and external comparisons to form their academic self-concepts" (Pinxten et al., 2015, p. 130).

Positive self-perceptions drive students' desires for academic and social achievement and play a critical role determining the potentialities for obtaining long-term personal goals (Marsh, Kuyser, Seaton, Parker, Morin, Möller, & Abduljabbar, 2014; Parker et al., 2013). Arguably, students are more likely to have higher academic self-concepts when they are successful in school just as students who experience more academic failures may have lower self-concepts (Martin, Goldwasser, & Harris 2017).

Marsh's (1990a; 1990b) Frame of Reference theory can serve as a model for understanding the development of gifted boys' self-concepts. Findings from Martin et al.'s (2017) study illuminate the need for understanding the complexities of the Frame of Reference theory and its influence on pedagogy and curriculum development. Martin et al. (2017), Marsh and Hau (2004), Williams & Montgomery (1995), and others also posit that a teacher's critical goal for students should be to help them construct healthy self-perceptions as learners and as individuals. Fortunately, Williams and Montgomery (1995) and Whitmore (1980) contend that growing attention has been afforded to gifted students' self-perceptions and their influence on their achievement, "A realistic and healthy conception of self has been identified as crucial to the realization of the potential for gifted students" (Williams & Montgomery, 1995, p. 400).

Conceptualizing the Frame of Reference theory elucidates the need to deepen educators' understanding of effective curriculum development that incorporates social and emotional instructional practices into effective academic pedagogy; thereby, helping gifted students construct healthy perceptions of themselves and school.

### **Socially Constructed Notions of Giftedness**

Worrell and Erwin (2011) state that, traditionally, educational institutions base their gifted and talented services on socially constructed definitions of giftedness; hence, "one should have a clear conceptualization of what giftedness is and some ideas about how giftedness is manifested" (p. 320). Even though there have been long-standing competing and widely varied conceptions of giftedness that causes student identification for gifted and talented services to be complex and somewhat subjective, socially constructed perceptions of giftedness remains rooted in the social constructs of learning, intelligence, and gender preferences for curriculum and instruction (Worrell & Erwin, 2011). Hence, the U.S. Department of Education, (USDE), (2018) explains gifted and talented students as those "who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities". The USDE's baseline for constructing giftedness serves as a guideline for state and local school districts to develop programs for gifted and talented students but leaves subjectivity about how they measure these abilities. Traditionally, only students with high intelligence scores were considered gifted and talented, but as research in the field of gifted education evolved, broader characteristics were attached to the conception, promoting educators to look at giftedness differently. Since that time, numerous school districts have designed elaborate measures to help students qualify for gifted and talent services rather than relying on intelligence tests as the sole predictor for gifted identification (Watts, 2018). While these

measures were designed to identify more students, perhaps, these measures leave some ambiguity as to how the constructions of giftedness vary among how school districts utilize the term and design programs for children considered gifted and talented.

My study's participating district followed this approach, using an intelligence test and a matrix to measure students' specific academic abilities. To further my understanding of gifted categorization as it is conceptualized by the participating district, I explored Henry's (1958) and contemporary researchers, Kronborg's (2014) and Pfeiffer's (2012) descriptions of giftedness that stresses intelligence scores do not tell educators everything about the abilities of a child. Henry explored Ruth Strang's early contributions to gifted education and identification (1958; Watts, 2018). Strang, co-founder of the American Association for Gifted Children, claimed that giftedness was many-sided, meaning that gifted children possessed a variety of abilities and talents, not just a high intelligence score (Henry, 1958). Later, Pfeiffer (2012) explained giftedness as not only described by an intelligence score but also is a socially constructed concept. He stressed that individuals can be gifted in one area or another and it is difficult to identify giftedness in concrete terms. Therefore, the social construction of gifted individuals is viewed as a way of understanding the exceptional intelligence and behaviors that are above and beyond the modes of thinking for most people. While there is little argument against an intelligence test as a measure of cognitive ability, Olszewski-Kubilius and Thompson (2015) and Pfeiffer (2012) focused on other components such as creativity, independence, and sociality in the classroom to measure overall ability of high-achieving students. Similar findings by Baum, Schader, and Hébert (2014) noted several other socially constructed factors that support superior talents and cultivate growth in students: a psychologically safe classroom, tolerance for various levels of emotional maturity, and positive teacher-student relationships. Additional criteria posed



by Baudson and Preckel (2016) included creativity, social skills, independence, individual motivation, and high verbal skills.

Linking additional socially constructed factors, such as students' race and class, to giftedness are present in literature when referring to potentialities for referrals for gifted identification. Based on a national survey on gifted education, Kurtz, Lloyd, Harwin, Chen, and Furuya (2019) found that a student's race or socio-economic status did not influence one's conceptions of intellectual ability. Rather, these constructed factors tend to play varying degrees of roles when educators refer students for gifted testing based on their stereotypes about gifted learners from different races, ethnicities, or classes (Baudson, Fischbach, & Preckel, 2016). For instance, a student's lack of English proficiency may prohibit a teacher from referring a student to the GT program because the teacher may not be able to observe gifted characteristics until the student is performing above grade level in English.

Informed by these studies, institutions commonly approach giftedness as "conceptualized through a social constructivist perspective" and incorporate intelligence measurements and a matrix of performances and behaviors that demonstrate unique qualities that are superior to same-age peers within the school contexts (Watts, 2018, p. 17). Taking the conceptualization of giftedness through the constructivist lens further, I examined literature to understand how teachers play a role in promoting normative conceptions of giftedness; and, what may be happening in classroom spaces that construct conditions where some students are categorized as gifted and talented.

### **Influence of Gender Role on Teachers' Perceptions**

Bailey's (2011) examination of gifted students and their ego development illustrated that teachers are traditionally trained to emphasize intellectual potential rather than the influence of emotional development on learning. Bailey (2011) considered, however, that students'

intellectual achievement must be in conjunction with attention to emotional health, which proves problematic when juxtaposing academics and gendered approaches to learning. Further, Bailey's (2011) study found that teachers held gendered assumptions that tended to overestimate their knowledge about the academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted boys. She implied that teachers' assumptions about student learning limit their skills for addressing social and emotional growth in students. She offered that gifted students "experience the world from a qualitatively different perspective because of the unique social and emotional characteristics of this population"; therefore, teachers' approaches to understanding best-fit instructional practices should include the social and emotional aspects to student growth (Bailey, 2011, p. 219–220).

Along those lines, Preckel et al. (2015) engaged in a rigorous mixed design study to investigate whether stereotypes about gifted students affected teachers' attitudes towards their academic achievement versus assumptions about their behaviors. Preckel et al. (2015) mentioned that existing literature portrays some gifted stereotypes such as uniquely high academic ability accompanied with social awkwardness and emotional instability as reasons for why teachers believe many gifted students are perceived differently than their average ability peers. However, for boys, they found in their study that teachers focused more on boys' negative behaviors than their positive ones because of their implicit beliefs about how boys versus girls learn and behave in the classroom. For instance, teachers admitted to referring fewer boys for gifted programs than girls because of their implicit biases that girls demonstrate more social competence than boys (Preckel et al., 2015). Teachers also associated giftedness with maladjustment more often in their male students than in their female students, rendering them less likely to believe their male students would benefit from gifted programming (Preckel et al., 2015).

In another study, teachers' expectations about how students were expected to behave were based on their academic ability rather than their social maturity (Hamilton & Roberts,

2017). Boys in this study demonstrated high performance in some subjects yet exhibited poorer social and behavioral skills, such as joking around and not taking learning as seriously as they were expected to; yet they were still held to high behavioral standards despite the asynchrony between the two aspects of academic and social development at school (Hamilton & Roberts, 2017). Furthermore, gendered binaries were evident through not only how teachers stereotyped boys as learners, but also how the boys felt towards their curricular interests and social behaviors. As the authors suggest, even the female students demonstrated gendered attitudes towards their male peers, reasoning such “boy” behaviors as being loud, acting silly, or being physically active. These behaviors seemed to become even more apparent in high achieving boys and who attempted to distract their peers away from noticing their academic abilities (Hamilton & Roberts, 2017).

Finding similar analyses, a study using a between-subjects design illustrated that misconceptions about gifted students sometimes increased the risks for unwanted behaviors because teachers lacked understanding about how to teach these learners (Baudson & Preckel, 2016). They explored the disharmony between how teachers perceived gifted students and their personal classroom experiences of teaching these students. Teachers’ conceptions of giftedness affected how they treated their gifted students and their approaches to curriculum designed to meet their academic and social needs (Baudson & Preckel, 2016). Several key findings included evidence that teachers over-relied on stereotypes of giftedness such as maladjustment, high academic abilities in all content areas, and contributed boys’ high intelligence to innate abilities and girls’ intelligence to commitment and effort (Baudson & Preckel, 2016). The findings illuminated the need for deeper understandings about gifted construction and appropriate instructional environments for which gifted students may thrive (Baudson & Preckel, 2016).

Like Baudson and Preckel's (2016) study, Legewie and DiPrete (2012) examined the composition of several classrooms to understand how the class environment influences gender gaps and found that learning environments which lent themselves to masculinity construction for boys enabled them to identify with their personal needs while engaging in school activities and teacher expectations (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012). According to Legewie and DiPrete (2012) and Farrell (2016) masculinity construction from a social constructionist approach refers to conceptions of boyhood and the fostering of gendered differences that represent boy culture (i.e., peer comparisons and status, and at times, negative attitudes towards school endeavors). They concluded that some boys' potential for classroom success largely depends on the emphasis teachers place on the cultural environment, and they maintain that teachers influence boys' academic potential when they chose resources and methodologies that connect with their male students (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012). For example, a curriculum designed to engage students through hands-on strategies, competition, and personal interests were highly favored by boys in their study.

In many ways, Farrell's (2016) qualitative study summarized this collection of scholarship through a study emphasizing young boys' narratives and found that often boys felt too enclosed by their gender at school. In other words, by ages of six to nine years old, boys understood the gender binaries within classroom spaces which were designed to assign them to "dominant masculine roles" rather than by their personalities, abilities, or interests (Farrell, 2016, p. 283). Farrell (2016) concludes by suggesting that teachers should adopt pedagogy that provides appropriate socially constructed spaces for gifted boys to learn in ways that interest and engage them through utilization of their personal learning preferences. Teachers may design more inclusive and academically rigorous curriculum and classroom environments for boys if they engage in understanding the social constructions of gender, learning, and intelligence

instead of relying on gender stereotypes about how boys presumably function and learn in classroom environments. It may be effective to consider VanTassel-Baska's (2003) position that teachers who "focus on student outcomes and then identify desired teacher behaviors that would facilitate those outcomes" and may also help address the binaries of both gender and ability in the classroom environment (p. 2).

### **Teachers' Normative Conceptions of Giftedness**

Education in the U.S. has continuously relied upon classroom teachers to provide appropriate services for all students, mostly through cognitive identification and categorization. Traditionally, teachers play critical roles in identifying individual needs and services for students who demonstrate academic or social needs and uniqueness. Specific to gifted and talented students, Moon and Brighton (2008) contend that a critical examination of gifted education should include how teachers conceptualize giftedness. They posit,

Both teachers' conceptions of giftedness and their beliefs about the abilities of their students are areas of critical consideration related to identification and talent development practices in primary school classrooms. Teachers play a central role in the identification of young gifted students. Teachers are more embedded in the method of gifted identification and talent development (p. 449).

Situating their research in this contention, Moon and Brighton's (2016) study explored teacher participants' beliefs about giftedness and their confidence in identifying students with high intellectual potential. Using survey and interview tools, they found contributing factors that teachers recognize as gifted traits; prior exposure to outside opportunities at home being the most important factor influencing students' intellectual abilities (Moon & Brighton, 2016). Given this predominant finding, Moon and Brighton (2016) felt compelled to inquire further about whether some students enter schooling with greater potential for intellectual ability based upon social-

cultural factors unrelated to innate cognitive abilities. Teachers' responses illuminated their beliefs that the more "social and personal development and language and literacy skills" students demonstrated at earlier grades, the more teachers were inclined to identify them with gifted potential (Moon & Brighton, 2016, p. 462). However, teachers' conceptions about how giftedness manifests itself in earlier grades led primary grade teachers to lean more towards traditional understandings about how giftedness is perceived in their classrooms. For instance, strong academic vocabulary and reading skills accompanying by zealous work habits stood out as prominently being labeled as talent-related skills (Moon & Brighton, 2016). Interestingly noted in this study, teacher participants struggled to identify other talent-related skills not typically stereotyped as gifted aptitudes which represented that aside from traditional, or stereotypical identification factors, teachers may or may not have clear conceptions of how giftedness can be manifested in learners from multicultural or various socioeconomic backgrounds (Moon & Brighton, 2016).

In later studies, Rothenbusch, Zettler, Voss, Lösch, and Trautwein (2016) and Kaya (2015) support the importance of understanding teachers' role in conceptualizing gifted and talented abilities. Like Moon & Brighton (2008), Rothenbusch et al. (2016) argue that teachers are mainly responsible for referring students for gifted evaluation and that they base their referrals on traditional conceptions of intellectual capacity and academic achievement. Seeking to understand what factors influence teacher nominations for students' gifted evaluations and services, Rothenbusch et al. (2016) focused on teachers' beliefs about intelligence and how their viewpoints influenced the conditions in which giftedness was manifested in their classrooms. They found that teachers view giftedness as either holistic or domain-specific in nature (Rothenbusch et al., 2016). In other words, some teachers understood giftedness through a holistic lens— or a traditional lens in which giftedness is based on students' overall intelligence

across most cognitive domains and across various school settings (Rothenbusch et al., 2016). Giftedness, according to teachers who view it in this way, believe that high-ability students perform above the class norm as evidenced by grades and/or achievement scores in most or all school content areas, and also possess superior reasoning abilities in non-subject areas (Rothenbusch et al., 2016; Hollingworth, 1942; Terman, 1925). Other teachers viewed giftedness through more the modern ideologies of domain-specific intelligence, meaning that most students can be categorized as gifted if they demonstrate high ability or intelligence in only a few or one specific domain (Rothenbusch et al., 2016; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011; Sternberg, 2005). Teachers subscribing to the contemporary views of giftedness through domain-specific intelligences also believe that high intellectual capacity could be judged in relation to the classroom conditions, or frames of reference in which students' abilities are considered (Rothenbusch et al., 2016).

Kaya (2015) suggests that how teachers conceptualize giftedness, such as those discussed in Rothenbusch et al.'s (2016) research, influence whom they refer for gifted and talented evaluations and programming. Kaya (2015) articulates that regardless of whether teachers view high intelligence through holistic or domain-specific measures, they must have a firm understanding of giftedness and how high intelligence is manifested in classroom spaces since teachers play integral roles in the identification process. In their study, Kaya (2015) found that teachers' conceptions of giftedness varied from possessing high intelligence as evidenced in achievement scores to expectations of mature social and psychological development. Kaya (2015) attributed the variances in defining giftedness to teachers' training and their personal and classroom experiences with gifted students and conclude that their awareness of how they perceive giftedness influences classroom conditions which promote positioning for some students to be categorized as gifted and talented. Kaya (2015) also suggested that "teachers

tended to evaluate giftedness of a certain student relative to the other students in the classroom” (p. 69). Using academic or performance comparisons as a criterion for identifying intellectual ability positions the classroom spaces and the transactions that occur in those spaces especially crucial for understanding how giftedness is situated in the learning environment (Endephols-Ulpe & Ruf, 2006).

Along those lines, Eremeeva, Bikbulatov, and Baranova (2016) argue that teachers’ normative conceptions of giftedness influence the conditions within classroom spaces that develop or promote the notion of giftedness. Challenging a prior study that suggested teachers need to create rigorous academic conditions for students with gifted potential, they discussed the teachers’ responsibility to understand and identify cognitive abilities before they can create opportunities in the classroom that enrich or promote their intellectual potential (Eremeeva et al., 2016). Conclusively, McCoach and Siegle (2007) articulate that identifying students as gifted may be unsettling for teachers, given the tensions behind how some school districts standardize eligibility for gifted and talented services and how one personally perceives or stereotypes how highly intelligent students should perform or behave in classrooms. Considering McCoach and Siegle’s (2007) research alongside others reviewed in this examination of literature provokes interest in understanding how the classroom environments and the transactions that occur in those spaces influence how teachers perceive normative conceptions of giftedness.

Siegle, Moore, Mann, and Wilson (2010) explored the classroom conditions that attribute to the high-ability characteristics demonstrated in children whose teachers identified them as gifted and talented. Their study suggested that teachers who had some training or classroom experience in teaching gifted students were more likely to credit environmental factors such as instructional time spent geared towards meeting these students’ needs, parental influences that encourage higher levels of thinking, and even the students’ siblings whom teachers had in their



classrooms as factors that encourage giftedness (Siegle et al., 2010). According to Fecho (2004), such environmental factors can be referred to as transactions. Fecho (2004) believes that classrooms are spaces in which theories about student learning and achievement intersect with practice to produce decisions about the ways in which teachers approach students' abilities and pedagogy. He contends that when teachers "seek to transact with theory, by acting as the prism through which theory gets defrayed, they engage in the idea of praxis" (p. 44–45).

Furthermore, Laine, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2016), Kagan (1992), and Pajares (1992) also state that teachers are crucial in creating supporting and challenging transactions within their classrooms that seek to develop gifted children's potential. They maintain that daily transactions with students develop teachers' beliefs about intelligence and how it is manifested in the classroom (Laine et al., 2016; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). These daily transactions also play a role in how teachers compare intellectual ability among their students. Lee (1999) argues that some teachers make judgments about which students they consider gifted and talented based on their perceptions of the intellectual abilities of their peers within the same classroom context. Lee (1999) also notes that teachers perceive student behaviors that transact in the classroom, such as "competitiveness, perfectionism, leadership, tolerance, and determination" as characteristics of high ability students (p. 190). Budson, Fischbach, and Preckel (2016) also found that teachers namely rated students' intellectual abilities by the behaviors they exhibited in the classroom, and how well teachers understood these behaviors to be generalizable to gifted students played an equal role in accurately judging their students' intellectual potential. Conclusively, Budson et al. (2016) maintain that how well teachers know their students through the conditions they create in the classroom can serve to better recognize and refer students for gifted evaluation and programs.

Understanding how both the teachers' perceptions and the classroom conditions converge to form normative conceptions of giftedness is an important discussion in this research. The literature proposes that teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and instructional practices for gifted students are influenced by their conceptions of giftedness (Baudson & Preckel, 2016). Cross and Coleman (2014) poignantly contend that understanding giftedness begins with conceptualizing the idea that its growth does not occur in isolation or just innately in an individual, rather it must also be cultivated in rich contexts focused on intellectual development. For rich transactions to occur in the academic and social contexts of school, Benny and Blonder (2016), Kaya (2015), De Corte (2013), and Lee (1999) maintain that teacher training and hands-on experiences provide them with important knowledge for understanding giftedness and addressing their academic and social needs at school.

Benny and Blonder (2016) and others, however, claim that traditional models of pre-service education do not provide teachers with adequate training in the field of gifted education, thus leading to various subjective beliefs about gifted conceptions and performance expectations. Teachers' beliefs about what giftedness looks like in academic and social contexts may be dependent upon their personal attitudes or perceptions rather than on theory unless teachers have plentiful classroom experiences and/or training to help them build their knowledge about gifted children (Benny & Blonder, 2015; Kaya, 2015; De Corte, 2013; McCoach & Siegle, 2007; Endepohls-Ulpe & Ruf, 2006). Similarly, Rothenbusch et al. (2016), Deku (2013), and Miller (2009) recognize that teachers are more likely to conceptualize high intelligence more accurately and nominate more students for gifted programs when they combine their knowledge, experience, and classroom contexts for determining which students should be categorized as gifted and talented. Since teacher referrals are critical instruments in the evaluation process, situating the literature as outlined in this review, highlights the importance of understanding the

conditions in classroom spaces that identify and promote gifted categorization for some students, particularly considering the role gender plays on giftedness construction.

### **Parents' Perceptions of Giftedness and Gifted Services**

It is without argument that parental roles in gifted education are as crucial to students' learning and development as are teachers' roles. Unfortunately, Morawska & Sanders (2008; 2009) assert that there has been limited research regarding parental perceptions of gifted children and their schooling experiences. Several years later, there continues to be a disparity in contemporary literature pertaining to parents' conceptualization of giftedness, their understandings of its manifestations in their children, and their feelings about institutional programs and services to meet their children's unique needs. Noting the recent gaps in literature challenges one to parcel through existing themes in literature, recognize how, empirically, parents' perceptions have contributed to the field of gifted education, and how further research may provide recent viewpoints on the importance of including parents in informative discourses about educating their gifted children.

Prior literature including parents of gifted children irradiates some differences and challenges in recognizing high intellectual potential and addressing children's exceptional academic, behavioral, and emotional needs. In Jacobs and Weisz's (1994) study, they examined parents' stereotypes about giftedness, specifically in relation to gender. Their findings illustrated that parents more easily recognized highly intellectual capabilities in their sons as opposed to their daughters, especially categorizing their mathematical abilities as gifted in boys more often than in girls (Jacobs & Weisz, 1994). Parents were more likely to attribute high ability in boys as being innately present. Whereas in girls, some parents attributed their ability to effort (Jacobs & Weisz, 1994). Similarly, Mudrak (2011) outlined several themes regarding how parents perceived their sons' giftedness, namely that parents viewed gifted abilities as innately driven

and nurtured through external factors and challenges. Parent participants in this study characterized their child's exceptional abilities through noticeable differences in thinking and behaving as compared to other children and their constructions of intellectual development varied based on home and school experiences (Mudrak, 2011).

Supporting these considerations in a later study, Solow (2001) examined several parents' narratives about raising gifted children and found that "parent's conceptions about giftedness may affect their interpretations of their gifted children's characteristics and behaviors and, in turn, may influence their reaction to them" (p. 15). For instance, parents who stated they had dedicated time in researching about giftedness felt they were more knowledgeable about how their gifted children function, thus were more aware about their own assumptions, or conceptions of giftedness and how it manifests itself at school and home (Solow, 2001). Because of their presumed knowledge about their child's abilities, some parents also expressed concerns about its connotations for schooling. A few of Solow's (2001) parent participants stated that they recognized characteristics associated with giftedness because they were also identified as gifted in school, but they had concerns about their child being labeled as gifted because other students may view their child as odd or socially outcasted. Other parent participants were reluctant to recognize their children as being gifted because they believed that this label should only be reserved for the few exceptionally intelligent (meaning, individuals who demonstrated intellectual stereotypes of genius), or they felt the institutional constructions of gifted and talented were too academically low, thus qualifying more students with this label than there really are (Solow, 2001).

In a more recent study, Kadioğlu (2018) found that parents believed schools often categorize students with high ability based on test scores, thus rendering inconsistent data to support whether their children are truly gifted in a specific academic area. In fact, while parents

in this study expressed positive feelings about their child being considered gifted, they questioned whether he or she was actually gifted or if his or her achievements were attributed to their efforts in one or more subject or test areas (Kadioğlu, 2018). Because of their inconsistent understandings about what constitutes giftedness, parents expressed concern with their children being labeled gifted; feeling as though this categorization unintentionally accompanies additional stresses and expectations to consistently perform well at school (Kadioğlu, 2018).

Parents who were surveyed in Ogurlu and Yaman's study (2013) also noted concerns that gifted children demonstrate socio-emotional pressures unique to their giftedness, and that these pressures were not perceived to be addressed in educational programs. Parents also expressed a desire to better understanding the characteristics of giftedness so that they can collaborate with teachers to improve their children's academic and social school contexts (Ogurlu & Yaman, 2013). Mudrak (2011) also contested that parents' constructions of giftedness aligned closely with how schools address their child's needs, focusing primarily on the schools' influence on future academic and life outcomes for these students. Mudrak (2011) argues that based on how giftedness is constructed, schools may unintentionally influence "underachievement and maladaptive coping strategies," which negates parents' perceptions that schools should be nurturing their children's unique intellectual talents (p. 214).

