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The Underrepresentation of Latin@ Students in Gifted Programs: Teachers' Perceptions of Giftedness and Its Effects in the Nomination of Potentially Gifted Latin@ Students

German Alonso Diaz Cardenas
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF LATIN@ STUDENTS IN GIFTED PROGRAMS:

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTEDNESS AND ITS EFFECTS IN THE NOMINATION

OF POTENTIALLY GIFTED LATIN@ STUDENTS

by

German Alonso Díaz Cárdenas

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ABSTRACT

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German Alonso Díaz Cárdenas
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The underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs is a serious problem that plagues public schools nationwide. Traditionally, teachers' nomination is the most frequent method used for identifying students for gifted programs. Seeking to understand how teachers' perceptions of giftedness influenced the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students, this qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with eight participants and a follow-up focus group in a Midwestern urban district. The researcher used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach as part of the analytical framework. This research identified several major findings: 1) most participants had narrow and subjective definitions of giftedness that varied based on their levels of training and teaching experience, but none of the participants' definitions were culturally inclusive. However, their conceptual definitions of giftedness did not necessarily mirror their description of robust referral and teaching practices; 2) teachers' perceptions of potentially gifted Latin@ students influenced the nomination process that varied due to their different biases and cultural models; 3) Latin@ parents were not involved in the nomination process and most teachers did not appear to value their participation. Some teachers expressed a deficit perspective of these families and students; 4) all participants increased the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students using traditional and nontraditional assessment tools; 5) three out of the four schools lacked adequate programming to meet the needs of potentially gifted Latin@ students.
 Key terms: underrepresentation, giftedness, teachers' perceptions, identification.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research project to my family. I am grateful for the sacrifices made so that I could pursue doctoral-level studies. I am cognizant that this is a privilege not accessible to all. To my mother, Ines de las Mercedes Cardenas. Thank you for instilling in me a love for learning, for her strong character, and for her unshakeable resilience to overcome adversity. You taught me that education was the only means to overcome poverty and oppression. And, although she only had the opportunity to attend two years of formal schooling, she was right! I am who I am because of you. To my wife Daisy, thank you for understanding the late nights and the time away I spent working. Thank you for your encouragement, love, and unwavering support. To my children Salem and Emaluna. I am sorry for the late nights and the times I could not play or share as much as a dad should do with both of you. You are the main reason why I did not give up in the most difficult moments. I hope that I have set a good example to inspire you to persevere towards whatever goals you may set for yourselves. To my family in Colombia, colleagues, and friends who offered me their support along the way. Finally, to the millions of immigrants that just like me left everything they had to find a better future for them and their families. I hope that my work will inspire many of them and their children to say, Si se puede! Yes, we can!

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<center>**INTRODUCTION**</center>

Overview

Are gifted programs really necessary? People often believe that gifted programs are for

the elite. The reality is that gifted programs exist to provide services to students with exceptional

abilities from diverse backgrounds whose needs are not being met by the regular curriculum

(Loveless, Farkas, & Duffett, 2008). Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that gifted

programming positively influences students' futures (Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, & Benbow,

2001; Kell, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2013; Campbell & Walberg, 2011). These longitudinal studies

have shown that gifted programs have a positive effect on students' post-secondary plans. For

example, a study conducted by Lubinski et al., (2001) found that 320 gifted students from

different backgrounds, who were identified during adolescence, receive services through the

secondary level pursued doctoral degrees at more than 50 times the base rate expectations. In a

follow-up report on the same study participants at age 38, 203 participants, or 63%, reported

holding postgraduate degrees. Of these, 142 (44%) held doctoral degrees and eight of these 142

had more than one doctoral degree. As a benchmark for this accomplishment, the authors of this

study compared these rates to the general U.S. population, noting that only approximately 2% of

the general population held a doctoral degree according to the 2010 U.S. Census. Now, the

questions remain, if gifted programs help students to advance in their quest for knowledge, why

are Latin@ students less likely to be nominated for these programs?

For decades, gifted education programs have strived to provide educational opportunities

for gifted students, nurturing and enabling them to develop their full potential. However, gifted

programs continue to face serious challenges, which include responding to accusations of serving

as a new tracking system, having to provide a valid rationale for its existence, and addressing the issue of equity. This is due to the prevailing underrepresentation of Latin@s [1]and other minority students in gifted and talented programs (Yoon & Gentry, 2009; Ford, 2014). The factors contributing to the latest are many and very complex. This includes the use of rigid identification practices, the existence of institutionalized racism, teachers' bias, limited learning opportunities for students of color, and the existence of deficit thinking models which devalue the cultural and linguistic capital that minority students bring to the classroom (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). For this study, I will be looking at the role that teachers play in the identification and nomination of Latin@ students for gifted programs. Failing to address this problem as well as whether or not teachers exacerbate underrepresentation could bring devastating consequences for students with high potential, who intentionally or unintentionally are being denied access to gifted and talented programs.

According to Ford (2011), lack of access to high-end learning opportunities limits students' academic potential, as well as the economic well-being of this nation, adding to the existing social and economic inequality. Thus, the current level of economic and social inequality among Latin@, African Americans, and Native Americans in the United States is a problem that directly correlates with the disparity that exists in whether or not students from these ethnic groups have access to rich educational opportunities (Worrell, 2011). Socially, this problem is even worse than what many might expect, especially because many of the talents,

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[1] Throughout this paper, I will make use of the hybrid spelling "Latin@" - rather than "Latina", "Latinx", or "Latin". While the Spanish language generally takes on masculine and feminine forms, I hesitate to be complicit with its lexical sexism and simply declare inclusion of the two binary gendered forms through the "@" sign. The term Latin@ is also linguistically inclusive and can be used to describe a person who speaks a Romance language (i.e. Italian, Spanish, French, and Portuguese) or their cultural heritage comes from any country that speaks any of those languages (Wallerstein, (2015).

social and cultural capital of these groups are being overlooked and underdeveloped, (Lakin &

Lohman, 2011; Wyner, Bridgeland, & Diiulio, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bernal, 1998;

Bernal 2000).

Description of the Problem

Currently, Latin@ students represent the largest minority group in American schools

(Gandara, 2015). Their brown faces and the exotic sounds of the Spanish language have

permeated every cell of American society. There is no doubt these students are here to stay and

they will contribute to the shaping of a new United States. It is estimated that the representation

of Latin@ students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools has increased from 19 to

24 percent. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES Digest of Education

Statistics, 2013), this new shift in demographics in the United States reveals that Hispanics[2]

make up a rapidly growing percentage of the overall population, yet their academic performance

in national standardized tests is well below White and Asian students; yet similar to African

American peers. A trend expected to continue, unless students' academic needs are being met

either in regular education programs and/or gifted programs, where their representation is still

negligent (Brulles & Castellano, 2011).

A huge disparity and inequality in educational opportunities among minority groups have

existed for quite some time. This includes programs that provide exceptional and unique

opportunities for students with exceptional abilities. For instance, in the field of gifted education,

research indicates that Latin@ students are less likely to be nominated for admissions into gifted

programs in comparison to White students. Latin@ students are 47 percent less likely than White

students to be assigned to gifted programs to accommodate their learning needs (Ford, Coleman,

& Davis, 2014). The absence of students from these groups is undoubtedly the result of multiple factors, including the existence of flawed identification practices (Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner, 1993), the reliance primordially on a single test score or IQ based assessments (Ford, 2004), the lack of high-end opportunities to learn (OTL) affected by students' socioeconomic status (Worrell, 2009), the prevalence of institutionalized racism (Spring, 2001; Gonzalez, Mont, & Amanti, 2005), and finally, the subjective criteria of teachers who might act as gatekeepers (Ramos, 2010; Ford, 2010; Ladson Billings, 2014).

Scholars agree that regardless of the existence of multiple factors, adding to the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in advanced academic programs, teachers play a determining role in the identification and nomination process of potentially gifted students have identified teacher discretion in the gifted assignment process as a potentially important contributor to this inequity (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; McBee, McCoach, Peters, & Matthews, 2012; Wright & Ford, 2017). They argue that because the process often begins with a teacher's referral, classroom teachers can play a gatekeeping role in gifted assignments. Furthermore, reliance on teacher referrals, which are based on subjectivism can disadvantage students of color, especially if teachers hold lower expectations for them or are less likely to recognize giftedness in students, thus, exacerbating underrepresentation.

Teacher nominations are the most commonly used method for identifying students for full consideration to gifted education programs in the United States, yet research shows that teachers receive little to no pre- or in-service training in gifted studies (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Additionally, little is also known about teachers' decision-making process when identifying and nominating gifted minority students (Grissom & Redding, 2016). This is true at both, the national and local levels.

Researchers have identified teacher discretion in the gifted assignment process as a potentially important contributor to this inequity (Donovan & Cross, 2002; McBee, Peters, & Waterman, 2014; Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003). These authors also argue that relying on teacher referrals can place students of color at a disadvantage if teachers hold lower expectations for them or are less likely to recognize giftedness in students. When teachers have a great deal of autonomy in making nominations to gifted programs, their perceptions of giftedness, beliefs, and biases can determine whether students have the opportunity to participate in such programs, regardless of the students' qualifications.

The underrepresentation and exclusion of minority students from predominantly White spaces in society are not unique to advanced educational programs at the K-12 level (Gagné, 2011; Hurt, 2018; Ford, 2014). However, this cannot serve as an excuse to continue ignoring such an endemic educational crisis, which closes the door of opportunities for minority students to develop their gifts and talents.

Since underrepresentation is the result of other factors, there have been numerous studies on whether or not modifying the tests, providing enrichment or using local norms would decrease underrepresentation (Naglieri & Ford, 2003, Naglieri & Ford, 2005; Naglieri & Ford, 2015; Peters, Matthews, McBee, & McCoach, 2013). However, a careful and detailed literature review reveals that few studies have been done to find out how teachers' perceptions of giftedness in minority high achieving students contribute to this problem. Additionally, much-needed research needs to be done to find out which criteria are used by teachers in the decision-making process. Thus, the purpose of this study is to research teachers' perceptions of potentially gifted Latin@ students as well as to explore the decision-making processes used by teachers

when nominating students for gifted education programs in the Milwaukee Public School district (MPS).

This situation begs to question, how do teachers' perceptions of giftedness in Latin@ students influence their decision-making process on the nomination of these students for gifted programs? This is the question that will guide my study.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it could potentially provide a deeper understanding of the factors that lead teachers to make referrals or contrarily, make the decision not to refer Latin@ students for gifted programs. Consequently, this information may lead to modifications in teachers' preparation programs or in the referral process itself to increase the number of Latin@ students participating in gifted programs.

Research on the identification of giftedness and underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs points to the lack of appropriate assessment and identification procedures often influenced by teachers' perceptions of giftedness (Gallagher, 1979; Raupp, 1988; Renzulli, Reis, & Smith, 1981). It is in this process that teachers play a crucial role in determining which students will be assessed and nominated for gifted services. Thus, such a process is influenced primarily by teachers' experiences, biases, and perceptions of giftedness.

Addressing the issue underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs and finding possible ways to mitigate such problems at the national and local levels is of extreme urgency. Failing to adequately increase the representation of Latin@ students, who are currently the largest minority group in American schools, will result in perpetuating inequality by intentionally or unintentionally denying access to high-end educational opportunities (Ford, 2016; Bernal, 2002). Furthermore, it will also add to widening the existing academic and

excellence gap, while at the same time placing in jeopardy the social and economic well-being of a nation, which may end up being ill-prepared to face the demands of a global society. Perhaps increasing representation of Latin@ students in gifted programs can be obtained by having a better understanding of teachers' perception of giftedness, as well as the criteria used in the decision-making process of who should receive services. This is important because most of the decision-making process to enter gifted programs rests on the hands of teachers who could either act as bridges or gatekeepers (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Contribution to the Field

Researchers have identified teacher discretion in the gifted assignment process as a potentially important contributor to the current underrepresentation of Latin@ students in advanced programs. Researchers argue that still today, regardless of the rapid growth of the Latin@ student population in the United States, these students are being nominated less than White students for advanced placement and gifted programs (Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Naglieri & Ford, 2005; Naglieri & Ford, 2015; Peters et. al., 2014, Ford, 2014; Renzulli, 2004; Ramos, 2002). A trend that continues at the college level where minority students are less likely to be enrolled in advanced academic programs, especially in the sciences, technology, engineering, and applied mathematics, commonly known as STEM fields.

The need to propose viable solutions to the issue of underrepresentation is of extreme importance to reach equal access to advance educational opportunities. Nonetheless, looking elsewhere, without taking a deeper look at the role of teachers in the referral and identification process of minority students for GT programs will result in perpetuating the existing educational disparity that plagues American schools (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2015).

This concern has been publicly addressed by the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) in a recent Position Statement paper on the issue of identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In this statement, the NAGC states that,

> "Identifying and serving Culturally Linguistically and Diverse (CLD) students enriches the fabric of gifted education and cultivates what is still an untapped national resource. In order to promote equitable access and school success for CLD students, schools and supportive organizations need to be strategic, purposeful, and committed to improving common identification practices. Current policies, procedures, and practices need to be thoroughly examined and defensible identification protocols developed and implemented. Effective teaching and learning models and school support services should also be intentionally designed to address the specific needs of CLD students." (NAGC, November 11, 2011).

Thus, a shift in mindset and practice must occur for change to happen. This shift must begin at the bottom of the educational pyramid, placing special attention on the role of teachers, their perception of giftedness, especially of minority students, and finally, their teaching practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the teacher's perception of the giftedness of Latin@ students as well as the decision-making processes used by teachers when nominating students for gifted education programs. For this study, the teacher nomination process refers to the timeframe from when teachers receive nomination forms and characteristics of giftedness from the district supervisor responsible for gifted and talented education until teachers turn in their nominations, a period of approximately one month. A subsequent goal of

this research is to use the resulting information to provide district leadership with insights about what role teachers' perceptions of giftedness and the nomination process may play in contributing to the underrepresentation of Latin@ students and other minority students in gifted and talented programs. Significantly, this knowledge will bridge the gap between the research base and the local site of practice so an action plan can be developed to address underrepresentation.

Despite limited research on the topic, scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ford 2016; Nicholson-Crotty, Grissom, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2011; Rocha & Hawes, 2009), agree that one of the contributors of the under-representation of minority students in advanced programs has to do with teachers' perceptions of students talents or giftedness and their teaching practices when working with disadvantaged minority communities. This includes an emphasis on teaching to provide remediation as if these students are deficient rather than challenging high achieving students, having lower expectations for Latin@ students, and placing too much emphasis on that which minority students do not have (deficit perspective), rather than valuing what students already know or the knowledge they bring from their homes. The review of the literature shows that teachers' understanding of giftedness is ambiguous, which might explain why teachers are not able to identify gifted behaviors and attributes in potentially gifted students (Renzulli, 2014; Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006; Wright & Ford, 2017). This is even more relevant when working with Latin@ students since often, gifted minority students might not manifest their gifts and talents in the same way as expected or determined by social and cultural norms of the predominant class. Traditionally, schools and educational systems, in general, have been tainted by issues of power, privilege and institutionalized racism, which has resulted in the

establishment of White middle-class criteria or norm of how academic excellence or giftedness should look like (Ford, 2016).

Furthermore, research methodologies in gifted education and approaches to the topic of giftedness, including the role of teachers in the decision-making process need to be reevaluated. Thus, a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of giftedness and its effects on the nomination of potentially Latin@ students will contribute to improving teaching programs in Milwaukee.

Research Questions

Using a Critical Theory (CT) approach, this study seeks to answer four primary research questions.

1. How do teachers define giftedness?

2. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?

3. How do teachers' perceptions of giftedness influence the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students? Do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs?

4. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?

To examine teachers' conceptions of giftedness and their perception of potentially gifted Latin@ students I will ask teachers to define giftedness and inquire how they came to their understanding of giftedness. Subsequently, it will ask them to describe some of the guidelines and criteria used to guide their decision to make referrals. The following are some of the sub-questions that will serve as an engine to collect data on the topic.

1. What is your understanding of gifted education?

2. How would you define giftedness?

3. Describe how a gifted student looks like in your classroom?

4. What behaviors would I see in gifted students?

5. What do you believe defines giftedness?

6. Tell me a story of a student or person you consider to be gifted? including details or stories that exemplify these traits

7. Tell me a story about how you made the last student's referral.

8. How do you help children reveal their talents or full potential?

9. What kinds of teacher-related measures do you currently use to determine if a child is gifted?

10. In which areas do you think a child can be gifted?

11. In your opinion, are there any common student characteristics regarding gifted students?

12. What are the criteria used to identify and nominate a gifted student?

13. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "*Gifted students come from all social strata, ethnic group, and socioeconomic background*"?

14. What do you think are some of the talents Latin@ students bring from home?

15. What training have you had in assessing student learning styles?

16. What strategies, if any, are used in your school to attract students to the IB courses?

17. In general, how would you describe students in your IB classes?

18. One of the groups that are currently underrepresented in GTP is Latin@s. Latin@ students are 47 percent less likely than White students to be assigned to gifted programs to accommodate their learning needs (Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014).

19. What are your thoughts about the issue of the underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this chapter, I will argue the importance of addressing the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs at the scholarly level. First, schools are centers of learning which must strive to promote equity and excellence. Nonetheless, it is troublesome the fact that minority students are barely represented in gifted programs. Failing to address this issue and the roots that lead to the exclusion of minority students is socially, ethically, and morally unacceptable. Educational systems and its members must strive for the inclusion, nurturing, and development of all students. Therefore, schools must recognize, validate, and cultivate potential, talent, and ability in all students in general, and students of color in particular. To do the latter is to make an intentional effort to challenge the ignorance and indifference surrounding this coveted educational and social space to achieve excellence and equity for underrepresented students of color in gifted education. Certainly, taking a deep look at the literature on the topic is a good start to best understand the issue of underrepresentation.

The following literature review serves as a conceptual and theoretical framework to study the topic of underrepresentation from a critical perspective. Therefore, it is my goal to present a clear understanding of the origins, development, and challenges of gifted education, with emphasis on the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs. This section will be divided into five large sections as follows: I will first start with a section on tracking and gifted education. This is done to provide clarity on the intrinsic relation of tracking and ability grouping, a technique often used in gifted programs. Second, I will continue with a brief history of gifted education and further exploration of the emergence of different conceptual models of giftedness that have had significant pedagogical ramifications. Third, I will look at different

conceptions of giftedness. Fourth, I will explore the current state of Latin@ students in American schools along with the issue of the achievement and excellence gap. And finally, I will conduct a review on the topic of teachers' perceptions of giftedness of potentially Latin@ students and their underrepresentation in GT programs.

At the end of this review, I will conclude with the exploration of various approaches and programs that have proven effective to increase the representation of minority students in GT. Such recommendations, I believe, could serve to enhance best practices in the identification process of potentially gifted students in MPS.

Scope of Review

It is important to clarify that this review is not a comprehensive review of all aspects of gifted education and the causes that result in the underrepresentation and referral of minority students for gifted programs. Rather, this research focuses on the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs and the possible effects of teachers' perception of the giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students. In this study, the term "*potentially gifted*" refers to students who are gifted or who have gifted potential but have failed to be identified as such. Children are considered gifted when they show evidence of the potential for high performance in intellect, creativity, artistic ability, leadership capacity, or a specific academic field. These students often require services outside of typical school activities to fully develop their capabilities (NAGC).

Key Terms

The following list of terms serves as a point of reference throughout this paper. It is necessary to be aware that there might be other or similar definitions of these terms in the literature. However, for this study, they show the most consistent and are well accepted by most scholars. These terms also served as a search engine to find scholarly articles that addressed the

issue of underrepresentation. Having a clear understanding of new terminology related to the field of gifted education serves a twofold purpose: to inform the reader and to allow for clear communication of ideas to flow. This is especially relevant because the field of gifted education is not a common area of studies at the current institution in which I am completing my studies.

Giftedness - One of the most contemporary key terms in defining giftedness and gifted students was promulgated by the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). Such act defines gifted and talented students as, "Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school to fully develop those capabilities." This contemporary definition, although it is not the only one that dominates the literature, had served as a cornerstone in the development of current gifted and talented programs as well as the belief that gifted children can show their ability in a multiplicity of ways, which go beyond academics. In addition, it also provided the opportunity to be considered gifted and talented in more than previously considered areas,

Identification of gifted students - This term is understood as the process of determining students qualified for gifted or advanced programming. Identification most commonly occurs through the use of intelligence assessments or other similar tests. Many researchers emphasize using multiple pathways for identification, such as adding teacher, parent, or peer nominations or authentic assessments such as portfolios of student work to the process (Renzulli, 2011).

Hispanic: In most of the literature review the terms Hispanic and Latino were used interchangeably. These two terms are sometimes formally and informally used as synonyms, but it is important to clarify that, "*Hispanic*" is a narrower term that only refers to persons of Spanish-speaking origin or ancestry, while Latino is more frequently used to refer generally to

anyone of Latin American origin or ancestry, including Brazilians. For this study, the researcher has chosen to use more gender-inclusive term Latin@. Hispanic will be used when reporting demographic information from government and school district sources.

Talent Development: - Talent Development, curricula, and services for gifted and talented students that can best meet their needs, promote their achievements in life and contribute to the enhancement of our society when schools identify students' specific talent strengths and focus educational services on these talents (National Association of Gifted Children, 2008). In this paper, talent is defined as a propensity for advanced development in a specific domain that reaches fruition in a small percentage of people who work in that domain.

Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Students (CLDS) - "Culturally and linguistically diverse" in education is a term used by the U.S. Department of Education to define students enrolled in education programs who are either non-English proficient (NEP) or limited-English proficient (LEP). The term is also used to identify students from homes and communities where English is not the primary language of communication. These students speak a variety of languages and come from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. The term most commonly used by educators to describe these students is "English language learners" (ELLs). English as a Second Language (ESL) is also used. Both CLD and ELL are used in this paper, but "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse" (CLD) is preferred in recognition that the needs of diverse students are broader than just learning English (Ramos, 2010).

Nurturing talent - This key term refers to the idea that talents are not just innate but developed. The later will occur as long as children receive the proper nourishment by their parents, schools, and community in which they live (Harradine, Coleman, & Winn, 2014). In the field of gifted education, nurturing talents speaks directly to the multiple opportunities to learn

that all students must have access to better help in the identification process of students with gifts and talents (Worrell, 2009).

At potential/potentially gifted - Throughout this paper these two terms will be used interchangeably to refer to students who display behaviors and characteristics of gifted children, but, have failed to be identified especially employing psychometric tests such as the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), Stanford Binet (L-M), Woodcock-Johnson, and the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children. Potentially gifted are defined as those individuals who *could* achieve eminence given the correct conditions. It also refers to students not working to their full potential.

Deficit thinking model - *D*eficit thinking refers to the pathologization of minoritized people by blaming them for issues they face within their oppressive contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is also understood as the idea that children from minority or immigrant groups do not have the "right culture" to succeed in school. It is a pernicious mindset, but one that is found very often in educational settings.

Cultural bias - Cultural bias in teaching can be described as teachers and administrators holding the belief that the dominant or mainstream (presumably European) cultural ways of learning and knowing are superior to ways of learning and knowing that does not reflect such a culture. A culturally biased person ignores the differences existing between his/her culture and those of others.

Teacher's perceptions - Teacher's perceptions refer to the thoughts or mental images teachers have about their students. Such perceptions are shaped by their background knowledge and life experiences. These experiences might involve their family history or tradition, education, work, culture, or community.

Rationale for the Selection of the Topic

I started researching the topic of underrepresentation based on my interest in finding more about why minority students are less referred for gifted programs. Throughout my practice as a teacher, I have served and taught many CLD students, who have not been formally identified as gifted, yet their academically intellectual, social, artistic, and leadership abilities provide evidence that these students are gifted in one or more areas. These students have failed to be identified, thus, limiting their capacity to exceed and develop their full potential.

The origins and development of different theories and models of gifted education have varied from time to time. In the last 80 years, these theories had played a significant role in the creation and establishment of gifted programs, the criteria used to develop training programs, and the establishment of guidelines of the selection process of potentially gifted students (Peters et. al., 2016). It is imperative to say that although not intentionally planned, this process of selection and identification of children has contributed to the underrepresentation of minority students, including African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Latin@ students in gifted and advanced programs.

The topic concerning the issue of underrepresentation is vast and consequently, there are multiple recommendations as to what to do or what needs to be researched. Hence, a single study cannot possibly cover all facets. The goal of this study is only to focus on the factors that have led to the current underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs and more specifically on teachers' perceptions of the giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students, as well as the criteria used in the decision-making process. Teachers are the primary agents responsible for the identification and nomination of students for gifted programs.

Criteria for How the Literature Review was Conducted

I first conducted my literature review for this chapter by searching for all relevant articles that addressed the issue of gifted education. Specifically, I searched terms including the following: gifted and talented education, underrepresentation, excellence gap, talent development, nurturing talent, intellectually and academically gifted, culturally and ethnically diverse learners, traditional views on intelligence, ability, and talent, students at potential, students at risk, and assessment methods for potentially gifted students. Then, I selected articles from this very broad literature. As a scholar, I chose articles and examples that I concluded had a strong impact on the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs. Finally, I used this knowledge to develop a conceptual argument and framework for the following chapter.

I narrowed my review by looking at the following words, gifted and talented, underrepresentation, identification practices, and teacher's perceptions. This search led me to narrow my search even further to focus on teachers' perceptions of giftedness and its effects on the nomination process of Latin@ students.

Throughout the process of the review of literature, I learned that different theories have contributed to the philosophical foundations that underline different theories and approaches to gifted programs (Gagné, 1999; Plucker & Callahan, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Renzulli, 2011; Worrell, 2009). These theories and models of gifted education will be explained in the following pages. It also became clear that the field of gifted education has been harshly criticized, in part, due to the underrepresentation of minority students (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Contrary to what I believed, I discovered that the terms "gifted" and "talented" have had multiple interpretations. There is no single definition that satisfies everybody. Such definitions have been widely inconsistent and at times polemical. For example, Worrell (2009), argues that

traditionally, the use of the label "gifted" had implied that there are other students who are not gifted or do not have the potential to be gifted. This idea reinforces the well-spread belief that giftedness is static, hereditary, and perhaps a label that should be given to the selected few mainly from the predominant class. In recent decades, other scholars such as Renzulli (2005), and Harradine and colleagues (2014), had opted to use different terminology such as students with exceptional abilities and students at-potential to refer to individuals that are either gifted or who have the potential to develop their gifts to mastery.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion from the Review

Given the scope of the literature on the topic of gifted education and the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs, I conducted a more focused search on the traditional and contemporary methods used to identify gifted children, as well as some of the main reasons that contribute to underrepresentation. This in-depth search included the role of the teacher in the selection and nomination of students for gifted programs and the criteria used in the decision-making process. Additionally, I explored other topics related to the problem, such as the relationship between tracking and gifted programs, the excellence gap; the existence of teacher bias and perceptions of students; and finally a review on new proposed strategies and educational models to increase representation. Some of these strategies include modifications of the selection process, the use of formal and informal assessments of culturally linguistic students, the implementation of school-wide enrichment programs, the implementation of culturally sensitive teaching practices, and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. In this study, I do not focus on the underrepresentation of African Americans and Native Americans; although this is also of great urgency.

Restating of the Problem

The absence of minority students from gifted programs is a contradiction in the principles that promote equity and equality. It shows that regardless of the efforts to advocate for equal educational opportunities for all students, there are some students whose cultural, linguistic, and social forms of capital are not seen as having the same value compared to the norm. This is due to the existence of embedded racism within institutions such as schools and the view of students of color from a deficit perspective (Ford, 2011; Yosso, 2013; Plucker & Callahan, 2015).

The very same fact that gifted programs remain as White spaces in which brown faces are hardly visible also represents a violation of the principles of equal access to educational opportunities established by The Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974. This prohibits discrimination and racial segregation of students and requires school districts to take action to overcome barriers to attain students' equal participation.

The exclusion of minority students from gifted programs is directly related to systematic flaws in the educational system in which issues of power and privilege prevent minority students from accessing high-end educational opportunities. Also, this reinforces existing deficiency models by which minority students are depicted as being less capable of learning or not having the right cultural assets to succeed in school. A model that in some ways resembles tracking practices. A prevalent practice that perpetuates educational and social inequality (Oakes, 2005). The existing literature on the theme of underrepresentation shows that such problem is the result of many factors, making it impossible for a single approach to solving a problem that has intentionally or unintentionally perpetuated the inequality, marginalization, and omission of minority students from gifted programs (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell 2011).

In recent decades, there have been multiple initiatives implemented to decrease underrepresentation. Such efforts have included the use of multiple tests upon which students are determined to have exceptional abilities, the modification of norms to include students from minority groups who score in the top 10 percent rather than at the 5 percent in psychometric tests such as the Cognitive abilities tests (CogAT). Finally, the use of alternative methods identification, such as students' portfolios and teachers' observations to spot giftedness (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Regardless of the outcomes, such approaches had fallen short to significantly decrease underrepresentation of minority students from underrepresented groups who currently are being overlooked.

This situation has led a limited number of scholars to look deeper at the issue of underrepresentation by examining the role teachers play in the process of nurturing and developing talent, as well as to study how teachers influence the nomination of minority students for gifted programs (Renzulli, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007). Since much of the efforts to decrease underrepresentation has been concentrated on changing and modifying the use of psychometric tests and norms as the main criterion to identify talent, there is limited research on the criteria that teachers use to identify talent, especially among minority students. Thus, the urgency to find more about how teachers' perceptions of the giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students influence the nomination of these students for gifted programs.

Argument for the Continuation of Research: A Long Existing Problem

A look into the window of the history of American schools shows that the problem of inequality of access-to-learn has haunted American Schools since the 1800s. Joel Springs (2016) makes this clear by pointing out that schools had promoted and continue to carry out a process of

deculturalization of minority students through which the predominant culture has continuously marginalized minorities from high-end learning opportunities. In the context of education and schooling, the term "deculturalization" is understood as a conscious attempt to replace one culture and language with another that is considered superior. Such a process is done mainly through the implementation of a mainstream curriculum, the carrying out of bias teaching practices, and the imposition of specific schools' norms, which tend to benefit White middle-class students.

The struggle for social and educational equity, as well as the power struggle between minority groups and those in power, has led to long-lasting battles about who has and does not have access to high-end learning opportunities (Ford, 2004; Bernal, 2002; Worrell; 2013; Freire, 1970). This is worrisome because the hopes and future of minority students are in jeopardy. It is precisely these students who are most vulnerable in society to have less access to education, mainly due to their socioeconomic status, race, and gender. Such struggles demanding access to equal educational opportunities, and the fact that still today not all students are provided with the same type of education is manifested in the current underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Thus, leading to educational disparity which often transfers to social and economic inequality.

In the following section, I will address the issue of tracking in gifted education, specifically the issue of ability grouping. This section is important because of the relationship that exists between tracking and gifted programs (Slavin, 1990; Oaks, 1995, 2005; Fiedler, 2002). These authors claim that as well as tracking, gifted programs, and ability grouping exacerbate inequality by providing preferential academic treatment to students that come from

White middle-class families while marginalizing others, especially minorities who do not have equal access to such advanced academic programs.

Tracking, Gifted Programs, and Ability Grouping

Tracking and ability grouping has fueled an irreconcilable debate spanning virtually half of the twentieth century. Claims that tracking and ability grouping exacerbates social inequality had served as the main argument to advocate for the ending of tracking practices in American schools (Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992; Oakes, 2005; Hallam, 2002; Gamoran, 2004). Scholars also argue that both practices result in the perpetuation of educational and social inequality in which minority students are marginalized and excluded from accessing high-end learning opportunities.

Even today, despite the decrease of tracking due to the detracking movement of the 1990s, tracking and ability grouping continue to exist. In the context of education, Oakes (1995) defines tracking as the process of identifying and dividing students together into categories so that they can be assigned to various kinds of classes. She adds that students might be labeled as fast, average, and low learners, which results in placing them into fast, average, and slow classes on the bases of their scores an achievement or abilities tests. Furthermore, sometimes students are classified according to what seems more appropriate for the future lives, guiding students according to perceived ability to enter vocational or advanced academic programs. In essence, tracking is sorting, a sorting of students that has certain predictable characteristics and catastrophic results for students placed in lower tracks.

According to Oakes (1995, 2006), tracking has devastating social, psychological, and personal effects on students, especially for those students who are placed in lower tracks. Gamoran (2009) who states that, despite the well-intended goal of tracking and ability grouping,

models often used in gifted programs, results of these practices have been appalling, resulting in having economically and/or ethnically segregated classrooms, has shared similar concerns. Yet, regardless of such strong criticism, tracking has been highly resistant to lasting change and remains in wide use in many American schools.

Several critics (Slavin, 1990; Oaks, 1995, 2005; Ferguson, 2002; Wells, 2018) claim that tracking and ability grouping not only fail to benefit any student but that it also channels poor and minority students into low tracks and dooms a vast number of students to an impoverished education. They argue that while there is considerable controversy in the literature about the relative contributions of students classification, and about the objectivity and placement criteria, studies have found a high correlation between, race, socioeconomic status and tracking (Mehl, 1965; Hobson; Hansen, 1967; Heathers, 1969; Shafer and Olexa, 1971; Heyns, 1974; Rosenbaum, 1976; Morgan, 1977). Thus, putting into question the claimed objectivity and criteria used to place students in either low or high tracks.

Furthermore, critics of tracking systems and ability grouping, a strategy widely used in gifted programs, argue that homogeneous classrooms have a great disadvantage for students who do not learn as fast as others, as they are not pushed forward by the so-called peer effects, but left to fall further and further behind the students with high learning ability. This also implies that tracking will not only perpetuate the existing inequality between students but also enlarge it. Even if tracking works, the fact that minority students are often excluded from high ability programs such as gifted programs shows that the existence of a tracking system in American schools result in what Bowles and Gintis (1976) called the legitimization of educational and social inequality.

Defenders of tracking and ability grouping (Loveless, 2002, 2011; Renzulli, 2002; Tieso, 2003; Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Ayalon & Gamoran, 2000; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2006; Kaer, 2018; Card & Giuliano, 2016) argue that high ability students languish in mixed ability classes. In addition, they claim that it is nearly impossible for teachers to lead students through complex educational tasks while simultaneously helping students attain mastery of basic skills. As in the case of high ability students, these scholars argue that failing to provide challenging instruction and access to advanced courses, which traditionally are not provided by the regular curriculum, will result in a disservice to students, sacrificing excellence on behalf of equity.

Historical Development of Tracking

Tracking has had devastating consequences, primarily for minority students who traditionally have been placed in lower educational tracks (Oakes, 2006). The history and development of a tracking system in American schools go back to the 1800s. Although such ideas were at first seen as part of the democratization of education, based on the desire to match students' needs with the curriculum, the truth is that such practices run contrary to constitutional principles of equality and fairness. To best understand tracking, its origins, purpose, and the principles behind it, it is necessary to look at the historical moments in which it emerged.

Tracking like many other practices in schools emerged as a solution to a specific set of social problems. Before 1860 free public education was established only in a small section of the country, principally in the more prosperous areas of New England and the Middle Atlantic states (Springs, 2001; Oakes, 2006). The mass creation of public education came much later after most of the states and territories had a solid formal organization. At that time, schools were seen as normative social institutions that promoted and taught morality and citizenship, encourage

leadership, maintain social mobility, and promote responsiveness to social progress (Spring, 2001).

During the first period of the 19th century, most students in their vast part White middle-class attended Latin grammar schools. However, later on, with the emergence of schools called academies, a larger and less exclusive group of students had the opportunity to attend American schools (Oakes, 2006, Spring, 2001). Back then, most of the groups were heterogynous and included few immigrant students who, by now were moving to big cities. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, a third form of secondary education, the public high school education system began to develop in part as a response to a growing demand for secondary education.

Around 1890, however, strong changes began to take place. Both educational and social forces began to put more pressure on schools leading to dramatic changes in the quantity and quality of secondary education. Such changes included the standardization of a pre-college curriculum, and the creation of various tracks (vocational and academic) for students to be placed to meet the needs of the growing economy (Oakes, 2006). By 1918 the reforms of the new high school were emerging clearly. The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education (1918), put forth in a widely read report a special committee of the National Education Association (NEA) attempted to outline an educational curriculum that had something for every student in society. Such principles, according to the committee in charged, aligned perfectly with two key components of the new democratic American society: unification and specialization. It is important to point out that specialization was interpreted by public schools as the provision of an education that would best meet individuals' future needs to best fulfill the demands of emerging industrial America.

Scholars such as Oakes (2006), Gamoran (2010), and Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, Klapproth, & Böhmer, (2013) argue that tracking is a pervasive practice that has evolved over the years and that the institutionalization of tracking in American schools has varied considerably. At first, students were openly classified into various programs according to their ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. This procedure, supported by social Darwinism as well as misconceptions, back then believed to be true, resulted in the establishment of low and high academic tracks. From a Darwinian point of view, it was thought that some students were naturally less fit for academic education which served as a justification to place minority students in lower tracks. But, by the end of World War I, such practices were being called into question, in part, because such educational practices ran contrary to the idea of an open and classless society.

Opponents of tracking systems (Slavin,1990; Oaks, 1995, 2005; Ferguson, 2002) claim that a key historical development that provided a scientific ground for the use of a tracking system was the emerging and use of IQ tests. Therefore, with the use of these tests into school, ability grouping came into being. They argue that because these tests were seen as scientific and used statistical procedures, they were considered both objective and efficient of assigning students. In 1916, test pioneer, Lewis Terman was one of the first to conduct IQ tests on students, concluding that students with low IQs were suited to do unskilled work, while students with high IQs were suited to enter the academic and scientific fields. In his longitudinal study (1916) he concluded that scores an IQs below 70 to 80 served as an indicator that these students rarely could perform anything better than unskilled labor, from 80 to 100 that of the skilled or ordinary clerical labor, from 100 to 115 that of the semi-professional pursuits; and that above all these are the grades of intelligence, which permit one to enter the professions or the larger field

of business. Terman went even further affirming that low IQs were used to determine based on race or the family background. He argued, "the fact that one meets these types of IQ scores with such an extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew…there will be discovered enormous significant racial differences… which cannot be wiped out by any schemes of mental culture" (Terman, 1916. p. 91). He also added that children of this group should be segregated in special classes, due to their inability to master abstraction.

The use of educational testing and the influence of psychometric tests have had a powerful influence on determining which educational opportunities students can attain, as well as providing a rationale for the grouping of students according to ability (Oakes, 2005 and Gamora, 2005). Educational testing became not only a scientific but a meritocratic basis for assigning students to various school curricula. Such practice has resulted in predicting the probable future of students, the classes they are allowed to take, and the training and treatment they will receive in schools. This, even though standards used to measure ability and students' IQ has been based on White Protestant middle-class values.

At the beginning of the 20th century, America was changing drastically. Jobs started becoming more industrial based and these jobs demanded of schools to provide a massive number of workers to meet the needs of the market. Sadly, tracking was a means by which schools reproduce social inequality and ended up being a justification for segregation and discrimination. Very few minorities were allowed to pursue the college prep tracks. In the 1940s, this also led to gender discrimination, where women were persuaded to take more home economics classes and family classes (Loveless, 1998).

As time went on, the blatant discrimination and misuse of tracking faded. However, the launch of Sputnik (1957) by the Soviet Union, led American schools to a great panic that students weren't learning rigorous enough material. As a result, programs such as gifted education, special education, took on old forms of tracking, under the excuse that the general education system was leaving some students out (Loveless, 1998).

Tracking in American Schools

The literature on the history, development, and implementation of tracking in American schools shows that with the movement toward universal secondary education of the 19th century, the demands of society to produce well-trained workers, and the increase of the student population, let schools develop an educational model of "tracking" to prepare students for the labor force (Coleman, 1966; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Callahan, 2005). Additionally, the secondary school population became highly diverse and as schools increased in size, tracking was viewed as a mechanism to assist schools in providing effective programs for this newly diverse student population. Oakes (2005) argues that classifying students and sorting them into programs based on perceived abilities, standardized tests, and intellectual performance, served well to meet the demands of an efficient educational system. As a result, tracking became a widespread feature of secondary education.

Since the emerging of tracking, the debate about the pros and cons of placing students into rigid tracks has been controversial that it reached the courts. Following the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education decision of 1954 and the court's clear commitment that public education, "must be made available to all on equal terms," increased scholarly attention has focused on sources of educational inequality at all levels (Slavin, 1990; Oaks, 2005).

Early studies such as Coleman (1966), Jencks (1972), and Smith (1972) discuss the issue of equality of educational opportunity, making it clear that inequality in American education is far more likely to result from the ways the same school treats different children rather than from differences between schools. Similar claims have been shared by contemporary scholars who argue that students who are placed in higher tracks tend to attain better scores and have more access to high-end learning opportunities, while students placed on lower tracks show fewer academic gains (Donelan, Neal, & Jones, 1994; Ferguson, 2002; Oakes, 2005).

Similarly, research conducted in previous decades shows that in affective outcomes, students in lower tracks were the most affected when compared to students who enjoyed being placed in higher tracks. For example, Shafer and Olexa (1971) found more school misconduct and higher dropout and delinquency rates among students in lower tracks, even with the social class of students held constant. Kelly (1975) found that tracking placement was directly related to self-esteem, with lower track students scoring low on self-esteem measures. Heyns (1974) found that even with ability level and status origins controlled for, track level was an important determinant of future educational plans. These findings on the negative relationships between tracking and student achievement as well as effective outcomes take on a special significance because of work that has demonstrated that tracking in school functions to separate students along socioeconomic and racial lines (Slavin, 1990 & Oakes, 1995, 2005).

Furthermore, a study by John Goodlad (1984) of more than 38 schools across the United States found that students had access to considerably different types of knowledge and had opportunities to develop quite different intellectual skills. For example, students in high-track English classes were exposed to content that can be called "high-status knowledge." This included topics and skills that are required for college. High-track students studied both classic

and modern fiction. They learned the characteristics of literary genres and analyzed the elements of good narrative writing. These students were expected to write thematic essays and reports of library research, and they learned vocabulary that would boost their scores on college entrance exams. It was the high-track students in our sample who had the most opportunities to think critically or to solve interesting problems.

Low-track English classes, on the other hand, rarely, if ever, encountered similar types of knowledge. Nor were they expected to learn the same skills. Instruction in basic reading skills held a prominent place in low-track classes, and these skills were taught mostly through workbooks, kits, and young adult fiction. Students wrote simple paragraphs, completed worksheets on English usage, and practiced filling out applications for jobs and other kinds of forms. Their learning tasks were largely restricted to memorization or low-level comprehension.

Today, tracking still exists in the programs that were formed during the 1960s. Oakes (2016) argues that today schools continue to track students, even though it has taken other forms such as flexible grouping, ability grouping, AP classes, and gifted programs. A study by Loveless (2006) shows that while there has been a decrease in traditional forms of tracking, other forms of tracking such as ability grouping, flexible grouping, and gifted programs are on the rise. For example, Fink Chorzempa and Graham (2006) surveyed a national random sample of first through third-grade teachers about their teaching practices and whether or not they were grouping students by ability. They found out that three times as many teachers (63%) than teachers in the 1990s identified ability as the main way to group students. Interestingly, the top reason teachers gave for using ability grouping was "that it helps them meet students' needs." However, respondents also expressed concern about the quality of instruction in low ability

groups. They also found that tracking is rare in the elementary grades and it is increasing dramatically in middle school.

According to Oakes (2006), tracking is an endemic and a pathological system that is masked under noble ideals of providing students with various paths to best make use of their innate skills. In elementary school, this can look like students going to different math classes based on their standardized test scores, teachers' perception of ability, and merit. Consequently, these students are taught different curriculum and at a different pace. In middle and high school this displays having some students taking honors or AP courses while others are on the more generalized track. Students who especially struggle may take what Oakes calls "concepts" classes that provide a less rigorous material than what the typical student receives.

In sum, there seems to be a consensus on asserting that tracking has served as the primary vehicle for affording differential educational treatments of students within schools. Thus, becoming a major focus of an inquiry into the sources of educational inequality. Arguments explaining why tracking and gifted programs help to perpetuates educational inequality are many. However, one of the main arguments still prevalent today, rests on the fact that tracking and students' placement in gifted and advanced programs are strongly associated with race and socioeconomic status (Ford, 2004; Oakes, 2016; Gamora, 2005). Currently, few studies argue in favor of old tracking practices which emerged almost a hundred years ago. However, it is necessary to point out that some variations of tracking practices are still present in gifted programs that are perceived as elite or for privilege groups in society. Finally, the literature on the topic of tracking shows that although some variations of tracking are still present in education, the conversation has shifted to look at whether or not today's flexible grouping, a

strategy mostly used in gifted programs, resembles a new form or tracking (Oakes, 2005; O'Neil, 1992; Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

Tracking and Gifted Programs

Gifted programs are as controversial today as they were at the beginning of the nineteenth century when concepts of giftedness were associated with race, status, and gender (Staiger, 2004; Loveless, 2009). The idea of labeling students as gifted and providing additional enrichment services to a select group of students, who often does not include students of color springs up much debate. This in part, because such practices resemble tracking like characteristics that have been proven harmful, especially to students who are placed in lower learning tracks.

Oakes' (1995) defines tracking as "the process of identifying and grouping students who appear to have similar learning aptitudes or academic accomplishments for providing them a differentiated course of instruction." This resembles the way gifted programs work. She argues that such practices, which began in the 1930s not only perpetuates inequality but also provides students from different backgrounds, tracks that they will follow. Such a business model-like of schools ultimately will lead students, placed in high tracks to enter the labor force with an advantage over students who have placed less rigorous tracks (Oakes, 2005).

Opponents of tracking, ability grouping, and gifted programs argue that students who are not identified as gifted are often placed on lower tracks and as a result, are at a severe disadvantage. This, while placing students labeled as "gifted" in tracks with access to a rigorous curriculum, providing them with endless opportunities to meet their educational needs. They also argue that students in lower tracks are taught by less qualified teachers and develop low educational aspirations (Lleras & Rangel, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Oakes, 1995, 2005). In the United

States, tracking is not based on only assessments but also on perceptions about students' ability, race, gender, and socioeconomic status which results in increasing segregation.

As in the case of gifted programs, similar claims have been made by scholars such as Ford, (1998); Coleman, (2009); Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, (2001) who argue that although gifted programs exist intending to meet the needs of all high ability students, the reality is that gifted programs exacerbate inequality not only by separating students based on their abilities but also because such programs fail to be inclusive of minority students.

Binaries created through labeling students as gifted and not gifted send subliminal messages to those who enroll in lower-tracked courses. Students who are placed into academic tracks are often labeled, not only as *advanced* but also as *good.* Binaries, like these, create oppositional views of students on a different track and results in the preferential treatment of advanced students over *non-advanced* students. Additionally, minority students often recognize their overrepresentation in lower-tracked courses. The result, a common belief among many minority students that assume their White counterparts are simply smarter (Irizarry, 2012).

In the early days of tracking, junior-high and high-school students were assigned to academic, general, or vocational tracks. At one extreme, students were being groomed for college, while at the other they prepared to enter trades such as plumbing or secretarial work. By midcentury, a majority of secondary schools used some form of tracking. The practice was especially prevalent in large comprehensive high schools (Oakes, 2006).

Today, this extreme form of tracking is relatively rare. However, Hallinan, (2004) argues that contrary to popular perceptions, tracking in school is still a pervasive reality. She claims that with the new emphasis on preparing every student for college, tracking in its modern form has come to mean grouping students by ability within subjects. In each subject, students are assigned

to advanced, regular, or basic courses depending on their past performance. For instance, students in the advanced track or advanced courses might take pre-calculus as juniors in high school and calculus as seniors, while students in the basic track might go only as far as algebra II or geometry.

The creation and growth of gifted programs and Advanced Placement courses are perhaps the best examples of how tracking has become an institutionalized and well-accepted educational practice. And although there is agreement about the benefits of these courses, the question about who has access to these highly advanced academic opportunities seems to spark much disagreement. For example, a study conducted by Ndura, Robinson & Ochs (2003) found that in a large district of 58,000 high school students, in which minority students represented 38% of the total population, only 17% of them were enrolled in AP courses. Additionally, when breaking down the students enrolled in AP classes by minority and White non-Hispanics, data revealed that only 29.9 percent of AP students were minorities, while 70.1% were white. Generally speaking, most minorities still do not have the access/opportunity to thrive at their schools. According to data from the College Board (2017), minority students are still underrepresented in AP courses. African Americans, for example, represented just over 14.6 percent of the total high school graduating class last year but made up less than 4 percent of the AP student population who earned a score of 3 or better on at least one exam.

Similar concerns about underrepresentation of minority student in advanced programs have been reiterated by authors Anyon, (1979, 1981); Houtte, Demanet, & Stevens, (2012) who claim that on the surface, functional models of schooling promise equality and choice, but underneath are oppressive systems that promote social stratification. Typically, high academic tracks in secondary schools are geared to prepare students for pursuits in higher education. On

the other hand, vocational tracks most often prepare students for working-class jobs (Brunello & Checchi, 2007). Furthermore, the tracks into which students are sorted are classified hierarchically in terms of the level of abstraction and theorizing, placing technical and vocational tracks at the bottom of this ladder.

Commonly speaking, gifted programs provide further access to educational opportunities for students with exceptional abilities to nourish and develop their talents. This means that students in these programs or tracks are not limited by the traditional curriculum to which all students are exposed. At first glance such effort, to provide services based on students' needs is a noble one. However, the fact that there is an overwhelming representation of White middle-class students and a minimal representation of students of color in these programs is troubling (Ford, 2004 & Ramos 2002).

According to Oaks (2006), programs such as, gifted programs create a new tracking system in which only privileged few students have access to more experienced and better-trained teachers, while students in regular classrooms receive less of a quality of education. Thus, perpetuating social inequality and replicating old tracking practices.

As in the case of high achieving bilingual students or English Learners (ELs), research shows that they are rarely placed in high track and are less likely to be nominated for advanced and gifted programs (Ford, 2004 and Lucas & Berends, 2002). Minority students whose test scores and socioeconomic backgrounds match those of Whites are no less likely to be placed in high tracks (Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Lucas & Gamoran, 2002; Tach & Farkas, 2006). In addition, because minority students tend to reach high school with lower test scores and less advantaged socioeconomic circumstances, they tend to be placed in lower academic tracks, which contribute to achievement gaps.

As the demographic makeup of U.S. schools has changed, new patterns of inequality associated with tracking have become more salient. Concerning language minorities, Callahan (2005) argued that schools often combine limited proficiency in English with limited ability to master academic content. As a result, ELs are tracked into classes with a modified curriculum that is less rigorous than those of regular classes, which prevents these students from gaining access to advanced instruction even as their language skills develop. While Callahan supported these assertions with a study of a rural California school, Paul (2005) reached a similar conclusion based on her study of five diverse urban schools. Paul noted that enrollment in Algebra 1, the gateway to the college-preparatory curriculum, was stratified by race and ethnicity, with Asian American and White students enrolled in higher proportions and African American and Hispanic students enrolled in lower proportions. When ELs enrolled in the same levels of algebra as fluent English speakers, they had similar rates of college-preparatory course work. Padilla and Gonzales (2001) argued that one reason recent Mexican immigrants outperform second-generation students is that the immigrants have spent less time in low tracks in U.S. schools.

Nationally, minority students are underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs while at the same time, they are overrepresented in special and remedial education programs (Ford, 2014; Callahan, 2005; Coleman, 2011; Bernal, 2001). Thus, putting into question the issue of fairness and equity in educational settings. Central to the issue of fairness is the well-established link between track placements and student background characteristics. Research shows that poor and minority students, principally Blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately placed in tracks for low-ability or non-college-bound students (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006; Wright & Ford, 2017). Similarly, minority students are consistently

underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented. In addition, differentiation by race and class occurs within vocational tracks, with Blacks and Hispanics more frequently enrolled in programs that train students for the lowest-level occupations, such as building maintenance, commercial sewing, and institutional care. These differences in placement by race and social class appear regardless of whether test scores, counselor and teacher recommendations, or student and parent choices are used as the basis for placement (Oakes, 1996, 2006). Even if these track placements are ostensibly based on merit, that is, determined by prior school achievement rather than by race, class, or student choice, they usually come to signify judgments about supposedly fixed abilities and deficiency models. We might find appropriate the disproportionate placements of poor and minority students in low-track classes if these youngsters were known to be innately less capable of learning than middle- and upper-middle-class whites. But that is not the case.