Morawska and Sanders' (2009) study found that parents admit challenges of conceptualizing giftedness and behaviors characteristic of gifted children, so they relied upon schools to help them understand their child's needs. However, parents in this research expressed concerns with feeling as those some schools did not provide enough information about their gifted and talented programming, strategies to support their child at home, or how school services may stimulate or meet their student's academic and social-emotional needs (Morawska & Sanders, 2009).

Moreover, Saunders-Stewart, Walker, and Shore (2013) also contend that parents' attitudes toward institutional identification of giftedness may be influenced by the types of services and the classroom conditions presented to their children based on their gifted identification. Saunders-Stewart et al. (2013) examined parents' mixed feelings toward their children's giftedness, specifically that while they supported their identification, they expected teachers to treat their children with fairness and equity when considering the social-cultural aspects of the classroom. For example, parents voiced negative opinions about teachers' group work design because they felt their gifted child's abilities as compared to their group partners may unfairly be exploited rather than allowing their child to be equitable partners in workload sharing (Saunders-Stewart et al., 2013). Parents in this study concluded that they wanted their child's gifted categorization to support positive and rigorous learning opportunities, and they based their perceptions about whether these opportunities were beneficial from how their children recollected their classroom experiences (Saunders-Stewart et al., 2013). Understanding the impetus for ongoing teacher-parent dialogue about special programming and services for gifted students was maintained in Matthews, Ritchotte, and Jolly's (2014) research on parents' constructions of giftedness. They suggested that parents' understanding of gifted classification and how schools address students' needs may be more positive if schools would better inform parents about the "nature of intelligence" and encourage positive conceptions of the term 'gifted' (Matthews et al., 2014, p. 389–390).

Together, Koshy, Smith, and Brown (2017), Weber and Stanley (2012), and Jacobs and Weisz (1994) argue that how parents conceptualize their child's gifted abilities may influence how they develop their self-concepts as learners. In other words, their findings suggest that how parents view their child's strengths positively correlates to the emphasis and encouragement they give to those specific ability traits, which in turn, influences how children view their own

abilities (Weber & Stanley, 2012; Jacobs & Weisz, 1994). Specifically, Weber & Stanley (2012) conclude that “children are forming their self-perceptions on the basis of more than just their own and their classmates’ performance, such as gender-typed messages from parents and other sources” (p. 152). Koshy et al. (2017) suggests that understanding parents’ perceptions of their child’s intellectual abilities lends itself to further research on how these perceptions are critical in the formation of healthy gifted and talented identities and self-concepts in children.

### **Gifted Boys Self-Perceptions within the Social and Academic Context**

Another central area of scholarship influencing the purpose of my dissertation study focuses on how gifted boys perceive their academic abilities and social standings among their peers. Händel et al. (2013) assert, “The aim to assist [gifted] students in developing their gifts is not unproblematic, as their cognitive needs are often seen to conflict with their social needs (p. 99). Addressing their high academic needs sometimes leads to neglecting their social needs which creates social and academic tensions for gifted students. Taking up this notion, their study described how high school gifted boys perceived themselves, and were perceived by their peers, within their social and academic environments at school. Händel et al. (2013) specifically examined how peer acceptance influences gifted students’ academic choices and how they perceive themselves as valued members within their social groups. They found that peers admired their classmates who had high achievements in extracurricular activities but not in academic endeavors. Also, students who excelled in math and science were viewed as more intelligent than their peers but less socially adept than others who were gifted athletically or in foreign languages. They noted, “These results are of importance because they show that successful peers are characterized differently as a function of the school subject in which their high achievement is attained” (Händel et al., 2013, p. 109). Peers’ influence on self-perceptions

of highly intelligent boys was also supported by Rentzsch, Schütz, and Schröder-Abé (2011), Barber and Mueller (2011), and Morawska and Sanders' (2008) studies.

Rentzsch et al. (2011) and Barber and Mueller (2011) sought to understand if being labeled as gifted attributed to more social acceptance and increased self-esteem. Rentzsch et al. (2011) specifically examined the negative connotations that peers often associate with adolescent students who are gifted, such as being called a “nerd” or a “teacher’s pet” and their possible effects on gifted students’ behaviors. They, and Morawska and Sanders (2008), also explored several factors that influence peer acceptance, or lack thereof, including work effort, sports and extracurricular interests, and gender differences that may perceive them as being different (Rentzsch et al., p.146–148). Barber and Mueller’s study (2011) compared adolescent gifted students’ self-perceptions with peers’ perceptions of them. These researchers found similar results; high achievement was admired by school peers, but only if gifted students showed a conscious level of modesty about it (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Rentzsch et al., 2011). Additionally, Barber and Mueller (2011, p. 111) argued, “Giftedness has the potential to be either a social advantage or a social disadvantage” depending upon the classroom context and curriculum designed to support and enforce their academic expectations. For instance, male students who were perceived as being highly social, yet less academic, were noted as more accepted by their peers than boys who were highly academic and less social.

Similar research by Gallagher (2015) explored whether elementary-age gifted students were socially accepted among their peers. Using rating scales to determine relationships, if any, between high intelligence and social acceptance, he found peers’ social acceptance of the 54 gifted students who participated in his study decreased when they flaunted their academic superiority and when they displayed various immature behaviors. Gallagher (2015) concluded that based on his results, gifted children may sacrifice high academic performance for social



status since peer approval was noted as more important than their academic potential at this age level. Together with Orr's (2011) and Juelskjaer's (2008) examination of gender socialization and boys' apparent need for social status, key findings illuminated the importance of gifted students not wanting to be out-casted by their peers; and, because of this social need, they exhibited less intellectual capacity than they possessed because they tried to fit in with their peers who were not identified as gifted. Orr (2011) posed, "Even if boys have positive attitudes about school, they may adjust their behavior accordingly due to fear of being deemed "feminine" or lose socialization power with their peers (p. 273). Juelskjaer (2008) explored how teachers can misinterpret boys' motivation for fitting in with their adolescent male peers because some boys do not demonstrate acceptable social skills necessary to negotiate both academic and social classroom spaces. Juelskjaer (2008) believed it is the school that frequently fails boys rather than boys failing school because some teachers lack understanding about how to combine social and academic pedagogy into productive classroom instruction. Juelskjaer's (2008) study emphasized how viewing school from boys' personal experiences can positively influence the curriculum, increase academic achievement, and adapt personal self-perceptions about their male students.

Supporting that notion, Shepard, Nicpon, Haley, Lind, and Liu (2011) suggest that gifted boys struggle with tensions of academic achievement versus needs to be perceived as masculine, and that certain school activities traditionally labeled as feminine discourage some boys from engaging in them out of concern for negative peer feedback. They also noted, however, that when gifted boys feel that academics and their masculinity are not competing against each other, they demonstrated confidence in their high intellectual abilities

Together with this scholarship, Cleveland's (2011) book, *Teaching Boys Who Struggle in School*, and Arslan an Yüksel's (2018) recent study describe the importance of boys' self-perceptions to their school success, and how teachers' expectations of their male identities

influence their social and academic learning outcomes. Arslan and Yüksel (2018) posit that “self-perception which the individual develops by observing his/her environment and reconsidering the situations one encounters may contradict with the self that is shaped by the others’ perceptions of the individual” (p. 35). To illustrate, Cleveland (2011) mentioned when boys feel discomfort from failing at curriculum tasks, how teachers respond to their failure can make or break their feelings of confidence in themselves. Additionally, she noted that teachers who expect boys to always give their best effort towards their work without first building a safe environment for which to do so, might be setting boys up for failure. Cleveland (2011) believed that boys need emotional and social support, even when they cannot appropriately express those needs, and that these needs should be integral parts of any grade level curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

Examination of existing literature frames my dissertation study by providing background information on how giftedness is socially constructed by educational researchers, teachers, parents, and male students. Reviewing literature regarding teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of male learners irradiates teachers’ expectations for behaviors and learning achievements for these students and highlights the pedagogical gaps between academic and socio-emotional instruction. According to Weber and Stanley (2012), “Sometimes, teachers and administrators are exposed to very little of the ‘understanding the child from the inside out’” leaving scant ideas of how giftedness is conceptualized and addressed in U.S. schools (p. 134). Additionally, I suggest that while literature can be readily found on gifted pedagogy, there is a scarce supply of current literature that seeks to understand elementary-age gifted boys’ perceptions about themselves and their school experience. Most of the research related to this study included adolescent age students. There are also recent gaps in literature including parents’ studies, which presents new opportunities for scholarly research about parents’ perceptions of giftedness. Analyzing prior

studies about boys' perceptions of themselves and their school environment through the socially constructed lens of the Frame of Reference theory provides deeper understandings about the potential findings from my study, addresses gaps in existing literature about young gifted students' self and school perceptions, and enriches the significance to listen to young students' voices about themselves within school contexts. It also addresses the complexities of designing rigorous and emotionally sound curriculum and classroom spaces that meet this unique student population's academic and social needs.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my dissertation study was to conduct ethnographic field work to understand elementary-age boys', teachers', and parents' perceptions of giftedness and gendered ability construction. This study stems from my experiences as an educator working with children identified as gifted and talented by institutional standards, and equally important, by raising a son who was identified and labeled "gifted and talented" at the beginning of his second grade school year. Perhaps, my personal experiences as a parent of a gifted son combined with my professional experiences also situates me as a subject in my study, as I am continuously learning how to not only raise a son, but one that shows superior intellectual thinking. Tracy (2010, p. 842) contends that "good ethnography is not limited to knowledge or information about others 'out there' but expands the definition to include stories about oneself", positioning the researcher as an instrument within their own research (Patton, 2015). Moreover, Rowsell (2011) believes that acknowledgement of a researcher's "knowledge and experience inform analysis and heightens the credibility of the research as constituting an ethnography of emic perspectives" (p. 338). My transparency as a researcher serves as the basis for pursuing ethnographic work with young gifted students who negotiate today's institutional standards and social expectations.

## **Lessons Learned from My Pilot Study**

I conducted an ethnographic pilot study in 2018 that involved 10 male students, ages 9 through 11, who were previously identified as gifted and talented and receiving gifted and talented (GT) programming at a suburban elementary school. Through my work with these participants, I learned the value and strength that ethnographic fieldwork contributes to understanding the positionalities of young gifted males in school. Therefore, the purpose of this work was to conduct a similar ethnographic study to address the gaps in literature regarding self-concept formation in elementary youth, specifically gifted boys, to illustrate their perceptions about themselves and their school experience.

As I reviewed research for this project, I found gaps in literature about understanding the social and academic contexts of school through students' personal lenses. To me, these gaps signified missing opportunities for teachers to design inclusive, student-centered curriculum and classroom spaces influenced by students' personal viewpoints about their educational experiences. I was excited to see that the findings from my pilot study aligned with these gaps and may serve to enrich future literature in the field of gifted education. My findings led to three central themes, which I argue, may not have been illuminated had I chosen other less in-depth and connected research methods:

- a) the participants' feelings of embarrassment when they struggled with understanding certain subjects, b) the boys' personal connections to the social aspects of the classroom, specifically, how the participants perceived their behaviors compared to that of their peers, and c) the participants recounted a missing instructional component from their school experience— allowing them to have an opinion when choosing relevant and engaging instructional practices (Watts, 2020, p. 49–52).

Challenging the apparent needs to address such gaps in research and support findings from my pilot study, I continued to dive deeper into this discussion to contribute newer, richer scholarly literature about gifted boys. In my prior research, I chose not to include teachers' and parents' perspectives because I was solely focused on capturing the breadth of the boys' voices and providing them with a platform to be heard. After analyzing additional literature, I realized that including teachers' and parents' perspectives may serve to illuminate deeper tensions about how giftedness is conceptualized and influenced by the social constructions in which gifted boys navigate. As my pilot study suggests, giving students opportunities to be heard may begin with understanding teachers' perceptions about gifted learners in order to reconstruct their approaches for improving instructional practices for students (Watts, 2020). For this reason, and out of sheer curiosity, I conducted in-depth ethnographic work for my dissertation research and included gifted boys', teachers' and parents' perceptions. Understanding these tensions to the degree in which demonstrates their influence on young people's self-perceptions can be made powerful when researchers, like me, choose to immerse themselves into educational experiences and school cultures.

### **Research Design**

Heath and Street (2008) believe the significance of ethnographic work in educational research is that it offers researchers a multitude of ways to explore the languages, educational expanses, and the cultures navigated by people. It allows researchers to be in the moment with the participants, capturing details within their environments that might otherwise go unseen using other methodologies. This kind of in-depth work allows researchers to see and feel the emotions exuding through dialogue, observe participants' actions first-hand, and connect their daily lived experiences with rich, detailed conversations. This type of methodology provides enlightening opportunities for researchers to “uncover rule-governed behaviors, norms of

interaction, and complex skills for groups or activities previously acknowledged, unsanctioned, or thought of in entirely different ways” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 43). Heath and Street’s (2008) description of ethnography connects strongly to the purpose of my work, as it is much more than a study or obligation to me. It is a commitment to my educational profession and my personal journey as a mother to center the experiences of young people and illuminate their school lives in ways that readers not only understand but feel the power in their voices. It is about ‘uncovering’ the unconscious behaviors and perceptions from teachers, parents, and young students to understand their influence on school experiences and self-concepts that shape the students’ entire lives. It is about relating to the ‘norms of interaction’ from a socially constructivist perspective to connect the participants’ social school lives to their academic lives (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 43).

Beach (2011) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) assert that ethnographic work is not easy, nor has been it viewed as a neutral-stance type of research methodology. Beach (2011) states that educational institutions have never really been believed to be neutral territories, nor have they ever been viewed as equitable and promoting the pursuit of common interests and opportunities for everyone. Perhaps, his stance on the power relations within schools underlies a deeper tension my research; a quest for social justice for students whom I have witnessed be left behind in classroom spaces. Beach (2011) also emphasizes a key feature to using ethnographies for educational research, regardless of its presumed unneutral contentions: “it takes us inside everyday educational contexts and brings us close to everyday practices and the people involved in these”, thus, helping researchers avoid other research methods that may not fully capture the perspectives of the participants because they do not provide researchers with in-depth opportunities to feel close and connected to the participants and their social contexts (p. 572).

Ethnographic methodology grasps the richness and complexities of human lives, connects the researcher to the participants, and allows them to be in the work *with* them rather than

positioning the researcher to study *on* them (Heath & Street, 2008). I believed that working with children during research rather than studying about them is what makes my study worthwhile. In support of this belief, Isaacs (2017) acknowledges that research involving children can be challenging but critical to the pursued efforts of bettering opportunities for them, in this case, academically, socially, and emotionally. My ongoing observations and individual interviews allowed me to immerse myself within their daily school lives and strengthened my understanding about how their self-concepts were situated and developed within social and academic contexts. They also allowed me to connect to their experiences with one-on-one dialogue and interaction during the interviews.

Woods (2013) contends that in order for researchers to really capture students' experiences as they unfold, they must spend generous amounts of time with these students so they can reveal any issues surrounding their daily interactions with their peers and teachers in order to connect them to the wider social-cultural discourses of school. While traditional ethnographic trajectories can be long-term and take years in some cases, more contemporary ethnographic studies bear in mind that most researchers no longer have the time to study for years (Le Compte & Schensul, 2010). Effective educational ethnographic research can be achieved even with time constraints, but to do so, Le Compte & Schensul (2010) assert that I take a highly focused and problem-oriented approach to understanding the boys' self-perceptions and the social contexts that influence their development in order to use my research to promote understanding and positive change in the field of gifted education, general classroom pedagogy, and curriculum design and development.

Woods (2013) also strongly maintains that I remain attentive to the morality of researching children when conducting ethnographic research. While much can be gained by engaging myself into their lives, much can also be tested, such as, my trust, dependence on my



sharing their lives in a respectful, dignified manner, and a pursuit of a sense of justice. These aspects of morality become prioritized when committing oneself to any research method, especially ethnographic methodology (Isaacs, 2017; Woods, 2013). I add that such aspects of morality were present when involving the teachers, parents, and the schools in my study. Utilizing this type of methodology enabled me to not only discover what teachers were doing, but also explore the reasons behind why they were doing it through questionnaires, before I interpreted their actions and filtered them through my own personal and professional experiences (Le Compte & Schensul, 2010). Hence, I worked to maintain keen attention to present data through careful and detailed recordings that involve morality as a primary consideration for my educational research.

Bearing in mind the benefits of extending my work to include teachers' and parents' critical perspectives, I positioned myself to a wider range of data collection; an advantage of ethnographic work according to Heath and Street (2008). My narrative focus included in the analysis provided engaging descriptions of contexts, themes, and participants' positionalities. Conclusively, Rowsell (2011) explains ethnographic work to "put artifacts as the center of methodology, as an optic to get an insider, emic gaze of individuals, their communities, and their lived histories" at school (p. 332).

This methodology chapter includes research questions that guided my ethnographic work followed by data collection, analysis methods, and the strengths and limitations to my study.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research questions for my ethnographic work are:

1. What are the challenges, if any, that elementary-aged boys identified as gifted face?
2. How do boys identified as gifted conceptualize the social aspects of school?
3. How do boys identified as gifted perceive themselves as students?

4. How do parents/teachers' understandings of the relationship between gifted construction and gender influence, or not, their pedagogical, or parental, approaches for boys identified as gifted?

## **Research Methods and Procedures**

### **Participants and Research Sites**

Upon IRB and school district approval, I scheduled a time to visit with school administrators about my project. Both school administrators were extremely supportive of my research and offered their assistance with any scheduling or other procedural requirements that may have presented themselves. I was relieved to be welcomed so graciously, as all novice and experienced researchers understand the uneasiness of beginning their projects and feeling as though one wants to make one's self an unobtrusive guest in foreign spaces.

The two research sites were PK-5 elementary schools within the same urban school district, each with approximately 600 students. One elementary school, Rizemore Elementary School (pseudonym), has a long-standing designation as a Title I school with about 80% of the student population served by the free and reduced federal lunch program during any given school year. This school has approximately 60 students in the GT program. In contrast, about 25% of the student population enrolled at the second elementary school, Mayfield Elementary School (pseudonym), was served by the free and reduced federal lunch program every year. This school has approximately 100 students in its GT program. I chose to include two school sites within the same community for two reasons: 1) ethnographic research requires a generous amount of time immersed within the school contexts, so choosing two schools within close proximity limited the amount of time away from either site, giving each site ample observation time, and 2) teachers within the same district are typically provided similar training opportunities, thus making their perceptions more credible because their training and ways of teaching may be influenced by

similar knowledge and instructional methods. The community in which the school district resides provided a rich, multiculturally diverse setting, and many variances to social classes, ethnicities, and degrees of educational statuses.

After receiving the green light to proceed, I visited with the GT teachers at both sites to explain my project and request visits with potential participants during their GT class time. Again, I was openly welcomed into their classrooms and provided ample time to meet with the potential participants. I scheduled multiple visits to each of the third, fourth, and fifth grade GT classes during a two-week span and visited with students who met the criteria for my study. I followed Flewitt's (2005) example when working with children in research, "I emphasized to the children that they could choose whether to take part or not, and that if they decided to participate, they were always free to change their minds" (p. 555). I gave each of them a student and parent/guardian written permission form that asked them for agreements to participate in the study and allowing me to observe their child in classrooms and during unstructured school times, such as lunch and recess. I also sought permission for their child or student to participate in one semi-structured, individual interview with me that would occur on school grounds. Parents returned their forms to the GT teachers in a provided sealed envelope and I collected them on an ongoing basis, always checking in with the teachers when I came to observe to ensure I was receiving their forms and responses in a timely manner. This method of forms collection proved to be seamless and confidential, as the forms did not have to pass through many hands and were returned in the sealed, unmarked envelopes that I had provided.

Qualitative inquiry typically includes a small number of participants so that the information can be data-rich and focus on issues central to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2015). Given the ethnographic nature of my dissertation, I utilized purposeful criterion sampling to plan to include a total of 10–12 students (five-to-six students from each research site) who met

the following criteria: a) male students enrolled in grades three through five, (b) identified as gifted and talented by the school district's evaluation measures, and (c) enrolled in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program at their school sites for at least one year or more prior to the 2019 school year. There was a total of 47 male students who fit these criteria from both participating school sites. To my surprise, an astounding 22 gifted male students agreed to become members of this vital study. Most of their assent forms were returned with a few days after sending them home so observations began immediately upon collecting them. All these members qualified for the district's GT program during their first through third grade school years. The participating district uses evaluation measures for gifted and talented identification that include the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) and a multi-criteria matrix designed by the participating district to identify specific academic abilities. The model was adapted from their state department's recommendations for gifted identification through sample matrix measurements that include rating-scale domains which evaluate students' demonstration of creativity, nationally-normed tests scores, classroom portfolios, reasoning skills, and overall potential for success in a gifted program. Teachers recommend students who demonstrate consistent academic or creative skills above grade level for the GT program beginning as early as first grade. Teachers submit a portfolio of classwork, assessment scores, and a student-constructed, self-directed project illustrating innovation and creativity to the district's GT coordinator who is responsible for assessments and enrollment into the program. Qualifying students demonstrate an overall intelligence test score of 120 or higher as measured by the CogAT, or they achieve a score of 120 or higher on one or more CogAT subtests and score a minimum of 40 points on the district-designed matrix for gifted identification. Table 3.1 indicates the student participants' undisclosed pseudonyms (given as an ethical consideration), current grade levels and school attended, ethnicities, and the grade levels in which they indicated they qualified for gifted programming.

Table 3.1

*Descriptors of Student Participants*

Assigned/Undis- closed Pseudonym	Grade Level	Ethnicity	Grade Level Qualified for GT Services	School Attended
Anthony	3	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Isaac	3	African American	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Rizemore
Liam	3	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Rizemore
Daylen	3	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Josh	4	Native American	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Rizemore
Stephen	4	White/ of 2 or more races	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Rizemore
Elias	4	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Asher	4	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Josiah	4	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Kaleb	4	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Samuel	5	White/Hispanic	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Rizemore
Hunter	5	White	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Rizemore
Axel	5	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Connor	5	White	1 <sup>st</sup>	Mayfield
Nathan	5	White/Hispanic	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Rizemore
Micha	5	White	4 <sup>th</sup>	Rizemore
Nolan	5	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Shane	5	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Cody	5	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Ryder	5	Native American	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Timothy	5	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield
Grennan	5	White	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mayfield

Five out of eight study participants enrolled at Rizemore Elementary identified as non-White. However, only one study participant from Mayfield identified a non-white. These numbers are indicative of Rizemore’s more diverse student population as compared to Mayfield’s smaller non-White student demographics.

Additionally, my goal was to ask the members’ general classroom teachers and one parent or guardian of each student to participate in my study by completing a brief questionnaire about their perceptions of gifted male students and pedagogical strategies they implement in their classrooms or at home. A combined maximum of 12 teachers and parents would have been suitable for quality data collection and analysis, but again, I was surprised by the generous

support and interest in this study from both teachers and parents. Six teachers and 15 parents agreed to participate and completed the provided questionnaires. Some teachers and parents even asked me if I needed more information to accompany their responses and offered to assist me with whatever I needed to conduct my in-depth work.

Table 3.2 shows basic descriptors of the teacher participants who agreed to be a part of the study and provided responses to the questionnaire. I assigned gender-neutral last names as pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. The columns and the following responses included in the table support further data analysis discussed in Chapter IV, such as the number of years each teacher participant has taught, how long they have taught students identified as gifted and talented, and whether or not they have ever received any type of training or professional development on gifted students or gifted education, in general.

Table 3.2

*Descriptors of Teacher Participants*

Participant/ Teacher Pseudonym	Grade Level	Year of Teaching Experience	Years Teaching GT Students	Level of GT Training
Malden	3	Did Not Answer	Unsure	On the job/none otherwise specified
Phoenix	3	36	16	A few workshops/on the job training
Caulder	4	1+	NA	No formal training, on the job training
Vanwelder	4	6	0	Very little
Lloyd	4	16	0	0, on the job training
Mayes	5	1+	0	No formal training, on the job training

Note: *On the job training* refers to teaching gifted students who are enrolled in their class, thus learning about gifted students through direct instruction.

Table 3.3 indicates basic descriptors of parent participants who agreed to be a part of the study and provided responses to the questionnaire. As decided with teacher participant data, I

assigned gender-neutral last names pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the parent participants. The columns and the following responses included in the table support further data analysis discussed in Chapter IV, such as the grade level of parent(s)' child and whether or not they had received any training to learn about gifted children (i.e., academic, social, emotional, parenting a gifted child). Further information provided by the parent participants are discussed in the analysis section in Chapter IV.

Table 3.3

*Descriptors of Parent Participants*

Participant/ Parent Number	Grade Level of Gifted Student	Training about Gifted Children
Abbott	3	None
Yürgen	3	Parental training
Fishborne	3	None
Clark	4	None
Kendrick	4	Parent Groups/Meetings
Michaels	4	Counseling services
Teppen	4	None
Stephensen	4	Parent/Teacher conferences
André	4	None
Pippens	5	None
Zook	5	None
Hernandez	5	None
Hill	5	Yes- not specified
Meadows	5	No
Coy	5	Yes- not specified

Note: The response, “none” means additional training outside of what parents have learned by raising a gifted child.

### Data Collection

Ethnographic work in education allows researchers to immerse themselves in school spaces, record critical data, use it to understand tensions, and strengthen existing educational literature (Heath & Street, 2008; Anderson, 1989). Immersing myself into both research sites provided me with rich data collected from classrooms and unstructured school-time observations and fieldnotes, individual interviews with the participants, and teacher and parent questionnaires.

I maintained fieldnotes that include rich descriptions of the settings, activities, behaviors and emotions, recounts of conversations with all the participants, and my personal self-reflections (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1998). All data was triangulated and coded using multiple analytic methods to explore thorough thematic analyses and make empirical assertions based upon emerging themes threaded throughout the selected types of data.

### **Classroom and unstructured school-time observations/fieldnotes.**

I conducted a total of 56 observations from August 2019 to December 2019. My initial goal was to observe each of the student participants an equitable amount of time, but that proved to be difficult with the large number of members in my study. Fortunately, most of the participants were enrolled in the same classes so I observed several members within the same classroom culture during each visit. This multitasking approach to student observations would have proved nearly impossible had I not relied on my prior skills as a school administrator experienced in conducting classroom and teacher evaluations. Hundreds of administrative evaluations taught me how to walk into a classroom, and within minutes, note numerous instructional indicators and their impact on student productivity. My initial ethnographic approach was to conduct myself in the same manner, but instead, make myself as less intrusive as possible by using a paper and pencil method for jotting field notes and self-reflections. And, this time, I had to pay careful attention to observe the school culture through the Frame of Reference lens and revisit my research questions frequently to remain alert and focused on the purpose of my study. Keeping my visits as informal as possible, I did not want teachers or students to associate the use of a laptop or other electronic devices with me conducting classroom walk-throughs or evaluations like they are used to seeing with their school administration.



As I spent more and more time immersed in their classroom environments, I learned that to allow the data to lead me rather than me attempting to remain structured with an equal amount of observations I was conducting when and where, I needed to spend more time with some members whose schooling experiences were intriguing. It was as if some members' stories needed me to illuminate them in adult-words and teacher-language so they could share them with the teacher members. Therefore, I left myself open to what emerged in the observed school spaces which caused me to spend more time with some participants than others. During my four-months of fieldwork, I observed the students during various instructional times such as in the general education classrooms, specials rotations (which engage students in extracurricular activities), the GT pull-out program times, lunches and recess, and other unstructured times such as in the hallways and passing periods.

### **Individual participant interviews.**

One semi-structured individual interview was conducted with each participant during the school day in either an office, conference room, or in a quiet space at the end of a hallway. I wanted students to feel comfortable during the interviews, so I began each conversation with small talk before I asked them to come with me to our interview place. The interviews were scheduled with the classroom teachers during a time they chose so that students would not miss important lessons or activities. Each interview was recorded on my personal recording device and transferred to my password-protected computer. The interviewed last approximately 10–20 minutes, with all participants being asked the same questions, and subsequent questions varied based on their responses to the standard questions. See Appendix A to view the student interview questions. Some students were extremely comfortable telling me all kinds of interesting stories about their lives. Some were nervous and showed levels of anxiety by talking fast, varying their speaking volumes when discussing sensitive topics about how they feel about certain things,

fidgiting with their chairs, or not providing much information at all. When students appeared nervous or shy, I offered additional questions or more wait time, softened my voice tone, and gave complementary comments as a positive gesture to their responses. I transcribed more than five hours of interview time so that I could immerse myself in written data and code it for themes, hoping to give voice to the members' meanings.

### **Teacher and parent questionnaires.**

Questionnaires were hand-delivered to all potential teacher participants asking them to agree to complete the short survey consisting of nine essay response-type questions. See Appendix B to view the questionnaire. The purpose of the teacher survey was to gain understandings about their conceptualizations of giftedness, experiences with teaching gifted students, and their perceptions of gifted male students. Out of sixteen potential teacher participants, six agreed to complete the survey. Refer to Table 3.2 for a brief outline of the teacher participants. Questionnaires were also sent home with all the possible student participants asking their parents to agree to complete it and return it to the school site GT teacher. Fifteen out of 22 parents completed and returned the surveys. See Table 3.3 for a list of parents and their brief descriptors. Like the teacher questionnaire, the purpose of the parent questionnaires was to gain an understanding about their conceptualizations of giftedness, experiences with parenting a gifted son(s), and their perceptions of gifted programming. See Appendix C to view the parent questionnaire. Overall, I was quite pleased with the responses received from both the teachers and parents and found them critical to understanding current pedagogy regarding giftedness and gifted programming. Chapter IV details my analytic approach, findings, and connections to research using questionnaire responses.

## Data Analysis

Social constructionism provided my epistemological framework and the Frame of Reference theory served as a theoretical lens to analyze data. Understanding that self-concepts are socially constructed by the many facets of schooling negotiated by students, Marsh (1990a) sought to identify academic and environmental measures that influence the way gifted students form their self-perceptions. Keeping this theory in mind, I used multiple analytic methods commonly utilized in ethnographic research to code and discover themes threaded throughout my observation field notes, interview transcripts, and questionnaires. Using layered methods such as Luttrell's 100-Word strategy for reflexive writing, Emerson et al.'s (1995, p. 129) "pursuing members' meanings", Patton's (2015) identifying indigenous terms, and Saldaña's *In Vivo* coding and focused coding methods helped me delve into roughly 130 pages of typed data to develop analytic and theoretical memos that helped me organized my thoughts and find patterns that later formulated into three themes discussed in Chapter IV. Each of these analytic exercises illuminated certain aspects of data and meanings that wove a tapestry of important insights supporting the three main themes of social constructions of giftedness, gender roles and stereotypes about gifted students, and gender and giftedness influences on instruction and gifted programming. I found a visual representation to be the best analytic summarization for the student participants' perceptions. I respectfully credit my friend, Barry, for his artistry in shaping their voices (Kuttner, Sousanis, & Weaver-Hightower, 2018). Sometimes the power of images puts into words what words cannot attempt to do for themselves. A poetic analysis nicely summarized the teachers and parents' conceptualizations of giftedness and their perceptions of gifted boys (Humble & Radina, 2019).

## Understanding My Positioning within Research

As a researcher pursuing ethnographic work in elementary schools, my moral responsibility to the participants and educational research lend itself to an intense emphasis on my perspectives and interpretations gleaned from my chosen forms of data collection. Patton (2015) maintains that qualitative researchers who make connections to their work through a reflexive lens enhance their research through personal perspectives that add value and credibility to fieldwork. A reflexive lens, according to Brayboy (2000), requires that I remain “constantly aware of the ways that I am being positioned by those with whom I interact as a researcher” (p. 416). The student participants were elementary-age male students enrolled in grades three through five who were identified as gifted and talented by the participating school district. I understood the importance of positioning my research to young students in comprehensible terms when I met them for my study. I was also keenly aware of my presence as an adult, but mainly as one whom a few students recognized from working at one school when they were just pre-kindergarteners. My wonders of whether they would remember my face, though it had been years since I worked with them, were confirmed and led me to contemplate further if I would be able to help them focus on my role as an outside researcher and not their superior, as they once remembered. A reflexive lens, in my case, then required that not attempt to make invisible my past experiences as a former teacher and administrator (Humble & Radina, 2019). After all, there is worthy qualitative research conducted by teachers in the field; why could not mine be any different? In my work, I found it important to be forthcoming about my professional background so that teachers and other researchers understood my positioning and its influence on my methods and data analysis. I also explained my personal background as a mother of a gifted son because this experience, coupled with my professional background, constitutes the whole reason for my study— to understand elementary gifted boys’ perceptions of self and school.

## **Establishing Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe trustworthiness in research as maintaining “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 300). To address credibility, I worked to “focus on them (events) in close detail or follow them as they play out” in the school settings as the themes emerged, (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 63). I encouraged all participants to converse with me freely during interviews and asked them to clarify any confusing terms or responses as well as their personal perspectives rather than relying on my own interpretation of their dialogue; as Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest this may lead to dependability and “credibility as analog to internal validity” (p. 76–77). Acknowledging that my previous work as an administrator provides me with understandings about how school functions for gifted students at one school site, I remained alert to my own reflexivity by depending on the boys to interpret situations or conversations that occurred during my observations and interviews (i.e., perceived student behaviors as discussed in one of the central themes in this study). I found that writing self-reflection memos by jotting my emotions, first impressions, and other thoughts were extremely helpful because they helped provide me with an avenue to find my voice within the data. This exercise was a kind of self-discovery in research, while leveraging its influence, or lack thereof on the emerging themes or findings (Luttrell, 2010; Banister, 1999). My ongoing engagement in self-reflexivity served to address the confirmability of my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, I was careful to avoid what Higa (2010, p. 2) terms the “conceptual box of formal protocol” when analyzing, cross-examining, and transcribing observations, interviews, and questionnaire data. For ethical considerations, it was in the best interest of my research to remain open and allow the data to speak for itself rather than calculating my analytic lens to zoom in on information that connects or conforms to my prior knowledge and professional and personal experiences. I had to be open to interpretations and allow the data open spaces that irradiate the

participant's positionalities. Doing so, strengthened my awareness to establish trustworthiness through a triangulation of observations, interviews, and questionnaire data from the participant groups. The nature of my ethnographic work required my constant focus on maintaining a neutral stance on situations that arose as well as the unveiling of participants' emotions about school-related issues (Grills, 1998).

Lastly, I continued my pilot study research, deepening its findings by including teachers' and parents' involvement in this current work, thus attempting to address the transferability of research and expanding its influence on current existing literature about giftedness, gifted students, and gifted education. Tracy (2010) uses the term "resonance" as the ability to influence an audience with solid qualitative inquiry. Hence, I aim to move the readers through transferable findings that resonate with curriculum developers and current practitioners and their experiences in working with not only gifted boys but all students who need more academic attention intertwined with proper social and emotional support in institutional spaces. Moreover, I aimed to engage and transform readers who have no experience in gifted education into thinking about how students with high academic abilities feel when the curriculum and classroom environments are not necessarily suited to meet their needs.

### **Strengths and Limitations of My Ethnographic Work**

Possible limitations of my work must be considered and combed through for any tensions left for the readers and to address the in-depth levels of my research, which served to strengthen this project (Patton, 2015). First, this research was conducted at two urban elementary schools with 22 male students, six teachers, and 15 parents. Strong qualitative research should include a small population, but I was hesitant to exclude some members who were willing to participate. A large sample size proved to be a tremendous amount of time and effort; especially given the ethnographic nature I chose to utilize. On the other hand, I did not want to exclude members

whose involvement in my study actually gave me a broader picture of the school cultures because I was able to interview and observe a wide variety of students whose voices ended up coming together to create dynamic topics for gifted education research. Second, these participants were from few diverse ethnic backgrounds, although given the different school sites and their history of diverse demographic populations, I assumed that I would be fortunate enough to include participants from more varied backgrounds. The sample population did not represent an equitable comparison to the overall school demographics at both sites, thus, opening further possibilities to extend research about ethnic underrepresentation in gifted programming.

Third, as with all qualitative research, subsequent studies may be needed to support the generalizability of the findings to include male students in additional elementary school settings and to students of other ethnicities. Since few prior studies have included a direct focus on the self-perceptions of young male learners, more studies will be encouraged to further validate my findings (Preckel et al., 2015). Lastly, since the findings relied on students' perceptions, they cannot be validated with sources such as achievement data or other school reporting data. I chose to include explicit data like grades and achievement scores because I was not interested in recorded data about their performances; rather, this study focused on the perceptions and perspectives of all participants. Moreover, my experience with working through school data like achievement scores reminded me that explicit data does not tell the whole story of what goes on in school spaces, nor do they tell the stories about students' lives that I wished to explore in my study. Again, additional studies similar in nature would serve to strengthen the findings and support the importance of understanding how students' self-perceptions as learners can have a critical influence on the intersections of gender and ability in curriculum and pedagogy.

There are many strengths to this study, beginning with the amount of interest in this topic demonstrated by the large number of participants for qualitative research. While ethnographic

work is time consuming, especially considering the number of participants in the study, it produces evocative and reliable educational research. Second, the strengths and significance of this study reside in the participants' voices about their schooling experiences and the influence on their self-perceptions through an educational ethnographic approach. Teachers' and parent's perceptions served to increase broader issues about how giftedness is conceptualized and contribute to students' overall sense of self-concept. Heath and Street (2008) suggest that ongoing field research captures learning situations, emotions, and classroom spaces and elucidates the breadth of interpretative data available in trustworthy ways that might not otherwise happen in other methods of research. The more I immersed myself into my research, the more I learned about its significance and contributions to the field of gifted education and gendered pedagogy. Third, this topic also matters to the broad field of education for several reasons: 1) in general, U.S. primary education lends itself to a deficit-view of thinking; meaning that teachers are trained to focus on the skills that students demonstrate to be lacking versus designing curriculum based on students' strengths (Valenzuela, 2013), 2) multitudes of research suggest that gifted students are increasing being left behind and becoming disengaged with learning because of the lack of academic rigor, 3) unless pre-service teachers pursue gifted education as a profession, they receive very little, if any, higher education or professional training in gifted education; thus, making identification and programming challenging, and 4) stereotypes about giftedness and gifted students must be debated and erased if schools are to become communities for social justice and achieve high academic standards they set for all students.

My research was participant-driven so the ethnographic methodology left me open to in-depth interpretations of the data as it emerged. Rowsell (2011) suggests that what makes qualitative research in education critical is the contextualization of data as it reflects the



participants' "real lives and real-world settings" (p. 334). I strived to remain focused on the emerging themes and illuminate gifted boys' perceptions of themselves and their school experiences by engaging myself within their school spaces and daily transactions and interpreting the data through the theoretical lens of the Frame of Reference theory.

The following chapter includes my analytic workings where I detail how I immersed myself into the two elementary school environments and the school lives of young gifted boys and emerged with an exploration of their self-perceptions related to institutional design and programming. I also unfolded teachers' and parent's positioning on giftedness and gifted programming and decision-making, carefully blending the data from all participants in order to tell the boys' stories through rich contexts and thick descriptions (Patton, 2015). A contextual description of the school environments will begin the analysis followed by the data that is organized by themes to provide analytic clarity and conciseness.

## CHAPTER IV

### ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT

#### **Prepping the Data Analysis Landscape**

Working through the analytic approaches presented in the robust readings by Humble and Radina (2019), Saldaña (2016), and Wolcott (2009), and others have stretched my understanding of what it really means to dig into my data and emerge with purposeful and critical assertions. Qualitative methodological approaches drive thorough selections about ways in which data is analyzed. As a researcher conducting ethnographic work in elementary schools, my explorations first set out to discover themes that emerged from my current data collection. I used analytic tools such as engaging in an exploratory memo (Luttrell, 2010) about why my chosen topic, *Elementary Gifted Boy's Perceptions of Self and School*, mattered to me, the participants in my study, and to the broader educational system in which the participant's found themselves negotiating. The next stop on this trek involved a careful look at my understanding of reflexivity. Understanding that my prior experiences as an educator have influenced my understandings about school and giftedness, I would be remiss to not discuss them in my work. Therefore, remaining open to my own reflexivity was the key to trustworthy analytic work.

My study is based on the ethnographic approaches from Rowsell (2011), Heath and Street (2008), Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), others' work with in-depth, qualitative work. I chose

ethnographic methodology because I believe, as Farrell (2016) contends, that few ethnographic studies imply that the lack of interrogated spaces in masculine curriculum causes concerns for designing equitable approaches for boys to learn, especially boys who also negotiate high levels of intellect. Reading others' ethnographic contributions helped me further my understandings about how to research cultural aspects of participants' environments and triangulate multiple data sources when immersing myself in the participants' spaces.

Applying several analytic approaches to my data came next on my journey of analytic landscaping. I attempted coding methods called descriptive, In Vivo, value, and focused coding outlined in Saldaña's (2016) book. Saldaña (2016) poses that descriptive coding can be productive for looking at basic questions about our data and revealing what is observed so that the artifacts can move from surface level meanings to unrooted meanings that nurture the purpose of my study. Descriptive coding was utilized as a tool for understanding what was going on within the school environments. Saldaña (2016) describes In Vivo coding as "indigenous coding" (p. 105-106). This kind of coding helped me focus specifically on what the students were referring to in their interviews, classroom dialogue that occurred during observations, and what parents were wanting me to understand about their gifted children and their programming needs. I also used value coding to examine students', teachers', and parents' responses regarding the conceptualizations of giftedness, which helped me illuminate their beliefs and values about giftedness. These analytic processes helped me discover three themes: how participants define giftedness, how they believed giftedness is perceived by others/or what others tell them it means, and their attitudes about curriculum and instruction.

I used focused coding as a second cycle coding method to help me foster emerging themes from the "most salient categories" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 240). Focused coding was meaningful because it helped me connect themes and make empirical assertions based on the

data. I found Luttrell’s (2010) self-reflection memos and Saldaña’s (2016) and Emerson et al.’s (1995) jottings extremely helpful when summarizing chunks of observations and keeping me focused on the research questions. I was also inspired by Butler-Kisber and Poldma’s use of visual approaches and Fraiberg’s (2010) use of poetry for qualitative data analysis, so I chose to include both tools as thematic analysis summaries. Table 4.1 provides a brief overview of the types and purposes of analytic methods used with the data.

Table 4.1

*Methods of Ethnographic Analysis*

Method of Analysis	Description/ Rationale of Methods	Purpose for My Study
Descriptive Coding	Initial method used to identify topics/subtopics (Saldaña, 2016)	Identify aspects of school environments that may contribute to understandings of students’ perspectives
In Vivo Coding	Coding of actual words; “enhance meanings of adults’ understandings of children’s cultures and worldviews” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106)	Highlight key words or phrases during interviews and observations for interpretation of viewpoints; helped determine what statements are significant
Value Coding	Coding data that reflects members’ attitudes, beliefs, values that represent their perspectives (Saldaña, 2016)	Identify important comparisons and contrasts about values and beliefs exemplified in teacher and parent responses and student interviews
Focused Coding	Second-coding method for finding the most salient themes/categories that shine through In Vivo coding or initial coding methods (Saldaña, 2016)	Identify important themes and the major thread line presenting itself within the themes
Self-Reflection Memos	Writing “in conversation with yourself”; writing to note ideas, feelings, and make connections to data (Luttrell, 2010)	Practice reflexivity; note thoughts & questions about data; summarize data
Jottings	Making note of words, phrases, questions, thoughts, notes to return to and clarify	Note emerging themes; note thoughts and questions; give space to data not yet

Visual Representations	data (Saldaña, 2016; Emerson, et al., 1995) “Co-constructed method of understanding data”; focuses on aspects particularly meaningful in data	fitting/connecting to existing information Represent words or phrases identified through In Vivo coding that reflect the participants feelings about themselves
Poetic Analysis	Some data yearns for poetry, meaning its contextual understanding deepens expression when captured in poetic form (Fraiberg, 2010)	Summarize teachers’ and parents’ feelings/ beliefs about their gifted sons

---

Together, these analytic methods were extremely helpful for combining and strengthening similarities and differences in members’ responses. I delved into coding the member’s meanings to help me discover a critical question surfacing from my data: Why does no one tell students who qualify for gifted programming what it means to be considered gifted? This question evolved as the thread line throughout all salient themes, so I attempted to begin addressing this important question by first exploring Theme I: What Does it Mean to be Gifted? After I discussed the participants’ conceptualizations about giftedness, I examined Theme II: Perception of Gifted Boys in Classroom Spaces. I wanted to discover whether the participants’ abilities or gender influenced the ways in which they viewed schooling and their positions as gifted students within school spaces. I also wanted to see if how the ways in which the students viewed school and how teachers and parents view gifted boys had any influence on why they do not explain to them what it means to be gifted. Finally, I included a third theme, Theme III: Complexities of Curriculum and Instructional Design. I explored gifted boys’ perceptions on equitable instructional practices in the classroom. I also focused on how the teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of giftedness influence how they feel about gifted programming.

## **School Contexts**

It had been two years since I walked into any kind of school on a daily basis, so I was eager to start my regular visits to both sites and absorb their surroundings, the sounds of children learning and playing, and listen to teachers provide instruction and care to their students.

The two elementary school sites that I named Rizemore and Mayfield looked vastly different from each other, both on the outside and inside of the buildings. Rizemore was fairly new with a more modern appearance that left me curious about what school was like for kids who attended there. It does not come close to resembling a traditional schoolhouse look remaining in any Oklahoma town you visit, since public school funding is scarce, leaving school buildings in dire need of face lifts. Mayfield, however, just underwent major upgrades, mostly due to needing more space for the growing numbers of enrollment it has experienced within the last 10 years. Even with the exterior improvements, it managed to retain its traditional schoolhouse appeal.

### **Rizemore Elementary School.**

I began observations at Rizemore Elementary two weeks before I began visiting Mayfield Elementary. Rizemore was neat and well organized. The hallways were decorated with student work outside of each classroom door. Students walked to and from class in a straight and quiet line, and some would give me a quick wave as they passed by. The classrooms were clean but bare, only necessary school information items like class calendars and schedules, rules and procedures were posted on the walls. In many of the rooms, the walls displayed little to no student artwork or classwork. When I visited in the mornings, all teachers in the classes where my student participants were, were leading morning meetings with students sitting on a large area rug in the front of the classroom in a circle. Morning meetings are a common cultural practice in many elementary schools and part of their daily routines in attempts to provide time

connecting with students and building classroom community (Horsch, Chen, & Wagner, 2002). The teachers instructed students to greet each other, talk about something they wished to share, and reviewed academic reminders about bits of knowledge they had either been working on or was just a common part of the morning routine. One teacher's particular science-type question intrigued me, "A heavy brick weighs more than a fluffy cushion but a fluffy cushion takes up more space. Which object has more matter?" Several students raised their hands to respond and explain their answer, but they did not answer correctly. Even Samuel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, volunteered to answer but he also answered incorrectly. This morning's visit stood out to me as one of the few times that I observed higher-level questioning strategies that engaged my student participants in the morning discussion.

Another aspect that caught my attention at this school site was the unusual number of interventionists who assisted students in the regular classrooms. During several observations, there were three or more adults in the room, including me. Students did not seem to mind, in fact, their comfortable encounters with various staff members told me that having so many helpers in their classes was the norm. The teacher and staff roles were evidently established, however, the regular education teachers maintained control of the instruction while other staff members held student-support type roles. It appeared that students targeted for specialist support knew whom they could ask to assist them, while other students relied on the classroom teachers or general education teacher's aides to help them. Students appeared to understand the dynamics of schooling in this way— that some students were given different supports than others, even if they did not understand why.