Overall, ability grouping and tracking are associated as having the same goal: separating students based on ability to provide them with different educational tracks. However, regardless of some minor differences, these two systems of tracking have been legitimized and broadly accepted in schools as an attempt to match students with a curriculum based on students' ability or prior performance. Recent NAEP data reveal a resurgence of ability grouping in fourth grade and the persistent popularity of tracking in eighth-grade mathematics. These trends are surprising considering the vehement opposition of powerful organizations to both practices.

Finally, a profound ethical concern emerges from all the above. The U.S. is a country that was founded under the principles of equality and justice for all. However, the fact that schools themselves continue to replicate and perpetuate social inequality is of great concern. Using individual differences in aptitude, ability, or interest as the basis for curricular variation denies

students equal access to the knowledge and understanding available to humankind. Some students may not benefit equally from unrestricted access to knowledge, but this fact does not entitle those with power and privilege to control access in ways that effectively prohibit all students from equal opportunity.

The Tracking and Ability Group Debate

The review of the literature on tracking shows that tracking and its close association with today's flexible grouping, one of the methods used in gifted programs, reminds a highly contested issue. Critics charge that tracking and ability grouping not only fails to benefit any student but that it also channels poor and minority students into low tracks and dooms a vast number of students to an impoverished education (Oakes, 2005; O'Neil, 1992; Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

On the other hand, defenders of tracking or ability groups, argue that high ability students languish in mixed ability classes (Loveless, 1998; Card & Giuliano, 2016). The primary charges against tracking are that they do not accomplish anything. Secondly, that they unfairly create unequal opportunities for academic achievement. Ironically, findings from three case studies (Rosenbaum, 1999; Rubin, 2008; Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998) suggest that high-achieving minority students may have the most to lose when untracking is unsuccessful. These students are often found in urban schools where untracking has not resulted in challenging instruction in mixed-ability classes, and they may lack the support outside of school to succeed in the absence of a challenging curriculum. Rubin (2008) brought this problem to life based on interviews and observations of a high-achieving minority student in a detracked school who socialized with a small group of less academically oriented peers, to the detriment of her academic work.

Supporters of flexible grouping (Loveless, 1998, 2009; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2006; Matthews, Peters, McCoach, & McBee, 2013) support their arguments based on two premises. The first premise is that the theoretical purposes of tracking have been to better meet the different needs of various groups of students and to maximize individual learning within the group. Thus, allowing students to reach their learning goals by working and learning with peers who have similar academic and cognitive abilities. Furthermore, scholars argue that grouping students based on what they can do is beneficial for all students including students who are academically low. The second premise is that tracking and gifted education, as well as flexible groping are not synonymous concepts. These scholars argue that although terms such as tracking and ability grouping, acceleration, and enrichments, have been closely associated, with tracking there are irreconcilable differences. A clear example of this is the fact that ability grouping can be categorized into four main categories as follows. The first is between-class ability grouping, which involves assigning students of the same grade into high, average, or low classes based on their prior achievement or ability levels. The second type is within-class ability grouping, also called, small-group instruction. This kind of grouping involves teachers assigning students within a class to several small homogeneous groups for instruction based on students' prior achievement or learning capacities (Steenbergen-Hu, Makel, & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016). The third type of ability grouping is cross-grade subject grouping, which involves grouping students of different grade levels together to learn a particular subject based on their prior achievement or learning potential (Matthews et al., 2013). The last type of ability grouping is a special type of grouping for the gifted, which often refers to educational and instructional programs that were designed specifically for gifted and talented students, such as pull-out or honors programs.

The practical aim of flexible grouping is to reduce the range of individual differences in class groups to simplify the teaching task. This implies that teachers will be able to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners. Widely accepted by educators has been the assumption that individual differences can best be served in classes where students share similar characteristics.

Critics of ability grouping and tracking claim that students in lower academic tracks are often taught simplified, less stimulating lessons by less experienced or less talented teachers (Oakes, 1995, 2005; O'Neil, 1992). They also suggest that low-income and minority students receive an inequitable education because they are disproportionately represented in lower tracks. These concerns were probably valid in early tracking programs, but current practices are sensitive to racial, ethnic, and social class influences on school placement decisions.

Research concerning gifted students consistently shows that academically advanced students benefit from inclusion in an academic peer group of gifted students who receive accelerated, enriched instruction (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). Gifted students in higher tracks show better academic achievement than those in lower tracks. From one-fourth to three-fourths of the material taught in regular classrooms is information that gifted students already know, because most teachers do not differentiate content for them. Students who receive accelerated instruction in a group of high-ability peers perform nearly one year higher on standardized tests than students of equivalent age and intelligence in non-accelerated classes.

Arguments in defense of flexible grouping and its distinction from a tracking point out that great misconceptions are surrounding the term "ability grouping" (Steenbergen et al., 2016; Loveless 1998, Chmielewski, 2014). These scholars argue that many have used terms such as tracking, streaming, setting, sorting, classroom organization or composition, and classroom

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assignment. Although terms such as tracking and ability grouping have been used interchangeably in the past, researchers differentiate ability grouping from tracking. Although both ability grouping and tracking involve assigning students based on their prior achievement or ability levels (Loveless, 2009), the former often takes place in elementary schools with the latter occurring in middle and high schools. Other researchers, such as Tieso (2003), argue that ability grouping is a more flexible form of grouping than tracking.

To further clarify the difference between tracking and flexible grouping, authors (Loveless, 2009; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016; Tieso, 2003), define ability grouping as an instructional practice with three key features. The first aspect is that ability grouping involves placing students in different classrooms or small groups based on their initial achievement skill levels, readiness, or abilities. The second characteristics are that the main purpose of such placement is to create a more homogeneous learning environment so that teachers can provide instruction better matched to students' needs and so that students can benefit from interactions with their comparable academic peers. And finally, ability grouping uses placements that are not permanent school administrative arrangements that lead to restrictions on students' graduation, destination, or career paths. With this definition, we intend to differentiate ability grouping from historical tracking systems that involved assigning students, mostly middle and high school students, to fixed academic, general, or vocational tracks based primarily on their ability, achievement levels, or career aspirations (Chmielewski, 2014; Loveless, 2009).

In conclusion, ability grouping has been one of the most controversial educational practices for almost a century. Proponents argue for its value in effectively addressing the educational needs of students whose prior achievement, skills, or abilities vary greatly (Yosso 2005). Critics and opponents cite ability grouping as a contributor to achievement gaps, the

stratification of educational opportunities, and detrimental psychosocial outcomes, such as lowered self-concept or self-esteem, particularly for disadvantaged or lower-achieving students (Belfi, Goos, De Fraine, & Van Damme, 2012; Oakes, 2005). Regardless of the nature or extent of these disputes, the practical implications of ability grouping are profound and such practices do not seem to go away any time soon.

Where is the Debate about Tracking and Flexible Grouping Heading?

After a century of research on tracking and ability grouping, one might expect to see a definitive answer to the question of how best to organize students for instruction. Yet, the dilemma persists because the goals of commonality and differentiation lie in uneasy proximity to one another. In addition, every approach has disadvantages as well as advantages. This is due to the consequences of different solutions that may vary by context. In the last decade, research has made important progress, by focusing on the instruction provided to students to meet their needs rather than placing them in tracks. Ultimately, how students are arranged matters less than the instruction they encounter, so bringing together research on tracking with research on teaching offers the most useful way to continue to shed light on this topic of continuing interest.

Furthermore, findings that instructional differentiation accounts for much of the effect of tracking have led some observers to conclude that tracking per se does not generate inequality, but rather inequality has emerged because of how tracking has been implemented. If instruction in low tracks could be effectively geared toward students' needs, this argument states, then tracking might mitigate rather than exacerbate inequality. While reasonable in theory, this goal has proven difficult to accomplish in practice since there are few examples of effective instruction in low-track classes. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that most studies of ability grouping and curriculum tracking have found that high-achieving students tend

to perform better when assigned to high-level groups than when taught in mixed-ability settings. Proponents of tracking tend to emphasize the benefits of high-level classes for high-achieving students with little attention to implications for inequality, while critics tend to focus on the inequality without acknowledging the effects for high achievers.

Critical Theory, Tracking, Power, and Privilege

Historically, the tracking system had benefited those in power. That is to say, students who traditionally come from middle-class White families are the ones who have enjoyed the privilege of entering high tracking programs (Oakes, 1985, 2005). In many cases, societal privileges that people experience are often unearned. Those who experience power and privilege in society are often born into circumstances where skin color, socioeconomic status, and beliefs about people groups are not chosen (McIntosh, 1989, 2015). In particular, a person's race may be widely dismissed only as a biological classification, but dark skin is an easily observed and salient trait that has become a marker in American society, one imbued with meanings about crime, disorder, and violence, stigmatizing entire categories of people.

From a critical perspective, one can argue that the issue of race, privilege, and power has long been associated with educational systems that give preference to the dominant class (Ladson-Billings, 2004). This is particularly true in schools that implement the use of tracking, in which students of color end up trapped in lower tracks that mutilate their access to high-end learning opportunities. Many times, students are categorized into particular academic tracks based purely on teachers' perceptions and socially constructed potentialities rather than students' interests or personal choices (Oakes, 2005).

Tracking, flexible grouping, and gifted programs presumed to promote educational excellence. This because at first glance they enable schools to provide students with the

curriculum and instruction they need to maximize their potential and achieve excellence on their terms. But the evidence about tracking suggests the contrary. Certainly, students bring differences with them to school, but by implementing a system of tracking, schools help to widen rather than narrow these differences. Students who are judged to be different from one another are separated into different classes and then provided knowledge, opportunities to learn, and classroom environments that are vastly different. Many of the students in top tracks do benefit from the kind of knowledge and advantages they receive in their classes. However, the fact that for the most part, it is White middle-class students who enjoy this privilege, must make us think critically about the interconnectivity issues of power, race, and privilege when deciding which students have access to advanced programs.

Measures of talent, which allows students to enter advanced programs seem to work against minority students, which leads to their disproportionate placement in groups identified as slow (Ford, 2004). Once there, their achievement seems to be further inhibited by the type of knowledge they are taught, and by the quality of the learning opportunities, they are afforded. Limiting access to knowledge and placing barriers to limit who has access to high-end learning opportunities is a war strategy used to dominate and marginalized people of color. Patel (2015) eloquently states this by arguing that, when there is no longer territory to conquer or people to physically oppress, there exist opportunities to colonize knowledge. Recognizing knowledge as a commodity benefit many that already experience privilege in society, while simultaneously marginalizing those who do not. As a result, it creates an oppressive social structure that one could call a modern form of academic apartheid (Irizarry, 2012).

Good intentions, including those of advocates of "excellence" and of "equity," characterize the rhetoric of tracking models that have plagued schools. Tracking, because it is

usually taken to be a neutral practice and a part of the mechanics of schooling, has escaped the attention of those who mean well. But by failing to scrutinize the effects of tracking, schools unwittingly undermine their well-meant and noble efforts to promote academic excellence and to provide conditions that will enable all students to achieve it.

From a Critical Theory perspective, tracking is seen as a system that perpetuates inequality by failing to reject school practices that marginalizes ethnic minorities and people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Furthermore, CT supports the significance of a historical analysis of tracking as it relates to a systemic undercurrent of unequal access to the enriched curriculum by minority students. Critical theorists investigate aspects of society, institutions, schools, and classrooms to narrate the functions, meanings, causes, and consequences of educational inequalities based on race. These theorists identify ideologies and stereotypical impressions that are embedded in the educational system (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Many researchers have noted the benefits of detracking public schools. Jeanne Oakes led in the call for detracking in Los Angeles schools. Oakes' studies on the tracking phenomenon and its effects on minority students were also performed through the critical lens. In her historical and longitudinal seminal studies, an undercurrent of inequality was found in a system in which the public espouses equal opportunity for all. Her findings showed a disproportionate number of minority students placed in low tracks with no real way out once they are assigned, resulting in remedial education and limited opportunities for pursuing academic career paths. Similarly, Werblow, Urick, and Duesbery (2013) found that tracking in academic subjects tends to provide advantages for the already privileged students in society and disadvantages for students from minority groups.

Conclusion

Theoretical literature suggests that tracking is a manifestation of functional, capitalist models for education, which strive to fill the demands of the market, rather than meeting the needs of students. As a result, traditional low and high academic tracks create unhealthy stratifications in schools, replicating social inequality, and perpetuating the marginalization of students of color. These divisions, both intentionally and unintentionally created, serve to reproduce social class and solidify hierarchical ways of thinking (Oaks, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Gamoran, 2010).

Although the debate today about tracking and ability grouping is more subdued than in the 1980s and 1990s, it does continue. Therefore, scholars continue to wrangle over the wisdom of both practices. Effectiveness and equity persist as the dominant themes of this literature fulling the debate in pro and con of tracking systems.

Finally, to combat the societal issues associated with tracking, educational stakeholders must begin rethinking how schools are structured and how content is taught. One could argue that environments created in schools should be collaborative and democratic in nature. Healthy school environments serve as foundations for a true democracy. And although schools must implement a curriculum based on students' interests, talents, and abilities, they must be very careful not to fall in practices that benefit some while harming others. Tracking and ability grouping have been two common approaches to solve the demands of a forever changing society. Both practices continue to shape aspects of schooling that we know to be important: the curriculum that students explore, the textbooks they learn from, the teachers who teach them, and the peers with whom they interact. However, despite decades of vehement criticism and

mountains of documents urging schools to abandon their use, tracking and ability grouping

persist.

Gifted Education

In the following part of this paper, I will briefly present some of the historical events that

contributed to the development of various theories of gifted education. Additionally, I will

address some of the strengths and weaknesses of traditional and non-traditional models of gifted

programs, concerning the identification and screening process of gifted students. Finally, I will

address one of the most controversial issues in gifted education such as the underrepresentation

of Latin@ students in gifted programs.

History of Gifted Education

According to Robinson & Clinkenbeard (1998), the emergence of gifted programs is

closely linked to the development in the field of psychology. In the nineteenth, twentieth, and

twenty-first centuries, the psychological constructs of intelligence, creativity, and motivation

provided the foundation for understanding giftedness.

One of the earliest recounts on the history of gifted education was done by Grinder

(1985). In this review, in the topic of the evolution of gifted education, Grinder explains the

development of giftedness through the creation of three general epochs: Giftedness and divinity;

giftedness and neuroses; and giftedness and the rise of mental tests. The first epoch corresponds

to the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans concerning talented individuals or eminent adults as

people touched by divinity. For these ancient civilizations, to possess unique talent was to be

divinely inspired in the tradition of muses. According to Grinder, the second epoch of

preoccupation with giftedness is best captured by the connections made between giftedness and

brain or neuroses. Thanks to the rise of humanism in the Renaissance, thinkers increased their

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focus on the individual as a subject of inquiry. During this period, the practice of medicine provided a platform for observing the human body and behavior and ultimately led to the linkage of intellectual prowess with nervous instability. Finally, Grinder's third epoch in the history of giftedness focuses on the importance of mental testing. Citing the rise of compulsory education and the increases in immigrant populations in the United States and Great Britain, Grinder reviews the early history of intelligence testing and connects mental testing to the study of giftedness.

Early accounts on the study of giftedness also show that the development of giftedness began at about the time of Darwin's and Mendel's work on a variety of animal species (Tannenbaum, 1958). These scientists influenced other researchers such as Francis Galton to study giftedness from the perspective of evolution, which emphasized the difference among people on several measurements. Galton has been recognized for holding views on class and racial differences distasteful to modern thinkers. Nevertheless, Galton, a scientist, understood the importance of collecting data to investigate his theory of genius, one that assumed a biological and genetic etiology of giftedness (Galton, 1869). Regardless of Galton's conceptions of giftedness, which recent scholars have refuted (Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Renzulli, 2014: Callahan, 2015; Coleman, 2003) it is necessary to point out that it was his scientific approach to the area of study of giftedness that set the stage for the current study and interest of giftedness.

In the United States, the establishment of gifted programs began at the dawn of the 20th century. As cities began to develop at great scale, they became the epicenter of schools, universities, and multiple learning centers that sought to recruit the brightest minds to attain recognition and prominence. As expected, the instauration of gifted programs and the desire to recruit and retain the brightest minds in the country began in big cities (Robinson &

Clinkenbeard, 1998). From Hollingworth's Speyer School experiment in New York City on the East Coast to Terman's efforts on the West Coast in large cities like San Diego to the work of others in large Midwestern cities like St. Louis, Cleveland, Quincy (IL), and Chicago, gifted education began as an effort to provide advance levels of instruction to students with exceptional abilities. For example, in 1918, in Los Angeles, the so-called opportunity classes and other similar efforts in Rochester and Cleveland, sought to identify the brightest grade-school children and separate them from their slower learning classmates through the application of individual ability testing (Chapman, 1988).

It is estimated that by 1940, in Cleveland, more than 1,200 bright children were enrolled in 17 major centers catering exclusively to their needs, utilizing some of the methods of earlier experimental schools like Horace Mann and Winnetka (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). Furthermore, during the 1930s, honors classes, special classes in foreign languages, and other extracurricular programs, which were thought to advance the social and cultural capital of students with exceptional abilities were offered to gifted students as early as secondary schools. Most of these gifted programs were perceived as being elitists, and the truth is that these advanced programs often benefited students who had the means and the opportunity to have access to good schools.

Contrary to a few decades ago, today in most urban areas of the country, except for San Diego, New York, and Chicago, the number of gifted programs in urban settings is in decline. This as a result of the lack of federal funding, changing demographics of urban areas, and the implementation of federal state mandates such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act which required schools to focus on remediation by increasing minimal academic marks to proficiency.

The Booming of Gifted Programs

The acceleration in the establishment and development of gifted programs as part of the American system of education has been closely linked to sociopolitical circumstances. The search and identification of individuals with gifts and talents have been a common goal for developing countries, such as the US that want to keep their leadership, power, and innovation as a driving economic force (Callagher, 2015).

A clear example of this occurred in the 1960s when the United States and other industrialized countries began to promote gifted and talented programs so they could compete with other nations like Russia. At that time, Russia's superiority in scientific advancements and its efforts to conquest space with the launching of Sputnik. In 1965, this provoked a strong, but the sporadic reaction by the United States to find talented individuals who could make advancements, particularly in the sciences.

The first widespread attention to the special needs of gifted students in public schools can be identified as beginning in the Sputnik era of the late 1950s (Plucker & Callahan, 2015). This, was one of the key factors that pushed the United States to begin promoting the establishment of gifted programs, arguing that search for individuals with exceptional abilities contributed to national security. Such individuals were expected to lead a new militant force, whose main mission was the development of new technologies to keep the United States as a leader of what we now know as the Cold War. For example, in 1958, Congress passed what is known as The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) with $1 billion to bolster science, math, and technology in public education. Educators immediately rushed to identify gifted students and serve them in schools. Students chosen for gifted services were given intelligence tests with a strict cutoff, usually an IQ of 130 and higher. This meant that students who scored below the 130

mark were not seen as gifted regardless of their high potential. Since IQ scores were the norm to determine who was gifted, the definition of giftedness was too narrow. Giftedness was mostly understood as having a high IQ, which psychologists believe had a direct correlation with students being successful in academics, especially in reading and math.

Further, legislative efforts by the federal government in the early 1970s also brought the plight of gifted programs for children with exceptional abilities back into the spotlight. Along these lines, the definition of giftedness also expanded along with programming options now available for gifted students. As previously described, the understanding of giftedness was still very much defined by attaining high IQ scores. Such a concept was rigid and thus, giftedness was perceived and understood as a state of mind or as a condition that allowed to label students as either gifted or not gifted.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, funded entities as the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and provided grant monies for gifted education research (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). This allocation of resources and two reports, A Nation at Risk (1983) and National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent (1993), issued by the federal government, highlighted the missed opportunities to identify and serve gifted students nationally. According to Miller (2004), these mandates created a national interest which led to the funding and reemerging of gifted programs, with the premise that it will enhance national security by developing new technologies to keep the United States as a leading economic and military superpower. In turn, a call was made for additional research and programming in the field of gifted education.

Later, the issuance of national standards by the National Association for Gifted Children also helped solidify the field's intent and provided school districts across the country with a set of

programming criteria. Finally, published in 2004, A Nation Deceived reported on the advantages of acceleration for gifted children, which illustrated America's inability to properly meet the needs of its most able students despite the overwhelming research supporting acceleration.

Gifted and Talented Programs Today

Over the past half-century, especially in the 1980s, the conditions in large city school districts have changed dramatically. This in part due to changes in demographics, a shift in the economy, and a change in the means of production, which led to the dismantling of urban economies based on manufacturing. As a result, when manufacturing jobs left cities, which declined the economic prosperity of mainly minority groups. Sequentially, this caused an increase in poverty among minority groups. Such changes also had a significant effect on the establishment of gifted programs and many of them either disappeared due to being underfunded.

Today, urban school districts mostly serve a large number of low socioeconomic status and culturally diverse students. These students represent the new potential assets of our nation and scholars agree that it is perhaps these students who often will benefit the most from the existence of gifted programs. It is estimated that 60% or more of urban populations, in general, are comprised of different ethnic groups (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). However, the effects of bureaucracies that keep anything from getting done effectively, the decade of school's facilities, the ending of teacher unions, the lack of funding, and the myriad of other problems in urban areas. This makes it much more difficult to establish gifted programs in urban schools (Lipman, 2011)

Much of what we know today about the history, development, and effectiveness of urban gifted programs from the past are anecdotal or descriptive in nature, not empirical, making it difficult to generalize to today's efforts in any setting. Most urban programs from the 1960s

through the 1980s collected data on student learning and did formal evaluations (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). However, the work was never translated into journal articles to find its way to the field. Rather, it was archived in Research and Evaluation Offices in the individual urban school district, never to be used as a basis for further study or as the foundation on which to build future programs.

Despite the previous success of gifted programs in urban areas, VanTanssel-Baska (2010) points out that gifted programs in urban cities continue to face enormous underfunding, which places gifted programs in jeopardy of disappearing. Thus, leaving social and economic disadvantaged families and their children in further disadvantage when competing against White middle-class students. For example, in large cities like Chicago, the local budget has shrunk considerably over the years as other priorities have pushed gifted education to the side. Today, urban education faces new challenges and issues of poverty, immigration, and race. The political landscape has left gifted education as an easy target for reduction in spending if not for total elimination.

Theories of Gifted Education

There have been multiple scholars who have contributed immensely to the advancement of theory and research regarding gifted education. In the 1800s one of the first to conduct studies on giftedness was Francis Galton. To accomplish his goal, Galton (1869) collected extensive family pedigrees for British men who achieved eminence in various domains like science, politics, literature, art, and music and then demonstrated that eminence often appeared among individuals who were related. With the new knowledge of genetics, Galton concluded that giftedness was inherited (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 1998). Through his involvement both in mental testing and in the biographical studies of eminence, Galton's theory of giftedness as

something genetically predisposed passed from generation to generation dominated the scholarly discourse for well over more than a century.

In the 20th century, some of the first pioneers of gifted education were Lewis Terman (1925) and Letha A. Hollingworth (1942). They conducted the first studies of high-ability students in the United States (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). These studies of giftedness in the 1920s and 1930s evolved from research on mental inheritance and the realization that traditional models of schools could not adequately meet the needs of all children.

Pioneers, such as Lewis Terman and Leta Hollingworth, spearheaded the movement and conducted some of the first widely published research studies on gifted children. Their contributions were significant not only because they conducted the first systematic studies, but also because they were the first to break away from the idea that giftedness was something that only belongs to some on the merits of race and privilege. Although at first many were convinced that being gifted was merely hereditary, Terman and Hollingworth's findings served to disprove this widely spread misconception about giftedness.

As for the development of theories in gifted programs and their impact on determining who is gifted, Peters and Engerrand (2016) argue that the influence of psychology in the field of education had produced two different lines of thinking. Other well-credited scholars such as Renzulli (2014), Callahan (2010), and Coleman, (2012) also support this claim. They argue that while psychologists tend to use IQ based assessments, which may have contributed to the existing underrepresentation of Latin@ in gifted programs, educators tend to advocate for the use of authentic assessment to identify giftedness. Some examples of authentic assessments include student portfolios, teacher observation, parent and teacher nominations, and the use of non-verbal assessments, which serve as valid indicators to the identification of CLD gifted students.

Among the most important theoretical conceptions of giftedness are those of American educational psychologists; François Gagné and Joseph Renzulli. Others include Robert Sternberg's Theory of Successful Intelligence and Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Some theories, although not as prominent had provided modern scholars with a different framework to see giftedness in a broader perspective (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Harradine et al., 2014; Coleman, 2012).

Three Schools of Thought on Giftedness

The following sections contain descriptions of three theoretical models of giftedness and talent development. Such conceptions of giftedness are well accepted among scholars and many of their characteristics overlap between these models. It should be noted that concepts of giftedness and talent are sensitive to time, place, and cultural contexts, while being underpinned by social values (Miller, 2012).

The first conception of giftedness was proposed by Gagné. According to Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), there is a clear distinction between the two most basic concepts in the field of gifted education (Gagné, 1985). Gagné's work is sometimes summarized as "the Gagné assumption". The assumption is that different types of learning exist and that different instructional conditions are most likely to bring about these different types of learning. In Gagné's model, the term giftedness designates the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities called aptitudes or gifts. By contrast, the term talent designates the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places a child's achievement within the upper 10% of peers who are active in that field. His model presents five aptitude domains: intellectual, creative, socio-affective, and sensorimotor (Gagné, 1985). These

natural abilities, which could be considered as innate abilities, can be observed in every task children are confronted throughout the course of their schooling. According to Gagné, a child may be born gifted, but if these gifts are not appropriately cultivated, they will not develop into fully formed talents. For instance, a student may be musically gifted, but without training, these gifts will not be realized and potentially not even noticed at all. Moreover, Gagné also notes that a person who may be talented at age 10 may not necessarily be talented at age 20 if performance is no longer superior or it does not reach mastery. In sum, according to Gagné, giftedness designates the possession and use of outstanding *natural* abilities, called aptitudes, in at least one ability *domain*, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers. Talent designates the outstanding mastery of *systematically developed* abilities, called competencies (knowledge and skills), which appear in at least one *field* of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers who are or have been active in that field (Gagné, 2009).

Gagné's contribution to the field of education rests on the fact that gifts are naturally possessed while talents are subject to development if the proper conditions allowed for that to occur. Gagné's idea of talent development is especially important when considering that students from low socio-economic and ethnically diverse backgrounds are less likely to be recognized as gifted. This is due to the absence of an adequate nurturing environment to develop their full potential, which results in the widening of the academic achievement gap (Hardesty, McWilliams, & Plucker, 2014).

The second most important scholar in the area of gifted education is Renzulli. According to Renzulli (2005), gifted behavior occurs when there is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment

(motivation), and high levels of creativity. In his definition of giftedness, gifted and talented children are those who possess or are capable of developing this composite of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance (Renzulli, 2016). The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness developed by Renzulli is a theory that attempts to portray the main dimensions of human potential for creative productivity. These dimensions correspond to the areas of performance above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity.

Renzulli's (1986) conception of giftedness allows students to be identified according to areas not solely relying on formal academic testing. This model has found strong support especially among teachers whose "gut" instinct leads them to believe that a particular student is gifted, despite them not necessarily scoring well on formal assessments (Coleman, & Shah-Coltrane, 2015). Children who appear to be intrinsically motivated and with highly developed special interests and ability in particular areas typify those gifted students encompassed by Renzulli's model. Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness is particularly applicable to cultural models of giftedness as it acknowledges the integral and interwoven roles that creativity and task commitment play an important role in above-average ability in culturally valued activities.

The third school of thought on the topic of giftedness is represented by contemporary scholars (Freeman, 2005; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Kulieke, & Krasney, 1988; Renzulli, 1977; Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005; Winner, 1996; Worrell, 2010; Barab; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012; Plucker 2002), who argued that giftedness is both determined by innate cognitive abilities and the social environment in which pupils develop.

Around the turn of the 21st century, this new wave of philosophical and theoretical perspectives began to influence current views of learning and talent. This view is particularly

salient because it takes into consideration social, cultural, and economic factors that affect talent development. Barab & Plucker (2002), reviewed theory and research within five perspectives; ecological psychology, situated cognition, distributed cognition, activity theory, and legitimate peripheral participation. In her analysis, she concludes that "the separation of mind and context at the heart of traditional conceptions of talent development polarize the learner and the context, either implicitly or explicitly stating that, in the case of talent and giftedness, the individual impacts or influences the environment". Barab and Plucker (2002) proposed an integrated model of giftedness in which talents, broadly defined, are developed through the interaction of the individual, environment, and socio-cultural content. From their perspective, talent development is an ever-spiraling process, as continued interactions build on themselves over time and lead to greater opportunities to develop talent and greater success as a result.

Multiple Conceptions of Giftedness

The review of the literature on the topic of gifted education shows that the conceptual definition of giftedness, talent, and high ability, has been elusive and inconsistent. This perhaps stirs tension within the field of gifted education. There has been so much disagreement on the topic that even a workgroup of scholars of the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) had much difficulty agreeing on a single definition (Peters et. al., 2016). Some scholars even argue the inconsistency and the lack of consensus on defining giftedness presents a problem in itself and especially for a teacher who often is responsible for the identification and nomination of students for gifted programs (Peters, et. al., 2016). The following section of this paper explains three of the most relevant definitions or approaches of giftedness, which I believe have had the most impact, not only on the development of gifted programs, but even more important on the way students are identified and recommended for gifted services. It is necessary to clarify

that there might be other additional conceptions of giftedness. However, for this paper, these three conceptions on giftedness capture both; the conceptual evolution of ideas about giftedness and the ongoing debate in the field of gifted education.

Traditionally, the primary and most prevalent attention to giftedness and gifted education is directed at high intellectual abilities. From this point of view, giftedness is seen as generic, innate quality of an individual that needs to be recognized and revealed through some type of cognitive assessment or IQ test (Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2005). The first prospective study of intellectual giftedness based on longitudinal data was published in 1994 (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, & Guerin, 1994). As part of this study, the researchers studied a randomly selected group of 107 middle-class children for eight years. Once students were classified as gifted based on IQ scores at the age of eight, the researchers went back through the previously collected data to attempt to identify evidence that might have been predictive of the ultimate classification. The study found that gifted children were quantifiably different from their very first year of life. They required and received more stimulation; demonstrated more engagement and persistence in high-demand tasks; and progressed more rapidly over time (Gottfried et al., 1994).

Under this IQ approach used to predict and measure intelligence and exceptional abilities, giftedness is seen as a trait in which individuals are either gifted or not. Furthermore, gifted individuals are presumed to possess reasoning abilities that allow them to be successful across all academic domains. They are presumed to remain gifted throughout their lives, whether or not they achieve success. Another example of this conservative view is Terman's definition of the top 1 percent achievers in general intellectual ability as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or a comparable instrument (Renzulli, 1986).

Contrary to this view, many key scholars in the field of gifted education argue that outstanding academic achievement requires more than intellectual ability (Freeman, 2005; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Kulieke, & Krasney, 1988; Renzulli, 1977; Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005; Terman, 1954a; Winner, 1996; Worrell, 2010a), yet the conception of giftedness as primarily general intelligence, which refers to the general mental ability factor that is common to all tests of intelligence and ability, remains strongly entrenched in the minds of members of the educational community. This belief is reflected in policies and practices in individual states and districts across the United States (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011).

A second and perhaps the most modern and influential conception of giftedness was proposed by psychologist Joseph Renzulli. Renzulli (1977) argues for the existence of two kinds of giftedness; schoolhouse giftedness and creative productive giftedness. On one hand, schoolhouse giftedness is the type most easily measured by standardized ability tests, and therefore the type most conveniently used for selecting students for special programs. The competencies young people display on cognitive ability tests are exactly the kinds of abilities most valued in traditional school learning situations, especially those situations that focus on analytic skills rather than creative or practical skills. On the other hand, creative productive giftedness describes those aspects of human activity and involvement where a premium is placed on the development of original ideas, products, artistic expressions, and areas of knowledge that are purposefully designed to have an impact on one or more target audiences. Learning situations that are designed to promote creative productive giftedness emphasize the use and application of knowledge and thinking processes in an integrated, inductive, and real-problem oriented manner (Renzulli, 1977).

Contrary to the traditional definition of giftedness in which IQ and giftedness are seen as synonyms, Renzulli's conception of giftedness embraced the idea that giftedness and creativity represented two different forms of giftedness. From this standpoint of view, giftedness is conceived as something that goes beyond innate intellectual ability and IQ. Through his triad-model of giftedness (above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment) Renzulli explains that gifted behaviors are the result of the interaction of these three clusters of traits (Renzulli, 2012). Above-average ability refers to abilities in many areas not just rationally measured areas of reading and math. Task commitment is a form of motivation or perseverance. Creativity is understood as the ability to raise questions that others have not asked. Now, he makes clear that gifted behaviors only emerge if there is an interaction of these three clusters. Finally, he argues that above-average ability tends to remain constant over time in a particular area, while the other areas (creativity and task commitment) come and go with various circumstances and feed upon each other. Thus, concluding that giftedness or gifted behaviors manifest on certain people, not all people, at certain times, not all the time, and within specific contexts or areas of interest.

In sum, Renzulli's contribution represented an important conceptual alternative to existing ideas about what provisions should be made to potentially gifted children during the school years. Furthermore, Renzulli argues that psychological characteristics such as task persistence, creativity, and motivation are as important to creative productivity as is intellectual or academic ability and that these characteristics should be sought out and cultivated in school programs.

A third and final conception of giftedness combines multiple elements of the two previous definitions. It also expands on the idea that giftedness is more than having exceptional abilities. Furthermore, it takes into account the idea that giftedness and talent development are

associated with opportunities to learn (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Kulieke, & Krasney, 1988; Renzulli, 1977; Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005; Peterson, 2011; Worrell, 2010). Today, most researchers and scholars in the field of gifted education lean towards a more liberal and comprehensive conception of giftedness which includes displaying gifted behaviors in one or more areas or domains (Renzulli, 2002). The following are six categories (abilities) of giftedness to which experts and most recent definitions agreed upon general intellectual ability, specific academic ability, creative ability, leadership ability, visual and performing arts ability, and psychomotor ability.

Drawing from scholarship in human development, expertise, creativity, motivation, and optimal performance, contemporary scholars tend to agree on the following two key descriptors regarding the topic of giftedness.

First, *giftedness is conceived as a developmental process* (Cross, 2015; Horowitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2009; Sosniak, 1985; Wright, Ford, & Young, 2013). Contrary to previous conceptions of giftedness in which IQ was believed to determine giftedness and thus academic success. These scholars argue that the development of ability or talent is a lifelong process. Talent development can be evident in young children as exceptional performance on tests and/or other measures of ability or as a rapid rate of learning compared to other students of the same age, or in actual achievement in a domain. As individuals mature through childhood to adolescence, however, achievement and high levels of motivation in the domain become the primary characteristics of their giftedness. Furthermore, equally important is to keep in mind that various socioeconomic factors such as poverty, socioeconomic status, issues of institutionalized racism, and lower teacher expectations, can inhibit the development and expression of abilities (Ford, 1998).

Secondly, giftedness is *domain-specific and malleable* (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Gladwell, 2008; Hassler, 1992; Matthews & Foster, 2009; Mayer, 2005; Sosniak & Gabelko, 2008; Renzulli, 2012). Giftedness as a malleable characteristic aims to explain that abilities and gifted can be developed and affected by multiple factors including opportunity.

Research indicates that giftedness is malleable, affected by opportunity, developed over time from potential to increased competency, and expertise. Scholars agree on asserting that giftedness is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes cognitive, affective, and motivational qualities. It is influenced by both social and psychological contexts. Giftedness is developmental and malleable, rather than fixed. This is especially true for children from poverty whose IQ scores can increase as a result of exposure to quality educational environments. According to studies of brain development, intensive and challenging experiences can significantly modify problem-solving ability. In 2015, research conducted by the National Association for Gifted Children on expertise development also has revealed how new abilities are "unlocked" by extensive experience with and practice in a domain. This reinforces Renzulli's assertion that giftedness and gifted behaviors manifest on certain people, not all people, at certain times, not all the time, and within specific contexts or areas of interest.

Federal Definition on Giftedness

As previously described, there is not a single definition of giftedness able to incorporate all perspectives of what giftedness is. Nonetheless, recent advances in theory, research, and practice have proven effective to provide a set of guidelines on what is giftedness. Nationally, efforts to provide a single definition of giftedness have proven effective, and as a result in 1993 the U.S Department of Education made public a definition of giftedness, which seems to be well accepted among scholars and teachers. Nonetheless, some critics (Peters et. al., 2016), argue that

the absence of a federal mandate for its use, identification, and programming, impedes that states and school districts to take action to meet the needs of gifted children. A clear example of this is that only 32 states require school districts to provide some kind of services for gifted learners.

In the following section, I will summarize three definitions provided by the U.S Department of Education (1993), The National Association for Gifted children (2010), and the State of Wisconsin, correspondingly.

The following is the federal definition of giftedness. In 1993, the U.S Department of Education published the National Excellence Report. This report provided a clear definition of the topic of who is gifted and talented by stating that,

> "Children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high-performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor."

This definition of giftedness is the broadest and most comprehensive and is used by many school districts. It speaks of talent, which includes all areas of a child's life: academic, artistic, athletic, and social. Something unique about this definition is the fact that the term *gifted* is absent and instead the term outstanding talent is included. Most schools limit their definition and their programs to academics, but it is important to focus on performance and accomplishment. It is not enough to just have the talent; you must be using that talent to achieve at remarkably high levels.

One of the most important aspects of this definition is the fact that it recognizes that while all very talented students have the potential to achieve at high levels, some may not have yet realized or demonstrated that potential. Such students may be underachievers, twice-exceptional, or represent underserved groups who have not had a nurturing environment to bring out those talents. Finally, this definition is a comparative one; these students achieve or have the potential to achieve at levels way above their peers.

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) which was founded in 1954 is the largest association of educators, teachers, parents, and other leaders. Its mission is to

"Support those who enhance the growth and development of gifted and talented children through education, advocacy, community building, and research. As an organization, it aims to help parents and families, K-12 education professionals including support service personnel, and members of the research and higher education community who work to help gifted and talented children as they strive to achieve their personal best and contribute to their communities" (NAGC, 2017).

NAGC's current definition of giftedness is as follows:

"Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, and sports)." (NAGC, 2010).

In contrast with the definition of the U.S. Department of Education, the NAGC's definition is broader and more inclusive. For example, it includes a wider range of skills and

abilities that are typically addressed in public schools. Finally, it also specifies the percentage of individuals at 10% or fewer. However, because the NAGC does not specify a norm group, the terms outstanding and exceptional remain open to interpretation.

Wisconsin's Definition of Giftedness

According to the National Center for Statistics (2017), in Fall 2017, about 50.7 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools in the country. Furthermore, it is estimated that 6% of these students are enrolled in gifted programs in states that do offer gifted education programs. Yet, there are many states, not including Wisconsin, do not require services for students with exceptional abilities.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, giftedness, intelligence, and talent are fluid concepts and may look different in different contexts and cultures. Even within schools, you will find a range of beliefs about the word "gifted," which has become a term with multiple meanings. In Wisconsin, the statute states,

> "Gifted and talented pupils" means pupils enrolled in public schools who give evidence of high-performance capability in intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, or specific academic areas and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided in a regular school program to fully develop such capabilities. (Wisconsin Statute, § 118.35).

Contrary to other States, the State of Wisconsin dictates that gifted and talented students can and must be identified in five areas: intellectual, specific academic area, leadership, creativity, and visual and performing arts (Wisconsin Administrative Rule PI 8.01 (2) (t) 2, 2012): According to Peterson (2014), such state-level guidance in the form of a mandate, makes gifted/advanced academic programming easier than of a given state had no formal definition or did not require adherence to such a definition. At least, in theory, Wisconsin must identify

schools in these five areas and then provide these students with appropriate services. Nonetheless, some Wisconsin schools have no gifted programs even if they do identify students, and many others only identify high-ability students in math and reading.

In conclusion, the absence of a federal mandate, to make sure that public schools provide gifted learners with the educational services they need is troublesome. It is important to point out that, although there have been several mandates, such as the NCLB, instructing schools to meet the needs of students who score below proficiency. There is not a single federal mandate that aims to advocates for gifted students whose needs are not being met. This has allowed some states to focus on remediation only while ignoring and neglecting the educational needs of students whose academic needs are not being met by the regular curriculum. According to the 2010-2011 *State of the States Report on Gifted Education*, only 41 states had an official state definition for giftedness. However, only 32 of these states required that their definition be followed, allowing individual schools and districts in defining and identifying giftedness.

Gifted education varies widely across the United States. This is partly due to the wide inconsistency that exists around the definition of giftedness. Although Federal law acknowledges that children with gifts and talents have unique needs that are not traditionally offered in regular school settings, it offers no specific provisions, mandates, or requirements for serving these children. It is difficult to estimate the absolute number of gifted children in the U.S. and the world because the calculation is dependent on the number of areas, or domains, being measured and the method used to identify gifted children. However, many consider children who are in the top 10 percent compared to a national and/or local norm to be a good guide for identification and services. It is important to note that not all gifted children look or act alike. Giftedness exists in every demographic group and personality type. Adults must look hard to

discover potential and support gifted children as they reach for their personal best (NAGC, 2011). Currently, gifted education is a purely local responsibility and is dependent on local leadership. Unfortunately, leaving gifted education up to chance increases variability in the quality of services and creates inequities of access for students in poverty, from racial and ethnic minority groups, English learners, and those with disabilities.

A Future at Risk: Current Reality of Latin@ Students in Schools

The achievement gap is the disparity in the academic performance of students, especially in groups of minority students and students of low socioeconomic status, compared to the academic performance of their peers. This has been a disturbing reality of our education system since public education's inception in the 1800s. Neither the legal sanctions of *Brown v. Board* of Education in 1954 nor the more recent NCLB Act of 2002 has had the intended impact on closing the achievement gap. Multiples factors are contributing to the underachievement of minority students. However, a primary barrier to the change necessary for improving education is the low expectations teachers often have toward certain groups of students (Hurtado, Millen Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999; Ford, 2009; Worrell, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Before exploring the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs, it is necessary to take look at the current reality of Latin@ students in American schools. It is only by doing this that we will be able to capture the full picture of their successes, challenges, and perceptions of these students in both: regular and gifted education. Equally as important is to explore the role of teachers. Thus, I will also explore the topic of teachers' perceptions and expectations of Latin@ students.

Challenges of Latin@ Students

Latin@s students are not only underrepresented in gifted programs, but they also face numerous challenges within the American school system. Many Latin@ students continuously fall behind their White counterparts in academic achievement. It is difficult to pinpoint a single reason for the underperformance of Latin@s in schools. Instead, it is a combination of social, economic, political, and cultural factors that contribute to the complexity of this educational problem, which so far seems an impossible problem to solve. It can be asserted that in addition to previously mentioned factors, teachers' perceptions of minority students, especially the existence of deficiency models regarding their race, culture, and language, negatively influence minority students' academic achievement (Yosso, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Furthermore, the fact that Latin@ students are currently underrepresented in gifted programs and many high-quality educational programs such as in science, medicine, and engineering is troublesome, questioning whether or not schools are truly responding to the needs of these students. No doubt increasing Latin@ representation in these fields would help balance the social and economic inequalities that affect our society.

The following section of this paper will focus on two particular issues: the existing achievement and excellence gap of Latin@s in regular education and the topic of teachers' perceptions of Latin@ students and its effects on their academic achievement and a possible nomination for advanced programs. A detailed review on the topic of teachers' perceptions of Latin@s students, both in regular and gifted education, reveals that the existence of teachers' bias and stereotypes. Especially if combined with the misperceptions of bilingualism and race as a deficiency is in part responsible for the existing achievement gap and the underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs.

Growth of the Latin@ Population

In 2003, the Latin@ population of the United States reached 40 million or 44 million if the inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are included (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Only Mexico, with a population above 100 million, is larger among Spanish speaking countries today. The rapid growth of the Latin@ population, which had been estimated at only 4 million in 1950, has been massive. Its current growth rate is four times that of the total population. The U.S. Census Bureau (2004) has projected that, given continuing immigration trends, Latin@s will grow by 2050 to an estimated 103 million people and account for 25 percent of the national total, significantly exceeding the proportions of other ethnic or racial minorities.

Schools have witnessed the Latin@ presence in the United States. The ethnic and linguistic diversity of U.S. schools has grown significantly in the past 30 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the number of Latin@ students continues to increase while the enrollment of other groups such as White and African American students are decreasing. For example, recent statistics show that, from fall 2003 through fall 2013, the number of White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools decreased from 28.4 million to 25.2 million. In contrast, the number of Latin@ students enrolled during this period increased from 9.0 million to 12.5 million, and the percentage who were Latin@ increased from 19 to 28 percent (NCES, 2017). This change in demographics is a sign that Latin@s are here to stay. Therefore, public institutions such as schools must strive to be well equipped to face the new challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that newcomers bring with them, including their cultural, linguistic, and social capital.

Currently, Latin@ students make up the largest racial or ethnic group in United States public schools after White students. Thus, it is encouraging that by nearly every measure, the achievement for Latin@ students has risen over time (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). As a nation, schools have made adequate progress in educating Latin@ students. However, despite these improvements, Latin@ students still fall behind White peers and other minority groups in key measures of achievement.

The Achievement Gap: Historical Perspectives

To best understand the current achievement gap of Latin@ students it is necessary to take a careful look at the roots of this problem. Historically, segregation by race and ethnicity was a common practice in schools throughout the United States (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Spring 2011).

To start with, in 1896 the Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson, separate educational facilities were deemed equal and were not a violation of the 14th Amendment (Ford, 2010). In 1945, five Mexican American families battled school segregation in four California school districts, which paved a way for practice and policy change. The Mendez v. Westminister case brought to public awareness the segregation that was occurring in California's educational system. One year later, in 1946, the court ruled in favor of the families, but it was only a year later that California Governor Earl Warren signed into law a repeal to end all school segregation statutes.

Several years later, the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision by the United States Supreme Court deemed that school segregation throughout the United States was unconstitutional. Brown v. Board of Education established that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" because Black youth were placed in schools with inferior teachers,

supplies, and equipment. However, despite this decision, there was still resistance to interpretation in Southern states throughout the 1960s.

Decades later, improvement in the achievement gap was documented in the 1980s (Haycock, 2006). By the end of the 1980s, the gap had again widened. As a result, growing disparity among students' academic achievements, researchers and the public were critically scrutinizing the K-12 educational system. It was in this environment in 2002, that the federal government reauthorized the elementary and secondary education act (NCLB), which requires that all students of all groups will perform at grade level on all tests, and show continual improvement from year to year, or schools and districts will face state and possibly federal sanctions.

Because of the NCLB Act, states designed standardized assessments and recreated rigorous standards for each curricular subject. The purpose of the NCLB Act was to reform education by abiding by the new standards to hold schools and districts accountable for their assessment performances. However, this approach led to only accepting standardized achievement tests as valid instruments. Psychometricians agree that legitimizing such standardized tests lends itself to test content cultural bias (Ferguson, 2003)

The Latin@ Students' Achievement Gap

Despite the growth of the Latin@ population and the potential and future contributions to the well-being of this nation, Latin@ students are not achieving at the same academic level when compared to other ethnic groups (Akey, 2006; Cammarota, 2007; Madrid, 2011). For example, current reports indicate that White students score higher than their Latin@ peers on standardized tests at a national level. The "achievement gap" between Latin@ and White students in 2009 at grades 4 and 8 in mathematics was between 21 and 26 points on the NAEP scale (NCES, 2015).

This term, achievement gap, signifies the difference in performance between "racial" groups of students, which has long been associated with a difference in family socioeconomic status (Ortiz-Franco and Flores, 2001). Recent findings (NCES, 2015) show that the difference in academic achievement between ethnic groups is more than an issue of poverty versus wealth. Gándara (2005), reported that high achieving Latin@ students are not likely to come from economically and educationally advantaged backgrounds.

The achievement gap has existed for more than 50 years and is defined by educational assessments, standardized tests, grade point averages, dropout rates, college enrollment rates, and college completion rates. The gap's stark reality is revealed in the reading and mathematics test scores and abilities of students. Generally, by the eighth grade, Latin@ students across the nation have tested three years behind other students. There is a disproportionately high dropout rate for Latin@ and African American teens (Madrid, 2011). However, if they reach the 12th grade, they are generally four years behind their White peers (Educational Trust, 2004). According to studies conducted by Educational Trust that controlled for social background, the Black-White test score gap narrowed from 1974 to 1998, which is before the implementation of NCLB. In general, all student subgroups have improved as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). But disparities related to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status continue (Barton & Coley, 2010). Despite slight improvement at the end of the 20th century, the gap has widened again since the implementation of NCLB.

The implementation of NCLB was meant to ensure that all students had access to highly qualified teachers. As a result, the achievement gap between White students, African American, and Latin@ students decreased and eventually be eliminated, the gaps remain. By improving the quality of education across the United States, the learning opportunities, and thus future

possibilities for all students would change. What was once only attainable by a few selected people would be reachable by most. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) and other researchers (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004) stand by the premise that the heart of quality education depends upon quality teachers and teaching. Most researchers have looked at the practice of these teachers yet not at their educational philosophy, beliefs, and perceptions about the children they teach. Research on teacher effectiveness consistently agrees that, teachers have large effects on student achievement and that the effects of teachers' perceptions do have a significant effect on students' achievement (Mendro, Jordan, Gomez, Anderson, & Bembry, 1998),

A study known as Project STAR conducted by Nye and colleagues in 2004, found that the differences among teachers have a larger impact on student achievement than students' socioeconomic status or even class size. This implies that an effective teacher is effective with all students, regardless of their SES background. Conversely, an ineffective teacher is ineffective with all students (Stronge, Grant & Xu, 2015).

In general, Latin@ students fall behind all subgroups in measures of academic success except for special education students and English Learners. The disparity in educational opportunities is growing rather than diminishing, which is also affecting these same students' opportunities in the labor market as most jobs by more than 70% that require skills and training beyond that which is offered in high school (Kober & Center on Education, 2010). They lead most dropout statistics and are overrepresented in the youth penal population (Haycock, 2002).

Today, Americans are as segregated by poverty as they are by race and ethnicity, which may be the more important issue with which our schools have to deal (Berliner, 2005). Attaining higher education and having more access to equal opportunities to learn is one way to bridge the

income gap. However, it is often these same children who are seen from a deficit perspective and are not given the information, support, or encouragement they need to enter advanced programs and postsecondary institutions (Matthews, Peters, McCoach, & McBee, 2013). In his research, Ali and McWhirter (2006) found that 71% of high school students want to attend a four-year college while teachers expect only 32% of their students to go on to college. In 2000, Latin@ students had significantly lower high school graduation rates (63%) than their African American (87%) and White (94%) peers (Brindis, Driscoll, Biggs, & Valderrama, 2002). In addition, Latin@s are also less likely to attend college. That is, only about 33% go on to college (Brindis, et al., 2002). This discrepancy in achievement and access to a college education plays out in socioeconomic realities as well. In contrast, the number of Latin@ and African American young people in our prison system today is growing in a larger proportion than the numbers of these same young people on college campuses. It is these inequities, plus having less access to better teachers in the K-12 public education system that results in inequality. Thus, considering the educational vulnerability of linguistically and culturally diverse students, it is necessary to examine the role teachers have on the academic performance of Latin@ students so they can reach their full potential.

The Excellence Gap

Although many people might be familiar with the achievement gap, it is very unlikely that the same is true about the excellence gap. Plucker, Burroughs, and Song (2010) are credited for coining the term "excellence gap". They define the excellence gap as the achievement gap among subgroups of students performing at the highest levels of achievement. These excellence gaps are found in every state and on national assessments of math and reading, yet despite the implications for school and minority communities, they have received almost no attention.

There is still an ongoing debate about the potential causes of the persistence of excellence gaps. Some of these causes include stereotypical beliefs and negative attitudes toward gifted minorities include under-resourced schools that serve predominantly lower-income and disadvantaged minority communities; pervasive effects of poverty; inadequate training for educators who work with underperforming subgroups of students; a lack of attention to issues surrounding educational excellence in schools; and enforcing of federal and state mandates which only focus on closing the achievement gap (*NAGC 2015).*

In recent decades, a focus of the recent education reform has been on closing achievement gaps between students from different racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds by bringing all students up to minimum levels of proficiency. Yet, issues related to excellence gaps have been largely absent from discussions. Plucker & Peters (2016) argue that these significant gaps reflect the existence of a persistent talent underclass in the United States among African American, Hispanic, Native American, and poor students, resulting in an incalculable loss of potential among our fastest-growing populations.