Students identified for gifted and talented (GT), however, were not assisted with in-class support by the GT teacher. These students received GT programming through a pull-out

instructional program that meets for 40 minutes, four days a week, as mentioned in Chapter Three.

Classroom instruction more broadly followed traditional lesson planning designs such as topic starters, whole group guided practice and independent or group work time. Time was built into the overall school instructional design devoted to remediation of reading and math skills. For 30 minutes, twice a day, students were grouped together and received small group instruction based on their reading and math performance levels. During these times, gifted students and other students performing above grade levels in one or both subjects worked on skills at their academic functioning levels (according to test scores and frequent formative assessments). These scheduled times and the GT class periods were the only designed encounters I observed that specifically geared instruction and activities at above grade-level curriculum. I did not observe any students identified as gifted receiving remediation for skills which they lacked.

Other times of the school days operated like I anticipated they would. Students went to “specials” classes for 40 minutes daily, where they received physical education (PE), music, art, and library time with certified faculty members. Students went to recess once a day in grades 3–5 right before lunch, totaling 40 minutes of unstructured play and eating time in the middle of the school day. Lunch time was silent eating time. Students were not allowed to get out of their seat or socialize for the approximate first half of lunch time, which was 20 minutes. They raised their hand if they need anything and the lunchroom monitors, who were full-time staff members holding various capacities within the building, assisted them.

The end of the day routines operated similarly in every classroom I visited. Students wrapped up their days cleaning the room or their desk spaces, packing up their belongings, and lining up for dismissal.



## **Mayfield Elementary School.**

Mayfield Elementary portrayed a similar cultural style as did Rizemore. The hallways and general gathering spaces were neat and clean and displayed student work and words of encouragement traditional in school settings. Students transitioned from class to class without hardly making a sound in this quiet, clean, organized school. The classrooms were smaller than those at Rizemore but packed with a comparable number of students. The class walls were heavily adorned with years of effort put into making teachers' classroom spaces mirror their personalities— also possibly indicative of the number of years the teachers had taught at this school (as compared to Rizemore which approximately half of its certified staff were new to the school this year). The decorations gave each classroom its unique flair and added to the aura of students' home-away-from-home. Most teachers kept their lights down low, as opposed to the first school site whose rooms are so well lit with sunlight that it would have been impossible to pull off the kind of dimness that was popular in Mayfield's classrooms. At times, I could barely take legible notes because I could not see my own handwriting due to the overwhelming darkness that enveloped the classroom. Four of the classrooms contained flexible seating options where students chose where they felt they could optimize their learning and have some control over where they sat (Wroblaski, 2011). Seating options included bar stools, lounge chairs, bean bags, floor mats, plastic crates with cushions on them, office chairs, and regular school desk chairs. Students handled their seating choices quite maturely, going directly to a seat without arguing about whom would get to sit where.

Students' class schedules mirrored Rizemore's schedules. They began with morning meetings in some classes and independent work in others. Students rotated between teachers' classes based on subjects which gave them time to get up and move. All grade levels allowed students to eat morning snacks at their desks. When I would arrive mid-morning, the smells and

rustles of oranges, chips, and granola bars wafted in the air. Allowing kids to have snacks gave the classrooms and even more kid-friendly feel. Lunch and recess times proceeded like they did at the first school site; students went to recess before lunch, totally 40 minutes of unstructured play and recess time in the middle of the day. The difference between the schools was that at Mayfield, students' social landscapes were broadened by allowing them to talk during their entire lunch time. Additionally, students in all grade levels were given an additional recess—sometimes two—either in the morning or late afternoon times. Their specials rotations were the same as they were at Rizemore, and their days ended with students rotating back to their homeroom classes in preparation for going home.

Classroom instruction also followed a traditional model of teaching. I noticed students completed a lot of worksheets and written work during whole group settings, unlike what I observed in Rizemore's classes where methods of instruction included more inquiry-based instruction (i.e., projects, scavenger hunts, researching lesson topics). In addition, there were pockets during the day that allowed students free time to read a book of their choice once their worksheets were finished. They also provided a 30-minute time for remediation of academic skills designed the same way the other school designed their times. Students in the GT program and other students who were performing above grade level were grouped to reinforce similar skills, but they only met once a day for either math or reading; whichever subject their classroom teacher assigns them to practice. Overall, classes seemed heterogeneously academic with similar numbers of students identified as gifted spread throughout every teacher's class, though some classes contained more gifted boys than girls and vice versa.

Students enrolled in the GT pull-out program left class during their assigned times to attend the GT class for 40 minutes four days a week. The GT classes were equitable in gender for the most part, though the fifth grade GT class had more boys and girls. Like Rizemore, gifted

students were mainly instructed on their academic levels during their GT class times or during the scheduled remediation times.

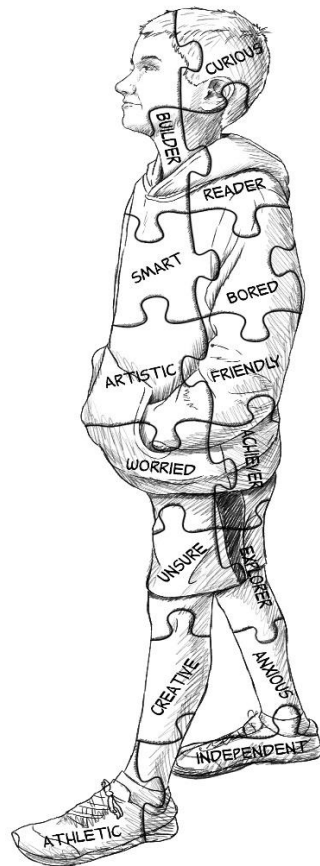
Overall, students at both sites seemed to know what was expected of them and followed routines easily. Grade levels, 3–5, had similar expectations for their students and conducted daily school operations in a similar manner.

### **Theme I: What Does it Mean to be Gifted?**

#### *The Boys' Perspectives*

The most significant theme that emerged from this study was the boys' lack of understanding about what giftedness means and how they perceived themselves as individuals identified by their schools as gifted. Out of the 22 male students who participated in the individual interviews, eleven boys responded to the question, "What do you think it means to be considered gifted at school" by stating, "I don't (really) know." Even with restating the question by posing, "What does it mean to be gifted," these students struggled to answer. Ten of the 22 boys gave one or two characteristics to describe what they think it might mean, which not only explained what they did know about gifted students, but also how they characterized themselves. I chose visual imagery, Figure 1, to express the characteristics the boys used to describe what it meant to be gifted. Visual imagery helps put descriptive words into a picture that resonates with the emotions and deepens understandings about the written context (Fraiberg, 2010). The picture of the boy filled with descriptive characteristics of himself as a gifted individual adds a sense of voice and humanism deserved of my participants who, through me as the researcher, can tell their stories.

Figure 1



One student's comments most closely aligned with early and contemporary conceptualizations of giftedness (Kronberg, 2014; Pfeiffer, 2012; Henry, 1958). With a short hesitation, Josh, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, replied, "Ummm...I think it means that you have talents that nobody else does and maybe you are really good at reading or math, or you know a lot about stuff that other people don't know about." I asked Josh, "Did your parents or teachers tell you what it means to be gifted, or did you figure out what it means on your own?" He explained, "No one really told me, I just think it's just not a subject that we talk about because everyone is actually

kinda' busy sometimes.” Positioning the boys’ voices and understandings of giftedness, I listed their responses below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Student Participants’ Conceptions of Giftedness at School*

---

Quoted Responses

---

- That I am good at school.
  - Being smart.
  - I think it means that you have a big brain.
  - I feel like it means to be, like, smart and one of the bigger people who stand up for people and try to help people.
  - It definitely means I have a bit of extra work.
  - Having a talent.
  - It doesn’t mean to be smarter because I know a lot of smart kids that didn’t take the test, so.... Better at problem solving.
  - I just think that, like, you are special somehow.
  - Just to be in the program.
  - I think it just means that you need to be more challenged, not that you’re smarter.
  - I think it means that you have talents that nobody else does and maybe you are really good at reading or math, or you know a lot about stuff that other people don’t know about.
  - I don’t know/ I don’t really know/ I have no idea (11 boys responded this way.)
- 

Searching to further understand the boys’ conceptions of giftedness, I re-read the transcripts and analyzed their answers to help me tell a story about why they responded in the ways they did. Since eleven students struggled to explain what giftedness was or said they did not know what it meant to be gifted, I asked the follow-up questions. Two of my follow-up questions about what they thought it meant to be considered gifted at school uncovered a critical piece to my analysis. The questions were 1) did anyone explain to you what it means to be gifted, and 2) has anyone ever explained to you how you got into the gifted program? I posed the first question to clarify any confusion about what I was originally asking and then to prompt further discussion after I noticed the first student interviewed struggle to respond. The boys’ strikingly similar conversations with me during their interviews illuminated some unique perspectives about gifted identification. Answering the first follow-up question, Kaleb, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, explained, “I

don't remember if anyone told me, but my brother and sister both go to GT"; a notion that he must be gifted because his siblings also were in the gifted program. Josiah, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, admitted, "I'm having trouble describing being gifted. I think it means you have a big brain...that to be gifted, you are very kind and generous, but I just thought of that myself"; conceptualizing that being gifted, or smart, is associated with the social aspects of one's personality. Daylon's, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, perspective demonstrated that he felt giftedness was also constructed by one's personality, "I feel like it means to be, like smart and one of the bigger people who stand up for people and try to help people." When asked if anyone explained giftedness to him like that, he said, "No. I just think that's what it is." Both Josiah's and Daylon's responses led me to question their perceptions of his non-GT peers, in that, did they did assume that students whom they felt did not display kindness or respect towards others could not gifted? However, after analyzing their parents' explanations of giftedness and what they valued in her sons, I inferred that being gifted, according to Daylon and Josiah, was attached to some moral attribute. Rather, their feelings exemplified the moral values of their homes that placed personal character above intellectual status.

Attempting to find an answer to the same question, Grennan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, expressed, "Uh...that's a good question. I don't know. It's hard. No one really told me what it meant." Likewise, Elias', 4<sup>th</sup> grade, reply mirrors many of the other boys' when asked if anyone told him what it means to be gifted: "No, they (teachers) said I just passed a test."

As soon as Elias mentioned passing a test, I knew I needed to probe further with the second follow-up question about whether they were informed about how they "got into" the gifted program to see if others also associated their giftedness to passing "the test." First, I wanted to know if they remembered when they began attending the GT program, and then I inquired about how the boys found out they qualified for the program. The purpose for these inquiries was to

see if the boys understood how a student qualified for advanced programs, thus serving to explore deeper their notions of giftedness. I explored two emerging connections fundamental to gifted education: 1) the participating district follows state guidelines for referring and qualifying students at during certain elementary years, leaving little to no room for allowing students to qualify in earlier grades if they demonstrated unique talents and abilities at younger ages, and 2) the boys did not recall having been explained the purpose for taking a test and how the results or indicators of the test identified them as gifted. The overwhelming response from 20 out of 22 boys showed they remembered taking a test near the end of first grade through mid-year of third grade, and then they were told they got to go to the gifted program at their respective school sites. Axel, fifth grade, candidly described his perspective on qualifying for the GT program in this way,

So, basically, one day someone comes in and says, 'Hey, come over here. We are gonna' take a test.' So, I take a test and I succeeded, and I went to GT. I didn't know I was gonna' take a test though. I think my mom just signed me up and I didn't know anything about it.

Then, I inquired, "Do you remember what grade you were in when you a test?" Axel remarked, "I took the test in second grade." Asher, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, also recalled taking a test and then being told that he was going to start going to the gifted class, "I remember that I took a test in first grade, but I didn't start going to the GT class until I went to second grade." Further, Asher explained that he knew that test was to see if he could attend the GT class but was never informed how or why the test was used to identify him as gifted and talented. Several other students, like Liam and Isaac, both 3rd graders, Stephen, 4th grade, and Samuel and Connor, both 5th graders, and others remembered taking a test in second grade and being told they would be attending the gifted class during the school day. However, Ryder, 5th grade, stated that he did not remember if

he was told how he got to start attending the gifted program. He did remember that no one actually told him he was identified as gifted, “I actually don’t recall ever taking a test. I guess I did, but I don’t remember it. Like one day it felt like I was told I was going to the GT class now.” Nolan, 5th grade, also could not describe how he was told he was qualified for the GT program, adding, “I think, just, that, like, everybody is smart enough to be in the program. They just don’t want to be in the program”; underlying that he did not understand the caliber of his intellectual functioning that qualified him for the GT program. I implied that Nolan must have wanted to be in the GT program which is why he was enrolled and that he did not understand that his performance on the district placement test is what qualified him for the program.

In sum, the boys’ overall responses to what it meant to be gifted supported the generalized notion that they viewed giftedness in a shared reality; that being gifted and qualifying for the GT program meant to have taken a test and then being told they were going to the gifted class during a designated time in their school day. Twenty of the 22 boys recalled taking the test near the end of first grade through mid-year of third grade. Micha, 5th grade, actually stated, “It actually took them (teachers) two years for them to accept me. I took the test in second and third grade. Fourth grade, I started going to GT.”

However, when asked, none of them could explain the actual purpose of the test, how the test identified them as being gifted, or what their unique talents and skill sets were. The lack of discussion and exploration with gifted students about their abilities was also found in Delisle and Galbraith’s (2002) study when they sought to examine the messages that teachers and parents consciously, or unconsciously send gifted students about their intellectual abilities. They contend in their study, “In our own interviews with gifted children, many said that neither their parents nor their teachers talk about giftedness” (p. 22). Further, they suggest that the reasons behind that vary from misinterpreting myths about giftedness to personal feelings or biases about gifted



children (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). Hence, my intention for further analysis was to look in-depth at the teachers' and parent's conceptions of giftedness to understand how their perceptions might have influenced the boys' lack of understandings about their giftedness and how they qualified for gifted and talented programming.

### *The Teachers' Perspectives*

I continued to pursue the question, *what is giftedness*, by asking the teacher participants a very similar question as I did the boys: "How do you conceptualize giftedness (i.e., what do you think gifted and talented means?" Their responses, listed in Table 4.3, were indicated common characteristics of giftedness.

Table 4.3

#### Teacher Participants' Conceptions of Giftedness

---

##### Quoted Responses

---

- Students who aren't being pushed or challenged enough, perhaps are bored, in the regular classroom. Those who are performing beyond grade-level.
  - I think giftedness is the ability to master grade-level material and seek an interest in material that is above grade-level. Or, they have the ability to use higher-order thinking skills and a wider depth of knowledge with grade-level subject matter. Students who are talented express a mature perspective towards content and can intellectually express themselves during discussions.
  - Gifted and talented means that students can think differently about concepts. They think more deeply, critically, and/or creatively.
  - Students that show high achievement capabilities in various areas.
  - Students who need extra, more challenging work.
  - I believe gifted and talented students are those who possess extreme creative abilities and academic intelligence significantly above their peers.
- 

Smith and Weitz (2005) provide a scenario-like classroom containing types of gifted students that catches the generalized notion of the teacher participants' conceptions of giftedness:

Imagine three types of students in your classroom. One student is a traditional "schoolhouse" gifted student who tests well, picks up new concepts quickly, and displays an overall interest and aptitude for established academics. Another student is a nontraditional gifted student who has an extremely high intellect, but does not perform

well in traditional tasks, and who reasons better when allowed to study and perform in a way that fosters a nontraditional style. A third student is one who has particular strengths or interests within an array of personal abilities, but may not be viewed as gifted on recognized measures (In Johnson & Kendrick (Eds.), 2005, p. 71).

In other words, the teachers' responses either indicated partial conceptions based on a lack of understanding or because of their experiences in working with various gifted students.

The teachers' comments aligned to some of the boys' perspectives, such as feeling as those gifted students can be defined as students who need more challenge or classwork, can problem-solve and use higher-order thinking skills, are smart, or possess creative abilities and academic intelligence. Gifted researchers like Worrell & Erwin (2011), Van Tassel-Baska (2003), and others argue that characteristics of giftedness include those stated in the teachers' descriptions. Delisle and Galbraith (2002) also mentions very similar characteristics, but they also argue that because some educational systems broadly define giftedness, it leaves some teachers relying on their own conceptions of giftedness to understand how to address high ability learners in their curriculum and instruction. Baudson and Preckel (2016) also suggest that how teachers define giftedness affects their expectations for achievement and social behaviors.

I followed the initial query about the conceptualization of giftedness by asking teachers what characteristics or traits they look for when determining whether a student is considered gifted, or to refer for a gifted and talented evaluation. The traits paralleled the teachers' conception of giftedness and to the traditional models or traits described by researchers when generalizing gifted children. Five of the six participating teachers shared that they recognized characteristics of high intellectual ability when students demonstrated high test scores, creative problem solving, and/or deep critical thinking skills. One teacher expressed that she looked for students who "think outside the box" and exhibit above average artistic abilities, while one

acknowledged that gifted students are often bored with the content; traits that do not necessarily place sole emphasis on test scores, thus widening the span of potentially identified students who may not perform well in testing situations. Yet, one teacher declared, “I look at academic performance first. I also look at their classroom behaviors and writing assignments.” Another teacher believed that gifted students are typically “more mature” in behavior and performance with above grade level material. One teacher cumulated all others’ beliefs by expressing,

I typically look for students who are consistently curious and ask thought-provoking questions during classroom discussions. They also provide evidence of understanding in their work, and often complete tasks correctly within a short amount of time. They also exhibit above grade-level skills while consistently using proper terminology.

Teachers revealed that students who displayed commonly threaded values or academic domains exhibit high enough intellectual abilities to be considered gifted or to be referred for evaluation and potential identification. To illuminate these valued domains, I asked teachers to provide adjectives that can best describe students who they considered gifted. I crafted a poetic analysis to illustrate the most salient feelings and values that teachers shared about giftedness. Poems can be very powerful expressions of emotions that use an intentional flow of words to describe one’s feelings in more vivid ways. Because I could observe the care teachers had for their students, I felt illustrating their adjectives in this way may allow readers a deeper connection to teachers’ perceptions.

#### *Who are Gifted Children?*

Gifted children are intelligent, creative, determined,  
Artistic and ambitious –to the point of over-achieving.  
They are problem solvers and diligent workers  
Full of persistence, curiosity, and maturity.

Gifted children are world thinkers and leaders of our time.

Coleman (2014) contends that school is created to promote certain contextual domains that are valued by the traditional school culture, but only a few students fit those valued domains. The teacher participants' beliefs about gifted children were primarily developed by what they have learned through working with children who exhibited these characteristics, since they admitted that they received little to no gifted education training.

#### *Parent Participants' Perspectives*

Finally, I posed the question, *what is giftedness*, to the boys' parents. I received a fantastic response rate, with 15 out of 22 parents agreeing to participate in my study, and all whom responded to this question. Table 4.4 displays the parents' responses to Theme 1: What is Giftedness?

Table 4.4

#### *Parent Participants' Conceptions of Giftedness*

---

##### Quoted Responses

---

- I feel like he thinks differently than most children.
- Able to use information to reuse in other situations.
- Working above his grade level.
- Curiosity in the world around him. Asking questions, constantly analyzing things and how/why they work.
- Further advanced and comprehends educational materials easier than others.
- Above average in regard to a skill or in knowledge.
- My child has abilities in problem solving skills, imagination, and tends to pick up on school subjects quickly.
- I believe that gifted children are those that have IQ's that fall outside the normal IQ's. At least this is what I think the school's definition is because that is the test that they administer to children before admitting them.
- The ability to be able to understand the concepts and ideas and apply them in everyday situations.
- Highly interested in learning; has a very easy time learning advanced concepts for his age.
- Very perceptive; picks up on most educational tasks easily.
- In school, gifted means he did well on a test and does well in school subjects. I do believe there are "gifted" kids that never get extra opportunities because they get nervous or do not test well. I also believe that some kids are gifted in book learning,

others are gifted in creativity, or building things or art/music, but are not labeled or given extra attention in those areas in our school system.

- Unique talents and abilities.
  - Able to learn quickly and obtain knowledge quickly.
  - He is a good listener in school and wants to do well. I think of him as any other kid.
- 

The commonalities in the parents' responses included academic abilities and creativity. Several parents described giftedness in terms of how their own son exhibited these characteristics or how they believed giftedness was based on their son's personality.

Several parents pointed to explicit behaviors such as their son's ability to learn things and apply them quickly and performing well in school. Others also noted intrinsic behaviors such as curiosity and interests in learning and doing. One parent observed her son as having an internal desire to do well on school tasks, yet also compares him to other kids his age. Using value coding, I categorized parents' conceptualizations by their beliefs or attitudes about what giftedness "looks" like or how it is perceived by themselves or the schools in which their son attends.

Diving further into my data, I connected the parents' attitudes and beliefs about giftedness to their impressions or thoughts about gifted children. Their responses shed light on other aspects of their perspectives not shared in their question responses about their conceptions of giftedness. One parent felt that gifted children are "interesting to talk to because they have a unique way of thinking." Two parents reported that "they have strengths and weaknesses" and "they bore easily" which "requires keeping them busy." Three parents discussed the social aspects of giftedness, sharing that "Although very bright, they often have many other challenges," "He is very social and makes friends easily," and "Most kids in the GT program are good communicators and problem solvers, but some can be condescending towards others or may cause trouble because they are bored in school."

My data also showed that only five parents revealed that they first learned or believed their son had exceptional abilities before the boys started formal schooling. The other nine parents stated their awareness of their son's high abilities began in the early grades of school via a classroom teacher or by testing measures. A recent parenting blog about parenting gifted children stated that,

Research shows that parents are the best identifiers of their children's giftedness. Most parents are well-attuned to their kids' needs, and most of them are unlikely to call a child who falls within the typical curve "gifted." In fact, I think the problem is not that too many parents identify their children as gifted, but rather that too few acknowledge their kids' giftedness (Suki, 2012).

The parents' involvement in this study is indicative of how parents perceive giftedness either by their experiences with having a gifted son or by what the schools or teachers have informed them about the unique talents and abilities of their children. As examined in Chapter 3, very few parents have received training about gifted children or gifted education, however their perspectives were influenced by first-hand opportunities through interaction with their own gifted child; a critical component that is fundamental to the way we guide and teach them.

## **Theme II: Perceptions of Gifted Boys in Classroom Spaces**

### *The Boys' Perspectives*

The second theme centered on how the participants' abilities and gender influence the ways in which they perceived schooling and their positions as gifted students within school spaces. I began by comparing the boys' interview conversations with the school observations and emerged with a theme central to understanding how gifted boys perceive themselves at school.

It was important for me to understand first how the boys described themselves and discover the kinds of things they liked to do at school or at home. I felt that both pieces of

information might tell me how they viewed themselves in relation to their abilities or gender. All but one boy described themselves by telling me what they liked to do rather than describing something about their personality. That may have been due to their developmental ages or simply because of the way I formulated the questions. Nonetheless, their remarks were insightful and most of them told me several things they liked to do rather than just one thing. Playing sports was the most popular answer with soccer, football, and baseball as the top sports they enjoyed playing. Kaleb, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, said, “I pretty much like any sport that is in season.” Connor, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, stated the same but also added, “Baseball is my favorite though because, to me, it has a lot of action.” The second most popular activity was recreational reading. Timothy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, said, “Chapter books or books that are in a series are the best novels to read because they are all connected into one world.” They preferred reading genres such as Greek mythology, graphic novels, fantasies, and the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan. Nonfiction was not on their list of favorites. Many expressed their feelings about nonfiction texts like Isaac, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, did, “Nonfiction is kind of boring to me. Fiction books are fun to read, and you learn things but also get fiction stuff.”