The existence of such gaps among minorities, which raises doubts about the success of federal and state governments in providing greater and more equitable educational opportunities, particularly as the proportion of minority and low-income students continues to rise. The goal of guaranteeing that all children will have the opportunity to reach their academic potential is called into question if educational policies only assist some students while others are left behind. Furthermore, the comparatively small percentage of students scoring at the highest level on achievement tests suggests that children with advanced academic potential are being under-served, with potentially serious consequences for the long-term economic competitiveness of the U.S (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song 2010). Data shows that regardless of their high abilities and

talents, Latin@ students with advanced academic potential, are still being outperformed by peers with similar talents. This reality prompts the following question, why are Latin@ gifted and potentially gifted students performing lower than their peers?

Several studies (Reardon, 2008; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006) have examined the achievement gaps between different demographic groups. These studies found that the achievement gap between low achievers shrank in most cases, while the gap between high achievers tended to increase between Grades 3 and 8, resulting in the widening of the excellence gap.

There is evidence of the enacting of federal mandates, such the enactment of the NCLB Act has had a significant effect on the growth if the excellence gap, especially because of its focus on minimum competency (Loveless, 2008; Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010). According to Farkas and Duffett (2008), the federal accountability system has resulted in schools and teachers placing greater emphasis on low-achieving students than on high-achievers as 40% teachers say that the content and curriculum of honors and accelerated classes are often watered down and lacking rigor.

Data from National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP), which assesses American students' performance in Grades 4, 8, and 12 in a wide range of subject areas, show that after the implementation of the NCLB Act the achievement gaps among minority students from low socioeconomic status did not decrease. NAEP results suggest that the excellence achievement gaps among different racial groups, high- and low-socio-economic status, different levels of English language proficiency, and gender groups have widened in the era of NCLB. In addition, the percentage of White, more affluent and English-language speakers scoring at the advanced level has increased substantially in math while the performance of other groups has

remained relatively stable. Very often minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are perceived through a deficit model and attend schools with less advanced classes and no high-end learning opportunities, which are determined by lack of financial resources, less qualified teachers, and a strong focus on remediation.

Furthermore, Wyner, Bridgeland, and DiIulio (2009) estimated that 3.4 million high-achieving children live in households below the national median in income, over 1 million of whom qualify for free and/or reduced price meals. They found evidence that compared to upper-income children of similar ability. These children are more likely to show decreased achievement in later grades and dropout of high school, and they are less likely to attend college and earn a degree. Given the well-documented personal and economic costs of academic underachievement, this study illustrates the immediate and long-term dangers posed by festering excellence gaps.

In conclusion, taking action to close the excellence gap should be a national and state priority. The literature review on the existing achievement gaps on each side of the spectrum shows that focusing too tightly on minimum competency will not automatically lead to excellence. At the same time, no one argues that focusing explicitly on excellence will automatically get all students up to minimum competency. So we ask the challenging question, why not focus on both?

Teachers' Perceptions of Latin@ Students

The achievement gap is the disparity in the academic performance of students, especially in groups of minority students and students of low socioeconomic status compared to the academic performance of their peers (Kitano, & Espinosa, 1995; Gándara, 2017). This has been a disturbing reality of our education system since public education began in the 1800s. Neither the legal sanctions of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 nor the more recent NCLB Act has had

the intended impact on closing the achievement gap. A primary barrier to the change necessary for improving education is the low expectations teachers often have toward certain groups of students. Under this deficit perspective, minority students as well as their culture, language, and social capital are seen as deficiencies rather than assets and valid forms of knowledge (Allen, 1999; Yosso, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994) making it harder for these students to be identified as gifted or students with gifted potential.

Teachers' Perceptions and Students Expectations

One particular component of a positive assimilation process for students is the successful integration into the U.S. educational system, facilitated by supportive relationships with teachers. It is the teacher who plays a crucial role in making sure minority students feel valued and appreciated for them to show their highest academic potential (Gándara, 2017). Existing studies of U.S. born students have shown that teachers' attitudes toward students are associated with student academic achievement in ways that are diminished by cultural stereotypes and social distance between students and teachers (Ferguson, 2003; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jussim & Eccles, 1992; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Ferguson and colleagues (2017) argue that the social distance between teachers and their immigrant students may even be more profound and complex, possibly encompassing race, ethnic, and cultural differences (Ferguson, 2003; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jussim & Eccles, 1992; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). While a small body of research focuses on students' perceptions of their teachers and their experiences of discrimination, little is known about the perceptions held by teachers of gifted or potentially gifted immigrant Latin@ students and how these perceptions are associated with educational expectations.

Some researchers have established the importance of teachers' perceptions of students for student achievement; however, interpreting the causes and repercussions of variation in these perceptions is widely debated (Brophy, 1983; Dusek & Joseph, 1983). In a thorough review of various claims, Jussim (1989) concludes that teachers' perceptions of minority student performance are largely accurate but points out that more subjective attributes such as student attitudes and personality dispositions may be perceived less accurately and that these measurement errors by teachers may result in large differences over time. For example, teachers' perceptions of hard work were highly subject to bias and minimally reflected student self-reports of effort, ability, or time spent on homework (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). In these cases, perceptions of students by teachers may reflect existing cultural stereotypes, preset ideas of what cultural and social capital traits are associated with school success, and the existence of deficit models which focuses on what students lack rather than on their strengths and funds of knowledge that students bring with them (Yosso, 2005; Bernal, 2002).

Studies have shown the divergent impact of teacher perceptions for minority, low socioeconomic status (SES), and other stigmatized groups. Matching between students' and teachers' ethno-racial and social class backgrounds affects teachers' perceptions of student maturity and potential (Blanchard & Muller, 2015) as well as persistence and performance. Further, children who come from academically stigmatized groups were more likely to confirm negative teacher perceptions of ability and less likely to confirm teacher overstatements of ability compared to children from non-stigmatized groups (McKown & Weinstein, 2002).

Generally, the extent to which teacher perceptions vary across groups from other measurable performance or behavioral indicators is interpreted as bias (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Ferguson, 2003; Tiedemann, 2002).

Researchers have measured not only the way that teachers' perceptions vary concerning teacher-student compatibility, but also how patterns of variation conform to ethno racial or gender stereotypes. For example, Tiedemann (2002) found that for low and moderately achieving students, stereotypes held by teachers regarding gender differences in math ability affected the teachers' perceptions of ability and effort. Other studies have revealed how teachers' perceptions of student effort and performance conform to stereotyped expectations that girls sought to be high achieving through effort and boys through natural ability, particularly in math (Fennema, Peterson, Carpenter, & Lubinski, 1990; Jones & Myhill, 2004). On the other hand, in interviews with teachers, researchers found strong, positive stereotypes of Chinese boys as good and serious students while Chinese girls were "repressed" and "passive" by the teachers (Archer & Francis, 2005). Although the study took place within a British context, the content of the racialized and gendered assumptions regarding Chinese immigrants are in line with what has been shown as the model minority stereotype in the U.S. This refers to the idea that Asian cultural values emphasize education in a way that facilitates their children's success. (Chou & Feagin, 2015).

In these studies, behavior that does not conform to a teacher's stereotypes was interpreted as an unusual departure from the rule, but not as undermining to their stereotyped expectations. This is perhaps one of the reasons that help to explain why Asian students are overrepresented in advance and gifted programs while other minorities are underrepresented in such advanced programs (Ford, 2011).

Another important finding present in the literature is that teachers' stereotyped perceptions greatly impact students' educational behavior, performance, and attitudes towards school. Thus, leading to the underperformance of students with average skills as well as students with exceptional abilities. Claude Steele (2010) has documented the topic of teachers'

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perceptions and their effects. In his book, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* Steele's name such phenomena stereotype threat. According to Steele, "stereotype threat refers to the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about an individual's racial, ethnic, gender, or cultural group." In his research, Steele performed experiments that showed that Black college students performed worse on standardized tests than their White peers when they were reminded, before taking the tests that their racial group tends to do poorly on such exams. When their race was not emphasized, however, Black students performed similarly to their White peers.

In the field of urban education, research has revealed substantial hostility between Latin@, African American students, and Asian immigrants based on perceived differential treatment and expectations from teachers and other adults (Katz 1999; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Specifically, students' beliefs that teachers prefer Asian students and perceive Latin@ students as delinquent, passive, and lazy has been identified as a contributing factor to Latin@ boys' disengagement from school (Katz, 1999). In fact, for Latin@ boys, experiences of discrimination reduced academic motivation and resulted in lower academic performance (Alfaro, Edna, Umaña-Taylor, Gonzalez-Backen, Bámaca, & Zeiders, 2009). By contrast, interviews with Asian students regarding their teachers' stereotyped perceptions of them revealed both a widespread awareness of the stereotype and substantial variation in attitudes toward being perceived as model minorities (Lee, 1994). While some students felt pride and motivation, others expressed frustration, anxiety, fear of failure, and academic disengagement (Lee, 1994).

In sum, numerous studies have examined how teachers' gender and racial stereotypes affect their interpretations of students' classroom behavior and academic performance. In

addition, research also has been focused on how these perceptions affect student outcomes. However, while these studies help understand how teacher perceptions of diverse groups of students vary, few studies could be found which considered ethno-racial identity as a moderating factor in assessing divergent teacher perceptions and expectations for foreign-born students.

Underrepresentation of Latin@s in Gifted Programs

The field of gifted education has contributed immensely to advances in learning opportunities for students that demonstrate exceptional abilities. Within this field, great advances have taken place. Some of the most successful initiatives have been the ongoing research of gifted education promoted by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, the establishment of national standards for gifted programs, and the establishment of gifted programs. These initiatives focus on meeting the needs of exceptional learners and the establishment of legal mandates (at the state level) to require schools to identify and serve gifted students.

However, despite such advances, the issue of underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs continues to spark much criticism. For example, in 1994, the elementary and secondary school population of Hispanics reached 12.7%. However, Latin@s accounted for only 6.4% of the gifted and talented student population. (Hispanic Education Fact Sheet, 2008). Additionally, the current underrepresentation is not any better than twenty years ago. Several factors such as the use of traditional identification methods, along with teacher's misidentification of gifted minorities contribute to the inequality of education (Ramos, 2010). Such inequality and deprivation to equal access to educational opportunities is not only a violation of the law, but it

also has resulted in the marginalization and Latin@ students whose dreams and hopes of reaching their true potential are cut short (Ford, 1998).

Currently, Latin@ students represent the second fastest-growing minority group in American schools (Brown, 2014). In 1972, CLD students made up 22% of public-school enrollment; as of 2005, they were 45% of the total population (Ford, 2010). It is estimated that the representation of Latin@ students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools has increased from 19 to 24 percent of all students. This new shift in demographics in the United States reveals that Hispanics make up a rapidly growing percentage of the overall population, yet their participation in gifted and advanced programs does not correlate with their growth.

This disparity in equal access to OTL, not only exacerbates inequality but also has other significant effects, one of them being the social and economic marginalization of Latin@s whose potential is being overshadowed and overlooked. Scholars agree that regardless of the existence of multiple factors adding to the underrepresentation of minority students in advanced academic programs, teachers play a determining role in the identification and nomination process of potentially gifted students. Researchers have identified teacher discretion in the gifted assignment process as a potentially important contributor to this inequity (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006; Wright, & Ford, 2017). They argue that, because the process often begins with the teacher's referral, classroom teachers can play a gatekeeping role in gifted assignments. Furthermore, reliance on teacher referrals can disadvantage students of color, especially if teachers hold lower expectations for them or are less likely to recognize giftedness in such students.

The underrepresentation of minorities has occurred since the formation of gifted programs (Bernal, 2002). Nonetheless, it has been until recent decades that such an issue has

taken the spotlight. This in part, thanks to the advocacy of teachers and scholars, who argue that the deprivation of equal opportunities is not only a violation of equal opportunity mandates, putting in jeopardy the future of Latin@ children who have the potential to exceed expectations (Ford, 2014).

Researchers argue that one of the main factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs is teachers' negative perfectives and deficiency model thinking of Latin@ students (Bernal, 2002; Wright, Ford, & Young, 2013; Coleman 1994; Peters, et al., 2016). Since one of the first requirements for entry into gifted programs is teacher nomination, minority students are often at a disadvantage. Reasons may include teachers' misconception of giftedness; teachers' predisposition against minority students; and the existence of deficiency models, which impede teachers to identify accurately gifted minority students. For example, it is estimated that Latin@ students are 46 % less likely to be nominated for admission in gifted programs, while at the same time they are being overrepresented in special education programs. Furthermore, each year, over 500,000 Black and Hispanic students combined are not identified as gifted, which places these students at risk of dropping out of school and wasting their true potential (Ford, 2010, 2013b; Ford, 2015). This is because they are not being challenged through a rigorous curriculum to meet their cognitive needs.

Using national data on teacher demographics, Bernal (2002) shows that the underrepresentation of students in gifted programs correlates with a similar pattern of a low number of minority teachers participating in gifted programs. Similar arguments have been proposed by Harradine and colleagues and Ford, showing that the recruitment and retention of minority teachers could serve to increase minority representation in gifted programs (Harradine, et al., 2014; Ford, 2014). They argue that still today, gifted programs remain very segregated

programs in which the representation of both: students and teachers from minority ethnic groups is still minimal.

From the critical perspective, the issue of underrepresentation has served to point one that issues of race, racism, privilege in power are still present in educational institutions. The absence of minority students in gifted programs has sparked criticism from scholars who contend that gifted programs have contributed to the segregation of minority students by intentionally or unintentionally denying access to minority students. Researchers claim that gifted education programs, as alluded to previously, have long been a White space, over-enrolled by White students, taught by White teachers, and protected by White middle-class parents (Ford, 2017; Bernal 2002; Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008). Historically, advocates for greater numbers of Black and brown faces in gifted and advanced programs have been confronted by White power brokers or establishments that view *difference* as a *deficit* and uphold biased views of intelligence that maintain the White enrollment status quo.

Other aspects are contributing to this problem including the use of rigid identification practices, the exclusive use of IQ assessments, the existence of institutionalized racism, teachers' bias, limited learning opportunities for students of color, and the existence of deficit thinking model. These practices devalue the cultural and linguistic capital that minority students bring to the classroom (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Garcia & Guerra, 2004. Although all of these factors contribute to the underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs, special attention should be given to current screening practice including the role of teachers, which research show contribute in great part to the unfair and unlawful deprivation of gifted services to students who have gifted potential (Carman & Taylor, 2010; Harradine et. al., 2013, Ford, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016).

Traditional Factors Affecting the Identification of Gifted Students

The issue of unequal access to educational opportunities for minority students in both regular education and gifted education is severe as it is longstanding. As briefly discussed before, the most critical area of concern within the field of gifted education is the screening process of identification of gifted students, in part because traditional approaches are widely perceived to be highly biased, against African American, Latin@, and Native American minorities, while still favoring White students (Ford, 2014). As a result, numerous recommendations for improving identification practice abound (Callahan, Renzulli, Delcourt, & Hertberg-Davis, 2013), and current publications and policy development have focused a great deal of attention on the identification of historically underrepresented populations (McBee, Peters, & Waterman, 2014; Coleman, Gallagher, & Job, 2012).

Often associated with the underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs is the use of IQ instruments to measure intelligence (Ford, 1998). From World War II until the mid-1960s, there appeared to be no serious challenge to the concept that intelligence is what an intelligence test measures. As a result, leading to the overuse of IQ measurements to tests intelligence (McBee, et. al, 2014). An explanation for the long predominance of the IQ test as a device for indicating high intelligence is that it largely did what the schools asked of it (Worrell, 2009). These IQ tests, many of which are heavily weighted with vocabulary, simple reasoning, and analogy questions, predicted very well which students would learn rapidly and which would learn more slowly than their classmates. This was particularly true since memory, association, and reasoning, the characteristics measured by the IQ test, were also the abilities predominantly demanded of students in the classroom. Furthermore, Worrell (2009), argues that for decades, researchers and scholars in the field of gifted education have helped to maintain the myth that IQ

scores are the most, if not the only reliable probe, to establish one's giftedness. In his study, he lists three main reasons that led to the perpetuation of the myth that IQ assessment is the best predictor of giftedness. These three reasons are as follows: (a) the predictive validity of test scores, (b) the belief that ability is fixed, and (c) the lack of attention to and evidence for other explanations for outstanding achievement. Furthermore, the literature reveals that there are plenty of studies (Neisser, 1997; Lubinski, D., Benbow, Webb & Bleske-Rechek 2006; Worrell, 2009), which help to disprove this myth.

Despite these arguments, the use identification instruments which rely on IQ measurements to determine who is gifted, as well as the use of divisive language, which labels children as "gifted" and "not gifted" continues to be used extensively in current literature (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Such a narrow approach to the issue of giftedness undermines access to educational opportunities of Latin@ children who are already at a disadvantage. This is likely due to language barriers, negative ethnic stereotypes (Steele, 2010; Delpit, 2012), racial bias, and especially their low socioeconomic status, which results in having less access to high-end learning opportunities (Carman & Taylor, 2010).

Until recently, one of the most disconcerting secrets in gifted education was the differential prevalence of ethnic and racial groups in identification and placement in special programs. This disconcerts stemmed from the inappropriate assumption that intelligence tests measured only genetic potential and that such a difference in proportions would then suggest superiority or inferiority in the native ability for such groups (Naglieri & Ford, 2005). Fewer minority students were being identified through traditional methods, except for Asian-Americans. The reasons for such low numbers were not universally agreed upon. In the review

of the literature on the issue of underrepresentation, scholars agree on two major hypotheses proposed to explain the underrepresentation of minority populations (Peters, & Engerrand, 2016; Naglieri & Ford, 2005; Olszewski-Kubilius & Ngoi, 2004).

Instruments Are Bias

Such argument rests on the proposition that there can be no true differences in levels of aptitude at the time of assessment; therefore, any group differences that are found are the fault of the measurement. Further, the identification process of gifted students from the mainstream culture for special education programs is an attempt some may even see as deliberate, to limit the opportunities of children from some minority group (Payne, 2011).

In response to these claims, scholars such as Lohman (2005), argue that bias of test instruments, however, needs to be demonstrated by more than group differences on the test. Just as there may be differences between ethnic and racial groups on athletic aptitude or musical aptitude, based upon greater opportunity and experience, so the same may be true of academic aptitude. The excellent performance of Asian-Americans, on both tests and school performance, tends to indicate that factors are operating here that go beyond simple differences from the mainstream culture (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Nevertheless, the current trend of identification tries to cope with this issue by adopting multiple criteria for giftedness, of which IQ tests are only one.

Unequal Educational Access Produce Different Outcomes

There is considerable evidence to support the importance of the role that environment, practice, and experience plays in measures of aptitude (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). If we can extend the general principle that we are good at what we practice or at what we have had the opportunities to learn, then it is easy to see how progressively, some minority students who may

have begun life with equal aptitudes with their majority group age-mates will fall further and further behind on measures of academic proficiency and aptitude. For instance, if minority students do not have the same access to high-end learning opportunities as their White peers, they will tend to show a differential in their abilities, which at times has been interpreted as a race or ethnic deficiency. In other words, since talent is something students develop over time (Renzulli, 2015), if students do not have the right nurturing social environment for such development to take place their gifts will not emerge. This is certainly the case of many Latin@ students, who due to poverty, social marginalization, and language barriers are likely not developed at their true potential (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2015).

Contrary to those who claim that traditional identification methods are to blame for the current underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs. The most reasonable position on cultural differences, given current knowledge, is to accept the second explanation which claims that different experiences and opportunities to learn are what make the difference and operate as though it is true (McBee, McCoach, Peters, & Matthews, 2012). The obvious step to be taken, then, is an early and intensive provision of experiences that can help talented minority students to more fully develop their potential (Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014). The current and most accepted view in child and talent development is that there is a complex interaction pattern between genetics and the environment (Renzulli, 2015; Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Payne, 2011).

For example, children who have been raised in an atmosphere where the language is not extensively used, or in which an adult is not present to interact with the child, will quite possibly have limited language development. This, in turn, will lead to less than full potential academic performance and probably have a lack of interest in school and school- related activities (Beeman & Urow, 2013). The combination of all of these progressive interactions could result in

a lower score on intelligence or aptitude measures than would have been likely under more optimum conditions.

As discussed earlier, much of the efforts in trying to address the issue of underrepresentation has a focus on modifying external factor related to gifted programs. Such factors include addressing the issue of IQ based assessments and modifying the norms and cut off scores upon which students are labeled gifted. Questions remain about the reasons why teachers are less likely to nominate African American and Latin@ students less than White students with similar abilities for gifted programs.

National Educational Trends and their Impact on Gifted Education

During the past ten years, significant attention has been given to improving and reforming K-12 education for struggling students in the United States. At the same time, there has been inattention toward advanced students or even those who have already reached grade-level proficiency. At least since the passage of the NCLB, much of the emphasis in public schools has been to bring students up to minimal proficiency (Farkas & Duffett, 2008). This, of course, is a laudable and important goal, but no less important is the development of talent. Talent development is vital especially in the early years in school for those students who are least likely to have opportunities to develop their talents outside of school. Far too often more "gifted education" or advanced educational opportunities are provided for higher-income, native English-speaking students than for economically disadvantaged students and English Learners. A recent (2013) national survey of gifted programs noted that urban school districts are the most likely to have cut their gifted education program in the last ten years (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2015). Additionally, anecdotal evidence also suggests that in an era of minimal proficiency-based accountability. These districts focus the majority of their time on helping students achieve

grade-level proficiency. Often at the expense of neglecting those students who are advanced or who show gifted potential. Thus, ratifying the myth that students with high abilities can do just fine on their own. For example, Loveless (2014) noted that low-income students are far less likely to be ability grouped than are their high-income peers. Even when gifted education services or interventions do exist in school districts, Peters and Mann (2009) found low-income and English Learners still struggled to access these opportunities because of overly exclusive admission criteria such as requiring high test scores in standardized tests.

The lack of widespread systematic and continuous services for advanced learners has led to wide variability in access to advanced educational opportunities. This has left some districts with outstanding services while others have nothing, or worse, they have policies that specifically harm high achieving students (e.g., implicit prohibitions on grade acceleration, complete heterogeneous grouping). When school districts cut back on advanced courses or programs, the parents and students who can afford to obtain the necessary services elsewhere do so while low-income students are left behind. According to Farkas and Duffett (2008), these differences in educational opportunities have resulted in large and growing excellence gaps between various student subgroups. Concerning students from low-income families specifically, before they even begin formal education, significant opportunity gaps tend to exist, which places these students with even fewer probabilities to succeed.

Social and economic disparity is also a contributing factor in the achievement gap of students with high potential. For instance, a study by Hart and Risley (2003) found that children of professional parents were read to approximately three times as much as children of parents on welfare. By age three, these children of professional parents had a vocabulary that was twice as large as that of economically disadvantaged children. More recently, Kornrich and Furstenberg

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(2013) looked at parental spending as another potential source of differential achievement (gaps). These researchers found that the lowest income decile families spent approximately $750 per year on each child, whereas the highest two income deciles spent $3701 and $6673 per year. This spending is a direct proxy for educational opportunities. Higher-income families can access advanced educational opportunities outside of the public school system to further develop their students' talents. When low-income families do not have access to advanced opportunities within the public K-12 school structure, these two conditions combined contribute to excellence gaps. Reading and parental spending are not the sole sources of achievement disparities, but they are major players that Hart and Risley noted are very difficult to eliminate once students begin their formal education.

Excellence Gaps at the National Level

The original purpose of closing achievement gaps was to bring all students up to a minimum level of proficiency in academic content areas – the idea being that students then left K-12 education with foundational knowledge and skills. However, at its heart, minimal proficiency is just that, a focus on basic skills necessary to meet adequate yearly progress. A topic that has received much less attention is the excellence gap. The excellence gap, as defined by Plucker, Burroughs, and Song (2010), is the difference between proportions of subgroups of students performing at the highest levels of achievement (as opposed to performing at proficient levels). For example, in Wisconsin in the 2013–2014 school year, 4.7% of students who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FARM) scored "advanced" on the 8th-grade math section of the WKCE, the state standardized achievement test. Comparing this to 16.8% of students who were not eligible for FARM and who scored at advanced levels reveals an

excellence gap of 12 percentage points or nearly 400% (Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children Report, 2017).

Excellence gaps first gained national attention in the 2010 report by Plucker, Burroughs, and Song. The existence of such gaps raises doubts about the success of federal and state governments in providing greater and more equitable educational opportunities, particularly as the proportion of minority and low-income students continues to rise. The desired goal of the NCLB Act of guaranteeing that all children will have the opportunity to reach their academic potential is called into question if educational policies and opportunities to learn only assist some students while others are left behind. Furthermore, the comparatively small percentage of students scoring at the highest level on achievement tests suggests that children with advanced academic potential are being under-served, with potentially serious consequences for the long-term economic competitiveness of the U.S.

Across the board, in math and reading, excellence gaps between students who are eligible for FRL and those who are not eligible have grown since 2002 (and they were substantial, to begin with. (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013, p. 20). It's worth noting that Plucker and colleagues focused on math and reading because the data painted the most positive picture. Data for science, social studies, and writing were worse.

In their 2010 report, Plucker and colleagues found that the percentage of students scoring at advanced levels from low-income families increased by 0.8% in grade 4 reading and by 0.3% in grade 8 reading compared to growth rates of 1.2% in grade 4 reading and 3.3% in grade 8 reading for their higher-income peers. High-achieving students from low-income families increased in representation by 0.8% in grade 4 reading and 0.3% in grade 8 reading, while their

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higher-income peers increased in representation by 1.2% and 0.6%, respectively. These rates occurred over approximately ten years.

The same trend can be found for students who are English Learners (Plucker et al., 2010) compared to those who are native speakers, excellence gaps are large and growing and roughly mirror national gaps for underrepresented versus overrepresented racial/ethnic groups. For example, in 2000 0.2% and 0.1% of English Learners scored advanced on NAEP Math in grades four and eight compared to 2.7% and 4.8% of their non-English learning peers. Since both groups have increased their rates of advanced achievement, but non-English Learners have increased much faster. In 2007, the percentages scoring advanced in fourth grade were 0.9% and 1.1% for English Learners and 6.1% and 7.4% for non-English Learners. The gaps were large before NCLB and, in math, have only grown in size. In reading, the gap for English Learners contains more mixed findings. They have remained relatively flat since 2000, but they were much larger to start than the math gaps. For example, the fourth-grade reading gap in 2000 was 0.1% vs. 7.3%. In 2007, it was 0.8% compared to 8.6%. In sum, these national NAEP data demonstrate that there are groups of students who are not realizing their potential, and this is causing inequalities and disproportionalities at the highest levels of achievement. What they also make clear is that students from low-income and English Learning families have seen the largest expansion in excellence gaps since the passage of NCLB.

The Need for Gifted Programs to Address the Excellence Gap

There are mixed arguments about the need for gifted programs. This especially because very often these programs have benefited White middle-class students more so than minority students. Especially in the last decades, gifted programs have been strongly criticized as being elitists to which only a few minority students have had the opportunity to have access (Ramos,

2012). Disparities in access have led to disparities in achievement, particularly between advantaged students and those from low-income homes.

Regardless of these critiques, supporters for gifted programs (Plucker & Peters, 2016; Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013; Ford, 2014) continue to advocate for the creation and establishment of GT programs as well as for the inclusion of more students from a minority group. They argue that the goal of GT programs is to meet the needs of students with exceptional abilities whose needs are not being met in the general educational curriculum (Peters et. al., 2016). They also argue that because of the strong emphasis on remediation implemented by schools especially in urban settings, gifted programs offer an alternative to level the plain field providing minority students the opportunity to develop their talents and gifts. According to Peters and Engerrand (2016), gifted programs are most needed in urban areas where typically students from low socioeconomic attend. Such programs do not only provide a new door of opportunity to advanced academic programs but also helps to close the excellence gap and promote excellence among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Plucker & Peters, 2016). Research shows this gap appears in elementary school and continues as students move through middle school, high school, college, and beyond. Thus, exacerbating underrepresentation of minority students in high demand areas such as the sciences, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, (STEAM).

Gifted Education in Wisconsin

The origins of gifted education in the United States goes back to the 1800s when William Torrey Harris, superintendent of St. Louis Public Schools, instituted the earliest systematic efforts in public schools to educate gifted students (NAGC, 2017). However, it was not until the turn of the twentieth century, that advancements in education and psychology brought empirical

and scientific credibility to the field of gifted education. The early studies of giftedness in the 1920s and 1930s evolved from research on mental inheritance, subnormal children, construction of instruments to measure both the sub and supernormal, and the realization that graded schools could not adequately meet the needs of all children (Plucker & Peters, 2016). Pioneers, such as Lewis Terman and Leta Hollingworth, let the movement and conducted some of the first widely published research studies on gifted children.

As in the case of Wisconsin, the first efforts to explore the topic of gifted education goes back to 1971, when the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, William Kahl, appointed an advisory committee to study recommendations of the gifted and talented in Wisconsin schools (http://www.watg.org/history.html). In the 1970s, Wisconsin had two major organizations, the Wisconsin Council for the Gifted & Talented (WCGT) and the Wisconsin Association of Educators of the Gifted and Talented (WAEGT). These two organizations, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, worked together in the drafting and development of the first proposals regarding gifted education. Finally, in 1992-1993 these two organizations merged creating what is currently known as the Wisconsin Association for Talented and Gifted (WATG). Today, WATG continues to work with lead educators and state leaders in Wisconsin to advocate for gifted children and the establishment of programs to meet their needs. Its mission consists of "educate about and advocate for the needs of gifted individuals in Wisconsin." (http://www.watg.org/mission-and-goals.html).

Gifted Education in Milwaukee Public Schools

At the local level, there is little written documentation about the history of gifted education and its practices. Thus, some of the history described in the following pages correspond to two informal interviews (December 09, 2017), conducted by the lead researcher of

this project to provide a local context on the current reality of gifted education in Milwaukee. The first interview was with the current MPS Advanced Academics Curriculum Specialist, Elizabeth Mallegni. Mallegni has worked for the district for the last five years. The second interview was with Dr. James Nelson, author of the book *Educating Milwaukee: How One City's History of Segregation and Struggle Shaped Its Schools* (2015).

According to Dr. Nelson, the MPS district in its efforts to retain White students, after the school desegregation movement of the 1970s, decided to create what was known as magnet schools. Magnet schools were specialized schools that geared students to a specific field, such as the arts, academic excellence, and vocational fields. However, he argues that "the problem was that some schools, located especially in the south side did not provide the same kind of education as other more affluent schools. For example, magnet schools located on the south side of the city, which has had a predominant Latin@ population, focused on providing extracurricular activities geared toward the training of students for manufacturing and services. Contrary, other schools such as Golda Meir (1970) and Samuel Morse (1982), which were conveniently located in the central-north part of Milwaukee, had the label of gifted and talented, which attracted mostly White students and African American students from middle and high socioeconomic status."

According to Mallegni, little is known, about the process of admission for MPS schools that carried out the labeled as "gifted" except that special preference was given to students with a strong academic performance. She argues that, the existence of magnet schools in Milwaukee and the creation of other specialized schools such as the Montessori model were created not just to meet the needs of diverse learners, but rather because of the demands of parents and the desire of the district to retain White families who at that time where leaving the city.

Current Reality

MPS is a diverse district that welcomes all students, preparing them for success in higher education, post-educational opportunities, work, and citizenship. MPS is the largest school district in Wisconsin and the 41st largest school district in the nation, with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. MPS's reported enrollment for the 2016-17 school year is 78,645 with a racial profile that is 88% non-White. MPS students represent 74 different countries and 64 native languages. About four in five (79%) of all MPS students are economically disadvantaged, under the National School Lunch Program.

Most recent data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC, 2013) documents the data collected for Milwaukee Public School (MPS) District. Data shows the demographics of the overall enrollment ($n = 78,645$). The largest ethnic group represented in MPS are Blacks with 55.1% of the enrollment, followed by 24% of Hispanics and 13.6% are Whites than Asians with 5.7% of the overall enrollment. The ethnic group with the lowest percentage is Native Americans with 0.8% of the overall enrollment.

Despite the existing student diversity present in the district, MPS follows national trends when looking at the issue of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Categorically, among the formally identified gifted and talented (GT) population there are 6.1% ($n = 4,796$). Out of the GT students identified, the largest group is White with 9.5% representation. Next with 8.3% representation are Asians, while 5.6% are Black, and 5.5% are Native American. The ethnic group with the lowest representation is Hispanics with 4.8%. Clearly, these percentages are disproportionate to the demographics of the overall enrollment, which causes a major concern for researchers of underrepresented groups in the field of gifted and talented.

Equally concerning is the underrepresentation of students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and with Disability Status. Of the overall enrollment ($n = 78,645$), 9.8% are students labeled as LEP ($n = 7,457$), of which only 2.1% of the overall enrollment are GT students ($n = 102$). Meanwhile, 20.2% are labeled with having a Disability ($n = 15,877$), of which only 6.5% of the overall enrollment are GT students ($n = 311$).

Mallegni and Nelson, agree on affirming that the establishment of gifted programs in the district, aimed to reach out to African American and Latin@ students has taken place only in the last five years. This is a direct result of the implementation of the NCLB Act of 2002, schools only focused on remediation, neglecting students with exceptional abilities whose academic needs are not being met in the regular classroom.

According to the interview with Mallegni, she stated, "The change in mindset moving from remediation only, to nurture and develop talent are relatively new". She mentioned that at the moment there are many school and district leaders who have manifested interest in the development of advanced programs to meet the needs of CLD students. She argues that, based on current data on the number of students identified as gifted, the future looks promising. This, as a result of the use of a new identification process and an arduous work at the district level, targeting the identification of Latin@ and African American students. She was hopeful that the current implementation of universal screening (CogAt in 2012) for all students in second grade, and the use of other non-psychometric identification (e.g. TOPS Inventory, 2015) tools would prove effective in identifying more minority gifted students, than in previous decades. She added that this early response to intervention (RtI) geared toward the identification, development, and nurturing of talent is a key component in the efforts of the district to decreased underrepresentation especially of Latin@ and African American students.

Robinson, Shore, & Enersen (2006) argue that considering that low-income and CLD gifted learners are often being overlooked by traditional identification procedures, it is necessary the implementation of a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach which must focus on both ends of the learning curve. They argue that, in a RtI system, this starts with universal screeners which Robinson, Cotabish, Wood, and O'Tuel, (2014) defined as systematic assessments used with all children within a given class, grade, school building, or school district. Robinson., et al (2006) share that despite increased use of multiple criteria, the identification of high ability/high potential students continues to be dominated by the use of standardized test scores. While many low-income students and English Learners can be identified through traditional tests, many more are overlooked. The authors recommend alternative screeners, such as observing behavior using student performance tasks that consider the language and cultural expectations of students. They also recommend providing training to sensitize educators to practices that may inhibit recognizing the potential of disadvantaged students.

In 2012, MPS began to give the Cognitive Abilities Tests (CogAT) to all students in second grade to increase the early identification of students for gifted and talented programs. However, after several years of using this test, it was noticed that the number of Latin@ students identified with the CogAT, was not representative of the demographics of the MPS schools. This according to Mallegni, who then began to search for other alternative forms to best identify potentially gifted Latin@ students. Finally, in 2015, a US Doe *Javits Grant* for 1.8 million dollars for Racine, Kenosha, and Milwaukee districts a new project called The *Expanding Excellence* project was implemented. Such a proposal called for the implementation of the U-STARS~PLUS TOPS Teacher's Observation a tool to increase the identification of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

USTARS~PLUS/TOPS: U-STARS is designed to support teachers in the early recognition of gifted potential in economically disadvantaged children and English Learners. Teachers use U-STARS~PLUS TOPS Folders as a tool to help systematically observe children as they complete rich performance tasks. This provides an alternate way to recognize children who have outstanding potential and who may be gifted. TOPS folders are organized around nine domains: learns easily; shows advanced skills; displays curiosity and creativity; has strong interests; shows advanced reasoning and problem-solving; displays spatial abilities; shows motivation; shows social perceptiveness; and displays leadership.

In the development of TOPS as an alternative tool to identify gifted behaviors overtime, specific attention was given to the recognition of educationally vulnerable children whose potential has historically been overlooked.

Positive Results

Data from the 2016-2017 academic year, on the number of students identified as gifted and/or potentially gifted, shows that the number of Latin@ students identified as gifted/potentially gifted using TOPS increased significantly. In 2016-2017, twenty demonstration classrooms began to use the TOPS tool. This was done after teachers received initial training on gifted education, characteristics of gifted students, and the use of TOPS. As a result, in the first's year of implementation, teachers from these twenty demonstrating classrooms identified 37% more economically disadvantaged students with high potential by using the TOPS identification tool than with MPS' current use of the CogAT (see Figure 1). Thus, increasing the identification of CLD students from urban schools in Milwaukee. This graph serves visually exemplifies the increased representation of economically disadvantaged students being identified.

Figure 1

Students Identified Using CogAT versus TOPS by Economic Status (2016-17)

Students Identified Using Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)
- 33% Economically Disadvantaged
- 67% Non-economically Disadvantaged

Students Identified Using Teacher Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS)
- 70% Economically Disadvantaged
- 30% Non-economically Disadvantaged
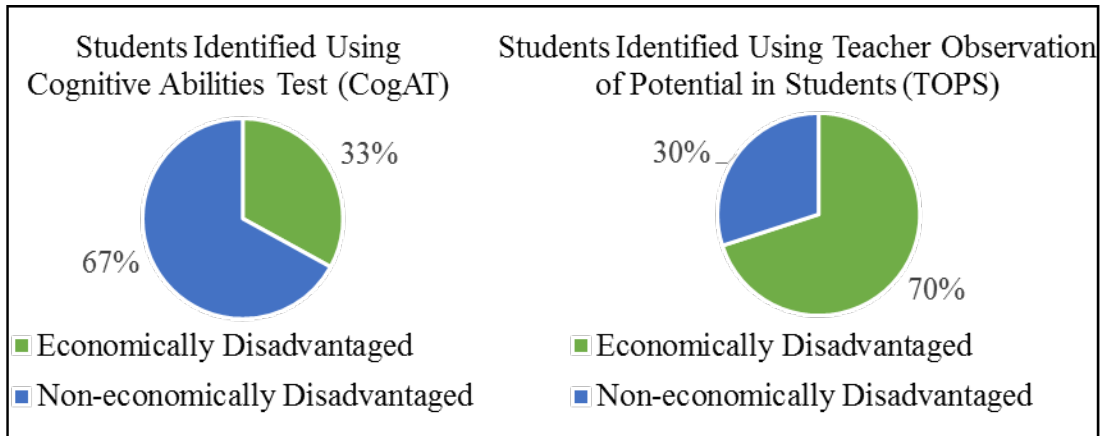
Note: This figure was created by the researcher using public data from the school district in which the study took place.

The Use of RtI as a Framework to Improve Identification Practices

In conjunction with the use of the USTARS~PLUS/TOPS inventory, the district is currently implementing a response to intervention (RtI) approach to nurture, identify, and develop talent among CLD students. As previously described, RtI is a multi-tiered or multi-leveled system of support that uses evidence-based decision making to identify at-risk students before they fail and prescribe interventions to promote their success. It should be noted here that RtI systems have traditionally been used for students with learning difficulties and with students who score a minimum and basic in standardized tests. However, in recent years nationally known experts in disadvantaged students and gifted education (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Coleman & Johnson, 2011; Payne, 2009; Fisher & Sloan, 2010) have advocated to identify and serve high ability/high potential students using a RtI framework.

The RtI Action Network (n.d.) and Murawski & Hughes (2009) identify the following essential components of an effective RtI system: 1) collaboration among school staff (i.e., general education and those who provide special services); 2) parent engagement based on information about goals for their child's education, the instruction and interventions used, and their child's progress towards the goals; 3) ongoing assessment about students' learning needs

and levels of achievement using multiple data points; and 4) high-quality tiered instruction differentiated to meet identified student needs.

Wisconsin's RtI frame includes three core components: collaboration, assessment, and instruction. Surrounding the three components is the multi-level system of support. At the center are culturally responsive practices. Ortiz (2002) notes a RtI system must ensure that students' socio-cultural, linguistic, racial/ethnic, and other relevant background characteristics are addressed at all stages, including interpreting assessment results, identifying why students may not be succeeding, and designing instruction. (2010) affirms that consideration for cultural and linguistic responsiveness and recognition of student strengths, such as in the case of potentially gifted students must be part of RtI. In other words, the system must be culturally responsive.

In conclusion, RtI is a multi-tiered or multi-leveled system of support that uses evidence-based decision making to identify at-risk students before they fail and prescribe interventions at both ends of the academic spectrum to promote their success. The existing excellence gap in districts like Milwaukee demonstrates that high ability students, locally and nationally, who are economically disadvantaged or English Learners are not achieving at their potential. Therefore, from this perspective, one could argue that such students must consider students who are at-risk in need of intervention.

Milwaukee Excellence Gaps

In analyzing Wisconsin gaps as measured by the WKCE state's achievement test, the news is not much better than it is on the national front. According to the Wisconsin state report, *Promoting Excellence for all: A Report from the State Superintendent's Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap* (2014), in the 2013-2014 test year, overall, 6.2% of students scored advanced in reading and 11.2% scored advanced in math. Furthermore, these results

become worse when disaggregated by subgroup. For example, the results show that 2.8% of FARM eligible students and 8.7% of non-FARM eligible students scored advanced in reading at all grade levels. The comparable numbers for math are 4.5% and 16%. Similar numbers can be seen at almost every grade level, in nearly every subject area, and for a variety of student subgroups.

In MPS, the state's largest metropolitan school district, the numbers are similarly challenging. In the 2013-2014 test year, 1.7% of students eligible for FARM scored advanced in reading compared to 6.7% of non-FARM eligible students. The numbers for math were 2.2% and 8%, respectively. The trend that becomes apparent when analyzing all the test data for MPS is that higher-income and English proficient groups (non-FARM and non-English Learners) tend to score at "advanced" levels in nearly every content area and every grade level at rates from two to four times as high as that of their low-income and English Learning peers. What is perhaps the most encouraging part of this phenomenon is that for nearly every disadvantaged subgroup, a larger number of students score proficient at levels just below advanced, than would be statistically expected compared to the advantaged groups. What this signal is that there are students of high potential from disadvantaged groups who could likely score at advanced levels if provided with the proper intervention.

Furthermore, when comparing the state of education in MPS, with neighboring districts, data reveals that such districts face similar advanced achievement disparities. This is the case for Kenosha and Racine public school districts.

In conclusion, what is clear from these data is that disproportionality in advanced achievement in Wisconsin is significant and growing, particularly among the largest urban districts in the state. A recent report on policies and practices that relate to excellence gaps gave

Wisconsin a "D" for inputs and a "C+" for outcomes (Plucker, Giancola, Healey, Arndt, & Wang, 2015). Thus, it is of extreme urgency to address the existing excellence gap, which current data shows affect minority students the most. It is necessary for educators, parents, and policymakers to focus more attention on the excellence gap. This attention need not come at the cost of addressing minimum competency gaps, which remains a necessary and noble goal. Yet continuing to pretend that nearly complete disregard of high achievement is permissible, especially among underperforming subgroups, is a formula for a mediocre K-12 education system and long-term economic decline.

Theoretical Framework

The qualitative and inquisitive nature of this study calls for the use of a critical theoretical lens to shed new light on the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs, and the systems that enable such a problem to exist. Critical Theory also gives insight into teachers' perceptions of minority students as well as the forms of social capital that are valued most by the predominant group (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). For example,   attempts to explain the correlation between privilege and power that White people have enjoyed by historically benefiting from extensive access to learning opportunities. Furthermore, it also looks at the power of institutions, such as schools, and its effects on minority students who often have to align with mainstream beliefs, practices, and norms. This is the case of gifted Latin@ students who tend to be underrepresented in advanced academic programs. This is because of the existing stereotypes and deficit thinking models of Latin@s because of misconceptions of race, language, and socioeconomic status.

Schools Norms, who do They Really Benefit?

Historically, educational systems have developed norms and social models, which all students must embrace and copy to be successful in schools. This, regardless of the fact that most of these norms which might include, behaviors, assessments, use of language, and school attitudes have been created and enforced under White middle-class standards (Ladson-billings, 1994).

To this regard, scholars such as Ladson-billings (1994) argue that the theories and belief systems predominant in education related to people of color and the representation of these citizens place them in disadvantage, which leads to their marginalization. Both of these structural norms present in most institutions have been premised upon political, scientific, and religious theories relying on racial characterizations and stereotypes of minorities that help support a legitimating ideology in which minorities are seen as less capable and less intelligent.

For example, some of the earlier studies with educational implications centered on the intellectual assessment and school achievement of African American and other ethnic minority students. This research legacy referred to as the inferiority paradigm, fueled in part by the use of IQ assessments is built on the belief that people of color are biologically and genetically inferior to Whites (Carter & Goodwin, 1994).

Similarly, scholars Padilla and Lindholm (1995) argue that a set of identifiable characteristics inherent in the deficiency paradigm, particularly IQ assessments, are still apparent today in educational research involving ethnic minorities. These complex, connected assumptions conform to a societal disposition that makes them appear natural and appealing. Some of these well-accepted assumptions include the following: First, The White middle-class American society serves as the standard against which other social and ethnic groups are

compared. Second, the instruments used to measure differences are universally applied across all groups, with perhaps with some adjustments for culturally diverse populations. And third, although we need to recognize sources of potential variance such as social class, gender, cultural orientation, and proficiency in English, these factors are seen as extraneous and can later be ignored (Padilla & Lindhol, 1995).

Teachers' Perceptions and Nomination of Potentially Gifted Latin@ Students

The literature on the issue of teachers' perceptions of minority students clearly shows that students from minority groups are often seen from a deficit point of view and validates the fact that teachers' perceptions are influenced by race, socioeconomic status, culture and personal bias (Ferguson, 2003; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jussim & Eccles, 1992; McKown & Weinstein, 2002, Gándara, 2017; Wright & Ford, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Deficit thinking as defined by Valencia (2010) is the idea that people of color, in this case, Latin@ students, in particular, have limited intellectual abilities, poor behavior, and linguistic deficiencies.

Applied to the field of regular and gifted education in schools, deficiency models of deficit thinking models are used (implicitly or explicitly) to explain the reasons why minority students fail to be identified as gifted and/or tend to underachieve in school settings. From this perspective, if minority students do not do well in schools, it is due to the deficiencies students bring from home, rather than focusing on schools and the existence of a well-established and bias educational system that perpetuates social and educational inequality. Furthermore, it is the student's' culture, home life, language, and behavior of these students which is to blame for their failure to achieve in education (Yosso 2005; & Gándara, 2017). Deficiency models do not take into consideration the historical background of these communities, the presence of

institutionalized racism, and the various ways schools and society structure inequality (Wright & Ford, 2013; Gándara, 2017; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

Deficiency models also conceive minority students as not having the "right culture" to succeed in school or do well in advanced programs. This results in teachers having low expectations for minority students. For example, research by Grissom and Redding (2016) shows that even if minority students demonstrate similar cognitive characteristics and academic abilities than White peers, teachers are less likely to nominate these students for gifted programs, resulting in underrepresentation. Currently, Latin@ students are about 47 percent less likely to be nominated for gifted programs than White students, while at the same time they are overrepresented in special education programs (Ford, 2005; Peters, 2011; Ramos, 2002).

The causes impacting the representation of Latin@ students are many. However, failing to recognize that racism, whether being carried out by institutions or individuals such as teachers is endemic and dangerous (Ford, 2005). Such racism manifests itself in many different forms such as teachers having lower expectations when working with students of color, blaming minority students and their culture as the main reasons for their underachievement, and failing to challenge the status quo. Ladson-Billings (1994) calls these form or oppression *dysconscious racism*, a type of racism that accepts the majority culture's standards and norms. In this case, the White culture is the norm by which all students must conform. This apathy to confront and challenge current norms, which negate the funds of knowledge students bring to the classroom adds to the social disparity that keeps growing in our society. Ford (2017), calls such apathy ignorance and indifference, arguing that "The potential of too many Black and Hispanic students remains untapped because they are denied access to gifted classes supported and protected by ignorance on the one hand, and indifference on the other."

From a Critical Theory perspective, the underrepresentation of minorities in advanced and gifted programs, as well as teachers failing to recognize the gifted potential in students of color, are the result of institutionalized racism, teachers' bias, and the existence of inferiority paradigms. Such racism could be well manifested by conceiving members of minority groups as being inferior or deficient (Hooks, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano, et al., 2001). Proponents of this approach claim that, through a Critical Theory lens approach, the underrepresentation of minority students from gifted programs cannot be explained by factors such as, lack of access to opportunities to learn, possible flaws identification system, or the socioeconomic status of minorities.

For this study, I subscribe to the definition of CT as a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses. CT is conceived as a social justice project that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling (Hooks, 1990; Freire, 1970; Patel 2015). This acknowledges the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower. Indeed, CT in education refutes dominant ideology and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color.

CT calls into question the role of the traditional educational system and its commitment to foster equity (Ladson-Billings 1994; Ford, 2004). Traditionally, equity has been understood as providing equal access without taking into consideration socioeconomic factors evident and not evident, which places minority students at a further disadvantage. From this approach, equity is defined as being fair, responsive, and impartial, especially for those who have the fewest resources and least advocacy, and who have experienced structural inequality due to historical exclusion (Ford, 2017).

Critical Theory and Its Rejection of Traditional Models of Social Capital

Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2000) and Delgado Bernal (1998, 2002) have asked: whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted? In addressing the debate over knowledge within the context of social inequality, Bourdieu argued, "knowledge of the upper and middle-classes are considered capital valuable to a hierarchical society. For example, if one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable, one could then access the knowledge of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). As a result, Bourdieu's theoretical insight about how a hierarchical society reproduces itself has often been interpreted as a way to explain why the academic and social outcomes of People of Color are significantly lower than the outcomes of the dominant class.

Critical Theory challenges traditional cultural capital theory and introduces an alternative model called Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992). These scholars argue that traditional conceptions of social and cultural capital do not take into account the cultural diversity and richness that minority students bring with them, which results in reaffirming the belief that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle-class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society.

The traditional cultural capital theory places value on a very narrow range of assets and characteristics while negating and depriving value to other forms of knowledge that minority students bring with them. Furthermore, a traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by white, middle-class values. CRT expands this view, centering the research lens on the

experiences of people of color in critical historical context reveals accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of communities of color.

Contrary to social capital approaches that focus solely on the knowledge of the dominant class, CT approaches social capital from a much broader perspective. For example under the community cultural wealth paradigm, minorities are no longer seen as being deficient. It argues that people from minority groups have different kinds of knowledge, which are both a form of social capital and a true form of knowledge (Yosso, 2005; Monkman, Ronald, & Théramène, (2005).

Yosso (2005) outlines at least six forms of capital that comprise community cultural wealth and that most often go unacknowledged or unrecognized. These six forms of capital (social, familial, aspirational, linguistic, resistant, and navigational capital) represent the cultural and social assets that minority students bring to the classroom and could prove useful in the empowering of students from minority communities to develop their gifts and talents. This is extremely important when addressing the issue of underrepresentation because very often minority students' cultures have been seen as deficient rather than assets.

The following description represents a various form of capital, which have barely been described as assets of the cultural wealth within communities of color. *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (Gándara, 1995). *Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. Linguistic capital is enhanced bilingualism and recognizes the value of being able to see and navigate two worlds (Cummins, 1986; Anzaldúa, 1987; Gutiérrez, 2002). *Familial capital* refers to that cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and

cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). *Social capital* can be understood as networks of

people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both

instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions (Stanton-Salazar,

2001). *Navigational capital* refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions.

Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with

Communities of Color in mind. This includes educational institutions that often serve as systems

of forced assimilation and oppression (Allen & Solórzano, 2000). *Resistant capital* refers to

those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality

(Freire, 1970; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano, et al., 2001). This form of cultural wealth is

grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color that

challenges the status quo and oppressive realities that dehumanizes them.

The Emergence and Persistence of Deficiency Models

Contrary to most contemporary views on cognition, learning ability, and talent

development, much of the earlier approaches to understanding culture and race in connection to

learning were used in the discriminatory philosophies of the times and were used to explain

differences on IQ tests and achievement by attributing these differences to cultural and biological

factors (Renzulli, 2014; Bernal, 2002; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2012).

From a critical perspective, the stereotyping of minorities as being deficient has served to

purposes. First, the continuous endorsement and ratification of deficiency models of intelligence

and ability, already present in society and educational institutions. And second, the maintaining

of privilege and power of White middle-class norms upon which all other students are to be

evaluated (Ladson-Billings, 1994, Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Throughout history, the argumentation and perpetuation of deficiency models have served as a tool of social oppression and marginalization against people of color. Such deficiency models have not always looked the same, neither have they been explained and defended with the same arguments (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In general, deficiency models have been explained and defended using misguided facts and bias theories, which argue that cognition and the ability to be successful in schools, are determined by biological, cultural, socioeconomic factors. Among some examples of biological and cultural deficiency models are Terman's (1916), longitudinal study *Genetic Studies Genius*, in which he argues that intelligence is hereditary.

Scholars in the field of education such as Solórzano & Yosso, (2012) agree that biological deficiency models are corrosive, untrue, and biased. Nonetheless, such opposition has not deterred the prevalence of similar deficiency models, which continue to be used as an argument to explain the current achievement gap, poverty, and the absence of minority students in advance and gifted programs. Biological deficit models should no longer be used to explain the reasons why minority students continue to fall behind White peers. Defenders of this approach argue that cultural traits and poverty serve to explain why a large group of minority students are not successful in schools. Therefore, programs like Head Start were created to begin to fight this reality. Research shows that other factors such as poverty, less access to highly qualified teachers, racism, and negative stereotypical images of minority students contribute to students' underachievement. In other words, minority students should no longer be defined as biologically disadvantaged, but instead as culturally and linguistically rich, but economically disadvantaged (Solórzano & Yosso, 2012).

Today, in addition to cultural deficiency models, poverty and the so-called "culture of poverty", continues to be a popular explanation for differences in achievement among groups, as seen with the popularity of The Framework for Understanding Poverty by Ruby Payne (2005). The theory of the *culture of poverty* suggests that poverty is the result of people's values or cultural norms. In a way, it suggests that poor people have different cultural values than mainstream society. The theory suggests that we learn certain norms when we grow up in a poor family, and this shapes our life choices and opportunities. As a result, we internalize the values we grow up with, which explains why people who grow up poor often remain poor (Payne, 2005). An example that illustrates this theory was a study conducted by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a United States senator from New York on Black families known as the Moynihan Report (1965). In it, he set out to explain why Black families in the United States remained much poorer than their White counterparts. The main arguments of the report were that the problems of inner-city Black families were the result of households headed by single females and high levels of unemployment. Authors and researchers who use deficiency models tend to explain educational inequality among minority groups, based upon minorities not having the right habits, or culture to succeed. In other words, even if the structure of things, like the economy or access to schooling changes, people are likely to remain poor because of the values they hold.

From a critical perspective, opponents of this approach argue that issues such as poverty and underachievement cannot be explained by Bourdieu's social and cultural theory. For example, in research presented in Canada in 1999, Allen explains that academic achievement is not so much about cognitive abilities or skills acquisition as it is about how the White territorial practices of teachers and others at a school create alienation, resistance, racism, and community membership. Unfortunately, schools do not provide the kind of democratic education that is

inclusive of historically disenfranchised students, mainly because of the territoriality of

Whiteness. (Allen, 1999).

Contrary to deficit thinking perspectives, which impedes the identification of potentially

gifted Latin@ students to enter advanced programs, the federal definition of giftedness strongly

supports the idea that gifted students are found in all ethnic groups. Such definition asserts that

"Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from [all cultural groups], across all

economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE],

1993, p. 3). Nevertheless, despite general acceptance among policymakers and researchers that

students from all types of backgrounds could benefit from gifted education services, students

from traditionally underrepresented groups continue to be served by such programs at lower

rates, which leads to loss of potential talent development (Castellano & Frazier, 2011).

The Role of the Teacher in the Identification Process

There are multiple factors affecting equity in the representation of gifted students.

However, the fact that teachers play a key role in nurturing of talent, identification and referral

process of gifted or potentially gifted students is of concern, especially because all seems to

indicate that minority students are less likely to be nominated for gifted programs (McBee,

McCoach, Peters, & Matthews, 2012; Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014; Ramos, 2010; Ford,

Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006; Wright, & Ford, 2017). It would seem that teacher

recognition and identification for students for gifted education programs would yield more

equitable results; unfortunately, this is not the case. Grissom and Redding (2016) found that even

among students with the same high standardized test scores and socioeconomic status, Black

students were less likely to be referred by teachers to gifted programs in both math and reading.

Interestingly, the only factor that increased the likelihood that a Black student would be enrolled

in a gifted program as if the student's teacher was also Black. This reality leaves one to ponder, why are White teachers less likely to refer Black students to gifted programs? This phenomenon, according to researchers (e.g., Ford, 2013), is implicit biases or nearly unconscious, split-second judgments that humans make. Given that approximately 85% of the current national teacher workforce is White, their views and biases are impactful. Sometimes, these biases go even deeper, causing teachers to underestimate a student's academic ability and intellectual not only based on his or her race and income but also by something as arbitrary as a student's name. For instance, Figlio (2005) showed that teachers were less likely to refer children to gifted programs when the student's name was associated with low-income status. The point of highlighting these studies is to further demonstrate the existing limitations and subjective nature of the teacher identification process, in determining the promise, potential, and possibility of certain students. Thus, resulting in underrepresentation.

The nomination and subsequent identification of potentially gifted students is a lengthy process in which parents and teachers play key roles in both; the nomination and formal identification of students for gifted services. In most cases, the process of nomination of students for gifted programs begins with the desire of parents to have their children enrolled in academic and non-academic activities to develop their talents in abilities in one or more areas. Usually, if parents think their child is gifted it is the parents who advocate on behalf of the student, requesting a process of screaming and testing to determine in which capacity that child might be gifted. Nonetheless, when parents do not know how to navigate the system, or experience language barriers, such as the case of many Latin@ parents, the process of nomination and formal identifications rests in the hands of teachers. Therefore, even if a child displays gifted behaviors or abilities above the norm, it is up to the teacher's subjective criteria and personal

judgment to determine who should be screened, and/or refer for formal identification (Ford, 1998).

Research on parental practices of Latin@ families shows that parents trust teachers not only with the education of their children, which goes beyond academics but also with the decision-making process of what is best for their children. Conventionally, in the Latin@ culture teachers are highly respected and venerated for their knowledge and wisdom. As a result, Latin@ parents are less likely to challenge the teacher's judgment regarding the educational decision (Faltis, 2006).

Traditionally, formal identification of potentially gifted students often begins with a classroom teacher's use of checklists, rating scales, informal recommendations, and cognitive assessments to document a student's academic capability and potential and ends with a referral for further evaluation (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Next, teachers or other school staff formally evaluate students using tools based on the district or state's definition of giftedness. In all but one State, the main criteria for giftedness are academic performance (Donovan & Cross, 2002), underscoring the importance of taking student academic achievement into account in predicting a students' probability of gifted assignment. Yet states increasingly have embraced broader understandings of giftedness as well, employing a "multiple criteria method" that emphasizes such factors as student creativity, artistic ability, or leadership.

Due to the extraordinary power that teachers have in the decision-making process of who should be nominated for advanced learning opportunities; scholars and advocates have supported the transition to a more holistic evaluation because of the potentially detrimental impact on gifted identification of lower scores on cognitive assessments for African American and Hispanic students (Joseph & Ford, 2006). The use of such criteria, however, also provides teachers with

greater discretion in an assignment. As most states rely on teacher referrals and input in an assignment, teachers' perceptions may influence outcomes at numerous points in the process (Nicholson-Crotty, Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Redding, 2016). To the extent that teacher perceptions of students are affected by race or ethnicity, this discretion may lead to unequal treatment of different groups of students even within the same school or classroom. For example, racialized teacher perceptions may lead teachers to misinterpret Black or Hispanic students' behavior because of different cultural backgrounds; what a teacher may attribute to precocity for one student may be considered disruptive behavior for another (Ferguson, 1998). Furthermore, rigorous or valid assessment tools may not be mandated or utilized, and teachers often are not trained on strategies for identifying gifted students (Donovan & Cross, 2002), increasing the influence of teacher discretion in the screening and referral process (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

Reflections on the Literature Review

Addressing the issue of underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs is a very complex challenge. Its solution goes beyond the school walls. As previously discussed, too many variables contribute to such a reality. As a result, there is not a single solution that could solve such a complex problem. That said, one could argue previous practice methodologies used to identify potentially gifted students, especially from minority groups have proven to be ineffective, adding to the disparity in educational opportunities. Thus, the implementation of new strategies and methodologies must help solve the problem of the underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs. The review of the literature shows that there is no single definition of a gifted child and that giftedness goes beyond multiple dimensions of intelligence. Furthermore, special attention should be given to the role that teachers play in the identification and nomination of Latin@ students for gifted programs.

Research on the identification of giftedness points to the lack of appropriate assessment

procedures to increase the number of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Giftedness is not a trait

inherent to native English speakers; however, there is a lack of instruments that can detect

giftedness in minority language students (Gallagher, 1979; Llanes, 1980; Raupp, 1988; Renzulli,

Reis, & Smith, 1981). Most tests rely on either oral or written language skills. Minority language

students who are not considered gifted may be very gifted, but unable to express themselves in

English. In addition, research shows that giftedness does not manifest the same in every child.

This means that teachers cannot rely on traditional definitions of giftedness and identification

method, which often serve as an exclusionary tool adding to the underrepresentation of minority

students. Many researchers urge that great caution be exercised in using English standardized

tests only for the identification of linguistic and cultural minority students. Researchers also

recommend selecting tests that reduce cultural and linguistic bias (Renzulli, 2014; Ford,

Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006; Wright, & Ford, 2017). The identification and

assessment of gifted and talented minority language students are complex because it involves

students who are both gifted and talented and from a language or cultural background different

from middle-class, native-English-speaking children (Harradine et al., 2014). Finally, researchers

and practitioners also recommend a careful study of the role of teachers in the process of

identification, as well as the use of multiple assessment measures to give students several

opportunities to demonstrate their skills and performance potential.

This literature review explored the significance of this issue of underrepresented Latin@

students in gifted programs, as well as some of the reasons that explain such challenging

problems. I also reviewed the development of gifted programs, theories, and different approaches

to the issue of gifted education. I also addressed the issue of proper representation of Latin@s in

gifted programs, in part due to the process of selection including the role of the teacher. Finally, I concluded with a summary of gifted and talented programs in the City of Milwaukee, and a short data analysis examining the current representation of students in GT programs.

As previously discussed, the issue of underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs is still long-lasting and it seems as it will continue unless there is a change in mindset from deficit to at potential. Historically, there have been some significant efforts to address and increase the representation of minorities in gifted programs. However, the fact that Latin@ and African American students are still underrepresented in gifted programs is worrisome. Finally, there is evidence that shows that teachers play a key role in the nurturing, identification and referral of students for gifted programs, as well as the fact that they tend to nominate more White students than minority students. Nonetheless, there are limited studies that focus on teachers' perceptions of giftedness in Latin@ students and the criteria used in their decision-making process. Thus, is of extreme urgency to continue researching how teachers' perceptions of the giftedness influences nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

As the discipline of gifted education continues to evolve, amid a very diverse and pluralistic society, it is necessary to think creatively. This includes adapting its methodologies and its identification process so schools can be more inclusive. Consequently, schools will be better prepared to meet the needs of CLD students, and the demands of today's global society.

Conclusion

First, after an exhaustive literature review on the topic of gifted education and the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs, it is evident that the underrepresentation of Latin@ students is an issue that still exists. As a result, there is much work to do to make sure that gifted and talented programs serve as an area of inclusion and not

of exclusion. This entails further research in the identification process, the criteria employed by teachers to identify giftedness, and their effects on the inclusion or exclusion of minority students. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010) has stated that limited access of minority students to gifted and talented programs remains as one of the challenges that educators, scholars, and administrators must urgently address. It also describes that some gifted individuals with exceptional aptitude may not demonstrate outstanding levels of achievement. Various factors include environmental circumstances such as limited opportunities to learn as a result of poverty, discrimination, or cultural barriers; physical or learning disabilities, motivational, or emotional problems. Identification of these students will need to emphasize aptitude rather than relying only on demonstrated achievement. Such students will need challenging programs and additional support services if they are to develop their ability and realize optimal levels of performance.

Next, identifying and serving CLD students enrich the fabric of gifted education and cultivates what is still an untapped national resource. To promote equitable access and school success for CLD students, schools, and supportive organizations need to be strategic, purposeful and committed to altering common identification and programming practices. Current policies, procedures, and practices need to be thoroughly examined and defensible identification protocols developed and implemented. Effective teaching and learning models and school support services should also be intentionally designed to address the specific needs of CLD students.

Additionally, to meet the needs of CLD students, a change in how educators view these students must occur. A multidimensional paradigm shift from a deficit to a strength perspective is proposed to ensure the unique abilities of these students are recognized. In addition, special interest in research must be given to the role of teachers, their perceptions of giftedness, and their

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perception of potentially gifted minority students. Research shows that teachers' perceptions affect students' self-esteem and academic achievement. Thus, the need to provide teachers with training on how to best identify and meet the needs of CLD students.

Also, as the demographics of schools in America continue to change, bringing within it a growing Latin@ population, it is necessary to promote the inclusion of a more diverse teaching labor force, especially since more teacher training of minority students have proven to be significant in the increase of minority students that are referred for gifted services.

Furthermore, identifying and serving CLD students enriches the fabric of society, nurturing, and developing a valuable group. To promote equitable access and school success for CLD students, schools and support organizations need to be strategic, purposeful and committed to altering common identification and programming practices. Additionally, as it is stated by the National Association of Gifted Children that "current policies, procedures, and practices need to be thoroughly examined and defensible identification protocols developed and implemented. Effective teaching and learning models and school support services should also be intentionally designed to address the specific needs of CLD students" ((NAGC, 2011).

Lastly, the racial disparities in gifted education can widen longer-term gaps in opportunity. Participation in gifted and talented programs has been linked with positive future outcomes, including improved academic performance, motivation, and classroom engagement. Furthermore, students' participation in gifted and talented programs should no longer be considered something for the elite. On the contrary, it should be equally accessible to all students regardless of their race, language, gender, and socioeconomic status.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Research about Latin@ underrepresentation in gifted programs has produced conflicting results. The extensive literature review presented in chapter II addressed this issue thoroughly and provided support for conducting further research on this topic. The following section serves to present the methodology used in the collection and analysis of qualitative data regarding teachers' perceptions of giftedness. This, because teachers' perceptions seem to influence the identification and referral process on minority students. Yet, research on how teachers perceive giftedness in Latin@ students is limited.

Various data collection methods including teachers' interviews and focus groups were used to collect data. These methods in qualitative studies have shown most effective to understand a given phenomenon such as the issue of underrepresentation (Ford, 1995; Bentley; Patton, 2002; Stargardter, 2016) especially because these techniques help to capture the untold stories of those involved in the process of identification and nomination of students. Consequently, teachers' narratives serve as a counternarrative story of those involved in the decision-making process leading towards the identification and nomination of Latin@ students. This decision-making process of choosing to refer Latin@ students or not, begs to explore whether conscious or unconscious racism in educational institutions as well as the existence of teacher bias, plays a part in the referral process.

This study also includes a critical analysis of factors leading to the exclusion of Latin@ students, especially the ones dealing with teachers' perceptions. Furthermore, because the issue underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted programs directly speaks about issues of exclusion of students of color from higher-end learning opportunities, the researcher used Critical Theory to

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best explain the convergence of race, racism, and education. Critical Theory aims to dig beneath the surface of social life and uncover the assumptions that keep human beings from a full and true understanding of how the world works (Kincheloe, & McLaren, 2011). This critical approach has been informed primarily by some of the tenets used by CRT theorists to shed light on the inequities that exist in gifted programs from a racialized perspective. Some of the tenets from CRT that were used as part of this critical analysis approached included: (1) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; (2) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; and (3) Whiteness as property (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006; Yosso, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000). It is important to clarify that this study does not focus on the analysis of laws and social policies. Therefore, CRT tenets such as interest conversion and critique of liberalism were not used as part of this study. Table 1. shows the tenets used as part of a Critical Theory approach.

Table 1

Critical Theory Tenets Guiding this Study

Critical Theory Tenets	CRT tenets informing Critical Theory
Critical Theory takes into consideration issues of class, gender, socioeconomic status.	Tenet One: Counter-storytelling is a framework that legitimizes the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalized groups (DeCuir & Dixson; Ladson-Billings; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Counter-stories are a resource that both exposes and analyzes the dominant (male, White, heterosexual) ideology, which perpetuates racial stereotypes. Counter-stories are personal, composite stories, or narratives of people of color (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).
Critical Theory considers necessary to understand the lived experiences of real people in context. As in the case of this study, this relates to the experiences of teachers in	Tenet Two: the permanence of racism. This tenet asserts that racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of American society, where, from the CRT perspective,

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Critical Theory Tenets	CRT tenets informing Critical Theory
charge of the process of identification and referrals of potentially gifted Latin@ students (Giroux, 1986; Yoon, & Gentry, 2009; Fernandez; 2002).	racism is regarded as an inherent part of civilization, privileging White people over colored ones. The permanence of racism suggests that racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of U.S. society. In CRT, racism is seen as an inherent part of American civilization, privileging White individuals over people of color in most areas of life, including education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In higher education, racism may be analyzed through a lens that examines the structural impact.
Critical Theory shares the ideas and the methodologies of interpretive theories. Additionally, Critical Theory interprets the acts and the symbols of society to understand how various social groups are oppressed, examine social conditions to uncover hidden structures, and teaches that knowledge is power (Herda, 1999; Patel, 2015; Ford, 2014).	Tenet Three: Whiteness as property. This tenet originated from the embedded racism in American society, where the notion of whiteness operated on different levels, such as the right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right of exclusion (DeCuir & Dixson; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).
Critical Theory, informed by other disciplines such as CRT, is proven effective to address issues of race and racism offering conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been institutionalized and maintained to limit access of minority students to opportunities to learn (Solórzano & Yosso 2002).	
Critical Theory seeks to be critical of institutions and calls for the transformation of these entities within the current system to become more equitable social spaces where all students have equal access to educational experiences (Ford, 2014; Herda, 1999; Patel, 2015).	
Critical Theory seeks to decolonize research practices of minority groups, which often benefit those in power. Thus, Critical Theory	

Critical Theory Tenets	CRT tenets informing Critical Theory
raises questions about how power relationships advanced the interest of one group while oppressing those of other groups while seeking truth and the construction of knowledge (Patel, 2015).	

Restating of the Problem

This qualitative study seeks to understand teachers' perceptions of the giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students and its effects on the nomination process for gifted services. Throughout this study, the term "potentially gifted" is used to describe students who show gifted behaviors and/or exceptional abilities in one or more areas (general intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, psychomotor, and academic) and who have not been formally identified as gifted. This implies that these students are found in regular education classrooms and in most cases taught by regular education teachers who are responsible for the identification, nomination, and formal screening. A detailed review of the literature on the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs (GTP), showed that Latin@ students were less likely to be nominated for gifted programs even if they possess similar cognitive abilities to White peers, resulting in their exclusion from gifted programs (Yoon & Gentry, 2009; Ford, 2014). Currently, Latin@ students represent the fastest-growing minority group in American schools (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016). Potentially gifted students are not receiving equal access to high-end learning opportunities brings devastating consequences to the fabric of American society (Ford, 2104 & Gándara 2017). In the last decades, there have been multiple efforts to learn more about what leads to such underrepresentation. However, little is known about how teachers' perceptions influence the nomination of Latin@ students for gifted programs.

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were used in the collection and analysis of data for this qualitative study. This includes the research design, research questions, sample population, the conceptual framework, instrumentation, and data collection techniques. The following questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers define giftedness?

2. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?

3. How do teachers' perceptions of giftedness influence the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students? Do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs?

4. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?

Research Design

Since I was interested in capturing the actual lived experiences and perspectives of multiple participants, this research design called for qualitative critical research consisting of two field components: Individual interviews and a follow-up focus group for member-checking (Merriam, 2009). The intricate nature of the questions asked in this research required that I ground the study's design in a qualitative phenomenological hermeneutical research (Van-Manen, 2014). Patton (2015) explains that phenomenology allows understanding how people describe things and experience them through their senses.

Although qualitative research emerged from the field of anthropology and sociology, it serves as a primary design for other fields of knowledge such as the field of education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of those who perceive a given phenomenon. Paraphrasing Merriam's

and Tisdell's words, qualitative research does not seek to test a theory or measure anything, but rather, it is interested in understanding the experiences of individuals and their perceptions of the world (p. 13). In other words, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, and the researcher's meaning-making process is a part of this phenomenon. Giftedness is a social construct, hence it is perceived differently, depending on multiple factors such as race, culture, educational background, gender, and personal experiences. Research shows that giftedness remains an elusive concept to most educators and there is not a single definition that seems to satisfy everybody (Peters, Matthews, McBee, & McCoach, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Kulieke, & Krasney, 1988; Renzulli, 1977; Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005; Peterson, 2011; Worrell, 2010). Therefore, to better understand how teachers perceive giftedness, such perceptions needed to be deconstructed, analyzed, and studied from a phenomenological and critical standpoint of view.

Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations, in this case, teachers (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative researcher conducts the study in the subject's natural setting and interprets the meaning behind the daily world. Subsequently, using a qualitative research design to capture teachers' perceptions of giftedness of Latin@ students proves adequate to best understand how teachers come to the decision-making process of determining which students are gifted. This issue cannot be studied in isolation, neither can hide deep ingrained social issues of race and discriminatory practices which prevents students of color from entering gifted programs. Therefore, a critical analysis, using Critical Theory was also necessary to understand the interconnectivity between the nomination of potentially gifted students and issues of race, socioeconomic status, and gender. Since the goal of this study was to understand

teachers' perceptions of giftedness, the researcher conducted teachers' interviews and focus groups. This, to collect data from those who were in direct contact with the phenomenon.

Using a Phenomenological Qualitative Approach

One of the main characteristics of qualitative inquiry is the fact that this kind of research is naturalistic, which allows the researcher to experience and study a phenomenon as it unfolds naturally. As a result, qualitative research permits the researcher to approach a problem or phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Patton, 2005, p. 97). This is true when trying to comprehend the issue of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. To answer the questions guiding this study, the researcher conducted a phenomenological hermeneutical analysis, which served to best capture the perceptions of teachers through their stories and teaching practices (Handwerk, 1989). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that arose out of and remains closely tied to phenomenological philosophy. The basic tenet of hermeneutic phenomenology is that our most fundamental experience of the world is already full of meaning (Herda, 1999; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 2006; Van-Manen, 2014). We are enmeshed in our world and immediately experience our world as meaningful because our world, with its other people, its histories and cultures, and its events, precedes any attempt on our part to understand it or explain it.

The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of this basic experience. Researchers first attempt to describe phenomena as they appear in everyday life before they have been theorized, interpreted, explained, and otherwise abstracted while knowing that any attempt to do this is always tentative, contingent, and never complete. Including opportunities for follow-up reflections, theorizing, and meaning-making among participants and researchers as an additional step is a common component in

studies with a hermeneutic phenomenological method (Herda, 1999). The stance of the researcher is that they always have something to learn and must check for understanding in ways that support the learning of all involved in the shared event of understanding. Phenomenology is a school of thought associated with Husserl (1970) which developed as a philosophical approach in the twentieth century. Phenomenologists are not concerned with modern science efforts to reduce a phenomenon to abstract laws. Rather, phenomenologists are interested in capturing the lived experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to "go to the things themselves" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to uncover essence. Lester (1999) argues that phenomenology serves as a vehicle to access the world as we experience it in our day-to-day existence. Consequently, to gain access to lived experiences, interviews and focus groups prove very effective to get to the essence of a phenomenon.

In sum, the goal of qualitative research was to develop a comprehensive summarization, in everyday terms, of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenology, on the other hand, tries to get beyond a mere description of human experiences by trying to get to the essence of these experiences and the underlying structures of the phenomenon. Van Manen (2016) writes "phenomenology does not just aim for the description and clarification of meaning; it aims for meaning to become experienced as meaningful" (p. 373). As in the case of this study, qualitative research and phenomenology allowed the researcher to investigate the nature of teacher's perception of giftedness, their perception of potentially gifted Latin@ students, and ultimately their perceptions of giftedness which impacted the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

Research Background and Context

This study took place in an urban school district in the Midwest region. However, before proceeding to the description of the setting it is necessary to put the issue of underrepresentation in context. Scholars concur multiple factors are contributing to the underrepresentation of Latin@ in gifted programs. However, since much of the power to nominate students relies on teachers, it is imperative to understand how their perceptions of giftedness influence nominations. Available data from the district's website in which this study took place, showed that the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs followed national trends (see figure 2).

Figure 2

Students' Representation in TG Programs at the District by Ethnicity
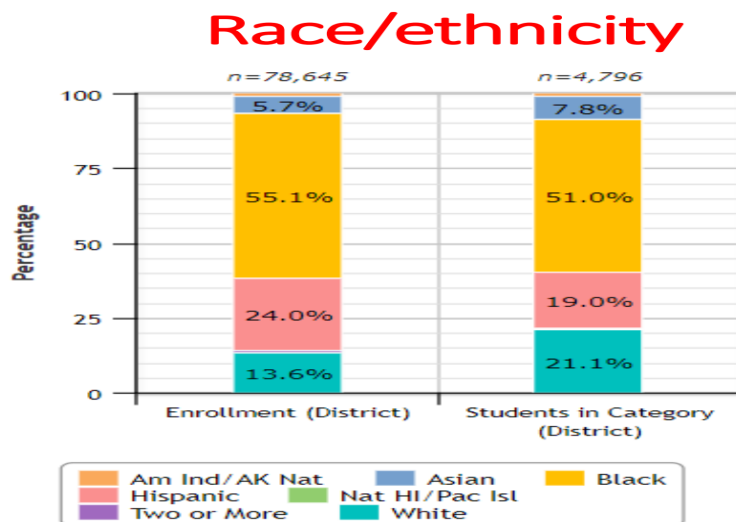
Categorically, among the formally identified gifted and talented (GT) population there are 6.1% (n = 4,796). Out of the GT students identified, the largest group is White with 9.5% representation. Next with 8.3% representation are Asians, while 5.6% are Black, and 5.5% are Native American. The ethnic group with the lowest representation was Hispanics with 4.8%. These percentages are disproportionate to the demographics of the overall enrollment, which

causes a major concern for researchers of underrepresented groups in the gifted and talented field.

Selection of Participants

In qualitative studies, the selection of the site and participants may occur in multiple ways. However, when trying to secure the best sources of data, it is important to conduct a careful selection of the research participants. According to Patton (2002), the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable you to answer your research questions. Purposive sampling does not serve to be representative of the population, but for researchers pursuing qualitative studies, this is not considered to be a weakness. Furthermore, the logic and power of purposeful sampling lead to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 2005 p.46).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) propose different types of purposeful sampling (e.g., typical, maximum, convenience, snowball, ongoing, and homogeneous). Based on the criteria used for the selection of participants and the questions guiding this study the researcher used homogeneous sampling. Homogeneous sampling is a purposive sampling technique that aims to achieve a homogeneous sample of the population. That is a sample whose units share the same or very similar characteristics. According to Creswell and Plano (2011), homogeneous sampling is often chosen when the research question that is being addressed is specific to the characteristics of the particular group of interest, which is subsequently examined in detail. For this in-depth study, a homogeneous sampling consisted of participants who shared similar attributes such as; education, work experiences, language, school demographic, and student population. Therefore,

issues of gender, race, and age were not considered as a determining factor to attain homogeneity.

Having a small number of research participants allowed for an in-depth study. Patton (2005) speaks in favor of this technique by arguing that, "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. Furthermore, the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on an in-depth understanding of specific cases: information-rich cases. As I return to the main research question, the term "perception" is yet again reexamined. It is this term that lay at the center of this research. Therefore, the sampling of the interviewees had to be the ones who were immersed in the experience. This directly referred to teachers who directly worked with Latin@ students in primary grades (grades 2 to 4) and who was responsible for the identification and nomination of these students for gifted programs. Considering this was an in-depth qualitative study, the limit of participants consisted of eight teachers who were part of the selection and nomination process of Latin@ students at their schools in a large urban school district in schools that had a significant Latin@ population. These research participants were doing more referrals than similar teachers in the district. As a result, they were the desired population of participants for this study. In this school district, gifted referrals occur in grades 2 to 4. These teachers were recruited from four schools that shared similar student demographics.

- These eight teachers met the following criteria to attain rich information to respond to the research questions guiding this study.

- Teachers have been working with the district for at least three years. Usually, work experience is one of the best predictors of teaching effectiveness. The three-year mark

period is what the district takes into account for the renewal of licenses. Teachers gradually reach a plateau after 3-5 years on the job.

- Teachers were currently involved with the identification and nomination process of Latin@ students for gifted programs in an urban setting. This means that they were in the classroom fulltime and under current district requirements, they were responsible for the identification and referral process.

- Teachers have received some type of training in gifted education such as personal development sessions or were currently enrolled in a process of receiving certification in gifted education.

- Teachers shared similar educational experiences working with Latin@ students in bilingual settings.

- Teachers worked with bilingual students from grades 2nd to 3rd. This criterion fitted with district guidelines for formal identification. Under the current district policy, all students in the second grade were tested using CogAT. A universal screener used by the district. Besides, teachers in subsequent grades (3rd to 5th) can nominate and refer any students who score at the 90 percentile in any district standardized assessment.

- Teachers who were working at the same educational institution in which the researcher was currently working were excluded from this research. This was done to avoid conflict of interest and to maintain validity and reliability.

To conclude, the following guidelines served as a roadmap for the recruitment of participants.

- First, I arranged a meeting with the gifted coordinator from the school district to have access to the names of teachers who fit the research criteria. The district gifted coordinator, in this case, is responsible for the implementation of GT programs, the

collection of the district and school data regarding students' identification, and teachers' training. I was successful in attaining this because I had worked directly with this person in various capacities including the planning and implementation of the S-STARS model and the use of Teachers' observations of Potential in Students (TOPS) to increase the representation of Latin@ students in Gifted Programs.

- Secondly, I formally reached out with a letter and flyer inviting potential research participants to partake in the study (SEE APPENDIX A).

- Next, I followed up with a phone call to set a formal meeting with all participants to discuss the detail of the study.

- Finally, I met with them in person and went over consent forms regarding interviews and the follow-up focus group, purpose of the study, and timeline regarding the length of the study to each participant (APPENDIX B).

Data Collection Strategies

The following chart shows the main research events planned for data collection purposes.
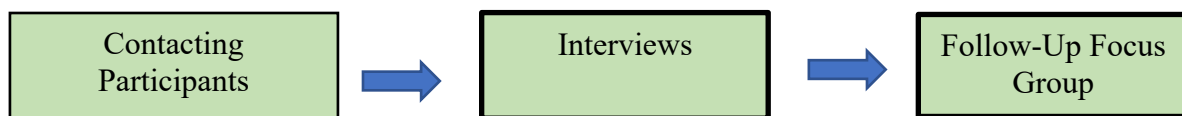
Data Collection Protocol

For this study, the researcher used interviews and a follow-up focus group for member checking to best capture teachers' perceptions of giftedness in Latin@ students. Data from interviews were coded and analyzed through the lenses of Critical Theory, which places a particular emphasis on the narratives of individuals who are often at the margins of society. In

the field of education, Critical Theory uses counter-narrative stories of those whose voices have been silent and marginalize to change educational systems that benefit those from the predominant group. Thus, opening the door of opportunity for students of color as a means to attain equity. Additionally, Critical Theory challenges traditional perceptions of minority students which places them as being at risk or as being deficient (Yosso, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; & Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). After all interview data was collected, initially coded, and analyzed, the researcher invited research participants to partake in one 60-minute focus group session (sense-making sessions) to share findings using data from interviews. This was done for member checking ensuring validity, and reliability. Merriam and Tisdell (2016), argue that this helps to warrant trustworthiness, making sure that the investigation, data collection, and data analysis was done with rigor and in an ethical manner. This process guarantees transparency and guarantees that the researcher was able to accurately interpret what was observed and shared by interviewees.

In qualitative studies, data collection is best captured through direct contact with the subjects and phenomenon to be studied (Patton, 2015, p. 14). Therefore, using interviews and focus groups are two of the most powerful methods to collect rich data. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the data collection techniques used during the research, as well as the specific information considered to be data, are determined by the theoretical orientation, the problem, purpose, and questions guiding the study (p. 106). In other words, qualitative research often identifies areas of inquiry that can be investigated through interviews.

Interviews

In today's society, interviewing has become one of the most convenient, but not necessarily reliable forms of attaining information. This is evident especially on television, where it is common to witness a story being told and interpreted with a particular interest in mind to serve the purpose of a particular group. Contrary to day to day interviews which often consist of spontaneous exchange of trivial information, interviewing for research purposes is a systematic activity that has structure and purpose (deMarrais, 2004). It is a process in which the researcher conducting the study directly and profoundly engages in a conversation, focused on questions about a research study. The purpose of interviewing is to collect and understand knowledge; beliefs and opinions from the participants' perspective (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

In qualitative research, interviews are necessary to reveal information that one cannot observe. They seek to unveil meaning on how others perceive the world around them, providing the researcher with an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 2016). In other words, interviews serve as an adequate tool to best understand other's perceptions of themselves and others; and the realities that people encounter. Patton (2005) argues that "We interview people to find out from them those things that we cannot directly observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions…We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 109).

There are various models to conduct interviews which include: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Essentially structured interviews are verbally administered questionnaires, in which a list of predetermined questions are asked, with little or no variation

and with no scope for follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration (Meriam & Patton, 2016, p. 109). Consequently, they are relatively quick and easy to administer and may be of particular use if clarification of certain questions is required. However, by their very nature, they only allow for limited participant responses and are, therefore, of little use if an in-depth goal is desired.

Conversely, unstructured interviews do not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and are performed with little or no organization (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008). Such an interview may simply start with an opening question and will then progress based primarily upon the initial response. Unstructured interviews are usually very time-consuming and it demands a skillful interviewer. Generally, this type of interview is only considered where significant depth is required, or where little is known about the subject area.

Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Britten, 2007). The flexibility of this approach, particularly compared to structured interviews, also allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to both the researcher and the research participants.

Qualitative research allows researchers to shape findings around the story and experiences of the interviewee. For this reason, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to tap into these experiences. A semi-structured interview format also allowed me "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview, and the new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). Semi-structured interviewing allows researchers to follow the interviewee's interests and thoughts; revealing deep information and establishing a sense of empathy for the research participants. Finally, in this type of interview, questions are flexibly

worded, and, in most cases, these questions seek specific information relevant to the purpose of the study. Qualitative studies use open-ended questions as a starting point to investigate that which numerical data cannot inform (Creswell, 2017; Kumar 2011). Although statistics and numbers shed light on key issues, it is also true that the use of qualitative methods helps to best capture people's stories and perceptions, which was the main purpose of this study.

To collect data for this study, the researcher conducted one 45-minute audiotaped interview with each research participant. This interview took place at the beginning of the study. This interview approach was exploratory, which sought to explore and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the research participants. After all, interviews were collected the researcher proceeded to code, categorized, and report preliminary themes and findings for research participants. This was done through a 60-minutes focus group and served a two-fold purpose: first to shed light on crafting or developing follow up questions and second, to allow research participants to make sense of the research findings. Thus, enhancing validity and trustworthiness. As previously stated, interweaving for qualitative research is understood as a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. Therefore, each question must seek to find specific and useful data. Researchers agree that the key to obtaining good information from interviews in qualitative studies is to ask a good question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; deMarrais, 2004; Fielding, 2008; 2014). Equally important is the fact that these questions must be related to the purpose of the study, use a familiar language, and are clear to the interviewed. For example, asking open-ended questions facilitates to stimulate rich responses and to keep a conversation flowing. For this study, the researcher purposefully used different types of questions including open-ended questions, follow up questions, probes, and interpretive questions (APPENDIX C). These types of questions as previously stated served as an effective technique to yield rich

descriptive data, powerful stories, and deep insights on others' perceptions about a problem or phenomena.

Some weaknesses and limitations of interviews are the fact that data collection is both lengthy and time-consuming. Transcribing interviews and taking field notes, demand discipline, and rigor. Such a process also requires side by side initial coding and data analysis to best capture rich insights present in the form of quotes, metaphors, and personal stories. Another cited limitation of interviews is they are highly subjective, although in some instances the same argument has been cited to affirm that, the role of the researcher as an insider adds power to the research process by seeing things that others might not be able to notice (Hellawell, 2006). Consequently, to limit subjectivism it is necessary a process of reflexibility by which the researcher is aware of his/her positionality, bias, and preconceptions about others and the phenomenon being observed.

Member-Checking Focus Group

Historically, focus groups were first used as a research method in market research, originating in the 1940s by the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University (Bloor, Frankland, & Robson, 2001). In qualitative research, focus groups can be done to accomplish numerous objectives, including the collection of data on a particular topic with a group of people who have the knowledge and firsthand experience of a phenomenon (Kitzinger, 1995). In this study, the researcher conducts one 60- minute focus group session for member-checking, sense-making, sharing, clarifying, and eliciting further information from all participants.

Merriam & Tisdell (2006), argue that focus groups are a reliable tool in qualitative research to seek clarity and to enhance understanding. Similar claims are shared by Williams &

Katz (2001) who state that one of the unique characteristics of focus group research is the interactive discussion though which data are generated, leading to a different type of data not accessible through individual interviews. Focus groups present a unique context for the examination of key and engaging educational issues, relevant to the life of educators, students, and educational institutions. Focus groups for the purpose of sense-making are defined spaces for the collaborative, synergetic, and spontaneous pursuit of knowledge and/or sense-making (Hartman, 2004; Stewart, & Shamdasani, 2014; Southwell, Blake, & Torres, 2005). In focus groups, sense-making is defined as the negotiated and discursive process of message production, interpretation, and the creation of meaning that occurs organically through talk. Interesting insights and outcomes may emerge from focus groups as a form of deliberative engagement.

First, participants do more than respond to questions posed by a moderator. They manage the communicative, task, and social goals and responsibilities inherent in a group conversation. Second, participants use local conversational and contextual resources available to them as they work together to establish common ground from which to build their conversation (Lindegaard, 2014; Robles & Ho, 2014). Third, focus group interactions have benefits that extend beyond the encounter. They can enhance community members' knowledge, influence them to participate in public dialogues, and heighten their communicative self-efficacy, all of which can be of significant civic benefit to individuals and the larger community.

Focus group discussions offer a forum for discursive participation and sense-making that allows citizens and scholars to understand systems of meanings and experiences better through the production and analysis of talk (Rakow, 2011). In addition to the field of education, focus groups have been used effectible in the social and political settings. For example, Kern and Just (1995) used focus group methodology as a simulation of the social and discursive construction of

meaning among voters exposed to real-life campaign messages to determine how people construct political candidate images and arrive at voting decisions. Their findings revealed that it was not only exposure to mediated campaign messages that influenced their image of the political candidates but, more importantly, the focus group that provided a sense-making arena for the discursive and social construction of candidate images. Similarly, Weick Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) described collaborative sense-making as a means of thinking that is acted out conversationally. Data generated from focus groups are analogous to everyday types of talk that occur within routine communicative contexts in which meaning is socially produced and reproduced). Under certain conditions, everyday talk can be a form of citizen deliberation increasing participants' confidence in their capacity to make social judgments. Thus, focus groups have the transformative potential to effect change, raise consciousness, and empower participants while at the same time uncovering both dominant and hidden discourses (Freire, 1985).

The homogenous sample included in this study includes teachers who work in the same district and had access to the same training for gifted referrals, so a collective member-checking, sensemaking component through a focus group is appropriate. For this research, the focus group took place in a semi-structure form and it included the presentation of data and initial findings, to check their reactions to themes and findings (see APPENDIX E). Researchers participants received a formal invitation to participate in the focus group after all data from interviews was initially collected, coded, and analyzed (see APPENDIX F). as part of their participation on this focus group, research participants had the opportunity to reflect on the research process by reading excerpts of anonymous data to determine if emerging themes resonated with them as well as to consider if there were other areas of inquired not yet considered in the research.

Hence, all participants had the opportunity to add relevant information on the topic, challenge the interpretation of the researcher, and finally reassure that the research was done ethically and professionally (Morgan, 1996). At the end of this focus group, all new information was added to the findings section in a separate section so it is clear what data emerged from the interviews, and what data emerged through the member-checking focus group.

Data Analysis

Traditionally, data analysis has been described as the classification of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. Also, several authors (e.g. Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2015), affirm that data analysis is the most critical phase of conducting high-quality qualitative studies. The latter implies that the researcher must follow a clear and methodical process for the collection and analysis of data as the research process unfolds. Such a process of data collection and data analysis calls for a dynamic and simultaneous process. For example, as in the case of interviews, many researchers advise in favor of transcribing and simultaneously doing initial coding (marginal coding or open coding) which serves as the foundation of future findings of the study.

For this qualitative study, data were collected through interviews and a member-checking focus group and it was coded and analyzed through the lenses of Critical Theory (Patel, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Yosso, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, Banks 20061977; Moll et al.,1992).

In summary, for data collection, I conducted interviews with all participants (n=8), and the transcribed interviews and field notes constituted the main data set for this study. I also conducted one follow-up member-checking, 60-minute focus group, with interview participants.

All data from interviews were collected, initially coded, and analyzed, and then presented in the focus group. This was done mainly for the purpose of sense-making, having the research participants corroborate or challenge the researcher's interpretation of data. Doing this contributed to our shared understanding and deepen my analysis of the subject matter. In qualitative studies, data collection and data analysis go hand by hand. Therefore, in the following section, I describe this process.

Open Coding

First, the researcher prepared for the interview by reviewing the questions crafted for this study. This open coding process is aligned with Johnny Saldana's grounded theory processes to identify themes from the data itself. These findings are presented in the common themes section and include only those themes that cut across all eight participants. Secondly, I transcribed the first set of interviews and typed the observation notes on Microsoft Word to prepare them for data analysis using NVivo software. This allowed me to begin writing marginal notes and personal memos about that, which I think was relevant; as well as ideas and speculation for what I think was going on. Conversely, qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative. Subsequently, for this initial phase of coding, I read the transcript results and observation notes several times to gain a sense of the data. Then I started the first data analysis process by assigning codes.

Hermeneutical Phenomenological Study

After the coding process, I reviewed all transcripts concerning how my guiding research questions. This process follows hermeneutical and phenological methodologies that seek to understand the phenomena and to make meaning to provide possible answers to a given problem.

For this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I first used analytical techniques described by Saldaña (2015). While he is usually considered a grounded theorist, these analytic techniques are widely used in studies with other methodological approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first phase is called open coding. Open coding consists in assigning some sort of shorthand designation to a section of data (Saldaña, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) so that the researcher can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data. Thus, coding can be created using words, colors, symbols, and notes that can also emerge from the literature review on the topic. The same process will take place as the second set of interviews take place. Finally, I used NVivo, a qualitative computer data analysis program commonly used in qualitative studies. NVivo is useful in facilitating code comparison of data, such as a similar definition of giftedness or similar teacher' experiences working with gifted children.

Second Phase of the Coding Process

The second phase of coding took place while re-reading and reviewing the transcripts from interviews. This process entailed the regrouping of open codes into axial or analytical coding. Analytical coding goes beyond descriptive coding and it consists of the interpretation and reflection on meaning (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At this point, I went back to side notes and personal memos and tried to group keywords, repeating concepts, unusual ideas, and notations into categories or groups.

Sorting categories and data was part of the second cycle of data analysis. These categories were grouped into themes or subcategories and it follows a highly inductive process. It is important to clarify the names for themes and categories that will come from at least three sources: the researcher, the participants' exact words, and lastly, the literature on the topic of underrepresentation of Latin@s in gifted education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Sorting Categories into Broader Themes

The last phase of data analysis corresponds to the sorting of categories and themes to describe the phenomenon under study. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016, p. 215) in this phase of data analysis, the researcher moves from a concrete description of observable data to a more abstract level that involves using concepts to describe a phenomenon. The analysis of these concepts, which ultimately the goal was to offer a response to the questions guiding the study, involved being able to make inferences, developing models, and/or generating theory (Fereday, & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Consequently, there was a radical shift in the analysis of data moving from an inductive to a deductive process. Commonly, this is a procedure in which there is a dialogue that goes back and forth between description, analysis, and interpretation. Wolcott (1994) suggests the three primary ingredients of qualitative research as being description, analysis, and interpretation (D-A-I). The amounts and formula must not be taken too literally and will vary for the differing purposes of studies. The formula also cannot account for everything since other materials find their way into academic writing. However, the D-A-I ingredients supported and provided guidance for the writing of my qualitative study.

Validity and Reliability

A fundamental aspect that determines the quality of qualitative research rests on producing valid and reliable knowledge. As such, it is important to ensure that my presentation of findings reflects high quality. Authors, Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lichtman, 2013 highlight the importance of this principle by arguing that there must be a strong connection between methods and meaning, which guarantees trustworthiness. From a qualitative point of view, trustworthiness refers to the rigor in carrying out the study. Research has internal and external validity to the extent to which the findings are credible, as well as if the results of the research are generalized

or transfer to other situations. It is important to clarify that generalizability (in the statistical sense) in qualitative studies cannot occur. Therefore, authors such as Patton (2015) and Merriam & Tisdell (2016), propose the use of the term extrapolation rather than generalization. They argue that "unlike the usual meaning of the term generalization, an extrapolation connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other application of the findings. Extrapolation is modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (p. 255).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that validity and reliability can be attained in different ways, including triangulation of data such as interviews and observation, member checks, having established protocols for the collections of data, and reflexibility. Therefore, to increase the validity and reliability of this study, the researcher first ethically conducted this research. This implies that had to demonstrate competency in the collection and analysis of data (Patton, 2015). I also followed a rigorous thinking process when collecting and analyzing data and I complied with IRB rules. Secondly triangulated data obtained from interviews with a member-checking focus group.

Finally, the researcher went through a process of reflection. By continuing to examine my ideology and biases, I grew in my ability to reflect. Reflexibility is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process (Berger, 2015). In other words, it is being aware of one's bias and personal views of the world, as well as to how the researcher affects and is affected by the research process (Probst & Berenson, 2014). Being aware of the researcher's bias does not mean that such bias will not place a role in the research process. However, it presents

the readers with an upfront understanding of how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (Maxwell, 2012).

Reflexivity in the Research Process

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary collector and interpreter of data. This means that any interpretation of reality occurs through a particular lens and it is for the most part subjective (Watt, 2007). Consequently, the identities of both researchers and participants have the potential to impact the research process. Identities come into play via our perceptions, not only of others but of the ways in which we expect others will perceive us. Our biases shape the research process, serving as checkpoints along the way. Through recognition of our biases, we presume to gain insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants (Patton, 2015).

To maintain the integrity and validity of the research process it is necessary to know the researcher's positionality (Macbeth, 2001). Reflexibility is a process that helps me to be aware of my own bias, dispositions, perceptions, assumptions, experiences, world views, believes, and theoretical orientations through which I interpret day-to-day experiences. Reflexivity involves a self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher, a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, a clear positionality regarding in his/her role as an insider-outsider partaker, and finally, an objective, yet critical analysis of the relations of power (Probst & Berenson, 2014).

Positionality of the Researcher

In the world of qualitative research, the interaction of epistemology and ideology happens at the intersection of worldview and background of the researcher. Since it is the researcher who collects and interprets data into meaning, such interpretation is always done through a particular

lens (Berger, 2015). My epistemological and ideological belief systems have developed through my life experiences, including the following: my upbringing, education, socioeconomic status, religion, and perhaps more importantly, my experience as a Latin@ immigrant.

In retrospect, one of the research questions guiding this study: How do teachers' perceptions of giftedness in Latin@ students influence nomination? I accept that several aspects directly connect me with both the theme and the desire to find out how teachers, who work with Latin@ students, perceive giftedness. As an educator, I am attracted to the problem because of my beliefs on the emancipatory power of education (Freire, 1994). I am originally from Colombia and having access to education is the only way to escape ignorance, social marginalization, and poverty. Thus, learning how to read and write provided me with a path to learn how to understand the world, becoming aware of the systems of oppression and socioeconomic inequities that I experienced firsthand.

The act of defining who I am is not an easy task, especially considering that each person develops and uses multiple perspectives. In the process of defining my persona, I have to consider different aspects. One of them is the fact that whether I accept it or not, I am defined in light of how others see me (Kirkland, 2014). In other words, identities are in part socially created.

In 2000, I had the opportunity to immigrate to the United States from Colombia. Back home, I was defined as the son of a single mother who experienced the burden of being a poor, uneducated woman, although I consider my mother to be a person with a lot of education. The term "uneducated" often refers to the lack of access to formal schooling. Here, in the United States, I was given the label of "Latin@" and I was thrown into the Latin@ and minority category. This label is given to all of those who have brown skin and who come from Spanish

speaking countries. I struggle with the idea of putting people into categories and I continue to be astonished by the segregation, racism, and discrimination that members from minority groups continue to face in this so-called "developed" country.

Currently, I could define myself as a Latin@, scholar, whose desire to pursue higher education, has led me to pursue a doctoral degree in education. I have to recognize that my main motivation to do this, has been more personal rather than the desire to climb the ladder. When reflecting on my journey, I realize that my desire to attain a Ph.D., is in part self-motivated, to overcome some of the prejudice and negative stereotypes of Latin@s, who are often seen from a deficit perspective (Steel, 2010; Gonzalez & Ayala-Alcantar, 2008; Berg, 2002). I am 41 years old and I have been living in this country for about 18 years. Although I have been here half of my life, I am still considered an immigrant, although other terms such as "alien", legal, illegal, and Latin@ had been used to define who I am. Nonetheless, and despite all of the challenges, I feel part of this society very much, even though my life is torn between two different societies, two different countries.

While living in the United States, I have mainly worked with immigrant students in the Latin@ community, especially in urban areas. In my role as a teacher, I believe I have served as a role model. I try to inspire children to reach their potential. I like to believe that I am making a difference, shaping the lives of young talented Latin@s by empowering them to break the cycle of poverty, oppression, and social marginalization many of them and their families experience. In my classroom, I challenge my students to work hard, focusing on using their gifts and talents to overcome adversity. In my process of formation, I have studied the history of America and the relations of power and exploitation that had led this country to position itself as one of the most powerful nations on Earth. I also studied the development of education from the perspective of

an outsider, and I have come to realize how schools have benefited some groups while excluding others. Finally, through my work, I had seen a very different reality of Latin@ students who very often live in the margins of society, in part due to existing educational models who see them from a deficient point of view. As a teacher, I believe in equal access to educational opportunities. However, I am also aware that such ideals are still developing. As a researcher, I believe I bring and operate from an immigrant Latin@ perspective, influenced by Critical theory and Critical Race Theory, postmodernism, social justice, faith, humanism, and a strong respect for cultural diversity.

Currently, I work as a 4th-grade bilingual teacher, and my work with mainly Latin@ students, many of them gifted, although not formally identified. My students continue to shape my teaching practices and my approach to education. As a teacher, I believe in equal access to high-end educational opportunities. I also believe that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, race, gender, and socioeconomic status should have the opportunity to receive a high quality of education so they can develop their gifts and talents. I conceive teaching a vocation more than a profession, through which I am entrusted a huge responsibility: to form critical individuals to become active citizens and agents of social change (Dewey, 1916). Nonetheless, I am also aware that issues of race, socioeconomic status, privilege, and power, play a big role in the quality of education that a child receives. Such inequities have contributed to form the American society we have today, and therefore, schools and other institutions are to blame for the social inequalities that we face (Ladson- Billings, 2005). While one may critique my positionality which projects my views toward social class, I hope to make use of this perspective, which I believe provides me with a unique opportunity to approach the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs. Finally, I see my bilingualism and

biculturalism as great assets in the research community and ultimately, my goal is to contribute to improve the high quality of education for minorities as well as to advocate for equal educational opportunities, especially in the area of gifted education.