Other students like Josh and Elias, both 4<sup>th</sup> graders, told me that they loved to draw fictional characters they created or famous cartoon characters when they had free time during school. Five boys shared that they really enjoyed playing video games. Anthony, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, shared his love of playing video games with his dad, “I really like super challenging games or games where I can create whatever.” Cody and Nolan, both 5<sup>th</sup> graders, said they played “just about all video games,” but that games like “Fifa Soccer, Fortnite, and Apex Legends” were among their favorite games. I thought more boys would have told me that video games ranked higher on their list of favorite things to do, but instead it was reading or playing sports.

One student, Josiah, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, was the only participant who described himself by telling me about his personality style. He and I shared a lengthy conversation about how he described himself as “generous, creative, and stubborn”. Like the other boys, Josiah was articulate in his storytelling about how once he decided on something, it was extremely difficult to change his mind. “You know, when I’m like, everybody comes up to me and is, like, ‘come on, do it.’ And I’m like, ‘no’, but eventually I do come out of that mood and everything turns out fine.” I soaked up Josiah’s sense of humor about himself and comfortableness with talking with me, which demonstrated to me his unique sense of thinking and enriched vocabulary typical of gifted individuals.

I redirected the boys’ interview conversations to discuss things they liked or did not like about school. The boys’ overwhelming response to what they enjoyed most about school revolved around the social times such as lunch, recess, or any time in which they got to be with their friends. Over half of the boys felt time with friends was extremely important. Josiah remarked, “I love recess and lunch because I like talking to my friends. It’s the best thing ever.” Exploring the boys’ social opportunities was a priority during my observations. Even though I observed that all their teachers implemented various forms of group work or collaboration time, which I could have counted as part of their socialization time, I chose not to make those particular connections to what the boys would consider enjoyable social time with peers because they were paired with other students that may or may not have been their friends. And, according to their responses I will discuss later in this section, the majority did not enjoy group work with their peers.

Therefore, I mainly focused on lunch and recess times to observe them interact with their friends. All but three students spent their time playing sports, laughing, and interacting with their friends. The students who attended Rizemore seemed to make the most of their social time. They



played hard, to the point of being rowdy and loud, as they only received one recess per day. The students at Mayfield, who had multiple recess times, played in more organized fashion, as if the rules of the sports or games had long been established and students just picked up where they left off from the last recess time they had earlier in the day. Students acted similarly during lunch times at both sites, as well as PE time where they socialized more than during other course times in the school day.

Nine boys also mentioned that they preferred free reading time or activities academic when at school. I wondered what their favorite subject(s) were, assuming they would say it was reading. However, fifteen out of the 22 boys revealed that math was their favorite subject. Ironically, Nathan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, acknowledged that even though he “got his first D in math because of long division,” math was still his favorite subject because everything else he learned was “pretty easy” for him. In fact, most boys who named math as being their favorite subject did so because they felt they mastered math skills with ease. Grennan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, described how he felt about math, “It’s hard, but you build on it and once you get it, then you know it”; inferring that the challenge that math often provided and the feeling of overcoming that obstacle was what he liked most about this subject. However, he also equated his ability to perform math to “My report cards. Whenever I look at them, it’s either math or social studies that I’m the highest in.” Samuel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, added, “I like the bigger problems. I like to work them out in my head, but sometimes the teachers say to show your work,” and Conner, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, explained that, “I like the numbers.” Liam’s, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, reasoning for liking math was not only because he felt he was good at it, but also because, “Once the teacher gives me the strategy then I can figure it out. But I use pictures to help me instead of just trying to do it all in my head.” Benbow (1988) found that boys tended to feel more confident in math than other subjects, and that math was viewed by boys as a masculine subject in comparison to others.

Not all boys stated that math was their favorite subject. Josh, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, admitted, “I don’t like math all that much. I am better at reading.” Hunter, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, further explained,

I don’t like math because either I don’t understand it at all, or I understand it so much that I already know it, so it doesn’t challenge me enough. I either get it better than anybody, or I don’t. I like it when they [teachers] are kind of challenging me, not like where I’m just kind of sitting there wondering, ‘what do I do now?’ So, it’s either I can do it, or I can’t do it at all.

Although not all the boys chose math as their favorite subject, it was not because they did not enjoy it. Rather, our conversations about math mirrored the underpinnings of the Frame of Reference theory, where many of the boys liked math because it was easy for them in comparisons to how they felt they did at other subjects; hence, identifying their presumed academic weaknesses as one of their least favorite subjects. When asked why writing was their least favorite, nine boys told me there were aspects of writing that they did not think they performed well in such as “the grammar part of it,” “cursive writing because it hurts my hand,” or writing in general. Shane, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, shared, “I’m not the greatest writer” and Grennan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, admitted, “It’s a lot harder for me because I’m not the best at it.” Ryder, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, best described his dislike for writing class by saying, “I don’t like writing because the English language is stupid. That’s why. Cuz’ there are no rules or too many rules. But, like, you can’t follow any of them. Like every single rule has an exception.”

Though I believed the boys were going to state that reading was their favorite subject, I found that some felt it was their least favorite thing to study. Seven boys told me that they do not like reading class, even though they enjoyed reading for fun. Why the contrast? Their answers linked to a lack of interest in the reading assignments, the stories in the textbooks that they were required to read “were too easy,” and lack of personal connections to the reading class in general.

During reading class observations, I noticed frequent reliance on textbook readings and worksheets and little use of discussions and explorations about books the students selected to read for fun. Based on the boys' behaviors during reading class, I felt Timothy's, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, feelings about reading class described most of the boys' common dislike for it,

I like reading, but reading class—not so much because we're just reviewing strategies to read and I already know how to read really well. So that makes it boring. Most of the time, we're just doing stuff because it's being assigned. Like, the first-third of the year is really like review from last year and the second-third is like, new stuff, and then the last-third of the year is reviewing the new stuff. So, it's like two-thirds review.

In all, the boys discussed academic areas in which they felt they were “good at” or the ones in which they felt they were “not very good at,” but there were no apparent links to their giftedness or abilities in relation to being identified as gifted. The boy's feelings paint a bigger picture as to how they compare their abilities to their weaknesses, as theorized in Marsh's (1990) Frame of Reference theory. I found that boys made internal comparisons about their abilities and some made external comparisons as to being “better” at certain subjects than others, or how their abilities were made explicit by their grades on the report cards. I understood these comparisons through Marsh's theoretical lens, but continued to seek understandings about how boys' lack of understanding themselves as gifted individuals could have helped them realize that just because they are identified as gifted, does not mean they are gifted in all academic areas.

### *The Teachers' Perspectives*

I sought to discover the teachers' perspectives on the gifted boys, namely how their observed differences between boys and girls influenced the ways in which they perceived them as learners and their instructional positionings for gifted boys within school spaces. I wanted to explore teachers' descriptive differences between gifted boys and gifted girls in the areas of

academics, motivation to learn, classroom and social behaviors, and peer social groups. Two of the six teachers did not notice striking differences across genders in general but stated there were some differences between boys and girls who were identified as gifted. Some teachers believed that gifted girls “seemed to be more advanced academically than boys” and “a little more capable of independent learning and work.”

On the flip side, four out of the six teachers depicted gifted boys’ behaviors as what sets them apart from the girls, coinciding with Hamilton and Jones (2016) reference to some teachers’ tendencies to emphasize boys’ behaviors over academics as predictors of performance in class. One teacher felt that “girls who are in GT are often well-behaved. Often, boys in GT are very talkative and can be disruptive.” Another teacher recognized that girls “seem more driven, yet boys’ motivation is not as high.” However, one teacher believed that differences depend on the student, but sometimes boys are “more socially awkward than their peers”. While not specifying gender, one teacher did say boys’ and girls’ differences “depend more upon the individual and their interests, as well as their personalities.” Another teacher admitted that she could not identify the difference between gifted boys and girls, while three others believed there to be “no difference” or that there may be differences in talent and abilities such as “one may be more academic and one more artistic”, but that gender may not be related to the kinds of skills they possess.

Understanding how teachers perceived differences between genders and students’ presumed abilities shed light on how teachers perceived gifted boys in their classrooms. Asking teachers to describe their gendered assumptions helped me understand what they valued in gifted students and stressed what they believed giftedness is versus what it is not in both genders. While I was not able to compare their explanations with classroom observations because I did not know who were the girls identified as gifted and those who were not, I was able to observe

how teachers interacted with the gifted boys in my study. I found that all teachers seemed to expect the same academic outcomes from all students regardless on their academic achievement levels, and the only differences I observed happened when addressing student behaviors. For instance, Stephen, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, wandered about the room during every observation I conducted with him. However, there were others in the class who also wandered around or exhibited distracting behaviors such as talking to students during work time, yelling, and playing with objects instead of working on their assignments. Yet, Stephen was told multiple times throughout my observations, “Stephen, are you listening?” or other directives along the lines of, “Stephen, you are going to have to sit down!”

I also observed that when girls struggled to maintain their frustrations with either academics or social endeavors, they cried and were given quiet time and space to compose themselves. Teachers acknowledged their feelings by stating things like, “I understand how you feel”, or telling the class to pay attention to the lesson instead of the girls’ negative behaviors. The three boys who displayed frequent frustrations like the girls were corrected almost immediately. If they verbalized or expressed their anger or negative emotions through body language, their teachers told them to stop, or attempted to redirect them to the assignments or directives rather than allowing them time to calm themselves or explain their feelings. Anthony, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, appeared to struggle especially when worksheets were assigned, not because he could not complete the work, but because they did not sustain his attention. During one observation, he told the teacher, “But I already know how to do this stuff,” and the teacher attempted to redirect him back to his seat with a hand gesture and the reply, “I know.” There were no observable attempts to allow him to further explain himself or offer alternative opportunities to practice other skills that would have suited his need for further learning. Josh’s, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, teacher allowed him to have frequent breaks to read which seemed to work out well for him by compromising

time to complete assignments with free time. This collaboration between Josh and his teacher seemed to satisfy both individuals, as Josh could engage himself in an activity that interested him, and his teacher achieved her goal of getting Josh to complete his work. I observed Liam, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, struggle multiple times to comprehend the directions to his math assignments. The teacher persisted to work calmly with him even though he exhibited small outbursts and threw his pencils and erasers. There was no acknowledgement of his perceptions or feelings about his assignment, rather the teacher continued to work him through it, which seemed to exacerbate the tantrums. In all, I observed that some teachers did not demonstrate clearly defined limits between behavioral expectations for boys and girls. The girls were afforded more freedom and time to process their negative emotions instead of requiring them to get back to work. The boys were almost immediately redirected to task with a sense of a zero-tolerance approach to their emotional expressions.

### *The Parents' Perspectives*

Lastly, the second theme focused on how the parents and guardians perceived their son's strengths and challenges to help understand how they felt about them as boys, who happen also happen to be identified as gifted. I asked parents, *what would you consider to be your child's strengths and challenges?* I found that ten parents listed strengths compared to what the boys also told me their strengths were— math, reading, artistic ability, and athleticism. It was enlightening to see that what the boys felt they were good at, their parents did too. Those same parents and the others also shared deeper perspectives about their son's abilities that spoke to the boys' unique personalities. One parent articulated, "He is observant, a quick study, energetic, and tenacious." Other parents shared these remarks about their sons: "He likes to discuss and analyze things,"; "He is a quick learner and naturally inquisitive,"; "He is very perceptive of others' feelings,"; "My son is a deep thinker and problem solver,"; and, "He has a great memory. He is

always looking at how and why something works.” All these characteristics suggest that parents identified their son’s high intellectual functioning and perceived these traits to be positive aspects they valued about their sons. Some parents also pointed to their son’s social and emotional traits as strengths that made up who they were as individuals. When discussing their perceptions of their gifted sons at school, parents took more of an emotional perspective than the boys or teachers.

Like their son’s notable strengths, the parents’ responses about their son’s challenges painted a telling picture about the boys. Fifteen out of 16 parents revealed that their sons struggle with social and emotional challenges to varying degrees. That was not to say, however that their sons did not internally function well regardless of these challenges. Of the fifteen parents, over half of them identified social skills as a top challenge for their sons. Specifically, these parents expressed the following social issues:

Socially immature; Trouble making good friends; Difficulty adapting to out-of-school relationships; Social challenges (unspecified); Tends to be an introvert and does not express his thoughts and ideas in a group; Challenges with social interactions and understanding the consequences of his actions; Does not like to stand out or be “different” in any way.

These social challenges presented a deeper image of the boys, and some that the teacher participants also commented on when asked about the social differences between boys and girls. Andronaco, Shute, and McLachlan (2014) contend that these types of social behaviors may also be influenced by asynchronous development that often occurs in children who are identified as gifted. Asynchronous development is described as a “term to describe an inner sense of tension experienced by the child as a result of disparities between cognitive, physical, and social development” (Andronaco et al., 2014, p. 265). In their study, the researchers focused

specifically on how asynchrony emphasizes social challenges among highly intellectual children and their peers. They found that gifted students who exhibit social concerns, like those shared by the parents, tended to perform better in school settings where they can interact with like-minded peers rather than be forced into positions where the social skills may be too maladaptive to produce positive social relationships with similar-age peers (Andronaco et al., 2014).

Emotional concerns related to the boys' self-perceptions were equally considered to be among their developmental challenges. Some of the parents' responses regarding emotionality were:

Being wrong—gets embarrassed; Overly worried about what others think of him;  
Emotional challenges (unspecified); Lack of self-confidence; A bit emotional and deep feeler; Constant worry, Stress, and Anxiety.

I interpreted one outlier parent response to have great importance to the overall purpose of the study, "He doesn't feel challenged enough in school", indicating that the parent's son struggled emotionally with school because he needed more rigor that suited his levels of intellectual functioning.

Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) argue that these parents' keen observations of their children align with research that explores emotional and psychological intensities in young gifted children. They maintain that emotional issues such as the ones the parents divulged are common among gifted children because they have a heightened sense of personal awareness which can manifest into emotional sensitivities (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). The parents' perceptions of their son's abilities combined with what they felt were their strengths and weaknesses may influence the ways in which the boys in this study viewed schooling and their positions as gifted students within school spaces.



### **Theme III: Complexities of Curriculum and Instructional Design**

#### *The Boys' Perspectives*

The third theme that emerged from this study was the understanding that while the student participants enjoyed certain aspects of school as discussed in Theme II, they also shared a desire for diversity and equity with classroom instruction. The boys' dislikes for certain subjects or ways of learning were evidence of how some gifted boys prefer to learn and interact with academics at school. Their positive feelings and connections to their gifted classes highlighted important attributes of pedagogy in which they wished were offered more in the general education settings, such as more rigorous instructional approaches designed to keep them engaged, help them feel valued as gifted learners, and gain a deeper understanding what it really means to be a gifted child.

What was it about the GT class that all the participants loved so much? The responses did not surprise me, as they matched the ways in which the boys told me they learned best. Some of the boys shared similar replies and all are noteworthy to include in Table 4.5 because they spoke to the wishes for curriculum and instruction designed to match their academic needs.

Table 4.5

#### *The Student Participants' Feelings about the GT Program*

---

##### Quoted Responses

---

- We're always learning new things.
- We never have to do work papers or worksheets.
- We get to read what we like.
- The teacher gives work, but we get to choose how we do it.
- You just get to do fun activities and projects.
- You get to do a lot of fancy projects and hands-on stuff.
- The project we are doing right now, it's in phases and the teacher only told us three things to do and we figure out the rest. The design is up to me.
- It is more challenging.
- I get to spend time with friends that are kinda like me.
- The teachers give us interesting stuff that I want to do.

- It gets me away from whatever the class is doing ‘cuz, like, I know all this stuff. Sometimes I wish I could get out and go to GT every time, and when I do go, I’m like, ‘Yes, I’m out!’
  - I love it because we get to do things like record videos and other projects.
  - It’s fun to get to go every day.
  - We get to do stuff like geometry and technology, and I like doing that.
- 

My observations in the GT classes connected to what the boys shared with me during the individual interviews. The students spent most of their time out of their seats working on projects which included configuring sizes, shapes, and formulating probabilities of functionalities and outcomes. Students designed architecture and worked through confusions they encountered in the ways they chose for themselves. They had the freedom to work with partners or create projects on their own, which was especially important for the boys in my study.

During the interviews, I asked the boys how they preferred to learn. Fifteen out of the 22 students divulged they would much rather work independently than with a group. Cody’s, 5<sup>th</sup>, grade, feelings about group work echoed many of the boys’ sentiments as well, “I don’t like to work in groups, in like big groups. It’s just kinda’ hard to get everyone to work. Sometimes it’s just easier to work by myself.” Axel, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, felt that group work depends on the assignment, “If I don’t know the subject then I don’t mind working in groups even though they are super slow. If I do know the subject, then, no, I don’t like working in groups.” Ryder, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, admitted he prefers independent work because, “I can work at my own pace and you don’t have to translate everything to someone else in a different way.” The boys’ preferences for working by themselves, even though they are not afforded that opportunity to the extent they wished they had may indicate they are not given spaces to cultivate their own ways of learning because of teachers’ personal preferences to instructional approaches.

Helping gifted students feel valued as members of the classroom environment contributes to building more equitable spaces for all learners. As part of helping them feel valued, the boys

admitted that while they liked being “smart”, there were aspects about it that they did not appreciate. When I asked them if there was anything about being gifted they did not like, their responses expressed social and emotional needs worthy of being voiced. Two boys had similar comments as Timothy’s, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, “I don’t like being called gifted, but I don’t, like, say anything if they do. Like, really, I don’t bask in it. I don’t want to brag about it.” I understood that while Timothy enjoyed being considered gifted, he did not use it to set himself apart from his peers. However, I observed that setting the boys apart was inevitable in some classrooms. Since both schools’ GT programs were designed as pull-out programs, the boys left general instruction time to attend. Ironically, the boys enjoyed leaving class, some to get out of the work they felt they already knew how to do, especially during their reading block. I witnessed teachers say, “GT kids, it’s time to go,” or “If you are in GT, then it’s time for you to leave.”; constantly signaling the students who had been identified as gifted and talented among those who had not. Additionally, Nathan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Micha, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and Daylon, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, dreaded having to make up their class work they missed from attending the GT class.

Josh, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, told me he noticed some differences between himself and the other students not in the gifted program; illustrating his frustrations with peers that are not like-minded, “I like to do things right and other people don’t. I remind them but they don’t do anything. It is frustrating, sometimes, and it makes me feel annoyed that people aren’t listening.” Still, Connor, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, voiced, “I don’t really see a difference between me and other students other than they don’t get to go to the GT class”; illustrating that his self-perceptions about his abilities lacked understanding about what intellectually sets him apart, or that he saw himself the same as other students and did not want to be seen as different than his peers.

Lastly, I was curious about what the boys wished their teachers knew about them as gifted learners. Ten of the boys expressed personal information that they wished their teachers

knew about their lives. Most candidly, Anthony, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, revealed, “I don’t like it when I get upset because I feel like teachers don’t understand the situation.” He continued to explain one scenario in which he was told to apologize for something he felt he did not do that, in his mind, did not warrant an apology. Nolan, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, explained a medical condition he struggles to keep under control at school, even though he felt pain and was tired from it. Hunter, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, admitted,

It’s common for me to use people’s words against them. Like in reading class. I think, well, this could be the answer ‘cuz of this way. I had one teacher get really mad at me because she thought I was trying to correct her, but I wasn’t. There isn’t always just one right answer. I like teachers who care about the things that I care about.

Asher and Josiah, both 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and Micha, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, wanted to teachers to know their other talents that they had not had the opportunities to share about in school, such their musical talents, hobbies, and outside of school interests. Others, like Stephen, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and Liam, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, added, “Less homework and worksheets” to the list of information for teachers to know.

Six boys stated like, Connor, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, “I don’t know. I think they already know everything about me.” Their views signaled that either they had positive experiences with making connections to their teachers, or they perceived their teachers the way many students do—they were the holders of all knowledge.

### *The Teachers’ Perspectives*

The teachers believed their responsibility included creating a diverse and equitable classroom for their gifted students, yet they expressed some frustration with institutional designs or mandates that interfere with designing equitable spaces for some students. Additionally, some teachers’ impressions about gifted students had also influenced how they thought they should be designing their instructional environments.

Some teachers felt the lack of rigorous curriculum negatively influenced gifted students' behaviors,

Gifted students continuously get off task if not given an activity that is stimulating on their level; Many times, students have been more disruptive or disengaged because of being bored; They tell me they already know so they don't always want to participate; Sometimes they are challenging because they need more enriching curriculum.

The teachers emphasized common concerns many that other teachers in other research have conveyed, but they did not explain their attempts to address their concerns. Mega et al. (2013) found in their study that boredom stemming from a lack of interest in the work or from not feeling connected to learning prompted negative behaviors and reduced self-regulated behaviors which teachers expected from their students (Mega et al., 2013).

Gifted and talented program practices also seemed to influence the ways in which two teachers viewed gifted students. One teacher conveyed,

Students seem to think if they are getting A's, they should be able to qualify (for the GT program). I think it's too accepting of different criteria for acceptance in the program. It is no longer students who aren't being challenged that get into GT.

The teacher's presumption that too many students felt entitled to get into the program or that the criteria for qualifying was too broad indicated questions as to whether all students in the program were accurately identified as gifted and talented. Given the impetus for concerns about program practices, one stands to reason that the teacher questioned *what is gifted* compared to *what is not gifted*? Still, another teacher shared their belief about the program practices, "The GT teacher has the best program for them." The teacher continued to speak highly of the GT teacher in charge of the program at the school site and that gifted students' needs were being met in the program. Does this mean that pull-out programs were highly favored for gifted students because their

academic needs can be addressed better outside of the general education classroom? Benny and Blonder (2016) suggest that, “Many teachers feel that they are out of their comfort zone when they are asked to adopt curriculum to make it sufficiently challenging for gifted students and perceive it as a highly consuming task” (p. 3).

Along those lines of inquiry, I asked the teachers how they thought gifted students’ academic, social, and emotional needs could best be met in school settings. Three other teachers felt gifted students were best served in the GT pull-out program because, “the GT program seems to adequately help them learn more challenging activities”; “the GT room really helps them grow”; and one teacher fully supportive of the GT program also said, “They need to be “served well in the general classroom” as well. The teachers advocated for the pull-out program because it gave gifted students “what they need academically”; which can often be overlooked with the overwhelming day-to-day teaching tasks and the number of struggling students they taught. However, teachers also stated that they felt uncomfortable with the gifted students being absent from general education classes to attend GT class because they were missing large chunks of untaught curriculum. Essentially, they felt that students leaving class created a perpetual cycle of deterioration of their academic achievements because they missed core curriculum while attempting to meet their gifted and talented needs. I found this ironic since the boys divulged that they felt like they already mastered the material, and that it was a relief to get to leave their general education classes to attend their GT classes. This confliction between the teachers and the boys about what was best for students academically threads itself back to the overarching theme of this study– what does it mean to be gifted? Specifically, how the students perceive themselves, their academic needs, and school was based on how they positioned themselves in the curriculum. Further, how teachers’ perceptions of giftedness and the boys’ gifted characteristics influenced their curriculum and instructional practices by feeling as though they

needed to be treated like all other students in regard to content delivery, rather than being open to designing curriculum at their high ability levels.

Only two teachers addressed the inquiry about meeting gifted students' and emotional needs, and both believed that, "their social and emotional needs are met from being in the regular classroom." There was no explanation provided as to how they were being met, only that both felt involving them in tasks with other students helped their social and emotional growth.

### *The Parents' Perspectives*

I posed a similar question related to their gifted son's opportunities for diverse and equitable instruction and overall growth. I asked parents how they felt their son's academic, social, and emotional needs could best be met in school settings. Nine parents gave similar responses to this one, "challenge them through engaging, student-driven exploration, hands-on work, and movement." One parent articulated others' beliefs in this way,

Gifted students all present their own individual needs, male or female. However, my son has the following in common with most other boys: he needs high interest lessons that allow him to struggle and find success. He needs stimulation (but he also needs to learn what to do with himself in the down time). He needs structure that allows him to find himself and the natural boundaries within (meaning that he needs to be given a task and the freedom to explore the answer). And, he needs help with how to appropriately interact with his peers within the classroom and other situations.