As a researcher, I am aware of the power that I possess in conducting my research. For example, I am a doctoral student researching teachers' perspectives. This implies that, first of all, I have more access to knowledge, not necessarily experiential knowledge, about the topic to be researched. Secondly, I have to be aware that I am a bilingual Latin@ teacher, which places me at an advantage with other teachers who do not have the same social and linguistic capital that I enjoy. Third, I am aware that I have my own bias and preconceptions about the role of the teacher and how should they teach. Finally, as a researcher, I believe I have an insider's perspective on the theme. This is perhaps better explained in light of my experience as a Latin@ immigrant (Anzaldua, 1993). As an immigrant, I faced multiple challenges including learning a new language, acculturating, and assimilating to a new culture and perhaps more important questioning my own identity. These experiences continue to shape my individuality, knowing that I do not belong here or there, yet, I have the power to navigate these two worlds.

Limitations

The findings from this research are limited in many ways including the following: First, is the issue of scope and generalizability. The current research was conducted in one urban school district. While findings may be useful for administrators, teachers, and gifted coordinators to best address the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students and improve teachers' training, caution should be exercised when broadly applying the study's findings.

The second limitation deals with teachers' participation. The participation of teachers was voluntary. Therefore, any teacher participating in this research could have withdrawn at any

moment. This could have limited the collection of data and possibly have a negative impact on the amount of data collected.

A final limitation deals with the longitudinal nature of this study and time constraints. The study was limited to one semester and resources were limited to my availability and funding throughout this semester. This implies that conducting interviews and focus groups demanded a tight and limited amount of time to collect all data needed for this study.

Conclusion

In summary, this study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and employed a critical theoretical frame. As such, this critical framework borrows from CRT tenants which specifically looks at the intersectionality of issues of race, racism, and power to explain the existence of unjust and unequal treatment of students of color. For the collection of data, the researcher interviewed eight (n=8) teachers who met the homogenous purposive sampling criteria and conducted one member-checking follow-up focus group. All interviews were audio-recorded to capture the full story and narratives of all eight participants. Furthermore, the researcher used NVivo software to assist with organizing the analysis of data.

In the following chapter, the researcher presents a thematic arrangement of the major findings of this study. These findings are presented as part of a common thematic unit and include only those themes that cut across all eight participants. After this, the researcher will used data from all interviews to respond to all guiding questions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Overview

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings that emerged after conducting a

qualitative study using semi-structured interviews and a focus group with eight study participants

in four urban schools in a large urban district. Data for this study were collected during June and

July 2019. The purpose of this phenomenological hermeneutical study was to provide an

understanding of teachers' perceptions of potentially gifted Latin@ students. The following

research questions guided this study.

1. How do teachers define giftedness?

2. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education
   programs?

3. How do teachers' perceptions of giftedness influence the nomination of potentially gifted
   Latin@ students? Do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing
   students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs?

4. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?

To provide a better contextual understanding of this study, the researcher provides a detailed

description of the framework guiding the research, a summary of the methods and theoretical

framework, a short recap on the collection of data and data analysis, and a description of the site

and participants.

Theoretical Framework Used in this Analysis

Qualitative data in this study were analyzed through a critical lens perspective using Critical Theory. However, due to the nature of this study, which sought to find more about the role teachers play in the nominations process of Latin@ students, the author used tenets developed by Critical Theory to analyze the convergence of issues of racism, bias, White privilege, and the existence of deficiency cultural models. (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006; Yosso, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

There are multiple reasons why using Critical Theory served as the ideal framework of the analysis of the current research.

First, Critical Theory takes into consideration issues of class, gender, socioeconomic status, which allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the topic of underrepresentation and the causes that result in the direct exclusions of Latin@ students from gifted programs.

Second, Critical Theory considers necessary to understand the lived experiences of real people in context. As in the case of this study, this relates to the experiences of teachers in charge of the process of identification and referrals of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Given Critical Theory's orientation to human emancipation and embody experiences, it seeks to contextualize philosophical claims to truth and moral universality without reducing them to social and historical conditions. Consequently, critical social scientists believe that it is necessary to understand the lived experience of real people in context (Giroux, 1986; Yoon, & Gentry, 2009; Fernandez; 2002)

Third, Critical Theory shares the ideas and the methodologies of interpretive theories. Additionally, Critical Theory interprets the acts and the symbols of society to understand how various social groups are oppressed, examine social conditions to uncover hidden structures, and teaches that knowledge is power (Herda, 1999; Patel, 2015; Ford, 2014). This means that understanding the ways one is oppressed enables one to take action to change oppressive forces (Freire, 1996).

Fourth, Critical Theory, informed by other disciplines such as CRT, is proven effective to address issues of race and racism offering conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been institutionalized and maintained to limit access of minority students to opportunities to learn (Solórzano & Yosso 2002). It draws from multiple disciplines including CRT to challenge dominant ideologies such as meritocracy, deficit thinking cultural models, and colorblindness, which suggests educational institutions are neutral systems that function in the same ways for all students (Patel, 2016). This critical framework challenges these beliefs by learning and building from the knowledge of teachers and Latin@ students whose educational experiences are marked by oppressive structures and practices.

Finally, Critical Theory seeks to be critical of institutions and calls for transforming these entities within the current system to improve equitable social spaces where all students have equal access to educational experiences (Ford, 2014; Herda, 1999; Patel, 2015). Patel (2015 argues that It is the system itself that requires reforming rather than forcing minorities to accommodate a system of education that is colonial in nature. Consequently, the use of Critical Theory serves as an effective lens for analyzing the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs which poses serious questions about true educational equity for all students.

Since the purpose of this study was to find more about teachers' perceptions of Latin@ students and their nomination process for gifted programs, the researchers used a critical approach to bring up to light the counternarrative stories of teachers regarding their perceptions about gifted education, their perceptions of potentially Latino students.

Summary of Study Method and Data Collection Tools

To best capture teachers' narratives and perceptions of potentially gifted Latin@ students, the researcher made use of a phenomenological qualitative study. Qualitative research examines individuals, institutions, and the phenomenon within the context in which they occur to gain an in-depth understanding of behavior and the possible reason(s) for that behavior (Salkind, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Critical Theory raises questions about how power relationships advanced the interest of one group while oppressing those of other groups while seeking truth and the construction of knowledge (Patel, 2015). Qualitative research is well suited to describe and understand the processes or problems related to teachers' perceptions of giftedness and its manifestation in potentially gifted Latin@ students.

The process to understand the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions was in the qualitative tradition of phenomenology. According to Max & Van Manen (2014), phenomenology aimed to grasp the exclusively singular aspects (identity/essence/otherness) of a phenomenon or event. This method of study made it possible to apprehend the first-hand experiences of teachers who instructed potentially gifted Latin@ students in an urban setting.

The participants in this study included eight instructors who work with Latin@ students. As part of their teaching responsibilities, these teachers took part in the identifications and referral process of Latin@ students for gifted services. Furthermore, since the researcher used purposeful sampling, it was necessary to find participants who could add to the existing research

on the topic of teachers' perceptions by adding rich quantitative data based primarily on their experiences working with Latin@ students. Additionally, these participants were selected based on their practices demonstrated that they were doing more referrals than other teachers in the district.

Looking at their qualification in the area of gifted education, the researcher found that they had various degrees of training in the area of gifted education and were in charge of the identification and nomination process. Consequently, the Gifted and Talented District Coordinator referred them because they participated in various district initiatives to increase the identification of Latin@ students using TOPS, which is a non-normative tool. TOPS was adopted by the district in 2015 for the strategic purpose of increasing nomination by identifying gifted characteristics in minority students. Research participants had an average of 10 years of experience working with Latin@ students, though primarily in traditional mixed-gender regular classrooms.

To collect rich quantitative data in the form of teachers' narratives, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and a focus group session, which served the purpose of increasing validity and reliability, as well as to allow research participants to part-take in a member checking dynamic session around preliminary findings. The recorded interviews and focus group discussions were converted into expanded write-ups, edited, commented on, coded, and analyzed using several steps to attempt to make a list of significant statements to answer guiding questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). These steps encompassed grouping the significant statements into "meaning units" or themes. Next, the researcher wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both textual and structural descriptions as the essence of the teachers' experiences (Creswell, 2007). As described in the theoretical framework

section above, the researcher conducted a critical analysis due to the nature of this study and the desire to uncover rich meaning about how teachers' perceptions influence the nomination of Latin@ students.

Review of Data Analysis

For this qualitative study, data analysis followed traditional qualitative procedures which included: the recording and transcribing of interviews, the creation of axial codes, open codes, categories, and themes. All data used in this study came from interviewing eight teacher participants as well the participation of four of them in a 60 minutes focus group. The latest, to increase validity and reliability.

Qualitative data in the form of interviews required the researchers to be an empathic listener to best capture others' stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consequently, during each interview, the researcher avoided taking notes so he could devote his full attention to each participant. To capture the full story, each interview as recorded and immediately transcribed using Microsoft word.

While transcribing each interview, the researcher began the first process of coding or axial coding. This was done highlighting and writing notes and personal memos on the margins of each transcript. This included making notes of keywords and ideas that pertained to research guiding questions. The next step after the second phase of coding consisted of sorting codes into categories. After this preliminary coding process, the researcher went back to review all transcripts seeking data related specifically to all four guiding questions. This phenomenological hermeneutical approached (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wertz; 2011) allowed the researcher to begin stablishing relations of codes, which resulted in the creation of categories aligned to all questions guiding this study.

To facilitate data analysis the researcher also used Microsoft Word and NVivo. These computer software-based programs provided extraordinary support to the research process by sorting categories, creating visuals of codes, frequently used words and establishing relations of thematic units and queries among research participants

The second phase of coding took place while re-reading and reviewing the transcripts from interviews. This process entailed the regrouping of open codes into axial or analytical coding. This was an inductive process through which the researcher began to identify patterns to be grouped into themes. It is important to clarify the names for themes and categories that came from at least three sources: the researcher, the participants' exact words, and lastly, the literature on the topic. Lastly, after the creation of themes, the researcher proceeded to group themes into major thematic units which were analyzed and interpreted through a critical lens.

Demographics of School Sites

All eight participants that partook in this study came from four elementary schools with similar demographics, which are listed in Table 2. These four schools are part of a larger Midwestern urban district. In total, there are 161 schools within this district, which employs 9,636 full-time teachers. As of 2019, this school district has a total enrollment of 77,746 students.

Table 2

Demographics of School Sites

2019	Alpine	Almond	Kane	Alliance
DPI State Report Card Score (*out of 100*)	52	74.7	71.8	74.7
Total Enrollment	695	585	253	511
Hispanic	75%	87%	80%	99%
English Learners	35%	45%	40%	65%
Free and Reduced Lunch	99%	99%	98%	90%
Special Education	30%	28%	21%	18%

Note. *Data from this table reflects public demographic information available on the district's website under Demographics.*

The terms Free and Reduced Lunch are used to describe a student's family or a member of a household that meets the income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price meals (less than or equal to 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines).

Next, a detailed description of each school's racial and economic demographics, language programming, and mission statement will be explained. To present a better description of schools' demographics, academic achievement, and state performance. Additionally, the 2018 overall report card score given by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will be provided. That is, as part of the state accountability system, DPI produces a report card overall score for every publicly funded school in the state based on data on multiple indicators on four Priority Areas (Student Achievement, Growth, Closing Gaps, and On-track and Post-secondary Success). A school can receive five Overall Accountability Ratings. The following Table lists the overall scores used to determine whether schools meet state expectations.

Table 3

DPI's Five Overall Accountability Ratings

Rating	Score	Stars
Significantly Exceeds Expectations	83-100	*****
Exceeds Expectations	73-82.9	****
Meets Expectations	63-72.9	***
Meets Few Expectations	53-62.9	**
Fails to Meet Expectation	0-52.9	*

Throughout this research, the researcher will use pseudonyms to refer to the four school sites and teachers' names. This is done to maintain the anonymity of school sites and research participants.

School Site 1: Alpine Avenue School

Alpine Avenue School offers families a developmental bilingual program along with the traditional monolingual program in grades K 3 through 5. In addition, it offers special education services, ESL, speech services, full-time art, music, and gym, as well as before-and-after school care. Alpine Avenue's mission is to be on "exceptional school bursting with dedicated, enthusiastic, and hard-working staff members committed to urban education." They also declare their staff "empowers students to achieve at high levels by gaining an in-depth knowledge of content areas."

At the time this study was conducted (see Table 2), Alpine Avenue Elementary had a total enrollment of 695 students. Specifically, the school services special education students (30%) and English language learners (35%). A total of 99 percent qualified for free or reduced

lunch and considered living under the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Demographically, the student body is mainly Hispanic (75%), followed by African Americans (18%), White (5%), Asian (1%), and Other races (1%). Finally, data from the annual state report card shows that Alpine Avenue attained an overall score of 52, which indicates they did not meet state expectations.

School Site 2: Almond Elementary

Almond Elementary school is a multi-ethnic school that offers a developmental bilingual program, grades K3 through 5th grade. The school's mission statement claims, "Excellence is nurtured, and each student will be prepared to succeed socially, emotionally and academically" and where students "become successful learners within their school and their world."

During the 2018-2019 academic year, there was a total of 585 students enrolled in this school. Explicitly, the school services mainly economically disadvantaged families (99%), English language learners (45%), and special education students (28%). District enrollment and Almond's demographic data show that Hispanic students are the largest minority (87%), followed by African Americans (10%), Whites (3%), and Other races (1%). Finally, data from the annual state report card shows that Almond Elementary attained an overall score of 74.7, which signifies they are exceeded state expectations.

School Site 3: Kane Elementary

Kane offers students a small, neighborhood school environment with a strong Dual Language and Traditional Bilingual program. Their mission statement declares, their students "are prepared for college and career success" and where they "achieve their full academic potential through rigorous instruction." They pride themselves with "parental engagement, and community partnerships are valued and utilized to support the success of our students in higher education opportunities and citizenship."

According to the 2018-2019 district data, this school has a total enrollment of 253 students. The majority of their students qualify for free and reduced lunch (98%), therefore they live under the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Moreover, the school's largest minority group are Hispanics (80%), followed by African Americans (17%), Whites (2%), and Other minorities (1%). The school services English language learners (40%) and special education students (21%). Lastly, according to the state report card, Kane elementary received a score of 71.8, which indicates they are meeting expectations.

School Site 4: Alliance Elementary

Alliance is a K3–5th-grade bilingual school with an emphasis on the arts to enrich student learning and is the only of the four school sites that sustain an enrichment program for advanced learners. This programming includes grade or subject acceleration for identified gifted students, advanced opportunities to develop and nurture talent and creativity through the arts.

Their mission statement states, their "bilingual environment embraces both language and cultural diversity and builds on ethnic background and knowledge to deliver a positive and strong bilingual education" and where "children are encouraged to maintain their cultural ties through language and arts while acquiring the language and life-long learning skills needed to be successful."

According to the 2018-2019 district data, the school had a total enrollment of 511 students. The largest minority group is Hispanics (99%), followed by African Americans and Whites (<1%), respectively. They service students eligible for free and reduced lunch (90%), special education (18%), which is the lowest percentage compared to the other three school sites. Furthermore, their English language learner's population (65%) is the highest percentage

compared to the other three school sites. Finally, according to the DPI state report card score, Alliance received a score of 71.5, which implies they are meeting state expectations.

Descriptive School Data Summary

1. All four schools serve a high number of students from economically disadvantaged families mainly from minority ethnic backgrounds. The fact that most students come from economically disadvantaged families is very significant, especially because economic status and race are two key variables that determine access to opportunities to learn (OTL). Research shows access to OTL directly affects talent development and consequently the identification and nomination of Latin@ for gifted programs. Peters and Engerrand (2016), argue, "The reason that OTL and its composite factors are so important is that most tests of ability or intelligence assume some level of similarity in background experience for a given normative group." For example, intelligence tests have very narrow age-level norms to enable inferences that are as valid as possible regarding a person's ability. By only comparing an individual to those who have had very similar OTL (based on age), assessments can produce a more valid measure of underlying ability or aptitude.

2. Data from the state report card (2018-2019), shows that two schools meet state expectations, one school exceeded expectations, and only one is not meeting state expectations. This shows that despite students' economic disadvantage status, language barriers, and other variables that may have a negative effect on student achievement, these schools are thriving learning communities where academic proficiency is being attained.

3. While Latin@ students at the district level account for only 27 percent of the population, the schools in which participants worked served a higher number of Hispanic students (Alpine 75%, Almond 87%, Kane 80%, and Alliance 99%).

4. All school sites serve more special education students (Alpine 30%, Almond 28%, Kane 21%, and Alliance 18%) compared to the average school in the state (13.7%). The average special education students at the district level are 20%. (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014).

5. All four schools had a significantly high percentage of ELLs (Alpine 35%, Almond 45%, Kane 40%, and Alliance 69%) compared to the average number of ELLs in other schools in the district. This is significant when compared with the state average of 5.5 percent of ELLs per school. The average number of ELLs per school at the district level is only 8 percent.

6. Only one school had a full bilingual program and no monolingual English program. While the other three schools had a bilingual and monolingual program within the same building. Traditionally, African American students and White students are placed in monolingual programs, while most Hispanic students are placed in the bilingual program.

7. Only one school site offered an enrichment program for all students and gifted services for students needing an additional challenge and/or acceleration. These services included a school enrichment program through the arts, as well as a grade and subject acceleration programs for identified gifted students in reading and math.

8. Lastly, data from the district in which this study took place showed that research participants worked in schools with a higher number of referrals of potentially gifted

Latin@ students when compared to other schools in the district in which the number of referred students is minimal. As seen in Table 4, it shows that although Latin@ students are underrepresented in gifted programs at the national and district level, these four schools were doing an excellent job meeting representation criteria. These positive results might serve as indicators that if schools focus on spotting and nurturing talent, teachers are more likely (as part of the school culture) to recognize and nominate more students for gifted programs. For example, Alpine had perfect representation, and Almond and Kane had slightly overrepresentation which is not the norm. Furthermore, the one school with a gifted program (Alliance) had extreme overrepresentation, which makes sense because gifted programs serve as a magnet for attracting and retaining students with high abilities (see table 4).

Table 4

Latin@ Representation at Research Participants' Schools (2007-2018)

School Site	Total Latino Population	GT Latino Population	Representation Index	Level of Representation
Almond	86.6%	6.23%	1.39	Slight Overrepresentation
Kane	81%	6.35%	1.28	Slight Overrepresentation
Alpine Valley	75.2%	7.47%	1.01	Perfect Representation
Alliance	98.6%	10%	9.86	Extreme Overrepresentation

Table 3 shows demographic data on identified Latin@/Hispanic students from the four school sites participating in this research. Data shows that, although these schools were doing a better job in identifying and referring Latin@ students for gifted programs when compared to other schools in the district, there was a large number of Latin@ students not yet identified. This considering that within any population 5 to 10 percent of the total number of its members could

possibly be academically gifted; scoring one to two deviations above the norms in IQ tests (Office of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education 2012). Only one school (Alliance) met the criteria for perfect Latin@ representation, which is accomplished when the school's subgroup population percentage is equal to the school's gifted population percentage that is, students who score at the top ten percent in standardized assessments.

Table 5

Demographics of total Latin@ Student Populations and GT Latin@ Populations by School Site.

School Site	Total Latino Population	Total Latino Population	GT Latino Population	GT Latino Population
Almond	369	86.6%	23	6.23%
Kane	126	81%	8	6.35%
Alpine Valley	348	75.2%	26	7.47%
Alliance	343	98.6%	37	10%

Demographics of Participants

The eight participants in this study were teachers of Latin@ children in grades one through four. In addition to their teaching duties, these teachers also participated in the identification and nominating of potentially gifted Latin@ students. The teachers were voluntary participants who responded to the recruitment email that was sent to them in early May after their names were referred by the district gifted and talented coordinator. Seven participants were female, while one participant was male. This follows national trends that show that about 77 percent of all public-school teachers are females and 23 percent are males for the years 2015–16. There was a vast variation in age with ranges between 25 and 55 years old. This follows state trends, which shows a teachers' average age is 41 (National Center for Education Statistics NCES, 2018). Their teaching experience range between five to twenty-two years. All participants had obtained a master's degree. All participants reside within the same Midwestern urban county. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Professional Background of Participants

The teachers' level of GT training was sporadic. District leaders in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and the University of Wisconsin-Steven's Point provided most of this training. Such efforts were possible thanks to the allocation of a Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education program grant given to the district in 2016. Data from interviews showed that one teacher had received minimal training in gifted education, which is equal to four or fewer hours of formal or informal training. Three teachers received basic training in gifted education, which ranges between four to sixteen hours of training. Two teachers received intermediate training in gifted education, which ranges between sixteen to forty-five hours of training or completing a 3-credit graduate-level course. One teacher received advanced training in gifted education, which equals to obtaining a GT licensure that includes 12-credit graduate-level courses. The demographic information of participants is listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Demographics of Participants

Teacher	Gender	Race	Teaching Experience (*in years*)	Level of Education	Level of GT training*
Peter	Male	White	5	Masters	Basic
Brianna	Female	White	12	Masters	Minimum
Blanca	Female	White	20	Masters	Intermediate
Patricia	Female	White	15	Masters	Intermediate
Cindy	Female	White	22	Masters	Basic
Laura	Female	White	6	Masters	Basic
Mary	Female	Latina	12	Masters	Advanced
Elizabeth	Female	White	20	Masters	Basic

Note. All names are pseudonyms.
*Levels of training are as follows:
    Minimum training: 4 hours or less
    Basic training: 16 hours of less
    Intermediate training: 45 hours or less (3 credit course)
    Advanced training: GT license or equivalent to 12 credits.

Participant-Researcher Relationship

It is important to clarify that before the data collection; the researcher played an active role in the implementation of various strategies at the local and district level to address the issue of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. Therefore, some of the research participants knew me in some capacity and likely viewed me as an advocate for gifted education. For the last four years, I was part of the district task force in charge of the implementation of TOPS at ten selected schools as a means to increase teachers' knowledge of a non-normative nomination tool (TOPS) to increase identification and nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

Family Background of Participants

The literature on the topic of teacher's perceptions of students' true potential suggests that the way teachers perceived students may be affected by a teacher's background as well as lack of exposure to rich multicultural experiences (Ford et al., 2004; Ford, 2013). Data from interviews show that seven of the participants had similar experiences growing up. All of these seven participants came from White middle-class families with access to an extensive range of rich multicultural opportunities, including traveling, studying abroad, and access to a high-quality education. Only one of the participants came from a Latin@ immigrant family. She was the daughter of Mexican immigrant parents and although her parents made possible for her to go to good schools, she was placed in remedial classes while attending a predominately-White suburban school. This occurred in part because her teachers misconceived of dual bilinguals.

Another important aspect that influences the way we perceive the world has to do with our personal experiences growing up. Consequently, in the following sections, the researcher

uses quotes for participants to have. A better understanding of their personalities and the way

such experiences influence their view of giftedness, and perceptions of teaching urban students.

When asked about her experiences growing up, Laura shared the following narrative:

> I grew up on the Southside of Indianapolis in a White native family lower-middle-class family and I went to Public Schools all throughout from elementary school and high school. I also had the opportunity to travel to South America, which allowed me to learn Spanish.

One research participant (Blanca) was identified as gifted and she had the opportunity to

attend gifted schools in the area, especially for middle school and high school. When asked if she

considered herself a gifted adult she undoubtedly said, "Yes!"

> I'm the youngest of five kids in my family and all of my brothers and sisters went to the same school and they were there during the time of desegregation. I went to a school which was a Bilingual School and then to a magnet school for the gifted and talented. I grew up on the south side of the city and I went to school in La Crosse Madison. I also had the opportunity to travel to Spain and when I returned to the States, I attended UWM. I am fully bilingual and gifted in languages (This participant speaks five languages), creativity, and spatial ability.

Only one of the research participants was a Latin@ teacher (Mary). She came from a

Mexican immigrant family and her school experiences growing up were significantly different

from the rest of the participants. During the interview, she shared some vivid memories of her

childhood. In her account, she shared that while attending school in Madison, WI; she was

placed in remedial classes, suffered personal discrimination, and was in part marginalized mainly

to her ethnicity. In her account, she shared the following:

> I come from a Latin@ Family. Both of my parents are first generation of Mexican immigrants. I grew up with the same cohort of students since kindergarten. We did not have the same kind of instruction that we have now. Teachers wouldn't differentiate like we do now. When I was in 4th grade, my teacher pointed out that I was different and that I couldn't do ok in schools academically, because I was, as we know it today as a simultaneous bilingual. She told me that there is no way I could master English. So, because of that, they started to place me in remedial groups. In 6th grade my (English) teacher had me tested for reading disability and they found out I was dyslexic and that gave them another reason to continue to pull me back, very early on I learned to mask my

reading disability and I learned to cope by myself. After middle school, I went to a private school and suffered from a lot of racism. There were only two Latin@ students out of about 2000 students. I graduated early from high school and I was discouraged from my guidance counselor. I went to her and ask her what my next steps were after finishing my last year of high school, how could I apply to college? So, she said to me, "Oh no honey, you are not college material, kids like you don't go to college, they go straight to work". That discouraged me immensely and it took me a couple of years to go college convinced that I was not good at it. Today, I am a successful teacher and I am in the process of finishing my Ph.D.

Similar to many students of color, Mary's narrative represents the lived experiences and the voice of students with exceptional abilities who are often perceived from a deficit point of view. In this very personal narrative, Mary shares how her teachers perceived her bilingualism as a deficit rather than an asset. Placing her in low academic tracks in which students like Mary are more likely to have less experienced teachers, and exposure to a less rigorous curriculum, these students are put at a disadvantage when compared to other peers.

Regardless of their backgrounds and their firsthand experiences, these teachers manifested a sense of pride and a strong commitment to work in urban settings where most of the students come from minority backgrounds. These participants manifested the benefits of having access to high-end learning opportunities while growing up. This regardless of whether they had access to high-end learning opportunities locally or internationally. Data from their narratives indicated that their unique experiences led them to the path of becoming teachers and they felt that they were doing their best to give back to the communities. This was the case of Cindy, a second-grade teacher at Almond Elementary who commented on this by stating,

> You always work where you feel you are most appreciated. I often get asked why I work here. And maybe I'm just really used to this, but as indicated, I think that this school has a very strong bilingual program. Just thinking about the teachers that I've met, and the teachers in my building, I have come to the realization that we've got great teachers. I know that this urban district has a bad reputation. But [I am convinced], our kids are so smart!

Another key component that influences teaching practices is training. Teachers participating in this study had various degrees of teaching years of experience with an average of 14 years working in urban settings (see Table 8). They all had high levels of education including master's degrees. Nonetheless, all participants said in their interviews that gifted education training was not something they were exposed to as part of the university training. Perhaps more significant than their education and qualification was their commitment to making a difference in the various communities where they worked. During interviews, all teachers manifested a strong commitment and desire to work in schools with urban minority groups, especially Latin@s. This strong commitment to urban education was manifested by Peter whose dedication to the education of Latin@ students is more of a passion than just part of a profession. To exemplify this, he indicated:

> I just came back here [Kane] to work and then I had a passion for it. When I was in Minneapolis, I also volunteered to a service-learning kind of Spanish class with a bunch of Latin@ youth. It was then, I realized I really had a passion for working with kids and something I liked. I also felt the same when I came here to Kane. I got along really well with the kids and if became somewhat more of a passion and now it's my calling. I went to the Urban Education Program. It was difficult, I think we'd drop the program, but I knew what I was getting into. I knew what the kids were like, I also knew about from my mother's experience and the demands of her job, and I was able to tough it out and now I feel pretty comfortable here at Kane.

Despite the challenges of working in an urban district, where often there is not an equal distribution of resources, all teachers expressed their love and passion for teaching urban students. Simply put, teaching in an urban setting, which traditionally served economically disadvantaged students as part of their dedication and commitment to make a difference in the Latin@ community. When asked about why teaching in the city, in their schools, Cindy commented:

> When I began to teach, I felt a strong connection with this [Latin@] community. These were my kind of kids. This was my environment. It was where I felt needed. Teaching Latin@ students is kind of part of whom I am, it's part of my DNA.

A similar feeling was shared by Mary who added,

> I like teaching and learning with [urban] kids and I think that based on my own experiences growing up, I wanted to be the teacher that prepares them, not just for the next year, but to adulthood. Having those skills and watching my students acquiring these skills is very rewarding. This keeps me going.

As previously described, the group of participants was homogeneous. However, there were

significant distinctions among participants described in the following table.

Table 7

Commonalities and Distinctions among Research Participants

	Commonalities	Distinctions among Participants
Access to educational experiences	*All of them had master's degrees and All of them had the opportunity to study abroad as part of the college experiences.	Having the opportunity to study abroad had a positive effect on the way participants perceived CLD students, and this increased their desire to work with economically disadvantaged urban students.
	*None of the participates received any training in gifted education as part of their university training.	All participants saw lack of formal training in gifted education as a factor that contributed to the under-identification of potentially gifted students.
Experiences growing up and schooling	*Seven of the participants except for Mary, manifested to have had access to high-end learning opportunities, which allowed them to excel in school.	Two teachers, Laura and Blanca were identified as gifted, although only Blanca had the opportunity to attend a gifted program. Five teachers (Peter, Briana, Patricia, Cindy, and Elizabeth) were in regular monolingual classrooms.

	Commonalities	Distinctions among Participants
		Mary was seen as being deficient and this resulted in having her being placed in remedial classes.
Work experiences	*All participants were working with Lain@ students	Five of the participants (Perter, Briana, Patricia, Cindy, Laura, and Elizabeth) came from White middle-class suburban families. Yet, they expressed their love and strong commitment to continue working in urban settings. The two other participants (Mary and Blanca) grew up in urban neighborhoods and they saw their work as being part of giving back to their communities.
Bilingualism	*One of the research participants (Mary) grew up fully bilingual, while seven of the participants learned Spanish while studying abroad in Spanish speaking countries such as Spain, Mexico, and Paraguay. *According to all participants, speaking a second language helped them to see language as an asset in Latin@ students.	Being able to speak a second language was seen by participants as an asset. However, Mary, a Latin@ participant, was seen as deficient growing up which resulted in having her placed in remedial classes due to being a simultaneous bilingual. This in part because of narrow conceptions about language by her teachers.

Thematic Findings

In the following section, the findings are categorized by themes and sub-themes. They are presented as part of the rich-textual description and in-depth analysis of the topic of teachers' perception of Latin@ students.

Figure 3

Common Themes of the Current Study Among All Participants

Theme 1 How do teachers define giftedness?	Theme 2 Teachers' Perceptions of Potentially Gifted Latin@ Students Do Matter for Gifted Referrals	Theme 3 Tools and Gifted Training Had a Positive Effect on Increasing Identification of Latin@ Students	Theme 4 Latin@ Parents were Not Included in the Nomination Process	Theme 5 Identified, But Neglected
1.1. Giftedness: One Definition Doesn't Fit All	2.1 Teachers' Perceptions and Bias	3.1. A Mindset Shift from Deficit and At-Risk to At-Potential	4.1. A Missing Puzzle Piece?	5.1. A School Dilemma: Equity Versus Excellence
1.2. Teachers as Advocates for Expanding Methods, if not Definitions	2.2. Cultural Bias: The Myth About Homogeneity	3.2. Decition Making Criteria: How do Teachers Refer Students		5.2. District's Lack Programming for Gifted Elementary Students
1.3. Perceptions and Manifestations of Giftedness are Influenced by Cultural and Social Norms	2.3. Giftedness Goes Beyond Academic Areas	3.3. Schools Culture: Nurturing Talent		5.3. Whose Responsibility Is It?
	2.4. Teachers Training Can Help Overcome Bias			5.4. Remediation Only: Who Do You Save First?
				5.5. Lack of Opportunities to Learn

Note. Listing of major themes and sub-themes as it relates to the findings.

Discussion of Themes

The following section includes a presentation of major themes including findings that highlight commonalities and distinctions among participants, a synopsis of all sub-themes, and finally, a summary of exemplary quotes that serve to offer a cohesive response to all four questions guiding this study. All themes presented in the following section emerged primarily from the narratives of teachers participating in the study. Consequently, such narratives should be conceived not just as decontextualized data, but rather as counter-native stories that reveal rich and contextually situated stories that traditionally are not seen as truthful sources of knowledge (Yosso, 2005 and Anzaldua, 1987).

Theme One: How do Teachers Define Giftedness?

Definitions of giftedness are significant because such definitions serve as guiding criteria to determine which students are considered gifted, as well as the type of services these students will receive (Peters, 2016). As described in chapter II the term "giftedness" has remained elusive and difficult to encapsulate using a single definition that is culturally and linguistically inclusive of minority students (Ford, 2010, 2014). Furthermore, giftedness has not been interpreted nor understood in the same way by educators and scholars, which at times has resulted in the exclusion of minority students. Consequently, it is important to find out how teachers working with potentially gifted Latin@ students, perceived and understand giftedness (see Appendix I). This, to best understand how teachers' perceptions influence nomination and identification of Latin@ students for gifted services.

Giftedness: One Definition doesn't Fit All

In the current study, research participants did not share or agree on a single definition of giftedness. The researcher found that participants' conceptions of giftedness varied greatly. Such

definitions were either too narrow, which tended to exclude many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (CLD), or too open and subjective which resulted in the inability to adequately identify truly gifted students. For example, Cindy defined giftedness as something unusual, arguing,

> I think that giftedness is used too often. I think it's rare. I think I've seen it a few times in my life and when I say few, I mean few… Giftedness is when someone stands out, far beyond others. I mean it's not just the bright kid. I mean I had a bright kid. But he wasn't gifted. I think we use the term 'gifted and talented' way too often.

Other participants such as Peter described giftedness in vague words describing it as a very subjective criterion aimed to identify particular academic skills placing some students apart from their peers. To illustrate this, he stated,

> [Giftedness] is kind of an unknown. Like the X Factor… It's just something that you have. It's not necessarily definable because I think it's definitely subjective and it's individualized most definitely. Personally, I think everyone probably has in some way their own gift. Accessing that is a whole other ballgame. And also, just even identifying it, I think its huge challenging in itself. I would just say it's some sort of special calling or drive for that person, even if they don't realize.

The reason definitions are important is that the definition of a district adheres affects the inclusiveness of gifted programming. Furthermore, definitions of giftedness guide educators in determining who will or will not receive gifted services. At the center of the issues of gifted education and the underrepresentation of Latin@ students is the fact that there is not an agreement on a definition of giftedness that is inclusive of minority students. Consequently, unless all students meet traditional norms and demands of gifted programs they are excluded from entering them. Furthermore, throughout history attempts to define giftedness have proven to be exclusionary in nature by demanding the identification of minority students to adhere to White middle-class norms, resulting in the perpetuation of social and educational inequalities and the exclusion of these students from gifted programs.

In the literature on the topic of giftedness (Grissom & Reddings, 2016; Renzulli, 2014; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; McBee, 2006; Wright & Ford, 2017) as well as in the responses of teachers participating in this study, the researcher found evidence that lack of teacher training as well as lack of knowledge of how culturally diverse gifted students differ from the norm, were contributing factors to being unable to clearly define giftedness in a way that was inclusive of Latin@ students. Data from interviews pertaining this study shows that participants (Peter, Patricia, and Laura) who defined giftedness in narrow terms had minimum and basic levels of training, which indicates that training plays a key role on how teachers understand giftedness.

Reflecting on the effects of training Patricia commented, "As I mentioned before, I don't have much training in GT education. I only went to some district training and I don't think it's anything at the school level per se." Laura, a teacher with more than five years of teaching experience with similar amounts of training also added, "I would say my training in gifted education has been minimal, and this is not something I was trained as a part of my teaching classes. I feel as though I am just scratching the surface of gifted education and how to work with gifted students. In reality, in my experience as a teacher, this has not been one of the priorities or interests in my school."

In contrast, teachers who had more training in GT education had a more accurate approach to giftedness although their definitions were more academically based. This was the case of Brenda who defined giftedness as a "natural ability". To illustrate this, she stated, "Giftedness just means a persons' natural ability or strength in an area or a couple of areas. So, it [is] kind of like an area where your talent lies." Mary also shared a similar idea saying, it [giftedness] means having the cognitive ability to process information at a faster rate compared

to your average ability students and being able to hold more details and more information in your both semantic and procedural memory and taking that knowledge and transforming it into something else."

From these definitions, it is clear that giftedness can be something innate that a person has. Nonetheless, such abilities also need to be nurtured and developed to fully reach excellence. Thus, the need for gifted education. The idea that students' gifts and talents develop on their own is a misconception, which resulted in the myth that high ability students and students with gifted potential can do it on their own (NAGC, 2019). The idea of talent development and the need for students to have access to rich educational programs was an idea that resonated with Laura who argued, "The purpose of gifted educations was to nurture talents that students have."

Critical Theory challenges rigid and narrow definitions of abilities as one-model-fits-all ideologies, which serve as modern forms of oppression forcing students of color to conform to the norms of the predominant class. Teacher's training, especially on culturally responsive teaching practices, has proven fundamentally important when working with minority students. Thus increasing identification of Latin@ students for advanced opportunities (Ford, 2014). Yet, despite this, the way all participants spoke of giftedness did not reflect this. In addition, using a definition of giftedness that do not take into account the students' culture and funds of knowledge results in reaffirming deficit ideologies that result in the perpetuation of looking at Latin@ students as being deficient or lacking knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Failure to be culturally responsive to the students' cultures results in misunderstanding students' attributes, characteristics, and gifted behaviors as true manifestations of giftedness in Latin@ students. Finally, teachers' definitions of giftedness must include a clear criterion of how the use of descriptors to identify gifted behaviors, may differ in a

cultural context. After all, as Blanca stated, "one cannot find what one can seek", adding that, "training in GT and culturally relevant teaching is essential to know what the hell you are doing."

Teachers as Advocates for Expanding Methods and Promoting Referrals, if Not Definitions

While participants indicated conflicting and narrow definitions of giftedness, all participants were in favor of expanding the tools for identifying giftedness. Regardless of the traditional emphasis on psychometric tests and standardized assessments used by schools to identify giftedness, all research participants advocated for the use of more inclusive forms of identification such as students' portfolios, students' inventories, teachers' observations, and students' work samples. This dilemma between what teachers are asked to do versus their experiences based on their interactions with Latin@ students was communicated by research participants who struggled with putting into words terms such as "giftedness" and "gifted" using a traditional criterion when thinking of Latin@ students.

A key finding of this research, linked to how teachers defined giftedness versus their teaching practices showed that while participants conceptualized giftedness in narrow, subjective, and academic terms, their practices showed a more robust and inclusive understanding of what giftedness is. Thus, focusing on teachers' practices rather than abstract definitions of what giftedness means seemed to be a better indicator of how teachers perceive giftedness in potentially gifted Latino@ students. Their referral practices may ultimately matter more than their working definitions of giftedness.

Mary's experience, the one Latin@ participant included in the study, commented, "Not all gifted students look the same, act the same, or are gifted in the same areas. Many, many unidentified gifted Latin@ students have been under-challenged, underserved, and overseen."

The reality that CLD students do not always show their talents in the same form or the same areas as expected when being compared to the norm was communicated in Mary's account. This has huge implications to adequately increase representation. This idea was also communicated by Laura in her interview commenting on the various ways and classroom conditions under which giftedness of CLD students manifest itself,

> I know many Latin@ gifted students don't show their abilities right away as many traditional gifted students do. I think Joseph was one of these students because he was very quiet and very shy. He didn't participate much in front of the whole class. But once he got more comfortable with the class, he was able to demonstrate his true potential. I think for him it was more about trust and feeling appreciated for what he could really do.

As ratified in inclusive culturally informed models of giftedness, gifted students do not act and look the same (Renzulli & Reiss, 1987). The literature on CLD gifted students shows that students' manifestations of giftedness are influenced by cultural, social, and even religious norms. Consequently, teachers must strive to implement best identification practices to increase the representation of potentially gifted Latin@ students. However, as described by Laura, this only occurs when students "feel appreciated for who they are and what they can do."

To overcome part of these barriers and to best identify Latin@ students, who often do not show their full potential through the use of standardized assessments, Mary advocated on the use of teachers' observations as means to know students' strengths. In her narrative, she mentioned the following, "I think that the biggest thing in identifying Latin@ kids for the gifted program is being very observant and not just [look] for academic behaviors. You have to be observant of what the kids are really interested in." Brenda, also added her powerful voice echoing the idea that a more inclusive definition of giftedness, would allow teachers and schools to use other identification tools that are proper when working with traditionally underrepresented minority students,

Academically, we use STAR 360, a formal assessment. However, I use observations too, because a test doesn't tell you everything. I do use work samples because often kids were gifted writers it doesn't show up on a test. You can't test for that. It's just their ability is there, their interest is there, so you see their work samples to find their talent. If [a child] is artistically gifted in an artistic area, then you see that as a talent. The kids that are [artistically gifted] you know, choose always to illustrate something or to create something, or to dance and sing or play their instruments. Now, this [being artistically gifted] is not measurable when taking a test, you can only see it, you observe it if you are looking for it. If you don't look for it, you won't see it.

Perceptions and Manifestations of Giftedness are Influence by Cultural and Social Norms

A relevant finding by the researcher was that seven of the participants' definitions of giftedness did not take into account that giftedness and its manifestations are also influenced by cultural and social norms of students' backgrounds. Only Mary (a Latin@ participant) made clear that to understand what giftedness is and how it manifests in CLD students, teachers must take into account that giftedness does not always show or manifest itself in the same way in students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Her approach was salient because she is a Latin@, which indicates that teachers who share the same ethnic background with students are may be more likely to recognize how cultural norms influence the way students show their abilities.

Findings show that although most educators did recognize that some of the assets that Latin@ students bring from home are their cultural and linguistic traits, they failed to recognize that CLD students might not manifest their true gifted potential in the same ways as the norm. For example, while Blanca pointed out the importance of the culture of students, her definition of giftedness does not include how culture influenced the manifestations of giftedness. In our interview, she said,

I think that one of the things that Latin@ students bring... from my perspective when I started working is that they bring beauty. They also bring their culture and a lot of different cultures. Because Latin@, could refer to a wide range of cultures and traditions. And then with that comes language. Those are the things that I have seen since I first started teaching.

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In this description, Blanca was aware of some cultural attributes of Latin@ students, yet none of these components were visible in her definition of giftedness which pretty much reinforces a traditional and narrow conception of giftedness. For her, "Giftedness is a label. It is having the cognitive ability to process information at a faster rate compared to your average ability students and being able to retain more details and more information."

From a Critical Theory lens, traditional views of giftedness manifested by research participants are exclusionary in nature and demonstrate the presence of closeminded educational practices that employ standardized norms such as standardized tests, traditional narrow definitions of giftedness, and White norms to benefit the dominant group, while students of color are segregated to the margins of society. Ford (2010), states that gifted programs remain "as White spaces" where the presence of minority students and their manifestations of being gifted is not recognized as such, resulting in the perpetuation of cultural and ethnic deficit models. Critical Theory calls for the reformation of educational systems to be more inclusive of minority students opening the door of opportunity. Nonetheless, such an endeavor cannot take place unless there are significant changes in the way gifted programs identify and serve minority students. Patel (2015) argues that this is a way to decolonize traditional educational practices in which schools and programs created for the elite serve as tools of oppression and exclusion of students of color. To illustrate this she argued that, "the system is, in many ways, doing exactly what it is designed to do, which is to segment land, people, and relationships among them into strata. When educational research focuses on these strata without addressing the societal design that creates the strata, it becomes complicit in the larger project" (p.18).

Deficit minority models are hard to overcome, yet some research participants'

perceptions of Latin@ students demonstrated an awareness of how the gifts and talents that CLD

students bring with them. These are the case of Laura, who stated,

> Our Latin@ students are fabulous communicators and their ability to go back and forth between the two languages is pretty unique, especially when they get to 4th and 5th grade they are really good, which before it was seen as a deficit, but not they show that it is part of their ability to know multiple languages.

Likewise, Laura shared how she believed had an asset mindset, which allowed her to see

students' potential. To illustrate this she said,

> I have an asset mindset; I am thinking of Joseph, he is struggling in English. However, if I only look at this, I will miss the fact that he is truly gifted. So, although his English language skills are just developing, it does not mean that he is not gifted. I guess I look at the whole student and consider all that they bring. Because a lot of our Latin@ students are ELLs and just because they're bilingual we should not be thinking any less. I think that's even more amazing is that they're learning two languages at once and developing code-switching all the time. So, they do bring a lot. You don't necessarily see it unless you get to know each student. As a teacher, I believe it is important to see those [bilingual students] at a deeper level so you are able to re-examine your own view of what giftedness is.

This quote clearly shows that teachers such has Laura can be advocates for Latin@

students. Her perceptions of students from an asset perspective, allows her to look beyond

linguistic barriers to discover that some of her students are gifted or have gifted potential. This

even though students like Joseph, will perhaps fail to show his true potential under traditional IQ

and standardized assessments in English.

Definitions and theories of giftedness are conceptualized, theorized, and normed on

middle-class White students, not students of color and those who live in poverty (Ford, 2013;

Sternberg, 2007aSternberg, 2007b). They have been operationalized heavily and almost

exclusively by intelligence tests and achievement tests, respectively. These assumptions and

criteria based on them trivialize and disregard the importance of culture, language, and experience on test performance.

Failure to value students' cultural and linguistic richness as assets leading to modified teaching practices including identification of Latin@ students, as well as to denounce the systems of oppression that permeate social institutions will result in exacerbating equal representation. An equitable identification of Latin@ students must be based on a more inclusive culturally sensitive model of identification in which they are no longer seen from a deficit perspective which also implies receiving the interventions they need to be successful, rather than demanding them to fit the norm. The researcher asserts that gifted students are children and youth who possess outstanding talent can show the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. Thus, giftedness is present in all ethnic groups, it is multifaceted, not rare, and most definitely not just a label.

Summary

Conflicting definitions of giftedness can serve as a favorable or unfavorable paradigm that could bring benefits to some while marginalizing and excluding minority students. Critical Theory opposes such as marginalization and micro-aggressions. Ultimately, excluding students of color from high-end learning opportunities based on the establishment of White norms that do not take into account cultural norms, issues of language, and the assets that minority students bring to the classroom is unjust and discriminatory. From this point of view, traditional or subjective definition of giftedness solely aligned with the norm (giftedness as something "rare" with a focus only on academics) are directly exclusionary, especially of minority students (Ford, 2010) who often are perceived as less capable to attain academic excellence.

Narrow approaches about giftedness with emphasis only an academic achievement is worrisome, especially knowing that Latin@ students often score lower on standardized assessments than White peers, due in part to issues of language, lack of equal access to OTL, and teachers' bias including low expectations. Adding to the limitations of having a narrow perspective of giftedness, Elizabeth also commented: "Giftedness, I think it's been considered for a long time a task force, and I think that's one of the easiest ways to identify because you have these cut scores and you either make it or you don't." Furthermore, Patricia said, "For me, giftedness means an extraordinary ability that students have in a certain area or another or even possibly in more than one area that is above and beyond what you would expect from the normal student of that age group."

From a critical lens, a narrow definition of giftedness has its origins in contemporary institutionalized racism practices that operate in subtle ways such as defining what giftedness looks like when thinking solely about the attributes, behaviors, social and cultural capital of the dominant class. Definitions of giftedness with emphasis on academic achievement places Latin@ students at a disadvantage when trying to gain access to gifted programs. This is even more salient because many Latin@ students do not have access to rigorous high-end quality education, which is often evaluated using state standardized assessments. Contemporary racial inequality in gifted programs is reproduced through color-blind racist practices that are subtle, structural, and non-racial. Again, in contrast to the Jim Crow era, where racial inequality and segregation were enforced through explicit means (e.g. signs in business windows saying, No Niggers, Spics, or dogs). Today's racial practices operate in often obscure and not readily detectable ways (Ladson-Billings & Etate, 1995).

In gifted programs, traditional definitions of giftedness often advocate for the use of IQ tests and verbal assessments, which research shows places Latin@ students at disadvantage, resulting in their exclusions form gifted programs. Ignoring racial and cultural differences maintains and perpetuates the status quo with all of its deeply institutionalized injustices to racial minorities and insists that "dismissing the importance of race is a way to guarantee that institutionalized and systematic racism continues and even prospers" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Bernal). Colorblind teaching practices are embedded in schools that could be portrayed as being a necessary framework to make sure all children are treated the same. This was the case of a middle-class Female teacher (Cindy), who argued that she did see race as part of her teaching practices when nominating students for gifted programs, but rather treated everybody the same (see Appendix I).

> I would say first of all when I look at children, I don't look at them as Latin@ or whatnot. I try not to let the children's culture or color or gender to get in the way. I always have been that way. I think we have gone way too over the top of labeling because we forget to look at children as children. Now, when you're saying the community and what they bring…. I mean I think of Americans as a Melting Pot.

Failing to recognize students' race and culture as legitimate aspects of their stories, does not only deny students of color the right to be unique but also forces them to assimilate into the mainstream culture. This includes, for example, forcing them to learn English while discouraging students to use their mother tonged and forcing them, directly or indirectly to adhere to White social norms to be accepted into what Ford (2010) calls "White spaces". This is so they can be part of the so-called "melting pot" ideology, which at the surface communicates a dreamland ideal in which all people's cultures and funds of knowledge are celebrated.

The following table serves to summarize some of the major distinction among research participants and the theme of how teachers define giftedness.

Table 8

Thematic Summary Chart: Theme 1 Defining Giftedness

	Commonalities	Distinctions Among Participants
Sub-theme 1.1 Teachers' Definition of Giftedness	None of the definitions of giftedness shared by participants is culturally inclusive or locally normed. Even when a participant (Mary) had an accurate definition of giftedness it was strictly academically oriented. Most participants defined giftedness in term of being rare, elusive, and an extraordinary ability.	Basic Training levels along with fewer years of experience seem to result in teachers (Laura & Peter) having a subjective and narrow conception of giftedness. Advanced levels of training seemed to result in a more academically oriented definition.
Sub-theme 1.2 Teachers as Advocates for Expanding Methods, if not Definitions	Most teachers included descriptors from the TOPS inventory tool. Observations of students' behaviors were seen as good indicators of students' potential. While most participants expressed traditional and narrow conceptions of giftedness, their practices reflect a wider and more cohesive way to understand giftedness.	Several participants emphasized teacher pleasing behaviors. These included 2 with minimum and basic training (Cindy and Peter) and 1 with advanced training (Mary). One participant with basic training had a vaguer approach (Elizabeth). Not all participants noted this.
Sub-theme 1.3 Perceptions and Manifestations of Giftedness are Influenced by Culturally and Social Norms. Yet, teachers'	When comparing the participants' definitions of giftedness, the researcher found that such definitions did not take into account the fact that manifestations of giftedness are influenced by cultural and social norms. Overall, linguistic and cultural characteristics of Latin@	Only Mary, a Latin@ teacher explicitly spoke of giftedness in a way that was consistent with her perceptions of Latin@ students. This perhaps due to her background.

	Commonalities	Distinctions Among Participants
definitions of giftedness did not recognize this.	students were seen as assets, yet these characteristics were not seen as factors that influenced (or prevented) manifestations of giftedness in CLD students.	

Theme Two: Teachers' Perceptions of Latin@ Students do Matter for Gifted Referrals

One of this study's main goals was to learn more about how teachers' perceptions of giftedness influenced the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students as well as to find out how these perceptions influenced nomination. Addressing these questions was challenging considering the multiplicity of layers uncovered as part of this research. Some of these layers included: teacher training as a means to overcome bias, a process of self-awareness to overcome prejudice, current conceptions of giftedness, and preconceived ideas of gifted behaviors (see appendix J). As a result, the following sub-themes were developed to properly capture teachers' perceptions of Latin@ gifted or potentially gifted students.

Teachers' Perceptions and Biases

One of the existing arguments to explain the underrepresentation of Latin@ gifted students has been the influence of teachers' bias. Although this topic shows repeatedly in the literature, there is not a unique solution proposed to solve this issue. Since the referral and identification process of the identification of gifted students often starts with the teacher, close attention should be placed on the decision-making process of teachers. Critical Theory argues that the existence of bias against students of color in schools is not something of the past, but rather part of an educational system that continues to marginalize students of color, reinforcing deficit models, and portraying minority students as being inferior (Ford 2010; Ladson-Billings,

1995; 2004; Nieto, 1992). Teachers' bias whether implicit or explicit are part of schools and the manifest themselves the way students of color are perceived, taught, and treated. This is clearly stated by Patel (2015) who argues, "The trope of the well-intentioned teacher without substantive interrogation of the impact of practices has long obscured problematic patterns that are in need of investigation and transformation" (p. 33). This results in what he calls Settler colonialism, which could be defined as the continuation of practices, that fail to challenge the status quo of those of power including schools.