Four parents explained the dichotomy between addressing their son's intellectual needs and their personal values placed on their son's social and emotional needs. They believed that social and emotional support should also be offered and prioritized at school. One parent suggested that keeping students interested and engaged in learning "would also help with social and emotional learning." Mega et al. (2013) posits that academic achievement and positive

emotional interactions go hand-in-hand. They found that students' academic achievement was influenced by their positive emotional experiences at school.

I inquired about what they thought teachers could do to address these needs and help their gifted son at school. All parents demonstrated through their responses that they saw challenging work and high expectations to be just as important as understanding who their child was and the types of social and emotional support they felt the boys needed to feel safe to be themselves. Each of the parents' responses included in Table 4.6 contained a unique message for their teachers.

Table 4.6

*The Parents' Messages to Teachers*

---

Quoted Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Challenge them with higher level classes and support.</li><li>• Stress that he is there to learn. He doesn't need to know it all already. Mistakes are learning opportunities.</li><li>• Remember, <i>gifted</i> doesn't mean expert in all areas of academics. Show kindness and patience.</li><li>• Give more 1:1 time.</li><li>• Be understanding. Listen to their needs.</li><li>• Create an environment that would encourage them to share their thoughts and ideas.</li><li>• I believe the GT teacher is an exceptional educator that meets most, if not all, my son's needs. He thrives in her class.</li><li>• Challenge them and find ways or activities that target their areas.</li><li>• Continue to push them.</li><li>• Every kid is different and will learn differently. But they need options and levels of support.</li><li>• Challenge them and let them fail and learn from their mistakes. Encourage them and praise them for their good efforts.</li><li>• Provide advanced work that meets their needs.</li><li>• Have high expectations.</li><li>• Having a loving, creative environment is important.</li></ul>

---

The parents in no way suggested that the teachers were or were not already providing the things they felt their sons needed at school. Rather, their messages indicated desires about what schools could do to enhance educational experiences for their sons. Ultimately, the parents wanted their



sons to be understood as advanced learners, but also as children who need nurturing spaces to develop socially and emotionally.

Lastly, I wanted to know what the parents' personal and academic goals were for their child to understand, further, their perceptions on parenting and teaching gifted children. Most parents told me that is not just about focusing on their son's intellectual status, it is about reaching the whole child. I chose to use a poetic analysis to conclude their thoughts to remind educators, as the parents shared, that all gifted boys are children first.

#### Wishes for My Gifted Child

You are so uniquely and brilliantly talented, my son.

Your gifts, I hope you cherish.

But with gifts come responsibilities—

Responsibilities to be kind, understanding, and strong.

Be confident, happy, and socialize more.

Find a balance between being challenged and things to do for fun.

Struggle, explore, and excel to new heights.

Your options are open, choose them wisely.

For my son, I love all that you are and all that you will be.

#### Connecting Analysis to Theory

The journey through analytic landscaping took me to the place of plugging my research into a theoretical framework. I used Marsh's Frame of Reference theory (Marsh & Hau, 2004; Williams & Montgomery, 1995; Marsh, 1990a; Marsh, 1990b; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985) as a framework for understanding how gifted male students formed their self-concepts based on their schooling environments and academic positioning. According to this framework, gifted students make comparisons within internal and external frames of reference. Further, gifted students tend

to perceive their academic strengths or weaknesses based on how they compared them to the strengths or weaknesses of their peers; thus, affecting their self-concepts and how gifted students demonstrate feelings towards their actual or perceived abilities.

How might this theory have helped me pursue understandings related to my stated question about why was giftedness not explained to these male students who were categorized as gifted? My initial thoughts led me to make an assertion that labeling and serving students as gifted, yet not explaining to them what that means in terms of their areas of uniqueness, could influence the development of their academic and personal self-concepts. If a child is deemed to be gifted, then the child assumes he (in my study's case) is gifted in all academic areas, and therefore, is expected to perform at high academic levels in all those areas. However, during the participants' interviews, each member compared their academic strengths to their presumed weaknesses, thereby, disproving to themselves that they are gifted in all academic areas. The participants tied their academic achievements to their socio-emotional needs. Therein lies a pedagogical and social-emotional developmental problem: "If I am supposed to be gifted, then why do I have academic weaknesses? (After all, my teachers expect me to perform above my peers in all my school subjects.) Am I really an imposter?" One parent also illuminated this notion as important for teachers to understand about their son, as did others when referring to allowing their children to make mistakes when learning. It was worthy for me to link these thoughts to Marsh's framework because it guided my interpretation of the participants' interviews and observations. I believe I would have found discovering themes and making connections to thematic analysis extremely difficult had I not had a working knowledge, a thorough review of literature, and some experience working with students identified as gifted and talented. I would not have been able to point out the participants' verbal and nonverbal language

and behaviors that gave me critical information and understandings about their school lives; leaving me to over- or under-interpret the data.

I weaved my analyses and coding methods of the teacher and parent questionnaires into my observation data to discover their connections to the Frame of Reference theory. Specifically, how does my data speak to what teachers and parents say about giftedness? I found that parents' conceptions were strikingly similar to how their sons behaved and performed at school rather than a formalized description to which their sons fit the mold. I made this assertion by comparing what parents said about what they think giftedness means to how I observed their sons behave and perform at school. I attempted to see if I could substantiate their responses by using my field notes. Strikingly, I thematically assumed that parents did not base their conceptualizations of giftedness by what they learned or knew about gifted individuals, instead, by how their sons had developed thus far in their young lives. For example, Daylon's, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, parent felt that she viewed him as any other child, and that he was caring and sensitive. She also believed him to be a good listener and that he excels academically because he wants to do well. Daylon's interview responses indicated that to be gifted meant to help other people and tried hard in school. I also looked at their responses to another question I asked them about whether they have ever received training or information about gifted identification. All parents replied that they had not received any training, which served to help me understand why their conceptualizations of giftedness mirrored their sons' gifted characteristics.

Making comparison to teachers' feelings about gifted boys was more difficult because teachers did not demonstrate different academic expectations for them, as compared to other students, through oral or written products. It was possible, however, that teachers expected higher standards of written work when I was not conducting observations— a question I should have asked them.

## Shaping the Possibilities

Wolcott (2009) says that researchers never really conclude with analyzing their work. While researchers tend to use the word *findings* when reporting analyses, research continues conversations about respective fields of study (Wolcott, 2009). Even though I felt I conducted thorough analytic work through the Frame of Reference theory, I continue to have some questions about the many observations I conducted. Questions like, what other performance tasks could have been assigned and still produced the same results? Were academic, social, and emotional differences obvious to children? What were what these questions telling me about my data, and more importantly, about the members? How might the absence of parents' understanding about giftedness contribute or not to their son's self-concept development? How might teachers' understandings, instructional approaches, and biases in which I have inquired about contributed or not to gifted boys' self-concept development? Wolcott (2009) argues that questions like these must remain centered and focused to further deepen my qualitative data analysis.

Understanding the boys' voices about what they think about themselves, their preferences for learning, and their curriculum and instructional desires are all relevant to the curriculum studies perspective. Everything that surrounds students when they enter classroom spaces is vital to curriculum development (Tenorio, 2010). The way teachers think about their students, how they design their classrooms, their pedagogical assumptions, and what students believe about themselves, in essence, the curriculum. Studying a student population that is often ignored by the deficit-views of curriculum design, or teaching approaches to address skills deficits, and development is an important contribution to richer curriculum practices that should be occurring for all students.

The last chapter, Chapter V, summarizes the overall findings and my conclusions made regarding this ethnographic study. I discuss purposeful implications for all teachers and curriculum developers in the gifted and general education fields. Finally, I present the significance of this study and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### **Discussion about the Findings**

I explored gifted boys' perceptions of themselves and school through an ethnographic study that immersed me in the school lives of young participants. Chapter five describes the findings from this study, connecting them to existing literature regarding gender and ability, and outlining key implications for teachers. This chapter also addresses the gaps in literature centralized on elementary-age students' perspectives about themselves and the tensions that exist within their school experiences. It also summarizes the findings on parents' conceptions of giftedness and perceptions about curriculum and instruction practices designed for their gifted sons; another gap in recent literature. In sum, I sought to address the four research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges, if any, that elementary-aged boys identified as gifted face?
- 2) How do boys identified as gifted conceptualize the social aspects of school?
- 3) How do boys identified as gifted perceive themselves as students?
- 4) How do parents/teachers' understandings of the relationship between gifted construction and gender influence, or not, their pedagogical, or parental, approaches for boys identified as gifted?

The overarching goal of my research questions was to situate the study through the lens of Marsh's Frame of Reference theory (Marsh, 1990a; 1990b) and interpret the findings, threading them into themes that illustrate the school lives of young boys who exemplify socially constructed conceptions of giftedness. To unravel these findings, I committed myself to giving the participants an opportunity to describe themselves— who they believe they are as boys and as gifted learners. Second, I provided them with a space to voice how they negotiated the day-to-day curriculum and instruction and about what they needed within those frameworks. Then, I connected the findings to substantial literature to discover how existing research interprets similar tensions experienced by gifted students, their teachers, and parents. The findings, combined with a thorough literature review informed major implications for gifted and general education teachers, gifted programming, and professional development opportunities.

Exploring the study's findings required my continuous reflexivity to remain cognizant of keeping all the participants' perspectives at the forefront of my study so that they would not be "lost or subsumed to my own views and interests" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 258). During the many visits to the boys' classrooms, I quickly realized that the entire class context unfolding around them played a significant part in their gifted constructs and how they viewed themselves as boys who are gifted, in position to their peers who were not identified as gifted. Relying on ethnographic methods, I weaved the three participants groups' experiences together to interpret how they conceptualize gender and ability. I interpreted how they used what they knew about both socially constructed ways of knowing and behaving to shape who they were, as boys, and to approach pedagogy and parental perceptions influenced by the two constructs (Wolcott, 1990). Ethnographic methodologies and ongoing self-reflections led me to emerge with findings from the three central themes of this study: 1) what does it mean to be gifted, 2) the perceptions of gifted boys in classroom spaces, and 3) the complexities of curriculum and instructional design.

The related themes offer educational practitioners and parents a deeper, more critical understanding about what school life is like for young gifted boys.

Thorne (2010) asserts that “to learn from children, adults have to challenge the deep assumption that they already know what children are like” (p. 12). While Conner expressed that he believed his teachers already knew everything about him, the findings unveiled several facets about the boys and their school lives that were yet to be discovered. The most critical aspect disclosed the complexities about what giftedness really meant to the student participants. I found that 20 out of 22 boys in this study did not understand what it meant to be identified as gifted because no one explained it to them; or, at least told them in developmentally appropriate ways that helped them grasp what it meant to be considered gifted. The boys could not articulate what their intellectual gifts were and how they were fundamental, or not, to who they were as individual members of the gifted education community and their general education classroom environments. They struggled to link their giftedness to their self-concepts or understand how their giftedness influenced their self-perceptions. I found this left them questioning how they fit into the general curriculum or what it was like being a gifted child. Interrogated in the literature review. I examined how gifted boys perceived themselves as learners within the classroom context influenced by intersections of gender and ability.

I concluded from through the Frame of Reference lens that the lack the conversations that could have helped the boys better understand their intellectual talents and how they contribute to gender and ability construction, deprived them of understandings about who they are as individuals and how they could have utilized their skills to adapt to the academic, social, and emotional demands of schooling (Marsh 1990a; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Marsh et al., 1985). Jenkins and Demaray (2015) argue that students’ self-concepts are inherently linked to their academic achievement, hence, I argue that young gifted students should be afforded respectful



conversations about what it means to be gifted and how their intellectual capacities converge to develop the whole child. Furthermore, O'Connor (2012) posits that students' overall wellbeing and self-esteem are influenced by how they perceive themselves as children labeled as gifted in institutional spaces.

However, it is possible that the greater issue lies within adults' various conceptualizations about giftedness. Several questions emerged as I analyzed the findings about teachers' perceptions. What do their beliefs about gifted students say about what they value in gifted learners? How do their beliefs influence the way they view boys? What happens when gifted boys do not exhibit what teachers believe to be typical characteristics of gifted learners? I found that the teachers in this study were able to describe some gifted characteristics, but overall, felt conflicted with the ways in which students were identified as gifted and talented because their experiences with gifted students demonstrated to them that some students who qualify do not fit their beliefs about who is considered gifted and who is not. In other words, while the teachers believed that gifted boys exhibited certain characteristics such as high intellect and curiosity, they also expressed their frustrations with their classroom behaviors and maturity levels. Some teachers believed that gifted students should be highly motivated and socially mature, but as Andronaco et al. (2014) and others argue, not all gifted students develop their cognitive and social skills at the same levels or rates, and often times, there is asynchrony between these developmental levels in gifted children. I found that while some acknowledged that they found few academic differences between boy and girl gifted students, they highlighted some behavioral differences. Compared to the girls, the boys' behaviors were found to be more challenging and required that teachers kept them more actively engaged than the girls. The literature review pressed the notions that teachers' holistic expectations for boys were influenced by their academic abilities rather than on the boys' social maturity or positioning; and, the possibility that

the teacher's conceptions of a student's intellectual abilities lies in comparison to their classmates' skills or abilities (Hamilton & Roberts, 2017; Rothenbusch et al., 2016; Kaya, 2015). I wondered how these approaches to understanding abilities may have contributed to what they thought giftedness is, especially when they have students who exhibit other characteristics that they do not recognize as gifted qualities.

I also found it interesting that some teachers disagreed with how students qualify for GT services since the district mostly relies on teacher referrals. This district does not employ universal screenings at any grade level. When teachers or parents request that a child be evaluated for gifted and talented programming, the teachers are required to complete a portion of the referral paperwork to establish school support for the referral. The nature of who is considered gifted and talented in this district seemed conflicting to whom some teachers believed were gifted, when teaching these students on a day-to-day basis. This confliction might have been due to most teachers admitting to a lack of pursued or offered professional development opportunities to learn about gifted students and gifted programming. This becomes problematic when who gets referred for gifted evaluation weighs heavily upon teachers' opinions about their intellectual abilities and potential (Moon & Brighten, 2008).

Like the teachers, the parents discussed characteristics or behaviors when explaining how they conceptualized giftedness. Similar to the findings in Jacobs and Weisz's (1994) study, parents categorized their beliefs or attitudes about giftedness rather than explained what they thought it meant in definable terms. Additionally, I found that parents described giftedness in ways that also described their sons. Since they knew their sons had been identified as gifted by their respective schools, then they must apparently characterize what it meant to be gifted. Comparably to Mudrak's (2011) research, parents also tended to validate their explanations by how their sons perform in school or as compared to other students their age. Their conceptions of

giftedness may have been due in large part to their lack of explanation about giftedness from their schools or lack of parental training, guidance, and support in which most stated they had not received.

Even though gifted identification is not a new process, Delisle and Galbraith (2002) believes that we still have much to learn about defining giftedness, measuring it in applicable terms, and accepting that educators have much responsibility in designing targeted instruction that helps students feel valued as members of classroom spaces. The study suggests that as long as adults attempt to “see the world through the children’s eyes”, the findings can transcend important implications to aid educators, parents, and other researchers better understand how to approach gifted boys’ academic, social, and emotional needs (Thorne, 2010, p. 163).

How does discovery of what it means to be gifted influence adults’ perceptions about gifted boys? I found that exploring how boys, teachers, and parents socially construct conceptions of gender and ability is instrumental to how they develop their instructional environments or perceive them to be designed. In this study, I described what boys enjoy, or not, about school, how teachers depicted boys and their learning needs, and how parents felt about their son’s strengths and challenges.

All but one boy identified themselves by what they liked to do rather than by their personality traits. I considered that their responses might have been influenced by their ages. However, listening to what the participants liked to do, what they enjoyed about school, and what they did not like about school shed light on crucial insights about how they think and feel as boys. For instance, the boys stated they liked to play sports, play at recess, or hang out with their friends. All these activities are certainly not gender-specific, but perhaps, they do speak to the young males’ personalities and interests with a more critical orientation to such binary gendering.

The boys also enjoyed some academic endeavors such as reading and drawing. Recreational reading included higher cognitive level genres but excluded nonfiction selections. I found that even though they liked to read, they did not share the same feelings about their reading classes because they felt they already learned the material, the practiced skills did not address their learning goals, and the stories used from the explicit curriculum were too easy to read and uninteresting.

Some boys mentioned that they liked math class, but others stated that math frustrated them because they did not feel good at it. Framing their views through the Frame of Reference theory, I speculated that the boys aligned their academic interests with the subjects in which they felt successful. However, looking at the boys' perceptions through this lens led me to question whether it was math that they did not like or was it that they felt good about their math abilities as compared to their other academic skillsets. I concluded the latter because when asked, some students who did not like math stated that if they were "good" at math, they would have probably enjoyed it more. However, it is possible that their confidence was affected by the notion that academics and their masculinity compete with one another when they struggle in math— a traditionally masculine stereotyped subject (Shepard et al., 2011).

Attempting to clarify, not complicate, the intersectionality of gender and ability, I concluded that understanding why boys prefer certain activities or school subjects over others, may have been influenced by the ways teachers and parents presented the curriculum or perceived what interested young boys. I found that the teachers noticed differences in how gifted boys versus gifted girls approached academic endeavors and behaved in school settings, as suggested in Bailey & Graves' (2016) literature. For instance, some perceived gifted girls to be more academically prepared and mature while the gifted boys were not as academically motivated. Does giftedness manifest itself differently in genders, as if it is a static, binary

predisposition, or can all genders be identified as gifted while being characterized with various descriptors or assumptions about gifted children? I concluded, as similar to Skelton and Francis' findings (2012) that having differing viewpoints about genders and ability construction complicates the notion of who is truly gifted and who is not. What teachers believe about genders and their stereotypes may influence how they feel about their academic achievements (Skelton & Francis, 2012; Orr, 2011; Van Houtte, 2004). Thus, it stands to reason why some of the teachers in this study challenged the methods for gifted identification. It also prompts further discussion about possible professional development opportunities for teachers to learn about gifted children.

An interesting find about the parents' perceptions of gifted boys in schools was that the strengths and challenges shared by most parents closely aligned with the boys' expressed interests and dislikes. I found that most parents felt their sons were academically advanced in math, reading, artistic ability, and athleticism. I was not at all surprised that parents also discussed their son's personalities traits, such as being observant, quick to learn things, and being extremely perceptive as influencing how they felt about them and their giftedness. Supported by Koshy et al.'s (2017) literature, parents' perceptions about their children abilities influence children's self-concept formation. Furthermore, the parents' perceptions about their sons centered on the notion that their academic potential was just as important as their social and emotional development, and that all valued areas could be addressed by increasing rigor and efforts towards motivating and engaging them in school through their strengths and interests.

The study's findings intersect conceptions of giftedness and how they influence perceptions about gifted boys to arrive at poignant conclusions regarding the complexities of designing adequate curriculum and instructions for gifted learners. I found that the boys in this study wanted to feel a part of the classroom while also desiring to have their academic needs

met. It presents a quandary for educators to balance making students feel included in the curriculum and instruction when there are so many needs that must be met. However, these participants possessed a clear understanding about how they wanted instruction designed; a voice for which their teachers should heed.

Overall, the boys preferred to learn through active engagement strategies, project-based design methods, and inquiry-based discovery while having time with like-minded peers. Their preferences mirrored much of what I observed their GT classes to be designed, which they overwhelmingly stated was their favorite class. I found in their other classes, there was not much of an academic space for them and their preferences for learning, including those influenced by assumed gender binaries, were hit-and-miss. I did not believe this was because teachers intentionally designed curriculum that promoted for more feminine ways of learning. Instead, I interpreted the lack of these interrogated spaces was due from not understanding the needs of gifted learners or a concerted emphasis on remediation of skill deficits. Again, it becomes complicated to design curriculum for boys when, really, gender is socially constructed and how boys situate themselves as learners may be different for each person. Kumashiro (2012) posits that “parallel arguments have been made by research that examines the ways in which curriculum promotes social-class consciousness, gender consciousness or other markers of difference in the United States” (p. 35). In this case, how schools promote more equitable spaces for gifted students begins with allowing gifted students a voice about the curriculum and instructional preferences for learning (Watts, 2020; Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002).

Equally important, boys need affordances to communicate their needs in the same ways that girls are allowed to express themselves. This was not the case for some boys in this study. I observed them be treated differently than their female classmates when allowed to show

frustration or anxiety. Gender differences became apparent when the girls were given time and space to cry or become upset, but the boys in this study who experienced frustrations or anger were not afforded the same opportunities to manage their own behaviors. As mentioned in the literature review, Preckel et al. (2015) found similar concerns with how teachers employ gendered assumptions to address boys' and girls' behaviors. Changing viewpoints involves educating teachers about how to best support the needs of all students and erasing the assumptions that all students must prescribe and be treated according to traditional gendered roles (Farrell, 2015; Orr, 2011).

Furthermore, I found that the biggest struggles that teachers faced in designing equitable curriculum stemmed from two issues in teaching. The first issue was their lack of understanding about giftedness, which transcended into a lack of developing extended learning opportunities for high-ability learners. The second issue was their feelings of being bounded to mandated curriculum and state standards and the push for more intense remediation and interventions for struggling students. The notion that educators must teach the academic standards to all students in their grade level poses uncomfortable moral decision-making when working with children who already know the grade level content. For some teachers, asking them to let go of teaching various standards for some children makes them feel as though they are not doing their job as educators. However, Delisle and Galbraith (2002) poses a greater problem when teachers do not adjust their curriculum to meet higher level of needs for some students. They contend, "Gifted children, who often receive curriculum and instruction that is unchallenging and lacking in rigor and creative appeal, have come to be seen as the source of their own difficulties" (Delisle and Galbraith, 2002, p. 173). In other words, the frustrations from lack of academic challenge can result in negative behaviors such as misbehaviors, boredom, and little work completion motivation, or connection to learning. These behaviors cause gifted students to develop poor

work or study habits and often provoke teachers to assign punishments or negative consequences to the presumed misbehaviors (Johnsen and Kendrick, 2005; Delisle and Galbraith, 2002). In my study, some students expressed that they felt their frustrations about their academic learning environments would never be resolved, while others felt misunderstood and corrected for behaviors that may have resulted from their unmet learning needs. Respectively, teachers also felt the frustrations for gifted students' behaviors and perceived lack of interest in school subjects.

I asked the parent participants how they felt the school curriculum and instruction should be designed to address their son's needs. I found the overall discussions highlighted more efforts to provide challenging, engaging, exploratory methods regardless of their gender. There was no clear distinction between how they felt gifted boys versus gifted girls should be taught. They did, however, discuss that their sons needed a safe, open environment that allowed them to be themselves, make mistakes and learn to overcome them, have opportunities for social and emotional growth, and offered generous amounts of stimulation that peaked their interests in learning. Again, it was not surprising that the parents' responses to designing curriculum and instruction coincided with the boys' desires for learning. In all, I found that parents were supportive of their teachers and their schools and did not fully assume that teachers were not attempting to manage the complexities of teaching every child. They simply wished to share their perceptions for enhancing their son's educational experiences.

Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) maintain that self-concepts are formed through students' school experiences, environmental reinforcers such as achievement, and close significant others like parents. I found that examining the teachers' and parents' perceptions of giftedness and gendered construction contributed to an overall understanding about how all three



key players, boys included, intersect to socially construct views on how boys learn, develop their self-concepts, and navigate school experiences.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study presents several vital implications for curriculum and instructional application to current teaching practices. Perhaps all educators, pre-service to current educators at all levels of education, need to reflect on this kind of work to address complexly structured classrooms made up of all types of learners. Adults can learn much when children's own perceptions are expressed in ways that help to better understand these complexities of designing equitable and valued instructional environments.