The fact that Latin@ students are underrepresented in gifted programs is a symptom of the existence of systems of oppression and microaggressions as well as the continuation of settler schools practicing foster social and educational inequality. Some of these microaggressions that inhibit Latin@ students from reaching their full potential include the effects of teacher's bias against minority students, the existence of institutionalized racism, and finally, the prevalence of White privilege and White norms which lead to colorblind policies and norms in gifted programs, upon which Latin@ gifted students must adhere in order to gain access.

A Critical Theory approach on the issue of underrepresentation calls for the transformation of oppressive exclusionary systems such as gifted programs and demands the inclusion of Latin@ students as a starting point to overcoming racism and social and educational inequalities. Such biases are palpable in meritocratic educational systems that determine who has and does not have access to OTL determined by issues of race, socioeconomic status, gender, and zip code.

As in the case of gifted programs, the underrepresentation and segregation of Latin@ students in gifted programs contribute to reinforce deficit models and stereotypes through which

these students are portrayed as less capable to attain excellence. This was voiced by Laura that

stated how issues of gender and race impact teachers' perceptions of Black Latin@ students,

> When I first started teaching, I had a lot of trouble with Puerto Rican boys due to their behaviors, but then, I had to question within myself, why? Why I, a White native teacher am I getting into so many issues with Puerto Rican boys typically dark-skinned Puerto Rican boys? I mean, that was something for me that I had to figure out and I'm kind of questioning myself. How can I, as a teacher still support them despite their behaviors and what they're exhibiting? So, I do think I definitely question how I see my students all the time. I don't think I ever thought Latin@ students couldn't be gifted and talented. I don't think I ever had that mindset, but I think if you don't know their culture [students culture] if you're not exposed to it if you haven't worked in it before, I think it can be easy to say... you know... all Puerto Rican students are lazy. I have seen other teachers say this and definitely reflects a deficit mindset.

The problem with a person's bias and the racist view is not so much that they exist, but

rather the fact teachers are not aware of such and misconceptions in order to change. In Laura's

narrative, she is aware that in order to challenge her racist views on "Puerto *Rican dark-skinned*

boys" she needed to undergo a process of self-reflection. This implies, questioning her privilege

about race and White privilege, as a White middle-class teacher, working with Latin@ students'

dark skins whose behavior did not match her expectations.

Being aware of one's bias also resonated with other participants who recognized that

gifted Latin@ students often do not display their giftedness in the exact ways of previously

conceived traditional models of giftedness. Such manifestation of giftedness might be

overclouded by cultural, gender, and linguistic norms that could be misinterpreted if teachers do

not know the students' background, culture, values, and norms. For example, not all students

who are gifted might display teachers' pleasing behaviors, which include listening quietly,

following classroom rules, or doing their homework. To better illustrate this Brenda shared some

of her observations about students who at first, might appear as having behavior problems.

> In my experience, every dancer that struggles in math can do geometry. These advanced students are usually the leaders in the class and sometimes they even challenge the

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teacher. Now, in the traditional setting, these behaviors might be seen as students with behavior problems. They are the discipline problems [students], it's because you're bored and so once you can engage their brains and something that really engages them, they will show their full potential.

In this account, Blanca touched on the issue addressing the fact that in traditional settings when students are bored or under-challenged some of these students tend to underachieve, turning their unmet needs into problematic behaviors, which could be interpreted as being rude or defiant.

Similar insights were shared by Peter who commented on behaviors of traditional and non-traditional gifted students in his classroom, arguing that high achievers are often not challenged enough which results in students being bored.

> I think defiance is a big one (gifted behavior which results in students being bored). I think that we often overlook this one. I currently have a student that is a constant struggle. He was a struggle in second grade, but I think it is more of his mind wandering and a lack of challenging [tasks] because he finds school boring. It is clear that I have to find him things that are engaging to him, based on personal interest, which is a challenge itself. I see either a student who is bored and defiant or they are in tune because they not challenged. If we are talking about academically gifted, I see that these students produce high-quality work. This includes the arts and gym, but we currently don't have any of these specials, so it is hard because students don't have the opportunity.

In sum, teachers' perceptions can manifest in many subtle and not so subtle ways with terrible consequences that affect the way minority schools perform in class. In the current study, the researcher found teachers' perceptions of Latin@ students manifested in racist and narrow views about students' race, ability, and culture (see Appendix J). This serves to show that racism continues to permeate educational institutions and influence teaching practices. This despite of teachers' training or educational level.

Cultural Bias: The Myth about Homogeneity

Closely related to the issue of teachers' perceptions was the existence of cultural bias and the idea that Latin@s are a homogenous group. Elizabeth who commented on how at the

beginning of her teaching career, she had the idea that Latin@s were the same or shared the same

cultural aspects exemplified this generalization. In her interview, she explains,

> I had the perception that all Latin@ speakers or the Latin@ community were more
> uniform and less diverse than what I know now. I had no idea that I had the perception
> coming into teaching like will there they're all Spanish speakers, of course, they're all
> going to get along and everything was going to be great. Like "you all speak the same
> language" right? So that was an eye-opener for me.

In this research, data from interviews showed that almost all the participants

acknowledge in one way or another the diversity that exists within the Latin@ community as

well as the fact that many Latin@ students also differ in what the teacher expects them to know,

look or act. The reason this is important is that very often teachers who have not been exposed to

diverse audiences tend to assume that Latin@ students share the same cultural values, and

cultural and social capital than the majority-minority ethnic group, in this case, Mexican

students. This is a bias in itself, which alienate students who are not part of the minority-

majority. Briana for example, spoke about the issue of diversity, as something she was taught,

which limited her understanding and decreased her ability to have a real knowledge of what

diversity is. Her narrative illustrates how living in a mainly White suburb prevented her from

having access to rich multicultural experiences.

> When I was growing up in school, I was taught a lot about equality and diversity, but
> living in a mainly White suburb it's not something I really saw. I had a lot of good ideas
> about diversity, but it wasn't something you really saw. I had a few Asian students and
> some Indian students in my schools, and there was only one African American and my
> whole High School.

From this account, it is evident that teachers' perceptions are malleable, yet for this to

happen teachers need to be exposed to rich multicultural experiences. This was even more

evident when Brianna shared how her misconceptions about diversity, race, and stereotypes have

changed, especially after being exposed to rich and positive multicultural experiences.

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When I asked about why she chose to work in a predominantly Hispanic community, she said,

> I have always worked with kids from different cultures and so for me, it didn't seem like a cultural shock. I felt I fitted in here… As I said, I studied business and Spanish. I also studied abroad, and I think that gave me access to a lot of perspectives working with different cultures, and diversity. I am married to a Latin@ person, so my daughter is biracial.

Another finding related to teachers' perceptions of Latin@ students was the way participants conceived students' culture as assets, which shows a positive or non-deficient perspective of Latin@ students. The term *culture* was one of the terms that was mentioned the most by all participants, even though culture is a complex term that can be interpreted very differently depending on the person's experiences, education, race, gender, socioeconomic status. The following are some examples of how teachers described and perceived some of the cultural aspects that students bring from home.

Peter said,
"I think they [students] are in different ways bringing culture, their own culture. I want to avoid being stereotypical, but there's a little more "Sabor." You know, a little more flavor when I've worked with some Latin@ students."

Elizabeth said,
Hum you know, as far as culture and language, they are an asset. They [students] have at least two languages that they're bringing from home. Also, those values that they bring from home, they are really important. They value education for the most part.

Patricia said,
I've always thought that somebody who is very involved in their culture, brings a lot more to the table. This, because they [Latin@ students] understand and they have a little bit more of a worldly perspective, even if they have not been in many places. I just think that they have a better understanding of different groups of people, how they should get along, how everybody is different and that's okay. Now, in the meanwhile, they bring their own culture and at the same time, trying to understand and trying to learn about the culture here in the United States, and how they can kind of mold those two together to become [whom] they want to be.

Cindy said,
Hispanic children are not from the same place. So, they bring their own culture and a lot of the same things all children bring. My mother's first friends were Mexican, and he taught her how to make tacos and my mom made tacos because she was interested in

learning about other people's cultures. I think that the bilingual aspect is one thing that students bring as part of their culture.

Briana said,

I think that one of the things that Latin@/a students bring, and this is from my perspective when I started working is that they bring beauty. They also bring their culture and a lot of different cultures. Because Latin@/a could refer to a wide arranged of cultures and traditions. And then with that comes language. As part of the Latin@ culture, I think there's a lot of and strong family ties, which is something that brings the family. I think the Latin@ students also bring high regard for education and that I think that goes beyond a socio-economic standard... I just think that support from the families and the regard for teachers and regard for education is huge and I think it has to do with their culture. I think another thing that I have seen, when I was thinking about family ties is just how warm they are. And so, after a while and after meeting my husband who is Hispanic, I realized the importance of the idea of the communal / community connection. [It is] just a different way of thinking about community, family, and belonging.

Elizabeth said,

As part of their culture, Latin@ students bring from home to be able to navigate the world this society, as well as their culture, is also one thing they bring from home. In the meanwhile, they bring their own culture and at the same time, trying to understand and trying to learn about the culture here in the United States, and how they can kind of mold those two together to become who they want to be.

Mary said,

Not all gifted students look the same, act the same, or are gifted in the same areas. I think Latino students are unique because their parents tend to encourage education for a better future. Also, many Latino students are entering school as simultaneous bilinguals. So they come in with two languages. This language acquisition is unique because cognitively they already come in with an advantage compared to their monolingual peers."

Data from participants' descriptions of students' cultures serve to identify some key components that seemed essential to research participants when considering the complexity of culture. The following terms represent some of the most salient aspects of the cultural manifestations that students bring from home such as their bilingualism. For example, various foods (Tacos), the importance of education, flavor, a worldly perspective, belong of cultures (acculturation), various cultures, beauty, a big wide arranged of cultures and traditions, high

regard for education, high regard for teachers, warmth, ability to navigate the world, and community and family-oriented were highlighted as part of their work with Latin@ students. These descriptors, although very accurate, fall short to describe other key cultural components of Latin@ students and how they either facilitate or impede identification. These cultural descriptors are to some extend stereotypically and represent only the tip of the iceberg of culture. Thus, teachers must be able to look beyond the superficial manifestations of culture to best understand potentially gifted Latin@ students.

Using Critical Theory as a framework of analysis helped to shed light on how issues of power, race, and White privilege intersect with how minorities are conceived using a superficial and oversimplified concept of their culture (e.g. tacos as an example of Latin@ food when in reality this is just representative of one of many ethnic Latin@ groups). From a critical perspective, culture is understood as something fluid, not static, which confers dignity onto people of color rather than leading to the stereotypical depiction of minorities. In the current research, participants presented an oversimplification of all the cultural manifestation and cultural diversity that exists within the Latin@ ethnic groups. The problem with oversimplified views of culture is that it characterizes individuals as somewhat passive carriers of culture. Based on this view, culture is simply a set of rituals, beliefs, and fixed traits. Such an operational definition of culture contrasts with the concept of culture used to describe and explain the gifts and talents of underrepresented populations that often go unnoticed in schools. Culture with respect to gifted education is produced and reproduced in moments as people do life. From this standpoint, culture is both carried by individuals and created in moment-to-moment interactions with one another as they participate in and reconstruct cultural practices. This more fluid definition of culture is requisite to the current discussion.

Furthermore, current practical demonstrations of multicultural education in schools such as the ones perceived and shared by research participants have often reduced it to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures such as eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing or dancing, reading folktales, and other less than scholarly pursuits of the fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge or quests for social justice. Data from interviews showed that except for two participants (Mary and Blanca) the majority of teachers had a very narrow and stereotypical conception of the Latin@ community, which calls for the need of implementing more multicultural and antiracist education in schools.

It is important to keep in mind that even terms to describe culture (rather than race) can be ambiguous and can lead to overgeneralizations that could result in the perpetuations of deficit cultural, linguistics, and academic models, as they exist today. An example of generalization of culture and a very superficial understanding of it was provided by Peter who believes in the homogeneity of Latin@s stating,

> I think they [Latin@@ students] in different ways bringing culture, their own culture. I want to avoid being stereotypical, but there's like a little more *Sabor*. You know a little more flavor when I've worked with some Latin@ students. There are lots of other factors, but that's kind of what I think. A work ethic that I see in the students and their families about making ends meet, making things happen, and not making excuses. I think a lot of students bring from their home environment, not to say there isn't any sort of issues, because it is across-the-board and there's family-to-family it will change. But generally, that's what I see with our Latin@ students and families.

In Peter's narrative, the term "Hispanics" is unidimensional, failing to reject the presence of stereotypical representation of Latin@s in which they all are poor or uneducated which results in the reinforcement of cultural deficiency models. For example, the term Hispanic is meant to describe a part of the cultural heritage of an individual. However, a student may be of biracial Black/White Puerto Rican descent (as in many of the students in these schools), of American Indian descent from an indigenous Peruvian tribe, or the European country of Spain. Each of

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these students may be monolingual or bilingual, speaking combinations of English, Spanish, and native indigenous languages. Thus, although there may be some commonalities between students categorized as Hispanic, there might also be some important cultural differences. These differences may affect how they perform in school.

For example, a Hispanic student who had early school experiences in a metropolitan city in Mexico or Colombia may have a different level of exposure and familiarity to culture represented on an American test than a student who lived in a small rural Indigenous community in the mountains of Peru or Mexico and attended school only sporadically.

To reiterate, these differences in experience are not accounted for when grouped under the term "Hispanic." Thus, when educators, for example, compare the performance or behavior of Hispanic students, they may still be comparing them to students that have had very different experiences and backgrounds. For example, having assumptions or bias about lack of knowledge of Latin@ students when compared to the norm can lead to misinterpretation of performance. If educators merely examine test scores obtained on standardized tests, without looking at access to opportunities to learn, it is difficult to infer which students have high potential. Briana mentioned this in her interview by stating the following,

> Latin@ students are very diverse, thus one model does not fit all. The norm of being Latin@, many people think of language but did not think about the huge diversity of Latin@ students, including cultural differences, parent's education, urban vs rural, and race. Etc.

Giftedness Goes beyond Academic Areas

Several narratives from research participants (e.g. Laura, Peter, Blanca, and Mary), reaffirmed that the idea that teachers bias whether explicit or implicit, has tremendous effects not only on the perceptions of students but also on the behaviors, teachers expect to see when referring Latin@ students for gifted services. To illustrate this, Laura mentioned the following,

"I used to think they (students) had to be really advanced in all academic areas or that they had to

be on a different curriculum which meant that they had to excel in reading and math." Academic

expectations of Latin@ students, as being a necessary characteristic to be nominated for gifted

programs, varied among teachers. For example, while teachers such as Cindy, and Elizabeth,

emphasized students' high scores in standardized assessments as an indicator of giftedness, other

teachers such as Blanca, Laura, Patricia, Mary, and Peter insisted on the idea that giftedness

expands beyond academic areas. Furthermore, these educators kept a close eye on students'

behaviors in other areas not necessarily attached to academic scores as a method to identify

gifted potential.

Reflecting on this, Peter alluded to the following "In order to identify potentially gifted

Latin@ students I could no longer rely just on standardized scores." He also was aware that

giftedness was manifested in every culture regardless of whether or not students did well in

academics. In his role as a teacher, in charge of the identification and nomination process, he

kept a close look a "those students missed by CogAT", a district universal screener used to

identify giftedness. In our interview, this teacher shared how his conception of giftedness

allowed for students to also be considered gifted in art or music. In this regard, he stated,

> I think just about all these kids have some sort of gift that they're bringing in here, but
> there are some that their strengths are definitely more salient. For example, my art student
> is clearly gifted. She should be in an art school, and I wish she could go to one...I just
> personally think that these students don't belong in the regular classroom. They will be
> more at ease in a different environment.

Patricia also expanded on this, arguing that giftedness cannot be limited to students who

show exceptional abilities in academics areas such as reading and math. In her account, Patricia

alluded to the fact that some students could be gifted in leadership and creativity.

> I've seen a lot of creativity as I mentioned before. Another characteristic is being a
> problem solving, just learning how to solve problems in a different way or making kind

of make it up to their own way to do it. I've seen a lot of leadership and sometimes that shows itself in positive ways and sometimes not so positive ways.

As previously mentioned, identification and provisions for gifted programs to provide services to CLD students are influenced by teachers understanding of giftedness as well as other factors such as the specific assessment tools used for identification, educator bias, perception of cultural behaviors, quantity and quality of teacher preparation for working with CLD students, and access to adequate instructional strategies. Educator bias, for example, occurs when preconceived ideas about what constitutes giftedness fail to recognize indicators of giftedness in CLD students with high potential in areas such as leadership, visual, performing arts, and creativity.

Contrary to standard identification practices that rely on the use of IQ tests and standardized assessments most teachers participating in this study highlighted the benefits of using non-traditional methods of identification such as observations and inventories in addition to test scores. For example, Mary's understanding of giftedness was not limited to academics therefore, she advocated for the use of observations in areas such as the arts. To demonstrate how she accomplished this, she provided concrete examples that served as indicators of giftedness based on her observations, and interaction with her students. Mary explained,

> Some behaviors that I look for or see exhibited in gifted students vary by areas of strength. For example, an artistically talented student may exhibit very creative solutions, ideas, or analysis of a problem. They show this through diagrams, art, or verbally. Mathematically gifted students tend to prefer a logical or structured way to present information. I look for students who not only likes but creates lists, outlines, organizers without being asked by the teacher. A gifted student within a specific domain will be very curious and often have a lot of information on a topic (i.e. science, famous leader, etc.). I usually perceive this through writing, observations, and/or conversations. Other behaviors I look for are students' maturity level, possible learning disabilities such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, or other disabilities that have been linked to students of high abilities.

The following table presents a summary of the academic and non-academic behaviors identified by teachers when working with Latin@ students. The descriptors listed in Table 8. came in part from participants' responses as well as from descriptors listed in the TOPS inventory.

Table 9

Academic and Non-academic Gifted Behaviors Described by Teacher Participants

Identified academic gifted behavior	Identified <u>non-academic gifted behavior</u> which included (creative, artistic, leadership, musical, and psychomotor.)
GENERAL AND INTELLECTUAL ABILITY • Formulates abstractions • Processes information in complex ways • Observant • Excited by new ideas • Enjoys hypothesizing • Learns rapidly • Uses large vocabulary • Inquisitive: "Those are the ones that always drive you crazy because I answer every single question right or wrong" • Self-starter • Boredom with at level curriculum • Creates lists, outlines, organizers without being asked by the teacher • Well-behaved students • Social awkwardness: social behaviors that exclude them from their peers	LEADERSHIP • Assumes responsibility • High expectations for self and others • Fluent, concise self-expression • Foresees consequences and implications of decisions • Good judgment in decision-making • Likes structure • Problem-solving • Challenges authority • Well-liked by peers • Self-confident • Talkative
SPECIFIC ACADEMIC ABILITY • Good memorization ability • Advanced comprehension • Acquires basic-skills knowledge quickly • Widely read in a special-interest area • High academic success in a special-interest area	VISUAL/PERFORMING ART • Outstanding in sense of spatial relationships • Unusual ability for expressing self-feelings, moods, etc., through art, dance, drama, music • Good motor coordination • Exhibits creative expression

Identified academic gifted behavior	Identified <u>non-academic gifted behavior</u> which included (creative, artistic, leadership, musical, and psychomotor.)
- Pursues special interests with enthusiasm and vigor - Prefer a logical or structured way to present information - Very curious and often have a lot of information on a topic - Extremely excited, intense, obsessed or anxious to share newly acquired information	- A desire for producing "own product" (not content with mere copying) - Observant
	CREATIVE THINKING - Independent thinker - Exhibits original thinking in oral and written expression - Comes up with several solutions to a given problem - Possesses a sense of humor - Challenged by creative tasks - Improves often - Does not mind being or acting different from the crowd - creative solutions, ideas, or analysis to a problem

In sum, teachers' bias whether explicit or implicit has powerful effects on who is nominated for gifted programs. From a Critical Theory perspective, these biases camouflage under misconceptions of culture, teachers' expectations, and the use of tests to determine if a student is gifted or not. Furthermore, biases can be manifested in the subjective teachers' criteria used to nominate a child. Subjective criteria can be dangerous in nature because the nomination of Latin@ students depends mostly on the teacher. While teachers' explicit biases are easy to spot, implicit biases continue to show up in ways that might appear as part of daily life. This in part to an endemic system of racism where deficit models and bias against Latin@ students are

normalized. Teachers' implicit biases may also be manifested against a student's gender, race, socioeconomic status, or behaviors, which may influence who will be granted or denied access to gifted programs.

Data from this study shows that although most teachers made statements indicating they perceived themselves to be bias-free, such as "I treat all students the same" and "I don't see culture." Nonetheless, their narratives told a different story. Teachers' biases manifested in having racist views against "black boys from Puerto-Rico" (Laura), when admitting being culturally blind (Cindy), or simply when thinking of parents as being "unable" to attend to the needs of gifted learners (Briana).

Teachers' Training can Help to Overcome Bias

One variable that has huge implications in the identification and referral of students for gifted programs is teachers' training (Ford, 1998). It is proven that a lack of adequate teacher training in gifted education results in lower nomination and identification of Latin@ students. Yet, despite this reality, today the number of trained teachers in gifted education is minimal. For example, several studies indicate that teachers are less effective and less accurate in recognizing students who require gifted education services compared to parents. Specifically, 61% of the teachers surveyed by Westberg and Archambault (1997) had received no staff development in the area of gifted education. Similarly, Karnes and Whorton (1991) found that half the states require no certification or endorsement in gifted education, three states make this training optional, five states have statements of competencies, fourteen require practicum experiences, and eight require teaching experience in the regular classroom before teaching gifted students. As a result, teachers are not always the most reliable sources for identifying gifted learners,

particularly culturally or racially diverse students. Without adequate training in gifted education,

how qualified are teachers to recognize students with gifted characteristics?

As in the case of the teachers participating in this study, descriptive data shows that

teachers had different stages regarding training in gifted education. Research shows that a crucial

component of the identification and nomination of gifted students is teachers' training (Ford,

2010, 2011; Young, 2009).

The following Table shows participants' responses regarding training and their

perceptions of whether or not they think it was important.

Table 10

Benefits Communicated by Research Participants Regarding GT Training

Participant	Participant's Quotes	Benefits of GT Training as Described by Research Participants
Peter	"I think that in college they had some classes in differentiation and identifying or working with students who exceed beyond."	"I like the intent of trying to identify students or identify Urban students for giftedness, and I like that it gave Outlets that weren't just !oh! He's good at reading and in math. I like that there were also other aspects than just academics. Regarding the use of TOPS, I did not like the implementation of it. I felt like it was another thing thrown on our backs to take care of, as opposed to a program being out effectively. Tops had a positive effect on helping him to see gifted behaviors in a different way." Change in mindset.
Briana	"I have not received training on gifted education as part of my training as a teacher. As an undergrad, the only thing I can remember is in our assessment class, we just talked about how to make sure that your assessments are	"I feel as if though I am just scratching the surface of gifted education and how to work with gifted students."

Participant	Participant's Quotes	Benefits of GT Training as Described by Research Participants
	differentiated. In my graduate classes with the reading and learning disabilities."	
Patricia	"I personally have witnessed that administrators and psychologists do not understand what to be gifted is."	"In reality, in my experience as a teacher, this has not been one of the priorities or interests in my school, but rather on making sure struggling students or students below grade-level show progress."
Laura	"When I was getting my master's degree at Cardinal Stritch we talk about differentiating for some students that are a little bit lower academically or those students that are more advanced, but it wasn't specifically targeting advanced students or gifted and talented. It was more of a focus on differentiation for all students."	"Training on gifted education made me more aware of how gifted students need specific services to meet their needs."
Blanca	"Back in my undergraduate education, not really. It was something that was briefly discussed. It came out whenever we discuss special education, gifted education is similar to special Ed. It wasn't something that was highly talked about."	"I recommend teachers receive training on gifted students, particularly on introduction to giftedness, differentiation, best teaching practices, social-emotional development of gifted students.
Cindy	"I would say my training in gifted education has been minimal, and this is not something I was trained as a part of my teaching classes."	"I do think that my participation in the GT training made me a more self-aware and better teacher, thinking about how I can help develop these abilities in children."
Mary	"I had received a lot of PD. I think it all started with differentiation. And later did the license in Gifted Education."	"GT education is essential to know what you are doing. That is what makes me able to see the traits and characteristics of gifted students. Gifted Education is more specialized with a lot of more in-depth research-

Participant	Participant's Quotes	Benefits of GT Training as Described by Research Participants
		based instructional strategies that have worked."

The importance of gifted training was highly regarded among research participants (see Table 10). This was clearly stated by Patricia who believed that expanding her views about education along with her training and learning about gifted students and gifted education made her a better and more effective teacher.

> I really have learned a lot. Honestly, it has opened my eyes. Like I said before, I have been focusing more on the curriculum. My focus was on teaching them to read and the only kids that really stuck out to me were the ones that academically did well, which is one portion of the gifted and talented. But now that I have learned so much more about the program [gifted programs] I understand that there are so many different areas that a kid could show gifted or talented abilities. So, it has really opened my eyes to look not just at the academics. To look more at the whole child and see what sort of things are sticking out as a strength.

Training in gifted education, as Patricia argued, "open her eyes" empowering her to see her students from a strength point of view. This resulted in allowing her reevaluating her bias about giftedness as well as students who had gifted potential.

Mary has years of experience teaching in the field of gifted education also spoke about the benefits of receiving extensive training in gifted education and gifted learners. To illustrate his she stated, "I do think that my participation in the GT training made me a more self-aware and better teacher, thinking about how I can help children with exceptional abilities." Another teacher (Elizabeth) also echoed Mary's argument adding, "I would say my training in gifted education has been helpful, although I feel I am just scratching the surface of gifted education and how to work with gifted students."

It is important to note that such training was not part of their teacher's formation program, but rather as something these educators sought after they became teachers. This as a means to respond to the needs of urban Latin@ gifted students. To exemplify this, Peter shared his testimony sharing some aspects of his teaching educational and training experiences, which according to him, did not provide him training on how to meet the needs of gifted learners.

> I think that in college they had some classes in differentiation and identifying or working with students who exceed beyond. But, I think that in urban education, especially with the focus on remediation, the one lagging behind, and the majority of the population. Or even students who are below level or learning a second language. It is tough. I find it very tough because I know of some students who are gifted and [I] try to challenge them and provide additional work, responsibilities. But I find it one of the big challenges. Especially in urban education or with any sort of minority group, identifying them and giving them appropriate challenges in the classroom environment.

In this narrative, the teacher manifests his knowledge that there are many GT students in underrepresented communities where he works. However, he talks about urban challenges such as poverty, fewer resources, and less access to advanced classes for students, which impedes identification and access to adequate gifted programming to meet their needs.

As Table 5 shows, four levels of training that teaches participants had after receiving professional development or being enrolled in a licensing program to attain a gifted endearment license. For this study, the researcher created four levels of training categories: minimal, basic, proficient, and advanced. This for the purpose of identifying the amount of either professional development or credit classes they took in the area of gifted pedagogy.

Data from interviews show that one teacher (Briana) received minimum training in gifted education. That is receiving 4 hours or less of training on the topic. For example, regarding the need of ongoing teacher training in gifted pedagogy, Patricia manifested her desire to continue her formation process stating, "My training in gifted education has been helpful, although I feel I am just scratching the surface of gifted education and how to work with gifted

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students." Minimum exposed to training in gifted education traditionally includes professional development sessions and in-school presentations.

The next level of teachers' training was basic (Peter, Cindy, Laura, and Elizabeth). Data from interviews shows that four participants received basic training in gifted education or an equivalent of about 16 hours. Basic training in Gifted Ed entails; participating in professional development sessions and taking part in the district's initiatives addressing the topic of gifted education. At the district level, these teachers received specific training in the use of TOPS or Teacher's Observations of Potential Students. This tool uses an inventory of students' behaviors in nine domains to identify gifted potential in students from minority backgrounds. In their interviews, these teachers manifested the benefits of participating in this kind of training. This was well summarized by Laura, who even went on to recommend the TOPS to fellow teachers.

> The use of the TOPS helped me to be more open-minded about the topic of giftedness. I recommend other teachers use the TOPS tool at least to challenge their minds. If they don't identify students, at least to open their minds as to how to look for students with different abilities, as opposed to just focus on academics.

The third level of teachers' training is intermediate (Blanca and Patricia). These two teachers were placed in this level as a result of their participation in the TOPS training as well as the fact that they took at least one class (3 Credits) offered by the district in previous years. These teachers also pointed out that training in other than the use of traditional assessments to identify Latin@ students was a priority.

Finally, one teacher (Mary) had advanced training in gifted education. This, after completing four classes or the equivalent of 12 graduate credits, which granted her a state coordinators license in gifted education. The emphasis in remediation only creates a track system in which students get trap.

The following table serves as a summary of theme two: teachers' perceptions. In this chart, the author provides a summary of the major commonalities and distinctions among participants that were found when analyzing comparing and contrasting teachers' views of giftedness and importance of training.

Table 11

Thematic Summary Chart Theme 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Potentially Gifted Students

	Commonalities	Distinctions among Participants
Theme 2.1 Teachers' Perceptions, Bias and misconceptions & Theme 2.2. (homogeneity)	Teachers' perceptions and biases are manifested in the way teachers perceived their students' abilities, preferred behaviors, cultural traits, and assumptions. Overall, teachers recognized language as a cultural asset. This did not appear to be related to the length of time in TOPS training.	One teacher (Laura) explicitly spoke as having a bias against Black Latin@ male students. Elizabeth, Laura, and Cindy indicated that working with Latin@ students helped them to re-examine their bias or cultural assumptions. One teacher (Cindy) thought of Latin@ students as being part of the "Melted Pot. Thus admitting being culturally blind.
Sub-theme 2.3 Giftedness Goes Beyond Academic Areas	Teachers' perceptions and biases are manifested in the way teachers perceived their students' abilities, preferred behaviors, cultural traits, and assumptions. Overall, teachers recognized language as a cultural asset. This did not appear to be related to the length of time in TOPS training.	One teacher (Laura) explicitly spoke as having a bias against Black Latin@ male students. Elizabeth, Laura, and Cindy indicated that working with Latin@ students helped them to re-examine their bias or cultural assumptions. One teacher (Cindy) thought of Latin@ students as being part of the "Melted Pot". Thus, admitting being culturally blind.
Sub-theme 2.4 Teachers Training Can Help Overcome Bias	All participants had no formal training in GT educations as part of their formal training.	One participant (Elizabeth) did not think training on GT applied to urban schools.

	Commonalities	Distinctions among Participants
(change in mindset	Most (seven participants) said there were benefits of GT that argued training in GT education helped them to expand their understanding of giftedness. Teachers who saw the benefit of training (7) felt their teaching practices and perceptions of potentially gifted students changed.	

Theme Three: Gifted Training and Tools had a Positive Effect on Increasing Identification of Latin@ Students

Because of difficulties that present themselves when relying on standardized tests of cognitive or academic abilities for the identification of gifted CLD students, researchers have studied the use of behavior rating scales as an alternative objective measure that can be used during the identification process (Peters & Grissom, 2006).

One of the most relevant findings of this research was the positive effects of using alternative assessments to identify gifted potential in Latin@ students (see Appendix K). TOPS is a non-standardized tool used to systematically gather and document qualitative observational data within the context of instruction. The TOPS inventory tool is organized around nine observable domains of students' behaviors in the classroom. These behaviors include learns easily, shows advanced skills, displays curiosity and creativity, has a strong interest, shows advanced reasoning & problem solving, displays spatial abilities, shows motivation, shows social perceptiveness, and displays leadership. In addition, TOPS serve as a profile record intended to help systematize the observation component through documentation and to help teachers shift from an "at-risk" to an "at potential" mindset (Harradine et al., 2014). This mind-shift was described by Patricia as a mind-opening.

TOPS really opened my mind that there are so many other different areas of giftedness, such as areas of leadership, curiosity, and creativity. It really opened my mind towards those other areas as opposed to just the simple doing well in academics.

In this narrative, giftedness is understood as a concept that also encompasses non-academic areas that very often go unnoticed in schools. Thus, the terms gifted potential or potentially gifted in this framework should be understood as the untapped ability that students (usually from at-risk populations) have in one or more areas, which have not been manifested yet in part due to issues of poverty, language, and lack of access to rich learning opportunities.

A Mindset Shift from Deficit and At-Risk to At-Potential

Data from interviews demonstrate that in addition to teachers' training in gifted education, the use of non-normative and culturally sensitive tools to identify giftedness such as TOPS resulted in teachers' shift in mindset from a deficit and at-risk to at-potential as well as the broader conceptualization of students' high abilities in other areas other than in reading and math. What is the result? An increase in the number of Latin@ students nominated for gifted programs. The above quote "training really opened my mind" illustrates a shift in teachers' perspectives through which giftedness and its manifestations break away from traditional and rigid definitions of the term. In the same line of thought, Laura, another teacher, added,

The use of the TOPS helped me to be more open-minded. I would recommend to [teachers] to use the TOPS tool at least to challenge their minds. If they don't identify students, at least to open their minds as to how to looks for students with different abilities, as opposed to just focus on academics.

As described before, all participants of this study received various levels of training, specifically in the use of TOPS. This was part of a district Javits grant that began to be implemented in 2014 and ended in 2018. This Javits grant was awarded to the district by the United States Department of Education, which allowed the district to begin the training of forty bilingual teachers, from ten urban schools that mainly serve Latin@ students. Subsequently,

these ten schools began to pilot the use of TOPS to increase the identification of potentially

gifted Latin@ students. Commenting on the district efforts to identify more minority students

through the use of TOPS Mary said,

> Working in the bilingual program, I feel there's more of an opportunity to look at
> different aspects of Latin@ students, that perhaps other teachers would not look at. I
> personally use TOPS. I'm glad that we have it here at this school because we do get more
> of those Latin@ students that otherwise wouldn't be represented or nominated.

> TOPS include systematic observation across school settings, activities, and time periods.

The purpose of using TOPS with the teachers who were selected was to help them focus on and

recognize indicators of high potential and discover patterns of student behaviors. Such positive

results were echoed by Blanca, a second-grade elementary teacher, who stated,

> I feel like in schools like ours gifted and talented was kind of not a priority… most of the
> time it isn't a priority. So, I'm glad that we have changed that focus over the past few
> years and that we have been really intentionally nominating more students. Sometimes
> for teachers, it's very obvious to identify students if gifted in one or more academic areas.
> However, that is not the case for students who have not been identified or who are gifted
> in non-academic areas. That is why I like the TOPS tool to look for other possible areas
> of giftedness.

> Data from teachers' interviews reveal several advantages of performance assessments

when used with Latin@ students. First, performance assessments such as TOPS have several

advantages over normed tests such as providing opportunities to show unique strengths,

encouraging open-ended thinking, creativity, and providing opportunities for demonstration and

observation of complex learning tasks in authentic situations. Blanca expanded on this arguing

that the more teachers nurture students' areas of strength the better students do in academic

areas. She stated,

> I think we nominated kids through TOPS. So, it's really looking at a student for more
> than just academic ability. But seeing them for their unique gifts and talents. Sometimes
> students are dancers and not as great academically, but their talent lies and dance and so
> that's something that they need to be recognized for because it is their talent area. And I

believe the more we meet and nurture their area of strength the more they will positively respond.

Secondly, the goal of TOPS is not merely to identify students as gifted, but rather to identify students' areas of strength in order to be nurtured and developed. In other words, using TOPS does not guarantee the "label" of giftedness, but rather it provides a clear inventory of the gifted behaviors and potential that students have, which need to be nurtured and developed through rigorous interventions. Rich and meaningful interventions were clearly described by Elizabeth who described what to do once students are identified as potentially gifted. Elizabeth elaborated on this stating,

> So, it is teaching content through their strength and talent. For example, if they're visual artists and can draw, then that might be the reward once they finish through a tough assignment or changing the outcome product so that kids have an option. This means, students can choose how to do their final projects, such as doing a book report, they can put on a little drama, they can create a diorama, they can present to the class a scene from the book. Just giving them options to show their work in a way that they feel more comfortable and confident to show the same understanding.

This narrative demonstrates the nurturing that must take place to help students develop their talents and needs. This is especially relevant knowing that traditionally, Latin@ students do not have the same access to high-end OTL when compared to other students from more wealthy families. Consequently, providing rich interventions and pre-identification enrichment opportunities for Latin@ students is crucial to make sure these students can show their full potential.

Next, using TOPS increased the identification of Latin@ students. An important goal of the district in using TOPS was to help teachers understand what to look for when working with Latin@ students. This required training teachers on making students' observations and providing diverse and rich learning opportunities through different activities as ideal learning environments for students to show their true potential. The researcher found this was accomplished by the

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majority of research participants who deviated from the use of traditional assessments. An example of this is the following description which outlines the nomination process for students using this tool. Blanca expressed,

> When using TOPS, you look at how often a [gifted] behavior happens in an area and then you track how often this happens in that area or areas that are outstanding. Then, you would nominate the student in those areas. In the application for the gifted and talented traditional schools, typically ask about academic ability and so you use test scores. But then you can also use more anecdotal things such as when someone perseveres with difficult problems because perseverance or that level of mental challenge can be an indicator of giftedness. So, in summary, you look at a lot of different factors about the kid, instead of a cut score at the 95th percentile, which has been the traditional criteria for students to be considered gifted, or an IQ of 130.

Because TOPS delineate particular behaviors, it challenged teachers to reconsider some of the students' behaviors that in a traditional setting or classroom will be seen as disruptive or problematic. This results in a missed opportunity for students to have access to high-end learning opportunities that could lead students to attain excellence. Furthermore, TOPS include systematic observations across school settings, activities, and periods that helped teachers to focus on, recognize indicators of high potential, and discover patterns of student behaviors. To illustrate this Patricia said,

> TOPS has been very helpful for me, because it's very clearly stated in the different areas, and it gives you possible indicators that help you really focus on each child. This tool also has helped me to see some abilities that you maybe wouldn't have seen otherwise just doing regular classroom observations of your children.

Similar effects were reported by Researchers Harradine Coleman, & Winn, (2014) who studied more than 1,100 teachers that implemented TOPS in 100 schools in four states. In this study, the researchers claimed that the use of TOPS allowed teachers to identify 57 percent more African American and 37 percent more Latin@ students, that would have been missed using traditional assessments. This finding also emphasized the importance of including non-teacher-pleasing behaviors in observation tools.

Finally, TOPS provided a framework to observe students over time, and in a variety of contexts, and in authentic settings, rather than in a single fixed time assessment, which often fails to identify minority students. Cindy who questioned whether CogAT, a universal cognitive ability screener used by the district, was effective when assessing Latin @ students voiced the same concern.

> I think that traditional methods miss out on a lot of kids. In my experience with CogAT some years we have had a lot of kids identified, like seven or eight kids and then other years it is only one. And it seems to favor boys in our school over girls and I don't know why? It might have to do with the way the test is administered, so I think it is not as effective. For example, I'm thinking of a third grader that was identified last year. He is extremely bright and CogAT only tests for academic ability, the quantitative, and the non-verbal scores. But there is a girl who is in the same class. I believe she is equally as bright as he is, but she didn't show up that way in CogAT. That's why I kind of wonder what happened, why we are missing out on too many students?

Using the TOPS tool also provided evidence of the thinking process and concept development in a different way than standardized tests. Therefore, it is a tool to helped teachers get to know their students by focusing on strengths. Using non-normative assessments such as TOPS in addition to standardized tests has been an innovating practice in recent years as a way to increase representation. Some of the this befits were described by Patricia commenting on the following:

> I have been involved in the TOPS, using the TOPS tool for about five years. I'm comfortable with using that to identify students. I know there are other measures such as certain tests or classroom observations and things. But the TOPS has been very helpful for me, because it's very clearly stated in the different areas, and it gives you possible indicators that help you really focus on each child. This tool also has helped me to see some abilities that you maybe wouldn't have seen otherwise just doing regular classroom observations of your children.

In sum, research participants unequivocally stated the benefits of using TOPS. Thus, this demonstrates that using TOPS helped teachers to re-assess their conceptualization of potential, ability, and giftedness. Consequently, the researcher suggests that this study provides additional

evidence similar to earlier findings (Coleman, Shah-Coltrane, & Harrison, 2010) that shows that using the TOPS allows teachers to expand their perceptions regarding CLD students. Perhaps the most important aspect of participating in gifted training consisted of the fact that although all of these teachers had very narrow and elusive conceptualizations of giftedness, their *practices* in identifying gifted traits and behavior in students was robust and more inclusive than when participants tried to offer a definition giftedness. This is relevant considering that definitions of giftedness have had a dominant place in the literature (Grissom and Redding 2015: Renzulli, 1997; Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Consequently, scholars in the field of gifted education need to pay close attention not just to definitions, but also about teaching practices, which all seems to suggest are better indicators of how teachers perceive giftedness.

In the following section, the researcher presents a data analysis to address question two of the research: How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?

Teachers' Decision-Making Criteria

As mentioned in chapter II, teachers' referral is the most common method used to nominate students for gifted programs. This, even though most school districts in the country use some type of universal screeners or ability test to determine whether or not students are gifted or have gifted potential. Now, as it has been discussed before part if the problems are that these tests continue to miss a huge amount of minority students whom every year failed to be identified as gifted (Ford, 2010).

Data from research participants shows that their decision-making process to identify and nominate Latin@ students was influenced by three specific principles: the norms and guidelines offered by the district, their conception and understanding of giftedness informed by the TOPS

alternative assessment tool with which they were trained at the District-sponsored gifted referral program, and the schools' culture where they work (see Appendix K).

District Norms and Guidelines

Data from the districts' website where this study took place indicate that this district had a strong commitment at least in the establishing guidelines to meet the needs of gifted learners once they have been identified and referred for gifted services. Therefore, teachers and schools in this district must comply with state statute s. 118.35 under which, all public schools must provide a continuum of instructional activities to meet the needs of gifted learners. The following statement from the district serves to illustrates this.

> The Milwaukee Public Schools Gifted and Talented Development Program comprises a continuum of services for students needing acceleration and/or enrichment embedded in the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework. State law requires that the district provide systematic and continuous instructional activities and learning experiences appropriate to the developmental needs of students from kindergarten through grade 12 who are identified as gifted or talented in one or more categories: general intellectual, specific academic area, leadership, creativity, and fine arts. (**Wisconsin Statute: s. 118.35, Wis. Stats**.) Milwaukee Public Schools will fully implement an integrated Response to Intervention framework with a continuum of services to support measurable academic and behavior success for all students. Within this framework, the essential elements of high-quality instruction, a balanced assessment, collaboration, and culturally responsive practices interact to create a multi-level system of support through which data-informed decisions match appropriate services to the varying needs of students.

As in the case of teachers working for the district, it is expected that teachers carry out the task of making sure students who have been identified received the services they need to meet their needs. It is implied in the previous quote, that the purpose of identification, is to "provide continuous instructional activities and learning experiences appropriate to the developmental needs of students from kindergarten through grade 12 who are identified as gifted or talented in one or more categories: general intellectual, specific academic area, leadership, creativity, and fine arts." Yet, as it will be discussed later, only one school (Alliance) out of four

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of them had a program in place to meet the needs of gifted students. Consequently, not all

schools are doing what they supposed to do putting in jeopardy the future and well-being of high

achievers. This was communicated by Peter who stated that teachers are often left in charge of

meeting the needs of gifted learners who little or no support from the district or the school.

> I think that <u>teachers sometimes get disillusion</u> from our jobs and the state of education
> and the stress, and the workload that we kind of put blinders (Meaning it is not the
> priority to meet the needs of students who are doing fine)... We, teachers tend to ignore
> them, because it becomes one more thing we have to do.

To best summarize the districts' guidelines for schools and teachers, regarding the

process of identification of gifted, the researchers created the following figures. The first figure

shows the gifted referral and eligibility process that this district used to establish eligibility for

services.

Figure 4

Gifted Education Referral and Eligibility Process Chart
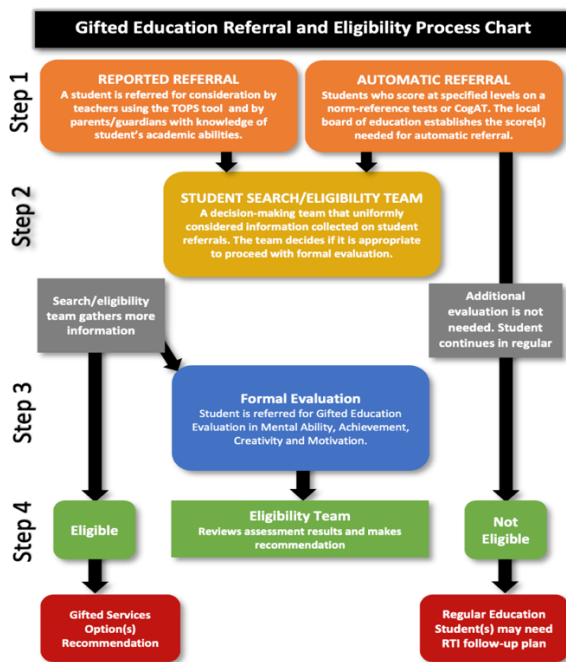
*This chart was created by the researcher to visualize the current district's referral and eligibility process.

The second figure shows the guidelines for teachers to help them inform their decision-making process when referring students for gifted services. It shows the various measures, proposed by the district, that teachers can use as a means to increase identification.

Figure 5

Gifted and Talented Identification and Referral Procedures

Gifted & Talented Identification and Referral Procedures

The process, representative of the population of students who are served in MPS, will result in the development of a student profile based on a variety of measures. A student may be identified in one or more of the categories under s. 118.35, Wis. Stats. Second-grade students will be identified as "at potential" for gifted and talented opportunities based on the following measures collected in the student profile:

- The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)

- Teacher observations

- Star Reading and Star Math assessments

- Student profiles may also include evidence of demonstrated performance

- Parent input

Classroom teachers recommend students for evaluation through teacher observations for all MPS students to the building intervention team early in the school year to ensure that proper services are provided to gifted and talented students.

*This chart was created by the researcher using information available to public use.

Both of these guidelines are very important. Nonetheless, as being discussed in this section, the researcher found that teachers did not have a clear conceptualization of either of these guidelines, although, in their practices, they incorporated some of the measures used to

identify students' abilities or potential. It is important to note that this chart includes both

standardized and non-standardized measurements of identification which is part of a more

cohesive approach to increase identification of minority students in the district.

Data from teachers who participated in this study indicate that all research participants

(with some degree of variation) did not have a clear understanding of the process of nomination

suggested by the district, which perhaps affected their ability to adequately identify and referred

more potentially gifted Lain@ Latin@ students. This included the various components that

should be taken into account when referring students for gifted services. Cindy who argued she

felt incompetent to know what she was doing echoed this. To illustrate this she stated,

> The process we are using now, I think is great as far as beginning to identify kids. What
> is good is the fact that we are thinking and talking about it, making sure that we are not
> forgetting these kids. However, we need to do so much more. I don't think I'm educated
> enough to sit down and really know what I'm looking for.

Now, despite not being fully informed of the district's process, some participants, such as

Mary, Blanca, Patricia, Laura, and Peter used some of the measures listed by the district as part

of their decision-making criteria. Some of the measures mentioned by these participants included

students' observations, collecting students' work, students' performance in standardized

assessments, and students' profiles. Commenting on the process Patricia stated,

> After we identify the students through TOPS, I know their names are submitted to
> Central Office and then they get a flag on their Infinite Campus. Then, those students get
> to participate in some extracurricular activities such as Saturday Academies or camps the
> school has.

It is clear that teachers do not have a clear understanding of district guidelines; they are

probably less likely to refer students or to use multiple measurements, which include

standardized and non-standardized forms of assessments to identify gifted potential in minority

students. Furthermore, none of the participants explicitly talked about the district's guidelines to

inform their decision-making process when identifying gifted students but rather relayed on whatever each school demanded of them or on their understanding of giftedness. This was the case of Peter offered an honest critique of the identification process. He argued that,

> I think the process is a work-in-progress. I think it's not fleshed out very well. I think that was probably one of the main issues with some of the training the district provided to us using TOPS, was that we met a lot, but it didn't feel like we were accomplishing much in those meetings. It was more busy work or just something required by DPI to meet for this amount of time. Rather than focusing on what was wrong with the process.

Cindy, a research participant working at Almond elementary spoke of the decision-making process of identifying gifted students as a political issue in which changes are needed. Yet, it is not something that has been the priority. This indicates that is teachers like Cindy, feel demoralized by the process, they might not be eager to identify and nominate students for gifted programs. She commented in this arguing,

> I think unfortunately in it's the nature of Education today particularly Urban education dealing with so many other issues that it gets a little put on the back burner and we haven't really been intentional about identifying these students…I think it's a huge political issue. I think looking at the entire structure of the educational system that we're going to see change and this is going to affect these children as well as all children. Something needs to change. I think things will get worse before they get better.

Other participants like Mary had a better idea of the timeline in which teachers just begin the referral process. She spoke about the fact that she used a combination of methods to help her decide which students should be identified and referred for gifted services. She also shared some of the classroom activities she used to allow students to show their abilities.

> I rely on what the district and the state require. I know, schools traditionally request an IQ test. However, I also use other measurements. The formal nomination process starts in September for about two weeks. That's where it's more intentional, offering a lot of project-based and problem-based learning. Then I make a formal nomination followed by flagging these students on Infinite Campus and purposefully plan. I do a lot of good projects and I purposefully plan for those students to be able to work together, but also working in other groups.

Creating this homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Then, I will continue with this throughout the year.

In sum, research findings show that district guidelines serve to inform teachers' decision making. This, by providing information on the process as well as by listing qualitative and qualitative measures that teachers should use in their daily practices to accurately identify gifted potential. Nonetheless, data from research participants also demonstrate that although the district has guidelines in place, much of their decision-making process is not based entirely on these norms. This, perhaps due to their lack of understanding about the guidelines, timeline, and school expectations of teachers related to the identification of students' potential.

Teachers' Understanding of Giftedness

Deciding which students have gifted potential as well as how to best meet their needs is a serious and ethical decision that teachers must take seriously. The act of nominating potentially gifted students for gifted services is part of an ethical dilemma that should be guided by having knowledge of the students and their abilities as well as a clear understanding of the issues surrounding gifted education.

Teachers participating in this study showed that their decision-making process was influenced by their perceptions of giftedness and the attributes they believe Latin@ gifted students would display as part of their interaction in the classroom. One of the key findings of this study points to the fact teacher training played a huge role in the ay teachers improved in their abilities so identify students' behaviors, which were not previously seen as gifted traits. This was true for teachers like Patricia who spoke in her interview about the benefit of being trained in the use of TOPS.

Training really has helped a lot. Honestly, it has opened my eyes. Like I said before, I have been focusing more on the curriculum. My focus was on teaching them to read and the only kids that really stuck out to me were the ones that academically did well, which is one portion of the gifted and talented

It is important to note that all teachers participating in this study had various degrees of training using TOPS. Even more relevant was the fact that data from their interviews revealed that TOPS' descriptors guided then in their decision-making as part of their participation in the referral and identification process. Some of the TOPS' descriptors mentioned by participants included the use of students' observations over time, collecting students' work, and focusing on students' behaviors (pleasing and non-pleasing) as indicators of giftedness in other areas beyond academic areas.

The following chart serves to look at some of the commonalities and differences among participants. It also shows what criteria teachers used to determine which students were gifted or had gifted potential.