### **Explore the Constructions of Giftedness with Children**

GT teachers and classroom teachers need to explain to gifted students, and their parents, what it means to be considered gifted and talented. Students and parents should understand how unique intellectual capabilities work and function within school settings. Children need to hear about their unique gifts and talents in ways that help them better understand who they are. According to Pfeiffer (2012) and Delisle & Galbraith (2002), there is not an absolute definition. However, there are common characteristics and strengths that should be explained in terms that young students understand so that they can learn to use them. They suggest that, often, educators avoid these kinds of conversations with gifted students because they do not want children to adopt a sense of elitism because of their intellectual aptitudes. Further, they contend that the problem is not the definitions adults use to explain to children about their giftedness. The problem lies with how adults use those definitions that promote a child's sense of understanding about the self and self-concept, or do the opposite; they promote a sense of hierarchy of thinking, or worse, devalue them as humans because the emphasis is on their intellect— not the person (O'Connor, 2011; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). However, avoiding the responsibility to help

children discover themselves sends gifted students mixed messages. Not talking about their giftedness can send the negative perception that they are different or not accepted. Delisle and Galbraith (2002) also state that adults should avoid sending other messages telling gifted students, that “it is okay be smart, as long as you are not too smart” (p. 22). In other words, not talking about to children about their unique abilities tells them that society does not accept people when they exhibit superior intellect above others, or that to acknowledge their abilities is portrayed as being elitist.

Further, parents rely on teachers to help and support their understandings about what giftedness means and the social and emotional factors that often manifest in gifted children (Weber & Stanley, 2012; Mudrak, 2011). School districts should work to increase awareness and information about giftedness so that the adults in children’s lives can feel supported, and in turn, support teachers and their children with the many needs of gifted children (Weber & Stanley, 2012). These conversations should begin when a teacher or parent recognizes that a student demonstrates unique intellectual characteristics common among gifted children.

In the case of all the boys in this study, I found that they admired their gifted positioning in schools, but some preferred not to be called “gifted” or pointed out that they were “smart” because it made them feel uncomfortable to be defined as different in any way from their peers. According to Rentzsch et al. (2011) and Van Houtte (2004), these feelings tend to be common in boys. Also, they could have had a better grasp on their assumed weaknesses which were not necessarily weaknesses at all. It was the comparisons they made between what they thought they were good at versus what they were not good at, that made boys some question whether they were really gifted at all (Marsh, 1990a; 1990b). Connor, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, stated that he felt all students are really gifted but that some just did not want to be in the program. Josh, 4<sup>th</sup> grade often felt frustrated when his peers did not follow the rules, and Timothy, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, felt annoyed when

working with other students. Their feelings posed misunderstandings and frustrations towards their peers because they lacked understanding about their own intellectual positionings, in relation to their classmates. Less negative internalization and more open-mindedness about themselves in relation to their peers would have resulted in making these students feel more included, understood, and accepting of their peers.

### **Recognize Intersections of Gender and Ability**

Bianco et al. (2011) strongly acknowledge, as other researchers do, that teachers play essential roles in referrals and identification of gifted students, and that what they believe about students and the conceptions of giftedness decide whom they refer for GT services. Further, they argue that,

despite decades of attention to gender equity in schools, and more specifically, gender issues in gifted education, there is a limited body of research specifically examining the role that gender plays in referring students for gifted programs (p.172).

What does this mean for students who are identified or have yet to be identified as gifted? This means that, traditionally, teachers have relied on stereotypes about what giftedness is and how it manifests itself in either boys or girls. Bianco et al. (2002) found that students who did not necessarily exhibit stereotypical characteristics of either gender were more likely to be considered gifted, thus increasing their chances of referral or the teachers' beliefs that they were, in fact, gifted. How does that connect to this study? All the boys expressed interests in activities that both boys and girls typically enjoy—reading, being with friends, playing at recess, and sports. Specifically, most of the boys expressed an interest in reading, but that did not mean they liked reading class or that they enjoyed writing. Some also stated they did not like social studies or math, which could be considered uncharacteristic of masculine-preferred classes among boys.

Some participants' behavioral challenges were another major consideration. Their behaviors, according to Hamilton and Jones (2016) and Delisle and Galbraith (2002), pose concerns for some teachers when juxtaposing them with their abilities. Their negative behaviors tended to be addressed before their academic needs, when denying attention to their academic or emotional needs may have been the antecedents to their misbehaviors. Misunderstanding behavioral needs may prevent other potentially identified students from qualifying for services based on biases or stereotypes about how gender and ability intersect in young children (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). I believe the parents in my study would agree based on their wishes that their children be understood for who they are as young boys.

### **School Influences Self-Concept Formation**

The student participants discussed what they enjoyed about school and what they disliked which gave me a plethora of information about how they think and feel about their self-positionings among their peers. I also gleaned from the interviews and observations the notion that the subjects they enjoyed the most were the subjects in which they felt most competent. Likewise, the subjects some students disliked where the subjects that either they felt less successful or subjects they felt were not designed to meet their needs. Most of the boys seemed to select math as the subject that gave them a sense of high self-concept because they could master the skills easily. Even for Hunter, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, who thought that he either “got it, or he “didn’t”, liked math because of feeling challenged when he was able to solve the problems his way. The students who did not choose math as their favorite said it was because they struggled to understand the concepts easily.

On the flip side, all boys articulated that they felt they were above-level readers and that reading and reading class were too “boring” or “below level” for them. However, writing presented them with challenges. Many reported not liking writing time because it challenged

their skillsets, but not necessarily their potential capabilities. It could be that the boys in this study assumed they should be “good” at writing because they are considered gifted. Marsh’s (1990a) Frame of Reference theory demonstrated critical connections to these students’ academic self-concepts between their perceived abilities. As discussed in the literature review, the Frame of Reference model posits an internal comparison process for which each student compares his or her self-perceived math skills with his or her own self-perceived English skills (Marsh, 1990a; 1990b). I did not, however, infer that the boys in this study disliked writing because it is considered a feminine activity, as suggested in Hamilton and Roberts (2017) study on gendered stereotypes within classrooms.

Applying this theory in relation to gifted students presents several instructional considerations. First, teachers need to acknowledge that students make connections between their school achievements and self-concepts. It is important to deepen one’s understanding that students compare their strengths, especially the skills that teachers value the most, to their presumed weakness which really may not be weaknesses at all. Further, when students feel successful in one subject, their self-concepts improve and their motivations for achievement follows. However, when students perceive they have weaknesses, their self-concept suffers and so do their levels of effort.

Students in this study felt no connections to their reading class because they did not see the value of the materials, thus making them feel that teachers did not value their learning levels. Many students did sense the value of math, however, because this subject made them feel confident in their academic abilities when they were challenged appropriately. The few students who did not value math correlated their feelings to their lack of confidence in mastering mathematical concepts. Hence, students’ self-concepts are positively formed when their learning needs are met. They need help growing their skillsets rather than feeling that because they are

already high-level readers that they should be self-managing their own learning in reading class. I am not suggesting this was, in fact, occurring. Instead, I am giving voice to these students who were asking for different opportunities to make reading class more inclusive and engaging. Their parent's responses indicated they wanted the same support and consideration for their sons, and they expressed value in increasing their child's self-confidence through increased challenges (Johnsen & Kendrick, 2005).

### **Open Spaces for Students' Voices**

The overarching goal for this work was to give gifted boys' a voice about their school experiences, and to understand how school plays an essential role in developing their self-concepts as learners. Kumashiro (2012) believes that schooling greatly influences who we are as individuals and the ways of making sense of who we are. If educational experiences play such vital roles in one's self-development, it stands to reason that those actively participating in their own educational experiences should have a say about how it works and helps them to develop their whole person. Teachers need to acknowledge that the same holds true for young children. Students should participate in developing their learning targets and express their preferred methods of instruction. Their accountability increases to achieve those targets and they become more mindful of the roles they play in their own learning. As research suggested in my pilot study, students can provide useful and unique insights about how to improve instruction if given the opportunity to be a part of the planning process with teachers (Watts, 2020). Incorporate short questionnaires or surveys about the current methods of teachings. Work with students to practice continual reflection of their personal learning goals and preferred methods for learning. Prioritize time to learn about students' funds of knowledge so that student backgrounds, interests, learning styles, and cognitive levels are addressed through adapting curriculum and pedagogy (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017).

Implement ways of understanding the students and open spaces for conversations that value them as human beings. Through these conversations, teachers may find out things about their students they might not otherwise have known. For instance, most of the boys in this study preferred to work independently or with students with similar skills sets. Johnsen and Kendrick (2005) state that gifted students “often do more of the teaching than the learning” when teachers place them into heterogenous groups without consideration for differentiation of the lesson learning goals that increase rigor and attention to their learning needs (p. 20). Their feelings about group work may go against common teaching strategies that include grouping students on various levels of ability, so I challenge teachers to question at what cost is the notion that working in varied groups outweigh the potential for academic progress for students who often feel left behind? Perhaps, reflecting on students’ individual needs, first, may help center students at the core of pedagogical practices.

Equally important, most student participants felt it was important for their teachers to know personal aspects of their lives, such as musical or singing talents, athletic talents, or hobbies that do not always get showcased at school. By telling me that they wanted teachers to know personal things about them demonstrates their desires for personal connections with their teachers.

### **Pursue Inclusive Curriculum Design**

The question of whether schools are designing inclusive spaces for gifted children remains threaded throughout current research in gifted education (Johnsen & Kendrick, 2005). Based on this study’s findings, I speculate that many of the issues of providing proper services for gifted children in public education stems from the lack of articulated conceptions about giftedness. I pose that further discussions between teachers and their schools districts may resolve some issues about the misperceptions of giftedness, and together, perhaps they could

work to dispel the myths surrounding gifted children (i.e., gifted students will succeed in life regardless of the school services provided, or students who do well in school should automatically be considered for gifted evaluations; a myth stated by one of the teacher participants– Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). The boys in this study exemplified the need for both cohesive, inclusive, and rigorous instruction regardless of whether teachers agree that gifted students are adequately served, and perhaps better served, in specialized gifted programs, or whether the responsibility should primarily rest on the classroom teacher’s shoulders.

The participating district provides a pull-out gifted program for elementary students. This type of model is most commonly used in public schools because curriculum and instruction can be specifically developed around the gifted students, and the time provides like-minded learners an opportunity to socialize and use higher level thinking skills that may not be required in their general classrooms (Smith, 2005). All the student participants expressed their love of the GT class for those reasons but did divulge two negative aspects about leaving class to attend the program. The first issue surrounded their feelings about not wanting to be viewed as different than their peers, and the second issue was the missing work from leaving class. I asked the GT teacher at one of the participating schools about the second concern, confused as to why this issue was still a practice in schools. I found that the district policy states that students should not be punitively held accountable for missing work to attend GT, but that teachers still must verify they that the students have mastered the material. In other words, teachers have a choice as to whether students are required to complete the missing assignments, but they cannot serve negative consequences for grades or missing work. Smith (2005) contends that both issues the boys encounter are all too common across pull-out specialized programs, leaving them to love the program, but dislike the extra workload and the stigma attached to being gifted.



Another type of GT program spreading throughout public schools in the United States is a push-in model where GT specialists and teachers work collaboratively with general education teachers to help provide resources for identified and non-identified students who are working above grade level. Push-in programs are still treated as fairly new strategies for helping teachers reach students who might otherwise be left out of the academic equation. They also require time and commitment on the part of the classroom teachers and the specialists to learn together, work together, and be on the same page with what works for high-ability students (Smith, 2005). However, I pose inquiry as to whether implementing a push-in model versus a pull-out model would address the challenges the boys in this study negotiated, such as wanting more academic rigor in some classes, leaving class and making up missing work, and overall greater attention to their individual needs. Equally critical, would push-in programs leverage the opportunities or potential for identifying more students from different ethnicities and social classes, as was scarce from my sample population (Cross, 2013)? Henfield, Washington, & Owens (2010), Olszewski-Kubilius (2003), and Cross (2013) contend that push-in models can deliver encouraging benefits for gifted identification. Gifted students who traditionally leave class to attend GT programs benefit from no longer feeling isolated, pointed out, or behind on missing work when their services are provided in the general classroom. Specific to boys, remaining in their general classes minimizes the competition between their intellect and their social standings among their peers (Hébert, Corcoran, Coté, Ene, Leighton, Holmes, Padula, 2014). Additionally, classroom teachers can be provided more instructional support and on-the-job-training, or professional development, to meet the diverse needs of their students (Smith, 2005). GT specialists work directly with classroom teachers to assist with differentiation, acceleration, and maximize opportunities for all students to learn in multiple ways that engage and interest them (Cross, 2013).

Regardless of the types of programs that school utilize to address gifted students' needs, Brandts (1999) poses questions that, still today, promote equitable curriculum and decision-making: 1) "what are we doing to teach children, 2) why are we doing it this way, 3) is what we are doing working in the best interest of all learners, and 4) can we do better" (p. 15)?

Additionally, students still need to feel included in the regular education classroom through similar opportunities for curriculum differentiation afforded to other students (Johnsen & Kendrick, 2005). I challenge teachers to seek professional development that enhances understandings about giftedness, gifted students, and gifted education so that they can serve them well, academically, socially, and emotionally. And, as a former educator and administrator, I encourage teachers to allow themselves the freedom to let go of how they think they "should" be teaching and put their energies on what their students are telling and showing them they need.

### **Significance of the Study**

This ethnographic study contributes to scholarly literature in the fields of gifted and regular education and specialized programs by addressing gaps in research involving elementary-age students' personal perceptions about school. The findings and implications also serve to strengthen Marsh's theoretical framework, the Frame of Reference theory, by substantiating the claims that self-concepts are influenced by institutional practices. This study invites spaces for educators to listen to the voices of students, and their parents, about designing inclusive pedagogy for gifted students. The findings and implications also encourage topics for professional development opportunities and pre-service teacher preparation programs. Because many college teacher preparation programs do not require that pre-services teachers participate in gifted education courses, perhaps this study illuminates the needs for current educators, pre-service teachers, and higher education course instructors to pursue learning opportunities designed to increase their awareness about meeting gifted students academic, social, and

emotional needs. This study also contributes to existing, yet limited, research about parents' understanding about giftedness and about gifted children's school needs.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Certainly, the voices of students' diverse backgrounds need to be included in a similar study. While I included a large sample size in which I anticipated would be more ethnically diverse, I learned that further research with either more diverse students than those included in my study, or solely based from the voices of students who are not White, would serve as a comparative study. Although I did not intend to recruit participants from various social classes, I did seek participations from two schools with different demographics. However, it seemed as though all my student participants were from middle-class backgrounds. I did not verify this assumption for the sake of keeping a keen focus on the discussions that unfolded throughout my analysis. Further studies that include students from various social classes might present intriguing insights about their gifted positionings based on their school experiences. Finally, further studies that provide young students with opportunities for input about their school experiences and how they influence their self-concepts seems almost necessary, given the plethora of concerns about young people's wellbeing and development in public schools, and the increase in interests for embedding social and emotional learning into the K-12 curriculum.

### **Summary**

The aim of this study was to seek understandings about elementary-age boys', teachers', and parents' perceptions of giftedness and gendered ability construction. In-depth analysis through the Frame of Reference lens illuminated three central findings described in themes: the conceptions of giftedness, the perceptions of gifted boys in classroom spaces, and the complexities of curriculum and instructional design. These themes were situated through the participants groups that included the boys, their general education teachers, and their parents to

understand how each sample population understands the complicated intersections of gender and ability and their influence on self-perceptions. The findings led to practical implications for educators and the impetus for further research for the sake of improving socially constructed understandings, or mutually constructed understandings of the school experiences for young people.

## REFERENCES

- Acee, T. W., Kim, H., Kim, H. J., Kim, J-I., Chu, H-N. R., Kim, M., Cho, Y., Wicker, F. W., & The Boredom Research Group. (2010). Academic boredom in under- and over-challenging situations. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 35*, 12–27. doi: 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2009.08.002
- Anderson, G. L. (1989). Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions. *Review of Educational Research, 59*(3), 249–270. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.3102/00346543059003249>
- Andronaco, J. A., Shute, R., & McLachlan, A. (2014). Exploring asynchrony as a theoretical framework for understanding giftedness: A case of cognitive dissonance. *Roeper Review, 36*(4), 264–272. doi: 10.1080/02783193.2014.945218
- Arslan, S. & Yüksel, M. Y. (2018). An investigation of the relationship between social behavior characteristics and self-perceptions of gifted children in primary school. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists, 6*(1), 17–42. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.17478/jegys.2018.71>
- Bailey, C. L. (2011). An examination of the relationships between ego development, Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration, and the behavioral characteristics of gifted adolescents. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 5*(3), 208–222. doi: 10.1177/0016986211412180
- Bailey, L. E. & Graves, K. (2016). Gender and education. *Review of Research in Education, 40*,

682–722. doi: 10.3102/0091732X16680193

- Banister, E. M. (1999). Evolving reflexivity: Negotiating meaning of women's midlife experience. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(3), 3–23. doi: 10.1177/107780049900500101
- Barber, C. & Mueller, C. T. (2011). Social and self-perceptions of adolescents identified as gifted, learning disabled, and twice-exceptional. *Roeper Review*, 33, 109–120. doi: 10.1080/02783193.2011.554158
- Baudson, T. G. & Preckel, F. (2016). Teacher's conceptions of gifted and average-ability students on achievement-relevant dimensions. *Gifted Children Quarterly*, 60(3), 212–225. doi: 10.1177/0016986216647115
- Baudson, T. G., Fischbach, A., & Preckel, F. (2016). Teacher judgement as measures of children's cognitive ability: A multilevel analysis. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 52, 148–156. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.106/j.lindif.2014.06.001>
- Baum, S. M., Schader, R. M., & Hebert, T. P. (2014). Through a different lens: Reflecting on a strength-based, talent-focused approach for twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 58(4), 311–327. doi: 10.1177/0016986214547632
- Beach, D. (2011). On structure and agency in ethnographies of education: Examples from this special issue and more generally. *European Educational Research Journal*, 10(4), 572–582. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.2304/eerj.2011.10.4.572>
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Benbow, C. (1988). Sex differences in mathematical reasoning ability in intellectually talented preadolescents: Their nature, effects, and possible causes. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 11(2), 169–183. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00049244>

- Benny, N. & Blonder, R. (2016). Factors that promote/inhibit teaching gifted students in a regular class: Results from a professional development program for chemistry teachers. *Education Research International*, 2016, 1–11. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2016/2742905>
- Berekashvili, N. (2012). The role of gender-based perceptions in teacher-student interaction. *Psychology of language and communication*, 16(1), 39–51.  
doi: 10.2478/v10057-012-004-x
- Bergold, S., Wendt, H., Kasper, D., & Steinmayr, R. (2016). Academic competencies: Their interrelatedness and gender differences at their high end. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(3), 439–449. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000140>
- Bernard, M. E., Vernon, A., Terjesen, M., & Kurasaki, R. (2013). Self-acceptance in the education and counseling of young people. In M. Bernard (Ed.), *The strength of acceptance* (pp. 155–192). New York: Springer. Retrieved from [https://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.1007/978-1-4614-6806-6\\_10](https://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.1007/978-1-4614-6806-6_10)
- Bianco, M., Harris, B., Garrison-Wade, D., & Leech, N. (2011). Gifted girls: Gender bias in gifted referrals. *Roeper Review*, 33(3), 170–181. doi: 10.1080/02783193.2011.580500
- Brandts, L. (1999). Professional voices/classroom portrait. *Primary Voices*, 7(3), 9–15. Retrieved from <http://argo.library.okstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/221690975?accountid=4117>
- Brayboy, B. M. (2000). The Indian and the researcher: Tales from the field. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(4), 415–426. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/095183900413368>
- Bristol, T. J. (2015). Teaching boys: Towards a theory of gender-relevant pedagogy. *Gender and*

- Education*, 27(1), 53–68. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.986067>
- Butler-Kisber, L. & Poldma, T. (2010). The power of visual approaches in qualitative inquiry: The use of collage making and concept mapping in experiential research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(2). Retrieved from [www.jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/197/196](http://www.jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/197/196)
- Carvalho, R. G. G. (2016). Gender differences in academic achievement: The mediating role of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 94, 54–58.  
doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2016.01.011
- Chan, D. W. (2002). Perceptions of giftedness and self-concept among junior secondary students in Hong Kong. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 31(4), 243–252. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/argo.library.okstate.edu/docview/204646003/fulltextPDF/98F23BC48F1740A9PQ/1?accountid=4117>
- Cleveland, K. P. (2011). *Teaching Boys Who Struggle in School*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Connell, R.W. (1996). Teaching the boys: New research on masculinity, and gender strategies for schools. *Teachers College Record*, 98(2), 206–235. Retrieved from <http://www.eduhi.at/dl/teachingboys.pdf>
- Cross, J. R. (2013). Gifted education as a vehicle for enhancing social equality. *Roeper Review*, 35, 115–123. doi: 10.1080/02783193.2013.766962
- Cross, T. L. & Coleman, L. J. (2014). School-based conception of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 37(1), 94–103. doi: 10.1177/0162353214521522
- Crotty, M. *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Czeschlik, T. & Rost, D. H. (1994). Socio-emotional adjustment in elementary school boys and girls: Does giftedness make a difference. *Roeper Review*, 16(4), 294–297. Retrieved



from

<http://argo.library.okstate.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&dbaph&AN=9411284076&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Daniels, H., Creese, A., Hey, V., Leonard, D., & Smith, M. (2001). Gender and learning: Equity, equality and pedagogy. *Gender and Learning*, 16(3), 112–115.

doi: 10.1111/1467\_9604.00201

De Corte, E. (2013). Giftedness considered from the perspective of research on learning and instruction. *High Ability Studies*, 24(1), 3–19. doi: 10.1080/13598139.2013.780967

Deku, P. (2013). Teacher nomination of gifted and talented children: A study of basic and senior high school students in the central region of Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(18). Retrieved from

[https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/32182335/Teacher\\_Nomination\\_of\\_Gifted\\_and\\_Talented\\_Children\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Basic\\_and\\_Senior\\_High\\_Schools\\_in\\_the\\_Central\\_Region\\_of\\_Ghana.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1556576270&Signature=kneR8Z%2BrpwdJK0Vp%2BqysX4tnBVo%3D&response-content\\_disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DInternational\\_Institute\\_of\\_Science\\_Tec hn.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/32182335/Teacher_Nomination_of_Gifted_and_Talented_Children_A_Study_of_Basic_and_Senior_High_Schools_in_the_Central_Region_of_Ghana.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1556576270&Signature=kneR8Z%2BrpwdJK0Vp%2BqysX4tnBVo%3D&response-content_disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DInternational_Institute_of_Science_Tec hn.pdf)

Delisle, J. & Galbraith, J. (2002). *When gifted kids don't have all the answers*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (1998). *Writing ethnographic field notes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Endephols-Ulpe, M. & Ruf, H. (2006). Primary school teachers' criteria for the identification of gifted pupils. *High Ability Studies*, 16(2), 219–228. doi: 10.1080/13598130600618140

Eremeeva, G. R., Bikbulatov, R. R., & Baranova, A. R. (2016). Specificity of teachers' activity