Table 12

Theme 3. Decision-Making Criteria used by Teachers in the Referral Process

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Training	Analytic Note
*Peter	"First of all, you have to look at just how they carry themselves in the classroom. I look at personality. Verbally physically, just kind of like their personality more or less. Then I also go on to their habits, their traits such as are they a hard worker, are they motivated, do they like to be challenged, are the leaders, and are they defiant. There's a whole checklist in the U-Starts-TOPS that I used to follow." "Just observations in General or any sort of other areas and I think that too is another way to start identifying these kids. The problem is that we don't really have a system or the resources to identify these gifted	Basic	Observations Critique of the identification systems. The process is in part very subjective. No school culture that promotes giftedness

	learners. The TOPS is ok, but it is not really a universal tool. It serves more of a checklist in some areas for some students not for the whole school to really provide a nurturing program to nurture and develop students' talent."		
Briana	"If I were to look for a gifted student in any area weather be looking at different scales. I would look at classroom-based assessment, I look at their work in any sort of projects that we do, how well they work in their team, and then just observation, which is something you do every day." "I like to do a lot of inquiry-based and experiments, any of those sorts of projects that that that isn't necessarily paper-and-pencil smart, but that you could show great skills in other areas. I think these kinds of opportunities are important to do because, I've had a couple of students that are not good readers but, they can remember things and they can present about it and talk about, and they have excellent skills that at times a test does not show."	Minimum	The teacher uses various scales and assessments Observations of students' behaviors Interest and Inquiry-based projects
Blanca	"I think that traditional methods miss out on a lot of kids, because of the CogAT. Some years with the CogAT, we've had a lot of kids identified like seven or eight kids and then other years it is just one. And it seems to favor Boys in our school over girls and I don't know why?" "Academically, we use Start 360 (Formal assessment). I use observations too because a test doesn't tell you everything. I do use work samples because often kids were gifted writers it doesn't show up on a test. You can't test for that. It's just their ability is there, their interest is there, so you see their work samples to find their talent. For example, So Jose [student} got to the third grade they did their Start testing in the Fall and he was just doing great. In addition, the psychologist did the testing and we were good. We move him a whole grade-level ahead."	Intermediate	She critiques current district practices. Traditional assessments missed out on a lot of Latin@ students. She also uses students' work samples. The parents were informed. The psychologist was involved. The student was accelerated. Her school has a strong school culture that promotes

			identification "celebration"
Patricia	"I keep portfolios for all of my students, but specifically for students with high potential or gifted, I would say that I try to keep more of their projects that we do in the classroom. …I write to myself about what I've seen in a certain child or another." "The first thing I usually do is a whole class observation to see what sort of abilities I'm seeing. After the whole class observation, I assess that data and see who is really sticking out. I look at the frequency of the behavior, who has a lot of times where their name was mentioned or things like that. Then go a little deeper into an observation that would just be about that child, moving into the individual TOPS folder. Doing the latest helps me to really drill down and see what's going on with that child, and what certain areas they're showing some abilities. It shows me their strengths."	Intermediate	Focuses on students' behaviors. Collects students' work and writes notes. It is part of the school culture.
Cindy	"I certainly use you know, the test that we have. I certainly differentiate assessments for higher-level Learners. I'll be honest though; expertise and teacher observations are important. I mean that's what you're going to see first and going back to the gazelle example, you see it. And you know you see it because you've seen enough of the other thing and it is pretty amazing and that's why I think teacher observations, teacher's expertise, and knowledge of what students should be able to do with their grade-level and experience in the field. I think those really truly gifted kids they pop out. Almost anybody will not miss them, but then when do you work with them." "Over the years I have collected samples of work they have done. Keeping samples of their artwork. Keeping portfolios, writing samples, some math that shows their thinking not just memorizing facts. Thinks that show their high-	Basic	Test and observations. Students work overtime. Teacher values experience and knowledge

	level thinking. These examples are also good to show parents."		
Laura	"So, at the beginning of the year, after getting to know all the students, I do look at their test results are. And typically if someone like Oscar. If someone scores very high that'll take me off to observe them a little bit more. But, I also get students in groups for group work and have different like engineering experiments and things like that where I kind of see who is going to take the lead or who has higher reasoning or higher thinking skills. I observe them over a period of a couple of months. I also use that checklist and then I make my list depending on what I see, I collect work student work if it's applicable, and then, that's when I would make my decision after a couple of months."	Basic	She follows district procedures. Her decision is informed by using various measures (standardized assessments, anecdotal notes, work samples) Students behaviors. Observations over time.
**Mary	"So after gathering a lot of data, including the things I just mentioned, then I feel more secure about who I am going to nominate. I look at the whole child. I also look at their behaviors, their maturity level or not, their cognitive abilities. All that together, If I feel like oh okay, yeah, this [student] really stands out then maybe he/she need to receive some special services. And that is how I make the decision." "The formal nomination process starts in September for about two weeks. That's where it's more intentional, offering a lot of project-based and problem-based learning. Then I make a formal nomination followed by flagging these students on Infinite Campus and purposefully plan. I do a lot of good projects and I purposefully plan for those students to be able to work together, but also working in other groups. Creating this homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Then, I will continue with this throughout the year. This is for academically gifted kids." "I rely on what the district and the state require."	Advanced	Use of qualitative and quantitative data. Observations over time. Relies on what the district requires.

Elizabeth	"I collect for all the students writing samples, anecdotal notes, and those are the things that I used at parent-teacher conferences. For example, he or she has good leadership skills and then, you just kind of keep a little bit of a tally, and anecdotal notes to support this looking at whether this kid has gifted potential or not. At the school level, I know there is the TOPs inventory done with students to identify gifted behaviors of potentially gifted students. I think that the way you do it is you keep tracking."	Basic	Collection of students' work. Observations and anecdotal notes.

*All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant.*

As shown in the previous chart, research participants had a very comprehensive way to look at students. This even though their conceptual definitions of giftedness were overall very narrow. This demonstrates that training, knowledge, and best practices resulted in allowing teachers to expand their views of giftedness in a pragmatic manner. Finally, data from teachers' interviews demonstrated the following:

- Some participants (Briana, Laura, and Blanca) explicitly mentioned the idea of seeking to find students' talents by providing access to high-end learning opportunities such as the use of project-based learning, projects, and students' interest-based activities.

- All participants used observations and collected students' work samples to identify students' potential.

- All participants argued that students' observations are good indicators of students' abilities.

- Most teachers used standardized assessments, students' portfolios, observations, artifacts, and anecdotal notes to keep "track" of students' abilities.

- Finally, although parents are important components in the nominations process, none of the participants mentioned parent input as a factor that could inform their decision-making process.

School Culture

Another factor that influenced teachers and the decision they make of referring students or not is the culture of the school. Having a school culture that promotes the nurturing and identification of talents, as well as the development of teachers in ways that they can focus on enrichment rather than remediation is key to increase representation. The findings of this study show that teachers who worked in schools with a strong culture of excellence tended to do more referrals than other schools in the district (see Table 7). On the other hand, teachers that worked in schools where they felt their schools did not have a system in place, felt demoralized. To illustrate this Peters said,

> The problem is that we don't really have a system or the resources to identify these gifted learners. The U-Starts is ok, but it is not really a universal tool. It serves more of a checklist in some areas for some students not for the whole school to really provide a nurturing program to nurture and develop students' talent.

The researcher found that only two schools (Alliance and Almond elementary) had a strong school culture where teachers were empowered to identify, nurture, and develop students' talents. As a result, teachers working at these schools (Blanca, Laura, Patricia, and Laura,) not only nominated more Latin@ students but also demonstrated better teaching practices when working with potentially gifted Latin@ students.

For example, Laura, Blanca, and Patricia spoke of their schools as places with a strong culture of learning which resulted in the desire to identify and nurture students' talents. Blanca commented on the value of school culture and the essential role it played in empowering teachers and students to be smart. To illustrate this she said,

One of the things we do here at our school is that we have a monthly student assembly on the first Friday of the month, and we celebrate kids for their reading, we celebrate kids for their math, we celebrate kids for science, for ESL, for art music, and physical ed, and so we are always celebrating academic and their artistic successes. So it's cool to be smart. All students then want those Awards. So the more that we create this kind of student culture of wanting to learn more the less we hear someone say, they are Weird or gigs. They're just normal kids who have talents. These are kids who learn easily and have just amazing, amazing ability, which allows that to happen.

It is clear from Blanca's narrative presented Alliance a school as a place where being smart and wanting to achieve high is part of what students do every day. The fact that this school celebrates being smart, influenced teachers' perceptions of giftedness and also reassured students that showing their full potential is something that the school valued. Quoting Brenda's words, "It is a culture that you build in the school because the second-grade teacher would say to the third-grade teacher; keep an eye on so and so next year."

A similar story was shared by Patricia who worked at Almond Elementary. During our interview, she shared how the school was purposely using a combination of identification methods to identify, nurture, and develop gifted potential. commenting on this matter she said,

We also really just try to nurture not only for them but for all students more of the project-based curriculum learning, open-ended things, even science lens itself very well, because of the inquiry portion of science. We are trying to implement a lot more of that and be more thoughtful about that. I think that the biggest thing in identifying kids for the gifted program is being very observant and not just for academic behaviors.

In sum, teachers have the power to act as gatekeepers and their decisions matter on which students they refer to or not. Thus, the identification of potentially gifted Latin@ students must take into account the fact that many of these students have not had the same access to opportunities to learn than other students who come from wealthier families. Additionally, it is important to state that unidimensional instruments have limitations, and no one piece of information is sufficient for identifying students' strengths, weaknesses, and educational needs. In this study, research participants spoke in favor of using both quantitative and qualitative

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information as well as objective and subjective information to guide their decisions when referring students for gifted programs. Finally, it is evident that the culture of schools also plays a huge role in either empowering or demoralizing teachers to increase identification. The following thematic chart serves as a summary of the commonalities and differences of theme 3.

Nurturing Students' Talents

It is clear that schools that focus on remediation practices only are neglecting the needs of high achievers. So what is the solution? Data from teachers' interviews show that to attain equity it important to meet to meet the needs of all learners, not just the needs of those in need of remediation. They argued that teachers who work in schools that emphasize a school culture of deficit resulted in having teachers feeling overwhelmed and abandoned as Peter mentioned. Data from this study shows that schools with a positive culture towards giftedness resulted in having educators doing more referrals than teachers who worked in schools where the school culture did not promote talent development. These results are also corroborated by descriptive data on the school's representations of Latin@ in gifted programs, (see table 3). For example, Alliance school had extreme overrepresentation or a higher number of Latin@ students nominated for gifted programs, which according to Blanca who worked there was the result of having a gifted program and a culture that "celebrated being smart."

From a critical perspective, gifted Latin@ students do not have access to programs and opportunities to develop their talents and gifts, which demonstrates the educational disparity between the haves and have-nots (Patel, 2015). Hence, it adds to contemporary racial inequalities that hinder these students of color, their families, and their communities. Contemporary racial inequality in gifted programs is reproduced through colorblind racist practices that are subtle, structural, and non-racial. In contrast to the Jim Crow era where racial inequality and segregation

were enforced through explicit means. Today's racial practices operate in often obscure and not readily detectable ways (Solórzano & Yosso, 2014). Finally, the lack of rigorous interventions for gifted Latin@ students and other minorities is even more daunting, because these students are less likely to have the financial means to pay for tutors and other educational programs not offered within the school walls.

Table 13

Thematic Summary Chart Theme 3: Positive Effect of Training on Increasing Identification of Latin@ Students

Participants	Commonalities	Differences among Participants
Sub-theme 3.1 Positive effects of TOPS Note: The purpose of TOPS as described in its guidelines involves a shift in perspective when working with culturally, linguistically diverse, and economically disadvantaged children. This implies moving to an "at-potential" mindset rather than seeing these students from a deficit or "at-risk" point of view (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2010).	The benefits of using TOPS included a change in mindset, the increase in the nominations of Latin@ students, and a wider perspective of giftedness. Most (six participants) explicitly commented on the benefit of using TOPS in their schools.	Two participants (Briana and Cindy), with minimum and basic training, did not explicitly comment on how TOPS influenced their identification and nomination practices. This despite being aware of the positive feedback offered by other teachers. Training seems to be a factor an implementing TOPS improving teaching practices leading towards the identification of potentially Gifted Latino students.
Sub-theme 3.2 Teachers' Decision-Making Criteria Teachers make decisions on referrals based on the norms and guidelines offered by the district, their conception and understanding of giftedness informed by TOPS, and the schools' culture where they work.	Most research participants used a combination of standardized and non-standardized assessments to identify gifted traits. All teachers had a vague idea of the district's decision-making process when dealing with the referrals of students for gifted programs.	One participant, Brenda explicitly spoke of the fact that universal screeners like CogAT were not very effective in identifying potentially gifted Latin@ students. All participants looked at observations, students' portfolios, anecdotal notes, and scores in reading and math as

Participants	Commonalities	Differences among Participants
	All research participants spoke of the importance of having a school culture that supports the identification of gifted learners.	part of their decision-making criteria. Only one school (Alliance) had a gifted program. Two schools Alliance and Almond had a positive school culture that promoted the identification of gifted students.

Similarities and Distinctions

Note: The purpose of TOPS as described in its guidelines involves a shift in perspective when working with culturally, linguistically diverse, and economically disadvantaged children. This implies moving to an "at-potential" mindset rather than seeing these students from a deficit or "at-risk" point of view (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2010).

- Most (six participants) explicitly commented on the benefit of using TOPS in their schools.

- The benefits of using TOPS included a change in mindset, the increase in the nominations of Latin@ students, and a wider perspective of giftedness.

- Training seems to be a factor in helping educators to expand on their conceptions of giftedness.

- Even more important, training in gifted education using TOPS allowed educators to have a more robust understanding of giftedness when working with Latin@ students.

- Teachers' decisions as part of the referral process are influenced by districts' guidelines, their perceptions of giftedness, and the school culture.

Theme Four: Latin@ Parents Were Not Included in the Nomination Process

The literature on parent involvement as part of the nomination process shows that parents play a key role in the nomination of their children for gifted programs, increasing their chances

to enter gifted programs (Humphries, Strickland, & Keenan, 2014). However, despite the benefits of parents' nomination, the current research found that Latin@ parents are less likely to be involved in this process, trusting teachers that they will do what is best for their children. The problem with relying on parent nomination is that often minority parents do not have the resources or the ability to navigate a very bureaucratic educational system that directly or indirectly exclude parents from participating in the decision-making process. For example, privileged parents have the power, autonomy, time, and resources to, for instance, attend school-district meetings to make sure their neighborhood schools are not closed or rezoned. They also know how to appeal to principals, making a case for why their child must be placed in their preferred teacher's classroom. They have the money to hire tutors so their children can stay on top of their classwork and score well on standardized tests. Some even do school-related work on their children's behalf. These parents do these things for the good of their children, even though they are not good for other people's children (Ford 1998; Yosso, 2005; and Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010).

A Missing Puzzle Piece?

One of the key components of students' identification for gifted programs is parent input. The literature on the topic reveals that parents' voices as part of a nomination process contribute to increasing the number of students in gifted programs (McBee, 2006; 2010). Despite this reality, the researcher found that out of eight participants, only two of them (Mary and Blanca) acknowledged having parents input as part of the nomination process of Latin@ students (see Appendix L). In a follow-up question on the process of nomination, the researcher asked Blanca to describe how parent involvement plays a role in the nomination process, she said,

> Our parents are very involved here. Some parents come into the building and go to the Parent Center and they work in the Parent Center all day. A lot of them stay almost the

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entire day in the Parent Center. They will prep materials, they will create decorations, they attend PTO meetings, they have education classes, but every day there are between 5 and 25 parents in the Parent Center. These parents want to be part of the school and their child's education and support the school. So, they know that once they leave here, they don't have that opportunity.

Based on Blanca's narrative the researcher concludes that there are various models to describe parent involvement. For example, Latin@ parent's involvement is described in managerial terms which indicates that Latin@ parents are present in schools doing voluntary labor-work such as "preparing materials and making decorations," rather than having the opportunity to play an active role in the classroom or advocating for the needs of their gifted learners. This contrary to White middle-class parents in suburban schools who often tend to have a more active role in the decision-making of schools.

Having parental voice being present at the decision-making table is key to making sure Latin@ students receive the services they need. This was echoed by Peter who advocated for more parent involvement, "I think parents, school administration, and the community, should be more involved in making sure the needs of gifted students are met." There are many reasons why Latin@ parents tend to be absent in the process of nomination of their children including, different parenting styles; cultural norms such as having high respect for teachers; and language barriers. This may also include parents lacking social and cultural capital to navigate a complex educational system normed and guided by politics and mandates aligned with White middle-class standards.

As in the case of Latin@ families, it is a cultural norm of parental practices to trust teachers not only with the education of their children, which goes beyond academics but also with the decision-making process of what is best for their children. Conventionally, in the Latin@ culture teachers are highly respected and venerated for their knowledge and wisdom. As

a result, Latin@ parents are less likely to challenge the teacher's judgment regarding educational decisions (Faltis, 2006). Very often, teachers are believed to be the experts and therefore the responsibility of the decision-making process, in this case nominating and identifying Latin@ gifted students, which falls primarily on the teacher. This, of course, is problematic especially considering that parents do play a crucial role in the nomination process of gifted students for gifted programs. Parents often possess additional information about their child's intellectual abilities that may not be recognized in the regular education classroom. This input can be a powerful component in identifying highly abled learners to receive gifted education services.

The literature emphasizes the importance and needs of parents to shape this information, especially for identifying gifted learners who may be Black, Hispanic, or ELLs. Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) noted, "Parent nomination can be very useful in the identification of gifted students because parents are the most knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Furthermore, they can provide different views of giftedness from teachers."

The idea that teachers are the professionals who know what is best for students is not always accurate. Teachers' willingness to have parents be part of the conversation might not always be seen as problematic by educators especially if implicit bias or deficit models are at work. Although indeed, many Latin@ parents do not have high levels of education, this does not mean that they do not have important information out their children that could be helpful to help teachers meet students' needs. Racism and deficit models permeate all cells of society, therefore the researcher advises caution with teachers' overgeneralizations of parents as being deficient are used as arguments to deny parents' voice. The following narrative describes the assumptions and concerns teacher participants had over the lack of Latin@ parents being advocates for themselves

and their children. Hence, if parents are unable to do so, teachers felt they had to fill in the gap. To best explain the previous, Cindy mentioned,

> When you have a child that is exceptional in some areas, it is important for the parents to really understand that. Especially if we think about the different levels of education that our parents in this community have. These might include language barriers, their inability to read, speak, or understand English. It is the role of the teacher to become an advocate for these children and all children. And today, it is really become more and more. As parents have more challenges in society, I believe it is our role to advocate for them and their children. It is our job to help parents understand their own children.

> According to the literature on the topic, parental involvement affects nomination. Thus,

not having Latin@ parents as part of the decision contributes to the issue of underrepresentation. Usually, if parents think their child is gifted it is the parents who advocate on behalf of the student, requesting a process of screening screaming and testing to determine in which capacity that child might be gifted. Nonetheless, when parents do not know how to navigate the system, or experience language barriers, such as the case of many Latin@ parents, the process of nomination and formal identifications rests in the hands of teachers. Therefore, even if a child displays gifted behaviors or abilities above the norm, it is up to the teacher's subjective criteria and personal judgment to determine who should be screened, and/or refer for formal identification (Ford 1998).

The following transcript of the interactions of the researcher with Peter captures a clear description of how this teacher perceived parent involvement.

> **Researcher**: Have you ever had parents coming to you telling you that their kids are gifted, and they need something extra (advocating)?

> **Peter:** No, I guess that Latin@ parents tend to trust the teacher's criteria and they appreciate that. I believe parents are respectful in part because I have a good relationship with parents. I really tried.

> **Researcher**: As in the case of one of the students you mentioned was gifted, do his parents understand that his son is in some ways gifted?

Peter: His parents, probably do [understand] to some extent. But I am not very sure other parents of other identified students do, or perhaps they don't exactly know how to nurture that. I think maybe as a whole, our school could do a little better having some meetings with the parents, explaining what it means for them, and how they can help nurture it at home. I do think our school could do a little bit better of a job with that. But I think some parents just inherently understand what it means and have a good grasp of it in those are the parents that are more involved and more invested.

It is clear from this interaction, that one of the reasons why Latin@ parents are not at the front of the line, demanding or advocating in schools to meet their children's educational needs is the fact that they trust the wisdom of teachers and school administrators to do what is best for their child.

The problem with this approach is that schools not always treat all students or provide them with what they really need. Peter alluded to the idea that meeting the needs of gifted Latin@ students was not something hos school focused on.

I think that teachers sometimes get disillusioned from our jobs and the state of education and the stress, and the workload, so we kind of put blinders, meaning it is not a priority to meet the needs of students who are doing fine….We, teachers, tend to ignore them because it becomes one more thing we have to do. So, I think parents, school administration, the community, and parents should be involved in making sure the needs of gifted students are met. I think that's what we should be pushing for education, to make schools a very efficient system where all students' needs are being met and not just some (special end) because there is a federal mandate that says we have to.

Providing what students need whether there have special needs or not at both sides of the learning curb should be part of each school implementation plan. Nonetheless, as the previous testimony showed, gifted learners and high achievers' needs are not being met, in part because it is not a school priority or something schools are forced to comply with.

From a critical perspective, schools are part of the social order. A social system that is endemically racist and bias against minority students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Bernal, 1998; & Ladson-Billings, 2000). Thus, advanced programs such as gifted and talented programs help to keep the social order by perpetuating inequality in the way they operate. Racism is endemic to

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American life," and as such claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, disguised under false precepts of equality instead terminating whose needs are either met or not. Furthermore, with such racial disparity in gifted programs, a parent's ability to network comes into play when gaining access to gifted services, sorting, and tracking programs. Along with cultural capital, a family's social capital of contacts and networks permeates the environments of gifted children and affects their talent development. This aligns with the notion that when both parents are present at high levels, the results can be striking (Ravitch, 2010,). Yet, many parents of color, whose children are equally, if not more, gifted and talented than others, cannot find the time or have the linguistic prowess to convince the administration of their child's ability. This opportunity is usually only accessible to privileged parents, and in the case of gifted programs program, this often means being White.

The fact that Latin@ parents are not part of the process of identification and nomination process shows the existence of cultural deficit models reinforced by schools, which results in preventing Latin@ students from accessing high-end learning opportunities. Deficit cultural models can be described as the representation of minority ethnic groups as being culturally deficient which explains why many minority groups do not do as well in schools (Yosso, 2005). Many of these parents remain in the shadows and margins of society, adding to the social order. The existence of cultural norms (e.g. teachers are thought to know everything) that tend to benefit the dominant class, cannot serve as an excuse for teachers and administrators to invite parents to be part of the process where parents have a valid voice. One thing is true, if parents do not feel welcomed and appreciated and schools do not provide opportunities for them to be involved in the decision-making process in ways that are respectful of their culture then these parents will continue to be absent.

Furthermore, if parents are not part of the process then teachers have all the autonomy to nominate. Yet, we know that issues of race, teachers' biases, and academic achievement, influence nomination. Critical Theory brings to life the voices of those who often do not have the opportunities to voice their concerns and states that institutionalized racism does not create a level playing field for minority parents and students to access equal OTL.

In sum, in the current quantitative research, the researcher found that parents' referrals of Latin@ gifted students were minimal. This despite the fact that parent nomination plays a huge role in who is nominated and who gains entrance to gifted programs. Other studies on parent nomination (McBee, 2006; 2010) also confirms this claiming that parental referral rates for gifted programming are higher among White parents that have middle and high socioeconomic status (SES) groups. In addition, discrepancies by racial groups may occur in part due to differential parental nominations, with Black and Hispanic students generally experiencing lower parent referral rates compared to White, Asian, and Native American parents.

Table 14

Thematic Summary Chart Theme 4: Latin@ Parents were Not Included in the Nomination Process

	Commonalities	Differences Among Participants
Parent involvement is the missing piece	All teachers manifested that parents do not play an active role in the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.	Only one participant (Blanca) mentioned parental involvement. Yet, it was more about doing managerial tasks such as making copies and preparing decorations.
	No attempt to empower parents to be engaged in this process.	The one Latin@ participant (Mary) explicitly described parents as assets, even though they are not a part of the nomination process.
	Schools need to have a school culture that is more inclusive of parents by intentionally reaching out to them so they might feel more welcomed.	While all teachers indicated there is no parent involvement,

	Commonalities	Differences Among Participants
	Administrators can do more to reach out to parents.	two teachers (Briana with basic training and Patricia with intermediate-level GT training) took a more extreme view and perceived parents as being "unable" to understand giftedness and how to meet their children's academic and socioemotional needs.

Similarities and Distinctions
- All teachers manifested that parents do not play an active role in the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.
- Only one participant (Blanca) mentioned parental involvement. Yet, it was more about doing managerial tasks such as making copies and preparing decorations.
- The one Latin@ participant (Mary) explicitly described parents as assets.
- One participant (Blanca) did acknowledge some degree of parent involvement as part of her school culture.
- While all teachers indicated there is no parent involvement, two teachers (Briana and Patricia) took a more extreme view and perceived parents as being "unable" to understand giftedness and how to meet their children's academic and socioemotional needs.
- No attempts were made to empower parents in this process.

Theme Five: Identified, but Neglected

Another key finding of this research has to do with the services and opportunities

currently available for Latin@ students after they have been identified either as potentially gifted

or gifted in one or more domain areas. Data from interviews reveals that even when efforts to

identify Latin@ students has increased, it is merely superficial, considering there are minimal

gifted services at the school sites where the research was conducted. Moreover, the school sites

lack an adequate curriculum specifically for advanced learners and limited high-end learning

opportunities for Latin@ gifted students to meet their cognitive and academic needs. Gifted

programming varies from school to school depending on the needs of the school community.

However, the fact that only one out of four schools had a gifted program or a system of

interventions in place to meet the needs of Latin@ students is worrisome. Scholars agree that the purpose of identifying potentially gifted students is not to give them a label as "gifted", but rather to purposely match their needs with a service (Plucker & Peters, 2018).

A School Dilemma: Equity versus Excellence

Overall, evidence from teachers' interviews shows a blurry and not very optimistic picture of the opportunities available for Latin@ students once they have been identified as gifted. Research findings show that two out of four school sites did not have a system in place to provide services to gifted students (Alpine and Kane). At the time of this study, Almond was in the process of establishing an enrichment model for all students and only one school site (Alliance) had a gifted and an enrichment program in place.

The establishment of gifted programs is essential for talent development and the promotion of equity by making sure that gifted students have the opportunity to nurture and develop their talents. From the equity point of view, precisely underrepresented communities could benefit the most from having access to gifted programs, especially considering that access to high-end enrichment opportunities is determined by access to financial resources. This was echoed by Blanca, a teacher at Alliance school, who openly advocated for the creation of bilingual gifted programs as a means to meet the needs of the Latin@ community where she works. When the researcher asked her about her dreams and goals for Alliance school she said,

> So, part of what we're doing next year is...we are moving along the IB path to becoming an IB bilingual school. So, we will be the only [elementary] bilingual school in providing services for gifted bilingual students. Because the IB program uses inquiry-based learning and so we know that inquiry-based is good for everyone, and it's really good for gifted kids too, really good for students with special needs, and really good for language learners. We are looking at a program where kids are able to learn through multidisciplinary themes [using] a hands-on format. I think it's just going to take us to a different level. And so hopefully, then we will see kids, excelling in other areas more than reading math and the arts. Hopefully, we'll see more leadership from more students

at younger ages. We're slowly adding the middle school bilingual component because there is not a bilingual gifted program in any school.

Blanca's dreams and hopes to summarize the existing needs across urban schools. Very often, lack of funding, the lack of well-trained teachers, and the existence of educational policies, such as remediation only, prevent schools serving minority communities from having adequate programming to meet the needs of gifted learners.

This finding is interesting because it was assumed that once students were identified as gifted in one or more areas, they would have access to OTL that would help them excel in their abilities. The assumption that the needs of high achievers are being met in the regular classroom is often a common reality. Patricia, who works at Almond school, which is currently in the process of implementing an enrichment model to meet the needs of all students, commented on the process of identification and what she saw happened next,

> After we identify the students through TOPS, I know their names are submitted to central office and then they get a flag on their Infinite Campus. Then, those students get to participate in some Saturday Academies as long as the school has the money to run these camps. From my perspective, we [the school] just try to nurture not only for them but also for all students more of the project-based curriculum learning, open-ended things even science lens itself very well, because of the inquiry portion of science. We are trying to implement a lot more of that and be more thoughtful about that. I've done a lot more of that in the past couple of years than I ever have. As a teacher, I'm just trying to foster those abilities and help move those children along, so they have an opportunity to show more of their abilities throughout those project-based activities.

In her narrative, Patricia mentioned some of the enrichment activities (school camps, project-based curriculum learning through science) that this school has in place. However, these learning opportunities for learning models are part of what good teaching should look like to help all students learn and master grade-level skills. Services for gifted students, on the other hand, must match the needs of gifted learners. Such services are not traditionally offered by the

regular curriculum. As a result, rather than establishing "a gifted program", schools must strive to provide multiple interventions to make sure students' needs are matched with specific services.

In the following section, the researcher will explore some reasons why gifted programming is minimal in schools where this study took place. Examining the reasons for the scarcity of gifted programs that would benefit students most leads to question district's initiatives of equity and equal opportunity. Are current efforts to identify minority students a priority for the district? What is the purpose of identifying Latin@ gifted students if there is no programming for elementary grades? These questions are also part of what some of the teachers participating wondered.

District's Lack of Programming for Elementary Gifted Students

Data from this school district's website shows that at the elementary level there are few specialized programs whose ultimate goal is to meet the needs of gifted learners. At the district level, there is only one magnet elementary school whose entire student body is identified as gifted and talented. Thus, although the number of identified Latin@ students has increased in recent years, they still do not have any programming or services to meet their needs. This reality was communicated by Peter when sharing his disappointment with the way gifted education at the elementary level is implemented. To illustrate this he said,

> Students in schools like mine don't have access to enrichment opportunities or specialized gifted programming to meet their needs. "Gifted" is just a label. I think all of it is superficial as far as identifying kids. I don't think we're alone in that. I think a lot of is a lack of resources and time. I think more than anything it is a lack of a process that really exists. Most of these programs are possible thanks to grants and when the money's gone, we go back to step one. So, I know we have gifted Latin@ students in our classrooms, but what do we do? We just keep treating them as if they can do it on their own. Our hope as a school is that we keep them achieving up there. Rather than how to really access and develop their gifts looking at student's strengths. The problem is that schools still follow the assembly line model in which access to a grade is based on age only.

The inequality in educational opportunities that exist in urban districts is multitudinous. Primarily, this includes the lack of adequate funding from the state. For example, while some states allocate a good portion of their budget to foster gifted education; other states such as this Midwestern state gives zero federal dollars to fund gifted programs. Many gifted programs, as mentioned by Peter are funded by grants. Therefore, when grants end, gifted services cease to exist or are left at the discretion of each school to either continue or discontinue services. According to data from the FundED: Gifted Funding Policies (2019), the absence of a federal mandate to fund gifted education also contributes to the current neglect of gifted students who have no choice but to remain in regular classrooms at the discretion of teachers. As in the case of the state where this research took place, it provided funding for gifted and talented students only through grants. It does so in the form of a competitive grant program. The state awards grants to school districts, nonprofit organizations, and institutions within the University system to provide special services and activities to gifted and talented students. The grants are awarded per application. In FY2018, the total amount appropriated for this purpose was $237,200 and individual awards were limited to $30,000 (http://funded.edbuild.org/reports/issue/gifted 2020).

Whose Responsibility is it?

Another side-effect of the lack of gifted programs in elementary schools is that if a teacher decides to identify students with gifted potential then, the responsibility of providing services falls solely on them. This is troublesome considering that teachers are already overworked and overwhelmed with their current responsibilities. This results in teachers unwilling to identify gifted students since they might not have the training or resources to meet the needs of gifted learners. This sentiment was communicated by Briana who shared her

concerns about the additional responsibilities that teachers encounter once they identify gifted students, "So, in conclusion, all this falls on the teacher and if the teacher does not do it then no one will notice, because our focus is on struggling students."

The researcher found that teachers who were in charge of the identification process felt they did not have the resources, interventions, and programs available to meet the needs of identified potentially gifted Latin@ students. Cindy, a veteran teacher who works at Almond Elementary, a school where a new enrichment program is slowly being implemented commented on the challenges and the current reality faced by teachers who work in urban districts. She said, "Often if there are interventions available there are only available in English, which means that this leads to the exclusion of students whose English language is still developing." Furthermore, when teachers acknowledged the presence of gifted Latin@ students in their classrooms, they also mentioned the challenges and responsibilities that teachers and schools have to provide these students with adequate programs to meet their learning needs. Cindy continued with her reflection on gifted programming adding,

> The process we are using now, I think is great as far as identifying kids. It is good the fact that we are even thinking and talking about it is good, making sure that we are not forgetting these kids. However, we need to do so much more. I don't think I'm educated enough to sit down and really know what I'm looking for. I mean, as a teacher with experience wow! That wild kid, I still need to know, what I put in for an observation and how to meet his/her needs.

Other participants such as Mary and Laura also shared similar ideas when reflecting on the lack of accessibility to advanced programs in urban schools. Laura shared her perspective on the "*nature of urban education*" pointing out the fact that administrators and district leaders have to deal with so many other issues, that providing services for high achievers that are minorities, such as Latin@ students, is not a priority. To illustrate this Mary said,

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I think, unfortunately, it is the nature of education today particularly urban education dealing with so many other issues that it gets put on the back burner, and we haven't really been intentional about serving these students. In my opinion, it [gifted education] is not one of the first things that the school system is giving a professional development.

This is shocking to hear, especially considering the district's current effort to promote equity. Serious questions remain as to how equity is understood at the district level, considering the huge implication that failing to meet the educational needs of gifted Latin@ brings to schools, the community, and the nation as a whole. Similarly, Laura also shared the following,

Sometimes when being in a public-school something does get lost. I think from my perspective teachers [who have] had more experience or teachers who have had more experience in the area of gifted education can provide better types of things to do, so these students continue to grow and learn. I think it's difficult in the [urban] setting to provide [interventions] for all gifted children. It's unfortunate. I think teachers really try but is it. It's no different from the kids that are really low. I mean, in my class, I currently have a child who has special needs. I have a child who functions in some areas like a three-year-old, and I teach second grade. And then, I have a child in my classroom who is off the charts. He is a very bright child who can perform at a 4th grade in a standardized test. I mean, the range is pretty unbelievable. It makes it very difficult for a teacher to meet all of those needs without other types of assistance.

As shown in the narrative above, one of the concerns manifested by research participants was feeling powerless when trying to meet the needs of learners, especially the needs of those identified as gifted due to the district and school policies that do not take into account students with high abilities. Meeting the needs of gifted students is indeed challenging, especially when teachers have not been trained or when schools and classrooms do not have access to a tailored curriculum to nurture and develop students' gifts and talents.

Emphasis on remediation only exacerbates inequality and results in schools having to sacrifice excellence, neglecting gifted students. This concern was echoed by Peter who reflected on his role as a teacher and the fact that he was solely responsible for providing interventions for gifted students. To explain this, he stated,

I find it very tough [to provide interventions for gifted students] because I know of some students who are gifted and try to challenge them and provide additional work and responsibilities. But I find it one of the biggest challenges, especially in urban education or with any sort of minority group, identifying [them] and giving them appropriate challenges in the classroom environment.

Although teachers have the responsibility to differentiate for all students, Peter reminds us that differentiation is not enough when trying to provide gifted students with "appropriate challenges" and opportunities for these students to reach their full potential. Some of these opportunities include ability-grouping, clustering, tiered lessons, curriculum compacting, advanced placement, replacement curriculum, subject acceleration, and grade acceleration. However, at the time of this study, none of these options was available for Latin@ gifted students.

Remediation Only: Whom do you Save First?

This was the response of Cindy when asked about the reasons why schools focused on remediation practices rather than enrichment. *"*There's only so much money and again, do you save your best swimmers when the boat is sinking? It is not a priority. I am sure these good swimmers are going to make it. It is the drowning kid we are grabbing first." This powerful metaphor shared by Cindy illustrated the current state of education and the educational philosophy guiding teaching practices in many schools, including Alpine Valley School where she worked. In her narrative, Cindy voiced her perceptions about why she believed meeting the needs of gifted Latin@s at her school was not a priority. Most research participants stressed the fact that schools' heavy emphasis on remediation only, had a direct negative effect on preventing schools from focusing on excellence. Cindy's narrative demonstrates the current school practices which focus on the implementation of a curriculum to bring struggling students to levels of proficiency levels, while high achievers and students with gifted potential are left on their own.

To illustrate this, Cindy used a metaphor by posing a question, "Do you save your best swimmers when the boat is sinking?...I am sure these good swimmers are going to make it. It is the drowning kid we are grabbing first". Her question and answers showed a disheartening reality depicting an accurate perspective of schools and the fact that attending the needs of high achievers is not a priority. When schools allocate all their financial and human resources including teachers, training, and money to help struggling learners only, then other students such as gifted learners are neglected. This results in reinforcing the myth that these students do not need systems of support and interventions to succeed. The decisions that school administrators must take on whether or not to save the "drowning kids first" comes with a tremendous human cost, which is to sacrifice and marginalize other students who have the right to have access to high-end learning opportunities.

Lack of Opportunities to Learn

Worrel (2016) argues that the disparities and unequal access to programs that have proven effective to meet the needs of advanced learners are a reflection of the educational disparities that have plagued the American educational system since its origins. He contends that inequalities and disparities in access to OTL, especially for African Americans, Alaskan Natives American, and Latin@ students also transfer from regular education to gifted programs. In regular education, these disparities are visible when looking at students' scores on standardized assessments. Now, this cannot serve as an excuse to make sure gifted minorities do not have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Furthermore, neither can educators, school leaders, nor scholars avoid the reality that minority students are not equally represented in gifted programs. This was verbalized when Cindy shared the following: "I think it's difficult in the setting we

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have, to provide for all the needs for gifted children. It's unfortunate. I think teachers really try

but is it it's no different from the kids that are really low."

The researcher found that one of the prevailing explanations, shared by all teachers

participating in this study was about the lack of OTL and unequal access to good programs that

allow students to move beyond grade-level material which in many cases they have mastered

already.

Access to OTL as described using the Critical Theory is a derivation of property rights

(Barlow & Kathleen, 2010). This implies that people with more property often enjoy access to

high-quality education than those who have less property. This was experienced by Peter who

commented on the disparities that he witnessed in schools from the time when he was growing

up. In his reflection, he said,

> While growing up, I went to many schools, including rural, public education. I didn't
> really realize it at the time but looking back I could tell the difference in education
> quality, in a small rural town like the one I was living at that time. I realized the
> difference in resources. In California, I got exposed to competitive soccer out there so,
> that was a different thing that always played soccer and I got exposed to a competitive
> level. That was kind of symbolic of the education out there, I got pushed into advanced
> classes or advanced algebra at an early age. There were more opportunities and resources
> and that's cool. So, I think that these experiences formed my opinion on education quite a
> bit, seeing all those different environments and how resources are a huge part of who has
> access to opportunities among a few other things. This might include extracurricular
> diversity. I noticed there's a huge difference going from school to school and classroom
> sizes too and that affected learning.

Peter's account of his educational experiences growing up show that the lack of or access

to educational opportunities is pretty much a result of racial and economic disparity that exists in

America. Peter's parents were both in a privileged position, economically and racially, which

allowed Peter to have access to more OTL, not taking into account that he is a White middle-

class male. Furthermore, since public schools are usually funded through local property taxes, it

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places schools in urban schools, at a disadvantage when compared to more affluent communities where higher taxes from homes contribute to having better-equipped schools.

Property also relates to education in explicit and implicit ways. Recurring discussions about property tax relief indicates that affluent communities (with higher property values, hence higher tax assessments) resent paying for a public-school system whose clientele is largely non-White and urban poor. In the simplest of equations, those with better properties are entitled to better schools. Thus, property differences manifest themselves in other ways. For example, the curriculum represents a form of intellectual property. The quality and quantity of the curriculum vary with the property values of homes in close proximity to the school. As in the case of urban schools in which this study took place, 98 percent of all students and their families are economically disadvantaged, which shows a direct correlation with the kind of opportunities available to them, referred to this as "fighting for the scraps". This means that access to resources and OTL are minimal in many urban schools, which puts educators and school leaders in a dilemma of who "saves" the struggling learners first that are "drowning" or students who seem to be doing just fine to "fight for" what is left. Cindy also commented on the existence of power dynamics that exists schools turning them into dysfunctional systems that perpetuate social inequality:

> I think the majority of American education is based on access to resources and opportunities. I think education is an opportunity for people who are less privileged to achieve something through the means of education, but I think you see that there are certain forces out there that make it more difficult for people of color. This includes economic motivations or basically power dynamics.

As described in Cindy's narrative, power dynamics, money, and privilege determine who has access to OTL. As a result, the availability of rich intellectual property delimits what OTL presumes is the presumption that along with providing educational standards that detail what

students should know and be able to do, they must have the material resources that support their learning. Thus, as described by scholars, "intellectual property must be undergirded real property, that is, science labs, computers, and other state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers." (Barlow and Dunbar, 2010, p. 72).

In sum, the efforts of teacher participants to increase the identification of Latin@ students to improve representation in gifted programs is only part of the solution. The researcher found that the increase in the nomination of Latin@ students for gifted programs does not have a purpose unless students have access to adequate programs and OTL to meet their needs. Furthermore, the inequalities of access to the same quality of education are the effects of endemic racism, White privilege, and power dynamics in our society and schools. Such inequalities are transferred and reinforced by schools through how school practices are implemented. For example, an emphasis on remediation, deficit perspectives of minority students, and the perpetuation of the access to learn as White property and privilege.

Table 15

Thematic Summary Chart Theme 5: Identified but Neglected

	Commonalities	Distinction Among Participants
Sub-theme 5.1 A School Dilemma: Equity Versus Excellence	Overall schools focused on equity, not excellence. Gifted education is not a priority. It all comes down to resources.	
Sub-theme 5.2 District's Lack of Programming for Gifted Elementary Students	Most (seven) participants indicated there is no system in place at their school site to meet the needs of gifted learners. The fact that only one school has a gifted program in	Only one teacher (Blanca) shared that her school (Alliance) did have a system in place to meet the needs of gifted learners. This included subject and grade acceleration.

	Commonalities	Distinction Among Participants
	place, despite robust referrals to gifted referrals in these schools compared to the district average, demonstrates the urgency to create gifted programs in urban schools serving Latin@ students.	Cindy and Laura spoke in favor of the creation of gifted programs.
Sub-theme 5.3 Whose Responsibility Is It?	Teachers indicated that it is their responsibility to identify, nominate, and serve GT students without much support from administrators. There was a sense among participants that high achievers can do fine on their	Only one participant (Brenda at Alliance school) expressed that her school had a system in place to provide adequate interventions for students with gifted potential.
Sub-theme 5.4 Remediation Only: Whom Do You Save First?	Schools are not being proactive to meet the needs of Gifted learners. Teachers felt schools' practices on remediation contributed to the neglect of gifted learners. All teachers showed concern about the reality that Gifted students' needs are not being met.	Only one school used acceleration and curriculum compacting to allow students move ahead in the curriculum.
Sub-theme 5.5 Lack of Opportunities to Learn	A majority (six participants) commented on the fact lack of access to high-end learning opportunities contributes to underrepresentation. If talents are not nurtured, they do not develop. Teachers are solely responsible for providing adequate interventions and access to OTL.	No major distinctions noted.

Validity and Reliability: Utilizing a Focus Group for Member Checking

There are several strategies recommended to improve the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Primarily, this research was done ethically. To attain this, the researcher made sure that all research participants understood the nature of the study and the fact that their participation was voluntary. In addition, all participants signed all consent forms; all interviews were recorded and later transcribed with fidelity.

From a qualitative point of view, trustworthiness refers to the rigor in carrying out the study. This includes the research design, and the application of standards well accepted by the scientific community (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher firmly believes that the research design of the current study which included the use of purposeful sampling, the collections of data through the use of interviews, and its interpretation through a critical lens, meet the criteria to guarantee transparency and validity. Data analysis for this study was done following qualitative methods and standard procedures such as the use of coding, categories, thematic units, and themes interpreted through a critical theoretical framework.

Another method used in the current study to help ensure internal validity and reliability consisted of a focus group for member-checking. Merriam and Tisdell (2006), state that, focus groups help research participants reflect on their research experience soliciting feedback on emerging findings ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what research participants shared during the interview process. This study included a follow-up focus group for the purposes of member-checking in the approved IRB submission.

Member-Checking Focus Group Session

A few weeks after all data was analyzed, all research participants were invited via email to participate in a 60-minute focus group. It is important to clarify that despite several tries to

reach out to participants only four decided to participate in this session. The email (see Appendix G) explicitly specified the purpose of the focus group for research participants as well as the fact that their participation was voluntary.

After several tries to contact all research participants, four (Blanca, Cindy, Laura, and Mary) out of eight participants confirmed their participation and attended the focus group. On the day the focus group took place, the researcher convened with all four participants at a central location to enhance participation. In addition, the interactions and conversations among the researcher and the participants of this focus group were recorded only of the purpose of capturing their insights and responses.

At the beginning of the focus group, the researcher established group norms to make sure all research participants had the opportunity to share their responses. Some of the norms included: staying engaged, speaking your truth, being ok experiencing discomfort, and finally, and accepting non-disclosure.

As part of the focus group, the researcher asked all participants to sign a consent focus form. Then, the researcher welcomed the research participants and proceeded to the presentation of findings. After reviewing norms and procedures, the researcher used a PowerPoint presentation and explained the main objective of the focus group was to seek clarity and provide the opportunity to research project and the research themes participants to refute, add, or concur with key findings.

Presentations of Preliminary Findings and Group Discussion

Focus groups present a unique context for the examination of key and engaging educational issues, relevant to the life of educators, students, and educational institutions. This was echoed by Mary who at the beginning of the focus group expressed her passion for the

importance of having an in-depth discussion about the identification and education of Latin@ gifted students. To illustrate this she commented, "I am really happy to be here because I know how important this issue is for me and many of my students." Similar insights were shared by the rest of the participants whose intrinsic motivation prompted them to partake in the focus group session. To complete member checking, the researcher re-restated and summarized the participants' responses during the focus group interview (see Appendix H.) Participants indicated they agreed through their verbal responses with the researcher's statements and summaries.

Emergent Themes and Participants Responses

During the focus group, participants were asked to share their perceptions regarding the process they had just completed as well as to comment on the main findings.

First finding: *Research Participants did not Share the Same Definition of Giftedness.*

Participants' reactions: Overall, the reaction of all participants to this finding was positive. They concurred with the idea that when comparing their definitions of giftedness there were significant differences as well as the way giftedness in Latin@ students was manifested. When talking about some of the variations among teachers' conceptions of giftedness, Mary, noticed that definitions of giftedness tended to line up with "how teachers identified giftedness, rather than what giftedness is." This means that if a teacher sees giftedness as indicators of superior mathematical process, then giftedness would be defined based on indicators that meet that criteria such as higher grades, advanced mathematical reasoning, and higher ability to process abstract information.

Similarly, Laura reaffirmed the idea that "giftedness could be found in many areas other than academic" leading her to wonder which definition the district is currently using. She also commented on teachers' definitions of giftedness arguing that such definitions of giftedness are

based on past personal experiences. Cindy also commented on the idea that definitions of giftedness have "changed over the years." She commented that rigid and monolithic definition of giftedness, such as definitions based on IQ only, are exclusionary adding,

> Giftedness is not only academics, and I believe that rather than putting a label on students as being gifted or not, all children need to be looked at for gifted potential." Similarly, Blanca added, "findings in this research were consistent current literature on Giftedness and that ambiguity about giftedness could be beneficial when trying to identify CLD students. This considering that CLD students may not manifest their true potential and/or gifted traits in the same forms as previously established by dominant norms.

Second finding: teachers' perceptions of Latin@ gifted students varied, but nearly all contained evidence of bias about Latin@s in general

Participants' reactions: During the focus group, participants reacted to this finding positively, although it sparked some interesting comments. Cindy, for example, argued that teachers, especially new teachers must proceed with caution when trying to generalize about the characteristics of an ethnic group such as Latin@s. She added that her ideas and perceptions of Latin@ students "have changed dramatically". She argued, "Latin@ students from twenty years ago are not the same as the students from today."

Blanca also commented on this finding by reaffirming that research findings were "consistent with typical biases and misconceptions when working with people of other cultures." She argued that, living and working in a society that tended to focus more on what makes us different rather than what unites us presented unique challenges for educators. On the positive side, both Mary and Laura agreed several factors helped them overcome their bias and misconceptions about Latin@ students. Some of these factors included "access to professional development", "working and interacting with students and parents" from diverse backgrounds, and finally, a "change in mindset." In other words, these teachers were aware that biases and mental deficiency models were moldable which allow them to see their students' true potential. To illustrate this, Laura

said, "teachers' training does help to overcome bias, the problem is that not everybody receives that training."

Third finding: Training *Using non-normative assessments helped teachers to expand their conceptions of giftedness, gifted behaviors, and gifted traits.*

Participants' reactions All research participants reacted positively to the fact that using TOPS helped them to expand their conceptions of giftedness as well as made it possible to increase the identification of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Laura, for example, praised this initiative as something positive at the district level. Yet, she was aware that "using observations non-normative tools such as TOPS to identified gifted potential was time-consuming." She manifested her commitment to continuing using TOPS in the classroom in light of the positive results shown in the current study. However, she was concerned about the continuation of the training and resources after grants money were gone. Currently, the district relies on Javits grants by the US Department of Education to provide teachers' training, mentoring, and coaching for teachers in ten schools in the district, which mainly serve Latin@ and African American students.

During the focus group, Blanca also expanding on the positive effects of using TOPS with Latin@ students. To exemplify this she said,

> TOPS broadened my definition and approach to the issue of giftedness. This tool provided me with a useful framework to look for gifted behaviors as the manifestation of students' gifted potential." Furthermore, she added, "TOPS training is helpful to debunk some notions about negative students' behaviors which could be manifestations of the gifted potential of students who often do not display teaching pleasing behaviors.

The other two research participants, Cindy and Mary also were pleased to hear about the effectiveness of TOPS. Although they did not comment extensity about it, Cindy reinforced the idea that "Looking at students as a whole, not just as numerical test scores, was key to boost identification of Latin@ students."

Fourth finding: *Parents of potentially gifted Latin@ students were not part of the process of nomination, which gave teachers all the power in the decision making process.*

Participants' reactions: All research participants were concerned with this finding, yet they were not surprised that Latin@ parents were not at the forefront of the nomination process. Regarding this finding, Blanca and Cindy stated that they believed part of the reason why parents were not involved in the nomination process was due to parents' socioeconomic issues. It was also stated that parents perhaps felt intimidated by the complexity of the school system and the politics in schools. Furthermore, adding to the discussion, Mary and the researcher spoke about language barriers as well as the cultural norms in the Latin@ community that prevented some parents from challenging teachers' criteria. This may result in giving all power to teachers and schools deciding what is best for their children's education. When participants were asked about how could teachers and schools contribute to addressing this problem, almost unequivocally all responded that teachers' training could be beneficial to address this issue.

Laura spoke with concern and addressed parental involvement in the nomination process calling it "The Pandora's Box", which refers to the potential problems that could arise because of having parents being part of the nomination process. When asked to elaborate on this, she stated: "We might have all parents coming to us [teachers] arguing they children are gifted." This approach to parent involvement in the nomination process could be seen as a narrow and biased approach to parents' involvement, especially considering that parent nomination among White middle-class students happens frequently, more so than with other ethnic groups (McBee, 2006; 2010).

Fifth finding: *Despite an Increase in Nomination, Latin@ Students Lack Access to Gifted Services*

Participants' reactions: When research participants were asked to comment on this finding, Mary commented that the district did have various programs in place for identified gifted students. Nonetheless, the problem was at the elementary level where few programs and resources were available to meet the needs of elementary pupils. She added that "the implementation of TOPS at the elementary level was a step in the right direction to increase identification and to provide OTL for minority gifted students to have their needs met." Other participants such as Laura added that training teachers how to respond to the challenges of teaching gifted students in the regular classroom could help to solve this problem. Adding to the discussion, Cindy, wondered about the "right programming model", questioning how schools were going to fund these programs, as well as the gifted program models and programs that schools should implement.

As previously stated, focus groups are a powerful tool to guarantying the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2006). In this study, the researcher used a focus group session to provide research participants with an opportunity to add, challenge, and/or elaborate on research findings. In sum, all participants who took part in the focus group concurred with the findings even though new questions emerged. These included questions about funding, the best ways to invite parents to participate in the decision-making and referral process, and the kind of programming or services that should be available at the elementary level. These questions are important, and they could be helpful as schools and districts continue to increase identification and services for potentially gifted Latin@ students.