- in intellectually gifted students' education. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, 20(2), 76–81. Retrieved from <http://argo.library.okstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1827844945?accountid=4117>
- Evans, J. (1995). *Feminist theory today*. New York: Sage.
- Falch, T. & Naper, L. R. (2013). Educational evaluation schemes and gender gaps in student achievement. *Economics and Education Review*, 36, 12–25. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2013.05.002>
- Farrell, F. (2016). Learning to listen: Boys' gender narratives. Implications for theory and practice. *Education + Training*, 58(3), 283–297. doi: 10.1108/ET-06-2015-0046
- Fecho, B. (2004). *“Is this English”: Race, language, and culture in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Flewitt, R. (2005). Conducting research with young children: some ethical considerations. *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6), 553–565. doi: 10.1080/03004430500131338
- Fraiberg, A. M. (2010). “With edges of rage and despair”: Anger and the poetry of office life. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 19(3), 196–207. doi: 10.1177/1056492610366731
- Francis, B. (2000). *Boys and girls achievement. Addressing the classroom issues*. London & New York: Routledge/Falmer.
- Gallagher, J. J. (2015). Peer acceptance of highly gifted children in elementary school. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 38(1), 51–57. doi: 10.1177/0162353214565549
- Grills, S. (1998). *Doing ethnographic research: Fieldwork settings*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hamilton, P. L. & Jones, L. (2016). Illuminating the ‘boy problem’ from children’s and teachers’ perspectives: A pilot study. *Education 3–13*, 44(3), 241–254. doi: 10.1080/03004279.2014.903987

- Hamilton, P. & Roberts, B. (2017). Man-up, go and get an ice-pack. Gendered stereotypes and binaries within the primary classroom: A thing of the past. *Education 3 -13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years of Education*, 45(1), 122-134.  
doi: 10.1080/03004279.2015.10598771
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*.  
London: Tavistock.
- Händel, M., Vialle, W. & Ziegler, A. (2013). Student perceptions of high-achieving classmates. *High Ability Studies*, 24(2), 99–114. Retrieved from  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13598139.2013.843139>
- Heath, S. B. & Street, B. V. (2008). On ethnography: Approaches to language and literacy research. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hébert, T. P., Corcoran, J. A., Coté, J. M., Ene, M. C., Leighton, E. A., Holmes, A. M., Padula, D. D. (2014). It's safe to be smart. *Gifted Child Today*, 37(2), 95–101.  
doi: 10.1177/1076217514520966
- Henfield, M. S., Washington, A. R., & Owens, D. (2010). To be or not to be gifted: The choice for a new generation. *Gifted Child Today*, 32(2), 17–25.  
doi: 10.1177/107621751003300207
- Henry, N. E. (1958). *Education for the gifted* (Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education; 57th, Pt. 2). Chicago: NSSE: Distributed by the University of Chicago Press.
- Higa, K. (2010). Art in alternative schools. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Oklahoma State University.
- Hollingworth, L. S. (1942). *Children above 180 IQ Stanford Binet: Origin and development*.  
Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY: World Book Company. Retrieved from  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/13574-000>

- Horsch, P., Chen, J-Q, & Wagner, S. L. (2002). The responsive classroom approach: A caring, respectful school environment as a context for development. *Education and Urban Society*, 34(3), 365–383. doi: 10.1177/0013124502034003006
- Humble, Á. M. & Radina, M. E. (2019). *How qualitative data analysis happens*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Issacs, D. (2017). Children in research. *Journal of Pediatrics & Child Health*, 53(9), 831–832. doi: 10.1111/jpc.13679
- Jacobs, J. E. & Weisz, V. (1994). Gender stereotypes: Implications for gifted education. *Roeper Review*, 16(3), 152. Retrieved from <https://doi.org.10.1080/02783199409553562>
- Jenkins, L. N. & Demaray, M. K. (2015). Indirect effects in the peer victimization-academic achievement relation: The role of academic self-concept and gender. *Psychology in the schools*, 52(3), 235–247. doi: 10.1002/pits.21824
- Johnsen, S. K. & Kendrick, J. (2005). *Teaching strategies in gifted education*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Johnson, C. & Gooliaff, S. (2013). Teaching to strengths: Engaging young boys in learning. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 21(4), 28–31. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.argo.library.okstate.edu/docview/1326254026/fulltextPDF/E08EEEEAEFAD649D3PQ/1?accountid=4117>
- Juelskjaer, M. (2008). Resisting and committing to schooling: Intersections of masculinity and academic position. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 21(1), 48–63. doi: 10.1080/09518390701768799
- Kadioğlu, A. H. (2018). Gifted children metaphor from the perspectives of teachers and parents. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 6(2), 30–42. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.17478/JEGYS.2018.76>

- Kagan, D. (1992). Implications of research on teachers' beliefs. *Educational Psychologist*, 27, 65–90. doi: 10.1207/s15326985ep2701\_6
- Kanevsky, L. (2011). Deferential differentiation: What types of differentiation do students want. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 55(4), 279–299. doi: 10.1177/0016986211422098
- Kaya, F. (2015). Teachers' conceptions of giftedness and special needs of gifted students. *Education and Science*, 40(177), 59–74. doi: 10.15390/EB.2015.2885
- Kerr, B. A., Vuyk, A., & Rea, C. (2012). Gendered practices in the education of gifted girls and boys. *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(7), 647–655. doi: 10.1002/pits.21627
- Kohen-Mass. J. (2016). Understanding gender differences in thinking styles of gifted children. *Roeper Review*, 38(3), 185–198. doi: 10.1080/02783193.2016.1183737
- Koshy, V., Smith, C. P., & Brown, J. (2017). Parenting 'gifted and talented' children in urban areas: Parents' voices. *Gifted Education International*, 33(1). doi: 10.1177/0261429414535426
- Kronborg, L. (2014). Ruth May Strang: A leading advocacy for the gifted. In A. Robinson & J. L. Jolly (Eds.), *A century of contributions to gifted education* (pp. 244–248). New York: Routledge.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2012). *Bad teacher: How blaming teachers distort the bigger picture*. New York: College Teachers Press.
- Kurtz, H., Lloyd, S., Harwin, A., Chen, V., & Furuya, Y. (2019). Gifted education: Results of a national survey. Education Week Research Center. Bethesda, MD. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/media/2019/11/25/gt%20survey%20report-final%2011.25.19.pdf>
- Kuttner, P., Sousanis, N., Weaver-Hightower, M. B. (2018). How to draw comics the scholarly way: Creating comics-based research in the academy. In P. Leavy (Ed.) *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 396–423). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- Laine, S., Kuusisto, E., & Tirri, K. (2016). Finnish teachers' conceptions of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 39(2), 151–167. doi: 10.1177/0162353216640936
- Le Compte, M. D. & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research: The ethnographer's toolkit (Second Edition)*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Lee, L. (1999). Teachers' conceptions of gifted and talented young children. *High Ability Studies*, 10(2), 183–196. doi: 10.1080/1359813990100205
- Legewie, J. & DiPrete, T. A. (2012). School context and the gender gap in educational achievement. *American Sociological Review*, 77(3), 463–485.  
doi: 10.1177/0003122412440802
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous. Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In D. D. Williams (Ed.), *Naturalistic evaluation: New directions for evaluation* (pp. 73–84). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Luttrell, W. (Ed.). (2010). *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Marsh, H. W. & Shavelson, R. (1985). Self-concept: Its multifaceted, hierarchical structure *Educational Psychologist*, (20), 3, 107–123. doi [10.1207/s15326985ep2003\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2003_1)
- Marsh, H. W., Smith, I. D., & Barnes, J. (1985). Multidimensional self-concepts: Relations with sex and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 581–596.  
Retrieved from  
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/argo.library.okstate.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=c2f27301-009a-4c8f-951a-3c1f2e027189%40sessionmgr4008>
- Marsh, H. W. (1986). Verbal and math self-concepts: An internal/external frame of reference

- model. *American Educational Research Journal*, 23, 129–149. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.3102/00028312023001129>
- Marsh, H. W., Byrne, B. M., Shavelson, R. (1988). A multifaceted academic self-concept: Its hierarchal structure and its relation to academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 366–380. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=e0aecacb-653f-4647-8eac-edf89b754967%40sdc-v-sessmgr04>
- Marsh, H. W. (1990a). Influences of internal and external frames of reference on the formation of math and English self-concepts. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(1), 107–116. doi: 0022-0663/90/\$00.75
- Marsh, H. W. (1990b). The structure of academic self-concept: The Marsh/Shavelson model. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(4), 623–636.
- Marsh, H. W. (1992). Content Specificity of relations between academic achievement and academic self-concept. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84(1), 35–42. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.1037/0022-0663.84.1.35>
- Marsh, H. W. & Craven, R. (1997). Academic self-concept: Beyond the dustbowl. In G. Phye (Ed.), *Handbook of classroom assessment: Learning, achievement, and adjustment* (pp. 131–198). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Marsh, H. W. & Hau, K-T. (2004). Explaining paradoxical relations between academic self-concepts and achievements: Cross-cultural generalizability of the internal/external frame of reference predictions across 26 countries. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(1), 56–67. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.96.1.56
- Marsh, H. W. (2007). *Self-concept theory, measurement and research into practice: The role of self-concept in educational psychology*. Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society.

- Marsh, H. W., Kuyser, H., Seaton, M., Parker, P. D., Morin, A. J. S., Möller, J., & Adduljabbar, A. S. (2014). Dimensional comparison theory: An extension of the internal/external frame of reference effect on academic self-concept formation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 39*, 326–341. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2014.08.003>
- Martin, K., Goldwasser, M., & Harris, E. (2017). Developmental education's impact on students' academic self-concept and self-efficacy. *Journal of College Student Retention, 18*(4), 401–414. doi: 10.1177//1521025115604850
- Matthews, G. J., Foster, J. F., Yamin, T. S., Neber, H., Linke, S. K., & Vidergor, H. E. (2010). Being smart about gifted education: A guidebook for educators and parents. *Gifted and Talented International, 25*(1), 129–131. doi: 10.1080/1532276.2010.11673565
- Matthews, M. S., Ritchotte, J. A., & Jolly, J. L. (2014). What's wrong with giftedness. Parents' perceptions of the gifted label. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 24*(4), 372–393. doi: 10.1080/09620214.2014.990225
- McCoach, D. B. & Siegle, D. (2007). What predicts teachers' attitudes toward the gifted. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 51*(3), 246–255. doi: 10.1177/0016986207302719
- Mega, C., Ronconi, L., & De Beni, R. (2013). What makes a good student. How emotions, self-regulated learning, and motivation contribute to academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 106*(1), 121–131. doi: 10.1037/a0033546
- Miller, E. M. (2009). The effect of training in gifted education on elementary classroom teachers' theory-based reasoning about the concept of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 33*(1), 65–105. doi: 10.1177/016235320903300104
- Moon, T. R. & Brighton, C. M. (2008). Primary teachers' conceptions of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 31*(4), 447–480. doi: 10.4219/jeg-2008-793



- Morawska, A. & Sanders, M. R. (2008). Parenting gifted and talented children: What are the key child behavior and parenting issues. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 42(9), doi: 10.1080/00048670802277271
- Morawska, A. & Sanders, M. R. (2009). Parenting gifted and talented children: Conceptual and empirical foundations. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 53(3), 63–173.  
doi: 10.1177/0016986209334962
- Mudrak, J. (2011). ‘He was born that way’: Parental constructions of giftedness. *High Ability Studies*, 22(2), 199–217. doi: 10.1080/13598139.2011.622941
- Neu, T. W. & Weinfeld, R. (2007). *Helping boys succeed in school*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press Inc.
- O’Connor, J. (2012). Is it good to be gifted. The social construction of the gifted child. *Children & Society*, 26, 293–303. doi: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00341.x
- Ogurlu, Ü. & Yaman, Y. (2013). Guidance needs of gifted and talented children’s parents. *Turkish Journal of Giftedness and Education*, 3(2), 81–94. Retrieved from [http://www.tuzed.org/publications/cilt3/sayi2/2013\\_3\\_2\\_ogurlu\\_yaman.pdf](http://www.tuzed.org/publications/cilt3/sayi2/2013_3_2_ogurlu_yaman.pdf)
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2003). Do we change gifted children to fit gifted programs, or do we change gifted programs to fit gifted children? *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 26(4), 304–313. Retrieved from <http://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.4219/jeg-2003-308>
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P. & Thomson, D. (2015). Talent development as a framework for gifted education. *Gifted Child Today*, 38(1), 49–59. doi: 10.1177/1076217514556531
- Orr, A. J. (2011). Gendered capital: Childhood socialization and the “boy crisis” in education. *Sex Roles*, 65, 271–284. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-0016-3
- Parjares, M. F. (1992). Teachers’ beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy

- construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 307–332. Retrieved from <http://argo.library.okstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.argo.library.okstate.edu/docview/62841310?accountid=4117>
- Parker, P. D., Marsh, H. W., Lüdtke, O., & Trautwein, U. (2013). Differential school contextual effects for math and English: Integrating the big-fish-little-pond effect and the internal/external frame of reference. *Learning and Instruction*, 23, 78–89. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2012.07.001>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Pfeiffer, S. I. (2012). Current perspectives on the identification and assessment of gifted students. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 30(1), 3–9.  
doi:10.1177/0734289114228192
- Pinxten, M., Wouters, S., Preckel, F., Niepel, C., De Fraine, B., & Verschueren, K. (2015). The formation of academic self-concept in elementary education: a unifying model for external and internal comparisons. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 41, 124–132.  
Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2014.12.003>
- Preckel, F., Baudson, T. G., Krolak-Schwerdt, S., & Glock, S. (2015). Gifted and maladjusted. Implicit attitudes and automatic associations related to gifted children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(6), 1160–1184.  
doi: 10.3102/0002831215896413
- Read, B. (2008). ‘The world must stop when I’m talking: gender and power relations in primary teachers’ classrooms. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29(6), 609–621.  
doi: 10.1080/01425690802423288
- Rentzsch, K., Schutz, A., & Schroder-Abe, M. (2011). Being labeled nerd: Factors that influence the social acceptance of high-achieving students. *The Journal of Experimental*

- Education*, 79(2), 143–168. doi: 10.180/00220970903292900
- Roberts, H. (2000). Listening to children: And hearing them. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (pp. 225–240). London: Palmer.
- Rothenbusch, S., Zettler, I., Voss, T., Lösch, T., & Trautwein, U. (2016). Exploring reference group effects on teachers' nominations of gifted students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 108(6), 883–897. doi: 0022-0663/16/S12.00
- Rowell, J. (2011). Carrying my family with me: Artifacts as emic perspective. *Qualitative Research*, 11(3), 331–346. doi: 10.1177/1468794111399841
- Roznowski, M., Reith, J., & Hong, S. (2000). A further look at youth intellectual giftedness and its correlates: Values, interests, performance, and behavior. *Intelligence*, 28(2), 87–113. doi: 10.1016/S0160-2896(99)00032-x
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *Coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Saunders-Stewart, K. S., Walker, C. L., & Shore, B. M. (2013). How do parents and teachers of gifted students perceive group work in classrooms. *Gifted and Talented International*, 28(1–2), 99–109. doi: 10.1080/15332276.2013.11678406
- Seaton, M., Marsh, H. W., & Craven, R. G. (2010). Big-fish-little-pond effect: Generalizability and moderation—two sides of the same coin. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47, 390–433. doi: 10.3102/0002831209350493
- Shalvik, E. & Rankin, R. J. (1990). Math, verbal, and general academic self-concept: The internal/external frame of reference model and gender differences in self-concept structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(3), 546–554.
- Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research*, 46(3), 407–441. Retrieved from

<https://doi-org.argo.library.okstate.edu/10.3102/00346543046003407>

- Shepard, S. J., Nicpon, M. F., Haley, J. T., Lind, M., & Liu, W. M. (2011). Masculine norms, school attitudes, and psychosocial adjustment among gifted boys. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 12*(2), 181–187. doi: 10.1037/10019945
- Siegle, D., Moore, M., Mann, R. L., & Wilson, H. E. (2010). Factors that influence in-service and preservice teachers' nominations of students for gifted and talented programs. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 33*(3), 337–360.  
doi: 10.1177/016235321003300303
- Skelton, C. & Francis, B. (2012). The 'renaissance child': High achievement and gender in late modernity. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16*(4), 441–459.  
doi: 10.1080/13603116.2011.555098
- Sleeter, C. E. & Carmona, J. F. (2017). *Un-standardizing curriculum: Multicultural teaching in the standards-based classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Smith, E. (2010). Underachievement, failing youth, and moral panics. *Evaluation & Research in Education, 23*(1), 37–49. doi: 10.1080/09500791003605102
- Sternberg, R. J. (2005). The WICS model of giftedness. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* (pp. 327–342). New York: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610455.019>
- Solow, R. (2001). Parents' conceptions of giftedness. *Gifted Child Today, 24*(2), 14–22.  
doi: 10.4219/gct-2001-533
- Subotnik, R. F., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Worrell, F. C. (2011). Rethinking giftedness and gifted education: A proposed direction forward based on psychological science. *Psychological Science in Public Interest, 12*, 3–54. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1529100611418056>

- Swiatek, M. A. (2004). Gifted students' self-perceptions of ability in specific subject domains: Factor structure and relationship with above-level test scores. *Roeper Review*, 27(2), 104–109. doi: 10.1080/027831905009554298
- Sword, L. (2001). *Psycho-social needs: Understanding the emotional, intellectual, and social uniqueness of growing up gifted*. Victoria, Australia: Gifted and Creative Services.
- Tenorio, R. (2010). Curriculum is everything that happens: An interview with veteran teacher Rita Tenorio. In T. Burant, L. Christensen, K. D. Salas, & S. Walters. (Eds.), *The New Teacher Book* (pp. ). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Terman, L. (1925). *Genetic studies of genius: Vol. 1. Mental and physical traits of a thousand gifted children*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Thorne, B. (2010). *Gender and play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. doi: 10.1177/1077800410383121
- Tucker, B. & Hafenstein, N. L. (1997). Psychological intensities in young gifted children. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 41(3), 66–75. doi: 10.1177/001698629704100302
- U. S. Department of Education. (2018). *Laws & Guidance/ Elementary and Secondary Education: Title IX–General Provisions* (Sec. 9101–Definitions). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg107.html>
- Van Houtte, M. (2004). Why boys achieve less at school than girls: The difference between boys' and girls' academic culture. *Educational Studies*, 30(2), 159–173. doi: 10.1080/0305569032000159804
- VanTassel-Baska, J. (2003). Selecting instructional strategies for gifted learners. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 36, 1–12. Retrieved from

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/224044187?pq-origsite=gscholar>

- Virkkunen, J., Newnham, D. S., Nleya, P., & Engestroöm. (2012). Breaking the vicious cycle of categorizing students in school. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 1(3–4), 183–193. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10/1016/j.lcsi.2012.08.003>
- Watts, J. (2018). *What is giftedness: A quest for identification of gifted and talented students*. Unpublished manuscript, Oklahoma State University.
- Watts, J. (2020). “Ask me and I will tell you”: Gifted boys’ perceptions of self and school. *Gifted Child Today*, 43(1), 46–54. doi: 10.1177/1076217519880579.
- Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The “boy turn” in research on gender and education. *Review of Educational Research*, 73(4), 471–498. doi: 10.3102/80346543073004471
- Weber, C. L. & Stanley, L. (2012). Educating parents of gifted children. *Gifted Child Today*, 35(2), 128–136. doi: 10.1177/1076217512437734
- Wessling, S. (2012, July 17). The role of parents in identifying gifted children [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://sukiwessling.com/2012/07/the-role-of-parents-in-identifying-gifted-children/>
- Whitmore, J. R. (1980). *Giftedness, conflict, and underachievement*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Williams, J. E. & Montgomery, D. (1995). Using frame of reference theory to understand the self-concept of academically able students. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 18(4), 400–409. doi: 10.1177/01623532950/800404
- Wolcott, H. F. (1990). Making a study “more ethnographic”. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19(1), 44–72. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.library.okstate.edu/10.1177/08912419001900003>
- Wolcott, H. F. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Woods, R. (2013). *Children’s moral lives: An ethnographic and psychological approach*. The

Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley–Blackwell.

Worrell, F. C. & Erwin, J. O. (2011). Best practices in identifying students of gifted and talented education programs. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 27(4), 319–340.

doi: 10.1080/15377903.2011.615817

Wroblaski, K. (2011). School furniture reflects function. *Buildings*, 105(2), 28.

Retrieved from

<http://argo.library.okstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.argo.library.okstate.edu/docview/853144421?accountid=4117>

## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Child Participants**

#### **Individual Interview Questions**

1. Describe yourself (Tell me about yourself, i.e., how old are you and what grade are you enrolled in). What kinds of things do you like to do when you are not at school?  
(What interests do students have)?
2. What kinds of things do you not like to do when you are at school?
3. What is your favorite subject? Why?
4. What are your favorite things to do at school? Why?
5. What are your least favorite things to do at school? Why?
6. How do you learn best?
7. What is your best memory of your school experience?
8. What challenges or struggles do you face at school, if any?
9. Do you like being in the gifted program? If so, what do you like about it? If not, what do you not like about it?
10. What do you think it means to be considered gifted at school?
11. If there was something you wished your teachers knew about you as a student in their class, what would it be? Why?



## Appendix B: Teacher Participants

### Teacher Questionnaire

- 1.) Describe your educational (professional) background?
  - a) years of professional experience
  - b) professional training in teaching gifted and talented students
  - c) experience with teaching gifted students (specifically male gifted students)
- 2.) How do you conceptualize giftedness? (i.e., what do you think gifted and talented means?)
- 3.) What are your thoughts/impressions about students you have taught that are/were identified as gifted? What experience or knowledge has influenced what you think about gifted students?
- 4.) What characteristics/traits do you look for when determining whether a student is considered gifted or to refer a student for a gifted and talent evaluation?
- 5.) Which adjectives can best describe a student who is considered gifted?
- 6.) In what ways, if any, do gifted students differ from their peers?
- 7.) How do gifted boys differ, if so, from gifted girls in the following areas:
  - a) academics
  - b) motivation to learn
  - c) classroom and social behaviors
  - d) peer social groups
- 8.) How do you think gifted students' academic, social, and emotional needs can be best met in school settings? Are these needs different/same for gifted boys and gifted girls?
- 9.) Do you have anything else you would like to share on this topic?

## **Appendix C: Parent Participants**

### **Parent Questionnaire**

- 1.) Please describe what your experience has been like parenting a child who has been identified as gifted.
- 2.) How/when did you first learn that your child has exceptional abilities?
- 3.) How would you conceptualize giftedness? (i.e., what do you think gifted and talented means?)
- 4.) What are your thoughts/impressions about gifted children?
- 5.) What would you consider to be your child's strengths and challenges (i.e., academic, social, emotional)?
- 6.) Have you received training to learn more about gifted children (i.e., professional training, read books, parent groups, etc.)?
- 7.) How do you think gifted male students' academic, social, and emotional needs can be best met in school settings?
- 8.) What do you think teachers can do to help your gifted child at school (i.e., academics, social skills, emotional needs)
- 9.) What are your personal and academic goals for your gifted child?
- 10.) Do you have anything else you would like to share on this topic?



## Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 07/22/2019  
Application Number: ED-19-86  
Proposal Title: Elementary Gifted Boys' Perceptions of Self and School

Principal Investigator: Jessica Watts Co-  
Investigator(s):  
Faculty Adviser: Erin Dyke Project  
Coordinator:  
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Expedited Expedited Category:

### Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):

Approved Approval Date: 07/22/19

---

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

**This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.**

The final versions of any recruitment, consent, and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a status report to the IRB when requested
3. Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
4. Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the OSU IRB and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.

5. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,  
Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Jessica A. Watts

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: ELEMENTARY GIFTED BOYS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND SCHOOL

Major Field: Education with a concentration in Curriculum Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy with an concentration in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Administration and Supervision at Texas Womans University, Denton, Texas in 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Education in Special Education at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2000.

Experience:

Graduate Teaching Assistant for Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma from August, 2017 to May, 2020.

Assistant Principal for Stillwater Public Schools, Stillwater, Oklahoma from August, 2000 to June, 2017.

Special Education Teacher for Lewisville Independent School District, Lewisville, Texas from August, 2000 to May, 2008.

Professional Memberships:

American Educational Studies Association (AESA)

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)