In sum, the participation of all research participants in a focus group provided an excellent opportunity to identify salient findings that sparked some profound considerations

about the issue of underrepresentation. Overall, all participants concurred with the major finding of this study. Some of the most interesting reflections were about the need and urgency to provide services for potentially gifted Latin@ students. They all agreed that there is a lot of work ahead of us to increase representation. Yet, they were excited about the fact that finally, this issue was being addressed at the local and district level. When asked about their hopes for the near future, they unanimously spoke in favor of having more professional development for educators and school leaders to help solve the current problem.

Phenomenological Analysis of the Guiding Research Questions

After completing the open coding process, the researcher conducted a phenomenological analysis of all eight transcripts by analyzing meaning units to identify the essence of the phenomenon highlighted by the four main research questions. These questions guided the current study from the beginning and they represent a small unit of a complex system to explain the issue of underrepresentation. The goal of this study was to find out how teachers' perceptions of potentially gifted Latin@s influence nomination for gifted programs.

The following section brings back the attention of the reader to reflect on the new insights found in this research to answer the main questions guiding this study.

Definitions of Giftedness Evolve

Overall, the phenomenological analysis of this question corroborated the theme identified during the open coding process conducted in the first round of analysis. Data reveals that definitions of giftedness remain elusive to research participants. As noted in the open coding analysis, research participants did not share or agree on a single definition of giftedness. The researcher found that participants' conceptions of giftedness varied greatly, with some noted distinctions based on levels of training. Such definitions were either too narrow resulting in the

exclusion of most students or too open and subjective which resulted in the inability to adequately identify gifted traits of gifted students. Some of the most relevant terms used by teachers to define giftedness included: rare, elusive, subjective, an individual's trait, and an extraordinary ability. Furthermore, this research also revealed that training levels in gifted education also influenced how teachers define giftedness. For example, Basic training levels along with fewer years of experience seem to result in teachers (Laura & Peters) having a subjective and narrow conception of giftedness. While medium and advanced levels of training (Mary, Blanca, and Patricia) along with more years of experience seem to result in a more cohesive, yet somewhat traditional definition of giftedness. Finally, definitions of giftedness shared by participants were not culturally inclusive and did not reflect many of the obstacles that many Latin@ students faced. This with the exemption of one participant (Mary), a Latin@ participant who spoke of gifted Latin@ students as culturally diverse.

Table 16

Questions One: How do Teachers Define Giftedness?

Teacher	Participant's Quote
*Peter *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 5*	"It's just something that you have. It's not necessarily definable because I think it's definitely subjective."
Briana *Training level: Minimum* *Years of teaching:12*	"I think that the word gifted that someone has an ability above and beyond the normal range should be."
Blanca *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:20*	"Giftedness just means a persons' natural ability or strength in an area or a couple of areas."
Patricia *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:15*	"An extraordinary ability that students have in a certain area."
Cindi *Training level: Basic*	"Giftedness is used too often. I think it's rare. True giftedness is rare."

Years of teaching:22	
Laura *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 6*	"The concept of giftedness is in a way a personal interpretation."
**Mary *Training level: Advanced* *Years of teaching:12*	"It means having the cognitive ability to process information at a faster rate compared to your average ability students."
Elizabeth *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching:20*	"I think that's one of the easiest ways to identify because you have these cut scores and you either make it or you don't."

*All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant*

Components of the Teacher Decision-Making Process for Referrals

Data from research participants showed that their decision-making process to identify and nominate Latin@ students was influenced by three factors such as:

1) the norms and guidelines offered by the district;

2) their conception and understanding of giftedness informed by TOPS; and

3) the schools' culture where they work.

It is important that clarify that the process of referral often starts with the teacher, yet there are additional steps that need to take place before students received gifted services. Overall, teachers participating in this study made it clear that although they did not have a very coherent understanding of all the guidelines, they tended to follow the district's recommendations especially regarding the use of standardized and non-standardized assessments. Some of the assessments and artifacts that teachers used to determine various levels of giftedness included test scores, students' observations, portfolios, work samples, and anecdotal notes about students' abilities in academic and non-academic areas such as the arts.

Another factor that helped to inform teachers' decision-making criteria in the identification process of potentially gifted Latin@ students was their perceptions of giftedness. As in the case of this study, all teachers highlighted the benefits of having the opportunity to received training

using TOPS, which allowed teachers to re-examine their bias and misconnections about giftedness.

Finally, three participants in specific (Blanca, Patricia, Mary) mentioned the importance of the school's culture. It was evident that teachers who worked at schools with a positive culture towards giftedness resulted in being more active and eager to increase identification to meet the needs of high ability students. Thus, having a positive effect on teaching and school practices that promoted student achievement in academic and non-academic areas. In other words, the teachers who worked in this kind of school felt that increasing identification and meeting the needs of gifted learners as part of their role as educators and a school expectation.

Table 17

Question two: How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?

Teacher	What do teachers look for to identify giftedness?	TOPS' identifiers and district norms
*Peter *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 5*	"First of all, you have to look at just how they carry themselves in the classroom. Then I also go on to their habits, their traits such as are they a hard worker, are they motivated, do they like to be challenged, are the leaders, and are they defiant."	"Just observations in general or any sort of other areas and I think that too is another way to start identifying these kids."
Briana *Training level: Minimum* *Years of teaching:12*	"If I were to look for a gifted student in any area weather be looking at different scales. I would look at a classroom-based assessment."	"I've had a couple of students that are not good readers but, they can remember things and they can present about it and talk about it, and they have excellent skills that at times a test does not show."
Blanca	"I think that traditional methods miss out on a lot of kids. Academically, we use Start 360 (Formal assessment). I use observations too because a test doesn't tell	"So Jose [student} got to the third grade they did their Start testing in the Fall and he was just doing great. In addition, the psychologist did the

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Teacher	What do teachers look for to identify giftedness?	TOPS' identifiers and district norms
Training level: Intermediate *Years of teaching:20*	you everything. I do use work samples because often kids were gifted writers it doesn't show up on a test. You can't test for that."	testing and we were good. We move him a whole grade level ahead."
Patricia *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:15*	"The first thing I usually do is a whole class observation. I keep portfolios for all of my students, but specifically for students with high potential or gifted, I would say that I try to keep more of their projects that we do in the classroom. …I write to myself about what I've seen in a certain child or another."	"Using TOPS help me to really drill down and see what's going on with that child, and what certain areas they're showing some abilities. It shows me their strengths."
Cindi *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching:22*	"I certainly use you know, the test that we have. I'll be honest though; expertise and teacher observation are important. I think teacher observations, teacher's expertise, and knowledge of what students should be able to do, and experience in the field are important."	"Over the years I have collected samples of work they have done. Keeping samples of their artwork. Keeping portfolios, writing samples, some math that shows their thinking not just memorizing facts. Thinks that show their high-level thinking. These examples are also good to show parents."
Laura *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 6*	"So, at the beginning of the year, after getting to know all the students, I do look at their test results are. If someone scores very high that'll take me off to observe them a little bit more. I collect work, student work if it's applicable and then, that's when I would make my decision after a couple months."	"I observe them over a period of a couple months. I also use that checklist and then I make my list depending on what I see."
**Mary *Training level: Advanced* *Years of teaching:12*	"So after gathering a lot of data, then I feel more secure about who I am going to nominate. I look at the whole child. I also look at their behaviors, their maturity level or not, their cognitive abilities. And that is how I make the decision."	"The formal nomination process, which starts in September for about two weeks. Then I make a formal nomination followed by flagging these students on Infinite Campus. I rely on what the district and the state require."
Elizabeth	"I collect for all the students writing samples, anecdotal notes, and those are the things that I used at parent-teacher	"At the school level, I know there is the TOPs inventory done with

Teacher	What do teachers look for to identify giftedness?	TOPS' identifiers and district norms
Training level: Basic *Years of teaching:20*	conferences. For example, he or she has good leadership skills and then, you just kind of keep a little bit of a tally, and anecdotal notes to support this looking at whether this kid has gifted potential or not."	students to identify gifted behaviors of potentially gifted students."

*All participants are white females except the following:*Male participant; **Latin@ participant.*

How Teachers' Perceptions of Giftedness Influence the Nomination Process

It was important for this research to find out about the way teachers perceived giftedness in potentially gifted Latin@ students since the process of referring students for gifted programs often begins with teachers' input. As a result, data from this qualitative study provided us with a snapshot of how teachers perceived giftedness in minority students and whether their perceptions influence the nomination process. Data from interviews revealed that teachers' perceptions of giftedness are influenced by their personal and educational experiences, the existence of implicit and explicit bias about minority groups, and access to training in the area of gifted education.

First, data from interviews showed that seven of the participants did not come from Spanish speaking families, yet they spoke English and Spanish. They had the opportunity to study abroad in Spanish speaking countries. Only one participant was Latin@ and she grew speaking both languages. Nonetheless, she also had the opportunity to study abroad. Thus, all participants had exposure to rich multicultural experiences, which contributed to shaping their perceptions of Latin@ students. Research findings also point out that teachers' perceptions are malleable, yet for this to happen teachers need to be exposed to rich multicultural experiences. This was evident when participants such as Brianna, shared how her misconceptions about diversity, race, and stereotypes changed, especially after being exposed to rich and positive

multicultural experiences. Overall, all participants shared a common appreciation for diversity and they enjoyed working with the Lain@ community.

Second, teachers' bias whether implicit or explicit were manifested in the existence of deficit cultural models, the emphasis on teaching practices focused on remediation, and narrow conceptualizations of giftedness that did not recognize the cultural assets of Latin@ students and their communities. Data from interviews showed that except for two participants (Mary and Blanca) the majority of teachers had a very narrow and stereotypical conception of the Latin@ community. Several narratives from research participants (e.g. Laura, Peter, Blanca, and Mary), reaffirmed the idea that teachers bias whether explicit or implicit, had detrimental effects not only on the perception of the students but also on the behaviors, teachers expect to see when referring Latin@ students for gifted services.

Third, teacher participants' perceptions of giftedness were overall narrow and subjective when trying to conceptualize what giftedness was. However, when describing how giftedness was manifested in students, such perspectives were more robust and inclusive. This appears to be in part to their exposure to training in gifted education. Consequently, one variable that has huge implications in the identification and referral of students for gifted programs is teachers' training. As in the case of the teachers participating in this study, descriptive data showed that teachers had different levels of training in gifted education. Specifically, these teachers received training using TOPS as a complementary tool used in the process of identification of gifted potential in Latin@ students.

Data from interviews demonstrate that in addition to teachers' training in the area of gifted education, the use of non-normative and culturally sensitive tools to identify giftedness such as TOPS resulted in teachers' shift in mindset from a deficit and at-risk to at-potential. This also

resulted in having a broader conceptualization of students' high abilities in other areas other than in reading and math, increasing the number of Latin@ students nominated for gifted programs. One teacher noted, "TOPS really opened my mind."

In sum, teachers who were aware of their bias and had an asset mindset tended to see students' abilities in academic and non-academic areas as gifted potential. On the other hand, teachers who perceived giftedness as something rare or exceptional tended to perceive students' abilities as being average in need of remediation.

Table 18

Question Three: How do Teachers' Perceptions of Giftedness Influence the Nomination of Potentially Gifted Latin@ Students?

Teacher	What do teachers look for to identify giftedness?	TOPS' Identifiers and district norms
*Peter *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 5*	"First of all, you have to look at just how they carry themselves in the classroom. Then I also go on to their habits, their traits such as are they a hard worker, are they motivated, do they like to be challenged, are the leaders, and are they defiant."	"Just observations in General or any sort of other areas and I think that too is another way to start identifying these kids."
Briana *Training level: Minimum* *Years of teaching:12*	"If I were to look for a gifted student in any area weather be looking at different scales. I would look at a classroom-based assessment."	"I've had a couple students that are not good readers but, they can remember things and they can present about it and talk about it, and they have excellent skills that at times a test does not show."
Blanca *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:20*	"I think that traditional methods miss out on a lot of kids. Academically, we use Start 360 (Formal assessment). I use observations too because a test doesn't tell you everything. I do use work samples because often kids were gifted writers it doesn't show up on a test. You can't test for that."	"So Jose [student} got to the third grade they did their Start testing in the Fall and he was just doing great. In addition, the psychologist did the testing and we were good. We move him a whole grade level ahead."

Teacher	What do teachers look for to identify giftedness?	TOPS' Identifiers and district norms
Patricia *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:15*	"The first thing I usually do is a whole class observation. I keep portfolios for all of my students, but specifically for students with high potential or gifted, I would say that I try to keep more of their projects that we do in the classroom. …I write to myself about what I've seen in a certain child or another."	"Using TOPS help me to really drill down and see what's going on with that child, and what certain areas they're showing some abilities. It shows me their strengths."
Cindi *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching:22*	"I certainly use you know, the test that we have. I'll be honest though; expertise and teacher observation are important. I think teacher observations, teacher's expertise, and knowledge of what students should be able to do, and experience in the field are important."	"Over the years I have collected samples of work they have done. Keeping samples of their artwork. Keeping portfolios, writing samples, some math that shows their thinking not just memorizing facts. Thinks that show their high-level thinking. These examples are also good to show parents."
Laura *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 6*	"So, at the beginning of the year, after getting to know all the students, I do look at their test results are. If someone scores very high that'll take me off to observe them a little bit more. I collect work, student work if it's applicable and then, that's when I would make my decision after a couple of months."	"I observe them over a period of a couple of months. I also use that checklist and then I make my list depending on what I see."
**Mary *Training level: Advanced* *Years of teaching:12*	So after gathering a lot of data, then I feel more secure about who I am going to nominate. I look at the whole child. I also look at their behaviors, their maturity level or not, their cognitive abilities. And that is how I make the decision." .	"The formal nomination process, which starts in September for about two weeks. Then I make a formal nomination followed by flagging these students on Infinite Campus. I rely on what the district and the state require."
Elizabeth *Training level: Basic*	"I collect for all the students writing samples, anecdotal notes, and those are the things that I used at parent-teacher conferences. For example, he or she has good leadership skills and then, you just kind of keep a little bit of a tally, and	"At the school level, I know there is the TOPs inventory done with students to identify gifted behaviors of potentially gifted students."

Teacher	What do teachers look for to identify giftedness?	TOPS' Identifiers and district norms
Years of teaching:20	anecdotal notes to support this looking at whether this kid has gifted potential or not."	

*All participants are white females except the following:*Male participant; **Latin@ participant.*

How Teachers Come to Their Understanding of Giftedness

This research found that understanding giftedness encompasses understanding what it is, how it manifests in students from all ethnic backgrounds and social strata, having knowledge, and attaining mastery of best teaching practices to meet the needs of gifted learners. Therefore, unveiling how teachers come to their understanding of giftedness entails asking teachers to share their stories about their conceptions and experiences in the field.

Question four of the current study aimed to find out and what to do with it. Understanding giftedness as a potential characteristic rather than as a fixed trait is part of a long process. Such a process is informed by knowledge of various theories, knowledge of students, and experience in the field. During the interview process, teachers commented on their understanding of giftedness by attempting to define giftedness and gifted education, describing their training and identification tools used in the process of referral, and lastly by sharing their teaching experiences nurturing, identifying, and developing gifted traits or behaviors.

Data from this qualitative study shows that although the vast majority of research participants had a very narrow conceptualization of giftedness, in practice such conceptualizations were broader, which allowed them to increase the number of students identified as having gifted potential. This shows that teachers' understanding of giftedness begins by thinking about what giftedness means; complementing it with what they see; and finally thinking about their

experience while working with students. This was the case of participants like Cindy who defined giftedness as "rare" yet, in her practice, she was still able to name key characteristics of students with gifted potential.

Teachers also came to their understanding of giftedness by participating in training and professional development. For example, all teachers participating in this study had various levels of training in the field of gifted education. Thus, their understanding of giftedness was influenced and shaped by being exposed to new knowledge based on theories of giftedness as well as the best practices to identify, nurture, and develop talent. In the current research, this was found to be a key component to increase teachers' perceptions, especially because training in gifted education was not part of their formal training programs.

Finally, teachers grew in their understanding of giftedness based on their teaching and professional experiences. For example, teachers who worked at schools that strive to increase identification by providing equal access to high-end learning opportunities for all students were more likely to refer more students for gifted programs, than schools that focused on remediation practices.

Table 19

Question Four: How do Teachers Come to their Understanding of Giftedness?

Teacher	Definition of Giftedness	Training Level and Teacher' Remarks on TOPS	Gifted Traits in Latin@ Students
*Peter *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 5*	"It's just something that you have. It's not necessarily definable because I think it's definitely subjective."	"I like the intent of trying to identify students or identify Urban students for giftedness using TOPS. I like that there were also other aspects than just academics. TOPS had a positive	"I think defiance is a big one. If we are talking about academically gifted, I see that these students produce high-quality work. However, I think there can be many different behaviors. For

Teacher	Definition of Giftedness	Training Level and Teacher' Remarks on TOPS	Gifted Traits in Latin@ Students
		effect on helping me see gifted behaviors in a different way."	example, I had a student who was autistic. This student was completely different. There were a lot of behaviors, awkwardness, but that kid was a genius."
Briana *Training level: Minimum* *Years of teaching:12*	"I think that the word gifted that someone has an ability above and beyond the normal range should be."	"I feel as if though I am just scratching the surface of gifted education and how to work with gifted students."	"I don't think there is a behavior that I could say is the behavior of a gifted child."
Blanca *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:20*	"Giftedness just means a persons' natural ability or strength in an area or a couple of areas."	"When using TOPS, you look at how often a behavior (a gifted behavior) happens in an area and then, you keep track of how often this happens in an area or areas that students outstand. Then you would nominate the student in those areas."	"It all depends on where they are gifted. For example, one of my students, who is academically very bright, but he is also very musical."
Patricia *Training level: Intermediate* *Years of teaching:15*	"An extraordinary ability that students have in a certain area."	"Training on gifted education made me more aware of how gifted students need specific services to meet their needs."	"I've seen a lot of creativity. Another characteristic is being a problem solver, just learning how to solve problems in a different way or kind of making it up in their own way."
Cindi *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching:22*	"Giftedness is used too often. I think it's rare. True giftedness is rare."	"I recommend teachers receive training on gifted students, particularly on introduction to giftedness, differentiation, best teaching practices, social-	

Teacher	Definition of Giftedness	Training Level and Teacher' Remarks on TOPS	Gifted Traits in Latin@ Students
		emotional development of gifted students."	
Laura *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching: 6*	"The concept of giftedness is in a way a personal interpretation."	"I do think that my participation in the GT training made me a more self-aware and better teacher, thinking about how I can help develop these abilities in children."	"I nominated Joseph and he is extremely gifted in math and reading. He analyzes things and becomes obsessed with one topic. I think they might have some different social behaviors that exclude them from their peers. This because they might not always pick up on social cues that easily."
**Mary *Training level: Advanced* *Years of teaching:12*	"It means having the cognitive ability to process information at a faster rate compared to your average ability students."	"GT education is essential to know what you are doing. That is what makes me able to see the traits and characteristics of gifted students. Gifted Education is more specialized with a lot of more in-depth research-based instructional." strategies that have worked."	"I look at the whole child but look at my conversations with students. I look at their maturity level or not and their cognitive abilities. A gifted student within a specific domain will be very curious and often have a lot of information in a topic (i.e. science, famous leader, etc.)."
Elizabeth *Training level: Basic* *Years of teaching:20*	"I think that's one of the easiest ways to identify because you have these cut scores and you either make it or you don't."	"My school uses TOPS. This tool helps to identify gifted potential. I personally feel every child has the potential to be gifted in anything they decide, they want to be gifted."	"I think it depends to some degree on their maturity. They are some high achievers who stimulate themselves reading or doing something else because they are done with their work."

All participants are white females except the following:*Male participant; **Latin@ participant.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented the findings of a qualitative study of eight teachers working in four urban schools in a Midwest public school district. The goal of this research was toto better understand how teachers' perceptions of giftedness influenced the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students. . Transcripts from the interviews and focus group were analyzed using open coding and phenomenological techniques to generate a thematic presentation of major findings as well to respond to all four guiding questions guiding this study. After a detailed data analysis done through a Critical Theory lens, the following findings were presented.

First, research participants had different definitions of giftedness. These could be seen as problematic, especially considering that definitions of giftedness influence teachers' decision-making about what students they should nominate and what services gifted students should receive. They developed their perceptions of giftedness through personal background and professional experience. Data also revealed that definitions of giftedness went from narrow and subjective to more progressive and academically oriented. This study found that this variation was related to participants' levels of training as well as years of teaching experience. For example, narrow and elusive definitions of giftedness emerged from participants (Peter, Briana, and Elizabeth) with minimum levels of training and fewer years of teaching experience. Mary, Cindy, and Laura had more scholastic and conventional definitions of giftedness because they had more advanced training and years of experience. None of the participants' definitions took into account that giftedness and its manifestations are influenced by cultural and social norms of students' backgrounds.

Even though their definitions were lacking in important ways, their conceptual definitions of giftedness did not necessarily mirror their robust referral and teaching practices. While most definitions were conceptually conservative and traditional, all teachers demonstrated a better understanding of how giftedness manifested in Latin@ students when they described students they nominated as gifted and when they described their referral processes. This was shown in the way teachers spoke of gifted students and their gifted attributes. This key finding of the study indicates that focusing on teaching practices and interactions with minority students are perhaps a better indicator of how teachers truly perceive and understand giftedness. This finding also indicates it might be more productive to focus on teacher practices, rather than abstract definitions, when seeking to increase teacher referrals.

Second, teachers' perceptions of Latin@ gifted students varied, but nearly all contained evidence of bias about Latin@s in general. Although most research participants reported that they considered themselves to be bias-free, data shows the presence of cultural and ethnic misconceptions about Latin@ students and their families. These included personal bias about culture and race, bias about behaviors that gifted Latin@ students should display, and cultural bias about the heterogeneity of the Latin@ community. The research also found that teachers' exposure to rich-multicultural experiences and training helped them to overcome some of their bias. All teachers included in this study were bilingual and all of them had the opportunity to live in Spanish speaking countries as part of their teaching training. These rich experiences not only provide them with opportunities to learn about other cultures but also to re-examine their views and perceptions of others. Even with these rich experiences, however, it was clear from many of their responses that these teachers would likely benefit from additional work on anti-racist education, culturally relevant teaching and referrals, and understanding white privilege. Finally,

the researcher also found that a teacher, who shared the same culture and background as Latin @ students, was more likely to describe the positive attributes of these students and their families. This was the case of a Latin@ teacher Mary, who thought of giftedness and its manifestations as something influenced by the cultural norms. It is possible that more Latin@ student nominations would occur if there were more Latin@ teachers.

Third, exposure to gifted training helped teachers to expand their conceptions of giftedness, gifted behaviors, and gifted traits, which resulted in more nominations of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Participation in training has real implications in the way teachers described gifted behaviors in Latin@ students. As a result, when referring to gifted students and the traits they were likely to show, teachers had a more vigorous and cohesive perception of giftedness than when they were attempting to define giftedness without a context.

Fourth, the researcher also found that parents of potentially gifted Latin@ students were not part of the process of nomination, which gives teachers all the power to either nominate students or not. The researcher found that cultural bias about parents' education and cultural norms served as the main explanation of why this happened. Teachers' narratives show that teachers thought parents trusted them to nominate their children for gifted programs, arguing that teachers knew best about how to meet the needs of gifted learners. It appears this is an area that additional training and support on the positive role families would be helpful.

Fifth, the researcher found that despite an increase in the nomination of Latin@ students, most schools and teachers did not have the resources or access to adequate programs and interventions to meet these students' cognitive and socio-emotional needs. In general, these teachers indicated there is a greater emphasis on the need for remedial services at their schools rather than enrichment for high performing students, and some of them agreed with this priority.

Only one school included in this study – Alliance -- had an existing gifted services program. The data reveals that school culture plays a crucial role in inspiring teachers to look for students' potential and strengths or than focusing primarily on students' scarcities. These data shows that schools with a positive culture towards giftedness resulted in having teachers do more referrals than teachers who worked in schools where all resources were destined to help only struggling students meet proficiency levels. The one teacher who worked at Alliance did more referrals than teachers who worked in schools where there were no gifted services. .

In closing, using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological methodology with a critical approach, the researcher sought to answer all four questions guiding this study with the main purpose of shedding light on finding more about teachers' perceptions of potentially gifted Latin@ students. As a result, five major themes emerged as described above. All guiding questions focused on capturing teachers' counternarrative stories, adding their voices to the existing body of literature. In the following chapter, the researcher will layout the summary, discuss the conclusions of the study, explain the implications, and suggest future recommendations.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Overview

Regardless of existing concerns that gifted programs contribute to social inequality by directly or indirectly denying entrance of minority students (e.g., Slavin, 1990; Oaks, 1995, 2005; Fiedler, 2002), scholars agree that gifted programs provide huge benefits, especially for minority students who often do not have access to advanced learning opportunities due to issues of poverty, socioeconomic status, and race.

Gifted programs provide gifted students with the opportunity to meet their socioemotional and cognitive needs. However, these programs run the risk of exacerbating inequality unless they intentionally seek to be more inclusive of gifted minority students. Increasing representation and retaining Latin@ students is of extreme urgency, especially considering that Latin@ students account for more than 22.7 percent of the general students' population in public schools (United Census Bureau, 2017). Increasing Latin@ representation in gifted programs is also a matter of social justice, which could provide the establishment of more just society in which all students should have the opportunity to succeed. This is especially important for minority students and their families for whom obtaining access to education is the only way to overcome poverty and social oppression. Experts in the field (Siegle, Gubbins, O'Rourke, Langley, Mun, Luria, & Plucker, 2013; Peters, 2010; Ford, 2010) argue that, in addition to students' success in core academic areas, which can translate into higher achievement test scores, improved graduation rates, and higher educational aspirations, the effectiveness of a gifted program results in other outcomes for underserved students. These outcomes include persistence, participation, retention across time in the program and access to educational fields such as STEM fields where minority students are vastly underrepresented.

Thus, the question remains, how much do gifted programs need to change to attain this. There is a plethora of data that chronicles the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs in our nation (Fraizer, 1995; Ford, 1996; 2006; 2010; Grantham, 2004; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Tomlinson, 2001; Whiting, 2009). However, limited data originates from studying the way teachers perceive potentially gifted Latin@ students. Consequently, teachers who work with Latin@ students are excellent resources of information, and their counter-narratives stories could prove helpful to begin making significant changes in the nomination and identification process of minority students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how teachers' perceptions of giftedness influenced the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

Deepening our understanding of the way teachers perceive giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students is crucial to better understand the phenomenon of underrepresentation. Furthermore, it is only by addressing the root of this problem that school districts and researchers will begin to act effectively to promote and attain equity, social justice, and equal access to opportunities to learn for students who are currently marginalized and deprived of exercising their full potential.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the importance of the study in terms of how the results contribute to the understanding of the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programming in the literature, and its implications for schools, teachers, and school districts overall.

The following section describes how these findings relate to the relevant literature on the topic as well as how it relates to current teaching practices. It concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, future recommendations, and implications for future research.

Review of the Study's Method and Conceptual Frame

As discussed in Chapter III, qualitative research is well suited to describe and understand the processes or problems related to teachers' perceptions of giftedness and its manifestation in potentially gifted Latin@ students. The process to understand the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions is in the qualitative tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology (Herda, 1999; Max & Van Manen, 2014). Using this approach, allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon as it occurs, trying to make meaning of teachers' experiences.

For the completion of this study, the researcher collected data using semi-structured interviews and a member-checking focus group. This method of study made it possible to apprehend the first-hand experiences of teachers who instructed potentially gifted Latin@ students in an urban setting.

The participants in this study included eight instructors who work with Latin@ students in an urban school district. As part of their teaching responsibilities, these teachers took part in the identifications and referral process of Latin@ students for gifted services. Furthermore, since the researcher used purposeful sampling, it was necessary to find participants who could add to the existing research on the topic of teachers' perception by adding rich quantitative data based primarily on their experiences working with Latin@ students.

Looking at their qualification in the area of gifted education, the researcher found that research participants had various degrees of training in the area of gifted education and were in charge of the identification and nomination process. These teachers also were making more referrals when compared to peers. Consequently, the Gifted and Talented District Coordinator referred to them because they participated in various district initiatives to increase the

identification of Latin@ students. Research participants had an average of 10 years of experience working with Latin@ students, though primarily in traditional mixed-gender regular classrooms.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and a focus group session, which served the purpose of increasing validity and reliability, as well as to allow research participants to partake in a member checking dynamic session around preliminary findings. The audio-recorded interview transcripts and focus group transcript were converted into expanded write-ups, edited, commented on, coded, and analyzed using open coding and phenomenological hermeneutical methods. The latest for the purpose of findings meaning units to answer all four guiding questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). These steps encompassed grouping the significant statements into "meaning units" or themes. Next, the researcher wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both textural and structural descriptions as the essence of the teachers' experiences (Creswell, 2007). Finally, due to the nature of this study and the desire to uncover rich meaning about how teachers' perceptions influence the nomination of Latin@ students, the researcher conducted a critical analysis using Critical Theory.

This rich data was carefully coded and analyzed through a critical lens using Critical Theory. As an overall framework, Critical Theory serves as an adequate tool to uncover the subtle yet existing educational practices that lead to the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs. This underrepresentation results in the perpetuation of educational and social inequalities by depriving some students of attaining equal access to educational opportunities. From a Critical Theory perspective, issues of race, teachers' bias, access to learning opportunities, and the existence of cultural deficit models are no longer taken for granted. Rather, they are conceived as tools of oppression that results in the direct exclusion of Latin@

students from accessing high-end learning opportunities to fully develop their potential (Patel, 2015; Delgado, 1990; Bell, 1984; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

A critical approach using Critical Theory served as the conceptual framework for the analysis and study of the phenomenon of underrepresentation of Latin@ students for gifted programs. Addressing the issue from a non-critical perspective would have only served to maintain the status quo, which reinforces the current marginalization of students of color based on deficit cultural conceptual models. It is through these deficit models that Latin@s have been seen and continue to be seen as less capable and less fit to enter gifted programs that traditionally remain as White spaces (Ford, 2014). In light of this reality, it is important to highlight the systems of modern social oppression and marginalization that impedes the entrance of Latin@ students into gifted programs, the researcher conducted a phenomenological hermeneutical study through a Critical Theory lens. This radical and critical approach has proved beneficial to untangle the intersectionality of issues of race, racism, and privilege, which plagues educational systems including gifted programs.

Summary of Major Findings

Several themes emerged to shed light on the way teachers perceived gifted potential in Latin@ students and how they make referrals.

Teachers had Different Conceptions of Giftedness

The first research finding includes different conceptualizations and perceptions of giftedness. Under the theme of teachers' perception of giftedness, four sub-themes, or major characteristics emerged including: one definition does not fit all, teachers advocated for the use of expanding identification methods, teachers bias influence nomination, and a school culture matter s.

The first sub-theme is that participants did not share a common definition of giftedness. Although all research participants shared some things in common such as the fact that giftedness does exist among all students regardless of their race, gender, or socioeconomic status, definitions of giftedness remained vague. Their definitions of giftedness included a variety of approaches from having a very narrow conception of giftedness as something "rare" to the idea that all children, in some way or another have a special gift and talent.

Teacher Practices Matters as Much as Definitions

In connection with how teachers defined giftedness, the researcher also found that although definitions of giftedness matter, in reality, what is even more important is teaching practices. In other words, definitions of giftedness that were either too narrow or to abstract did not match when compared to teachers' practices and referrals, which suggest that perhaps there has to be a shift in mindset from theory to practice.

Teachers who work with Latin@ students advocated for the use of performance assessments to increase the identification of minority students. This even though high academic performance in standardized tests, as well as district-mandated assessments particularly in reading and math, were seen as strong indicators of giftedness. This included students who tended to score at the 90th percentile and higher in assessments such as the STAR 360. This approach to giftedness, as discussed in the literature review on the topic, is problematic because CLD students may tend to attain low scores in these tests in part because of language barriers as well as possibly lacking access to extracurricular opportunities to learn due to their socioeconomic status (Crissom & Reddings, 2016). As in the case of this study, teachers made used students' observations, portfolios, students, and work samples to identify gifted potential.

Another sub-theme of Theme 1 is that research participants also expressed their concerns that any definitions of giftedness that are inclusive of CLD students must include an in-depth observation process of students' behaviors, as indicators of gifted potential especially when working with Latin@ students. This echoes similar concerns by experts in the field who advocate for the use of multiple measurements of giftedness, especially when identifying minority students (Erwin & Worrel, 2012; Ford & Harris, 2001; McBee, Peters, & Waterman, 2014.) Since minority students do not have equal access to high-end OTL, it is unrealistic to expect that they will be able to show what they are capable of when only taking standardized assessments. Consequently, rather than focusing only on academic scores, teachers should focus on the identification of potentially gifted behaviors.

Data from participants' interviews also indicate that most teachers were not aware of the way cultural norms affect how giftedness manifests in CLD students. Only one participant, Mary (a Latin@ teacher), spoke about the fact that CLD students might not show their gifts and talents in the same manner as the norm. It all indicates that perhaps the fact that Mary shared the same background as her students, made her aware of the cultural differences that may affect teachers' perceptions of giftedness in Latin@ students.

How Teachers Developed Conceptions of Giftedness

Data from the current study also shows that teachers' perceptions of giftedness are informed and influenced by teachers' training, their subjective perceptions, and their professional experiences working with minority students. Overall, research participants commented on the positive effects of having the opportunity to receive professional development or formal training on gifted education. They argued that taking part in training sessions on gifted education and gifted learners helped them to overcome bias and misconceptions of giftedness. Finally, research

participants' understood giftedness as a trait that exists in every culture. This wide and more inclusive way to think about giftedness empowered teachers to see themselves as advocates, fighting for the inclusion of Latin@ students for gifted programs. Through their personal counternarrative stories, they manifested a deep commitment to urban education, and a strong personal and emotional devotion working with Latin@ students.

Teachers' Perceptions Matter

A second finding that emerged during this study was that teachers' perceptions of Latin@ students are not bias-free. Although, all educators perceived themselves as being bias-free data shows that issues of racism against "black Latino males", assertions of teachers being "culturally blind," or thinking of Latin@ parents as being "unable" to meet the needs of their children are part of teachers' perceptions which affects nomination. Some of the subtopics under the theme of teachers' bias included: teachers' awareness that training served as an effective alternative to overcome teachers' bias as well as the existence of misconceptions of Latin@ students. Teachers also highlighted the benefits of training to create a more culturally responsive approach to the issue of giftedness, gifted behaviors, and traits that CLD gifted students manifest.

From a critical perspective, the existence of teachers' bias whether conscious or the unconscious contributes to the existing marginalization of minority students. Therefore, Critical Theory argues that the existence of bias against students of color in schools is not something of the past, but rather part of an educational system that continues to marginalize students of color, reinforcing deficit models which portray minority students as being inferior (Patel, 2015; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Consequently, the fact that Latin@ students are underrepresented in gifted programs is a symptom of the existence of systems of oppression that foster social and educational inequality. For example, a teacher's bias against

minority students, the existence of institutionalized racism, and the prevalence of White privilege and norms that lead to colorblind policies and norms in gifted programs, which affect Latin@ gifted students gain access to gifted programs.

Training in the Use of a Nontraditional Tool Helped to Increased Nomination

A third finding that emerged from this study was on the benefits and positive effects that teachers saw in their classrooms because of using a nontraditional assessment tool called TOPS to increase the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Speaking on the benefits of using TOPS to identify minority students, Laura commented, "The use of the TOPS helped me to be more open-minded and to expand my views of giftedness. I would recommend [teachers] to use TOPS."

Data from interviews showed that teachers benefit from participating in professional development on the topic of giftedness. Some of the most salient gains consisted of expanding teachers' understanding of giftedness as well as being more aware of the fact that giftedness extends beyond academic areas. Data also showed that despite training, teachers still hold racists views against students of color, negative views of Latin@ parents, and parents, and cultural stereotypes which prevent teachers from seeing Latin@ students' true potential. Consequently, more training is needed not just in gifted education, but also in culturally responsive teaching practices. Finally, schools culture played a key role in increasing nomination. Teachers who worked in schools that nurtured and developed students' talents made more referral than participants who worked in schools that focused on remediation. Thus, showing that a change in mindset from at risk to at potential, allowed all students to reach their true potential.

Latin@ Parents Were not Part of the Nomination Process

A fourth finding present in this research reveals the fact that parents of Latin@ students at the sites where this study took place were not active participants in the nomination process of their children. This finding is of particular interest, especially because parent nomination and input play a tremendous role in who is nominated for gifted services (McBee, 2006). Additionally, it is important to point out that parent input is also part of the guidelines proposed by the district to guide teachers in the referral process. Teachers participating in this study felt that Latin@ parents rarely approached teachers or administrators to advocate for their children to be accepted into gifted programs. This in part because of cultural norms that hold teachers in high regards as educational decision making experts.

From a critical approach, the fact that minority parents are not part of the nomination process only helps to exacerbate underrepresentation. One can argue that parents are not at fault, rather schools and teachers who use ethnic group norms as an excuse to challenge the way schools do business. From this point of view, the idea that schools help to level the playing field for all students is merely a noble ideal. The review of the literature addressing the existence of deficit cultural models of Latin@ parents demonstrates that such narratives served to perpetuate social and educational inequality (Yosso, 2005).

Commenting on the benefits of parents' input as part of the nomination process, Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) noted that parent nomination could be very useful in the identification of gifted students because parents are the most knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Furthermore, parents can provide different views of giftedness from teachers. From this perspective, parent input, especially from minority parents, could serve

as a powerful tool to help attain educational equity by increasing nomination and identification

of gifted minority students.

Identified but without Services

The fifth and final finding emerging from this study shows that despite an increase in the

nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students, programs and services available to them are

still minimal. The current study points to other related issues that contribute to the lack of

services for identified gifted students. This includes relying on the regular classroom teacher to

provide the services for gifted learners, lack of in-depth teachers' training in gifted education,

lack of access to high-end opportunities to learn, and a strong school emphasis on remediation

rather than enrichment and talent development.

Data from interviews reveal that even when schools have increased in the nomination of

Latin@ students, access to services is still minimal. Furthermore, as manifested by research

participants, it was up to the discretion of the regular classroom teacher to provide interventions

to meet the needs of high achievers. The challenge of doing this is not with teachers' disposition,

but rather on the fact that they lack the resources such as books, technology, and training, to meet

the needs of potentially gifted Latin@ students. The fact that only one out of four schools had a

gifted program or a system of interventions in place to meet the needs of Latin@ students is

worrisome. Scholars agree that the purpose of identifying potentially gifted students is not to

give them a label as "gifted", but rather to purposely match their needs with a service (Plucker &

Peters, 2018).

The researcher asserts that the ultimate purpose of the identification and nomination of

students for gifted programs is to match students' needs with services, not provided by the

regular curriculum. Therefore, providing services to students with gifted potential should also be

a priority for schools serving minority students. Such practices will help to shape the school's culture and empower teachers to seek and nurture students' talents. Data from the current study made it clear that schools' culture matters. For instance, schools that focused on nurturing and developing students' gifts resulted in having a higher number of students being identified and nominated for gifted services in academic and non-academic areas.

Implications and Contributions to the Literature

Findings of this study show that teachers' perceptions of Latin@ students as well how they understand giftedness may influence nomination, but actual practices, training, available tools for referral, and school communities of practice may matter as much as the definitions espoused by teachers. The following section describes implications of key findings: here is a need for more teacher training on anti-racist education.

Teachers' Biases are Pervasive

Teachers' perceptions and biases do exist playing a role in the referral process. These biases manifested in teachers' treatment of Latin@ Black students, their views of students' culture as not being pertinent to how giftedness manifest in these students, and deficit view of Latin@ parents. In this study, data reveals that one teacher (Laura) had racist views regarding Black Latin@ males. She harbored these views despite of training and years of experience. Cindy claimed not to see "students' culture" thus, being *culturally blind*. Moreover, Patricia argued that one of the reasons why parents did not nominate their children for gifted service was because Latin@ parents were "*unable*" to meet the needs of their children.

This finding is relevant in the sense that in order to increase the referral of Latin@ students, teachers need first to overcome their bias and deficit thinking models about minority students and their parents. This could be done not just by enrolling in professional development

about gifted education, but also by learning about and integrating culturally sensitive teaching practices in their classroom. In this research, teachers stated that their biases directly influenced their perceptions of giftedness and the students they taught. This was, for example, the case of Laura, who acknowledged that her racist views of black Puerto Rican males, impeded her from seeing their full potential.

Furthermore, teachers' deficit perceptions, the existence of deficit cultural models, and the lack of culturally sensitive practices when working with Latin@ parents also prevented parents from being active members of the decision-making process advocating for their children's educational needs. These biases are influenced by personal experiences, background, knowledge, race, gender, lack of training, and socioeconomic status.

The literature also states that teachers who see their students from a deficit perspective rather than from a strength-based point of view tend to have lower student expectations, focus more on remediation practices rather than enrichment and are less likely to nominate minority students for gifted programs (Ford, 2010, Peters, Siege & Grissom, 2016; Blanchard & Muller, 2015; Bae, Holloway & Bempechat, 2008). From a critical perspective, deficit cultural models are endemic to educational institutions, resulting in the perpetuation of racial and social inequalities (Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano & Parker, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Deficit thinking models and teachers' biases are contemporary manifestations of institutional racism serving as discriminatory norms that prevent parents from being part of the decision-making process. These microaggressions and language barriers do not allow parents to take part in the nomination of their children for gifted services.

Strengths of even the poorest and most marginalized families can include the unconditional love and support of family members for a child or the incredible resilience and

psychological strength of a child. It is imperative that any interventions to meet the needs of Latin@ gifted students must recognize, affirm, acknowledge, and take advantage of their strengths, identify, understand, and compensate for weaknesses in their schools, families, and communities. Teachers may be more likely to include parents in the nomination process if they value these families and home communities as assets.

Teachers who view themselves as allies or advocates of these students may also play a role in the gifted referral process. The testimonies and counternarrative stories of these teachers provide us with a unique approach from teachers who are aware of the need to increase Latin@ nomination and the challenges they face in doing so. For example, all participants saw themselves as advocates to increase the identification of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Nonetheless, they also were aware, to a varying extent, of existing personal biases and systematic gaps in the current educational system that prevent potentially gifted Latin@ students from entering gifted programs.

Definitions are only Part of the Story – Practice and Practical Tools May be Primary

Today, we know that the traditional understanding of giftedness which relies on the use of IQ tests and traditional verbal and quantitative standardized assessments have fallen short to adequately identify gifted potential in Latin@ students. In fact, these narrow perspectives of giftedness have contributed to the current underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs. Scholars agree that gifted programs could be exclusionary in nature because narrow definitions of giftedness do not take into account how giftedness manifests in students of color. Yet, as Ford (2003) suggests the field of gifted and talented remains responsible for the underrepresentation of minority students by continually focusing on a "unitary conception of giftedness", which usually means "white" (p. 157).

A critical finding of this research is that teachers participating in this study had narrow definitions of giftedness, yet their practices revealed a more coherent story. These findings show that even though teachers' definitions of giftedness were narrow, subjective, and academically based, their teaching practices were not. For example, when teachers shared the way they identify gifted potential in students, their criteria were not as rigid as their definitions. This allowed teachers to use different measures such as observation, students' portfolios, students' work, and even anecdotal notes as determine factors to determine the eligibility of services. This is important, especially considering that in the field of gifted education, the use of standardized measurements and the use of rigid definitions of giftedness have been used to explain what giftedness is and to determine how it manifests in students. Therefore, the researcher contends that focusing on definitions only, rather than looking at teachers' practices, are problematic. This is because teachers' practices seem to be indicators of how teachers understand and perceive giftedness while working with minority students. This is different from the general emphasis on the literature on definitions, which ignores the expertise of those in field.

Data from this study shows that, despite the lack of consensus on how to define giftedness, teachers had robust practices that could serve as better indicators of what giftedness is and how it manifests itself in minority students. Furthermore, there is not a single definition of giftedness that would please everybody or that would describe the totality of manifestation of giftedness in "all" students. Consequently, scholars must be able to move beyond simple reverberation of empty definitions of giftedness to look at the way giftedness is perceived by teachers who work with students from all backgrounds

The researcher found that educators hold multiple views of giftedness as well as what gifted education should be or would look like. Consequently, with disparate views of giftedness

and program goals, it is difficult to make emphatic statements about academic programs and outcomes of gifted and talented students. On the other hand, despite all of this, all research participants revealed a more comprehensive understanding of giftedness, especially when sharing data about the way they identify gifted traits in Latin@ students. This finding reveals that definitions and even the lack of consensus that exists about what giftedness is not as important as what teachers do to identify and nurture students' talents.

Training and Non-traditional Assessment Tools Support Teachers in the Referral Process

Third, findings of this study also point to the need of using a combination of training in giftedness that includes an anti-bias emphasis, along with non-traditional measurements to identify gifted potential in Latin@ students. This is significant especially because Latin@ students do not have equal access to opportunity to learn, which limits their performance in academically standardized assessments.

Teachers recognized biases are malleable. Teachers claimed that having the opportunity to receive professional development in the area of gifted education helped them to improve their teaching practices and overcome their biases about Latin@ students and their families. In addition, they claim they understand the non-teacher pleasing behaviors of minority students, which could be manifestations of gifted potential. According to all research participants, this change in mindset from deficit to at-potential was one of the main benefits of receiving gifted education training, as well as a result of using non-standardized students' assessments such as TOPS to nominate potentially gifted Latin@ students. In the context of gifted education, training teachers could emphasize strategies aimed at identifying giftedness among racially or ethnically diverse students and identify approaches that are not culture- blind (Ford, Moore, & Scott, 2011).

Data from research participants show that using normed assessments such as CogAt (the screener used by the district where this study took place) are not effective in identifying student's true potential, missing a large number of minority students with gifted potential. Hence, the researcher argues that effective methods to identify gifted potential must be culturally norm. This means that issues of language, access to opportunity to learn, and the students' culture must be considered in the design and testing of these assessments before they are implemented. Teachers must use a combination of assessments that also look for gifted potential beyond academic areas. As in the case of this study, participants use TOPS, which according to their narratives, allowed them to identify gifted behaviors in minority students wised would go unnoticed.

Cultivating Communities of Practice Supportive of Gifted Referrals

Finally, the researcher also found that teachers' referrals are influenced by the school culture. Data from teachers' interviews indicate that schools that had a culture that promoted the nurturing and identification of talents, and which focus was more on enrichment rather than remediation, resulted in having a higher number of referrals. On the other hand, teachers that worked in schools they felt these institutions did not provide interventions (services) for gifts students felt demoralized, arguing that giftedness was just a new "label" given to students with high potential.

Using a critical approach to understand the issue of underrepresentation allowed to bring to life the subtle, yet exclusionary norms that schools and gifted programs use to close the gate of opportunity for Latin@ students who have the ability and the capacity to succeed in gifted programs. It is important to note that increasing the identification of Latin@ students is possible. Data from this study shows that all schools participating in this study had a higher number of referrals for gifted programs when compared to other schools with similar demographics.

Therefore, focusing on what is working and trying to replicate good teaching and school practices that nurture and develop talent could prove beneficial to increase representation.

Despite the increase in the nomination and identification of Latin@ students, services, and programs available for these students are very limited. The literature on the topic strongly reiterates the idea that to meet the cognitive and socioemotional needs of gifted learners they need specific systems of support and access to services, which are not typically provided by the regular curriculum (Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Plucker & Peters, 2018; Gallagher, Herradine & Coleman, 1997).

In this study, all participants manifested frustration and worried that the responsibility to provide interventions and access to services for gifted students rested only on their hands. As Elizabeth mentioned, school administrators and teachers sometimes "don't have an idea of what to do with gifted learners." This is because of a strong emphasis in schools toward remediation practices only, which placed high achievers and students with gifted potential in a non-priority group. This reaffirms the myth that high achieving students can and will do fine without systems of support. Most teacher participants resented the reality that they ended up taking full responsibility in trying their best to meet their needs not having enough support, limited resources, and without much support from the district.

In sum, this study adds to existing findings and contributed to the advancements of theory by offering teachers' counternarrative stories based on teachers' experiences. For instance, while the current literature on giftedness stresses the importance of dentitions of giftedness, this research found that even more important than definitions are the way teaching practices influence nomination. Data from participants' stories corroborate this and point to the fact that even though teachers had narrow conceptions of giftedness, their practices revealed a more

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complete perspective of how teachers perceive giftedness. This study also adds to the literature by bringing up the importance of school culture to increase the representation of Latin@ students in gifted programs. It is well known that school culture impacts academic achievement. However little is known about how school culture affects teachers' ability to nominate students. Data from this study showed that teachers are positively influenced by schools who focused on enrichment and talent development rather than remediation. Thus, increasing the identification and nomination of students for gifted programs. Finally, this study corroborates that teachers' perceptions and biases influence the nomination of Potentially Latin@ students. The latest due to the existence of racism, apathy towards students' cultures, and deficit models that portray Latin@ parents as "unable" to meet the needs of gifted children.

This study is important because it could potentially provide a deeper understanding of the factors that lead teachers to make referrals or contrarily, make the decision not to refer Latin@ students for gifted programs. Consequently, information from this qualitative research may lead to modifications in teachers' preparation programs that address teachers' bias and misconceptions of giftedness, changes in the referral process, and school practices, which may result in the change of a school culture that focuses not just in remediation but also on talent development.

Peters, Matthews, McBee, and McCoach (2014), argue that even under state mandates, there remains flexibility in the range of domains that can be addressed by gifted education, and this is even truer within the broader category of advanced academics. Schools should be encouraged to reach out into these areas that might be unique to their students in any way they see fit, provided that identification systems proposed to locate students in need are well-designed and are closely connected to the program.

Data from teachers' interviews revealed the existence of implicit or explicit biases that directly influence the gifted referral process.

Recommendations

Data from the current study shows that none of the research participants had any formal college preparatory training in gifted educations. This was echoed by Elizabeth, who stated that she received plenty of training in special educations and received limited training on meeting the needs of gifted learners. Consequently, teacher education programs as well as school districts must make sure that teachers are trained in providing special services for students for whom the regular curriculum is limited in meeting their learning needs.

Based on the findings of this study the researcher makes the following recommendations for teacher education programs, school districts, and researchers.

Recommendations for Teacher Training Programs

Findings from this study suggests the need for teachers to receive professional training on giftedness, identification methods, and the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. This is because teachers' awareness of cultural behaviors serves as a critical link to meet the needs of CLED students. Therefore, teachers are central to the implementation of any educational innovation. The study's findings indicate a need for training to address teacher bias.

Research participants expressed that gifted education training not only helped them to expand their perceptions and understanding of giftedness but also helped them to embrace a change in mindset. This mindset shift from a deficit point of view to a strength-based point of view facilitated the recognition of gifted behaviors and gifted traits in Latin@ students that other ways would go unnoticed. Using a culturally relevant pedagogy could prove effective to help teachers make this mindset transition.

The ability of teachers to work effectively with gifted minority students will increase based on staff development efforts and teacher education preparation programs that address gifted education. This was stated by all research participants who advocated in favor of continuous professional development for all teachers on the gifted education offering classes on gifted education for all teachers.

Here are recommendations for teacher training programs:

1. Teachers should gain substantive classroom experiences with minority students during practice or internships while student teaching. Data from this study show that teachers' misconceptions about the Latin@ community changed after they had the opportunity to be submerged in the culture of the students and the community where they worked. Furthermore, this research shows that there could be more of focus on storytelling among teachers on best practices; practical experience with referrals and learning about that process rather than just being able to repeat back definitions of giftedness.

2. Teachers should have more access to built-in experiences for practicums where they have the opportunity to practice learning about how to make these referrals in mock settings. The data from this study demonstrates that teachers' experiences identifying with potentially gifted students serve as better indicators of how teachers perceived giftedness than when asked to define giftedness in a decontextualized setting.

3. Teachers should be trained in culturally sensitive teaching practices to understand and respect students' cultural heritage worldviews, values, and customs. Data from this study points out the need for teachers to avoid generalizations and stereotypical views of Latin@ students, either by failing to recognize the diversity that exists within the Latin@ community or by ignoring the cultural values and norms that exist in every ethnic group.

4. Teachers need to learn outreach skills on how to work effectively with minority students, their families, and their community. This includes being proactive in reaching out to parents as well as inviting them to be part of the decision-making process of the referral and identification procedure. Data from this research shows that parents were not included as part of the decision-making process based on teachers' perceptions of being unable to meet the needs of gifted learners.

Recommendations for School Districts

School districts play a key role in shaping the policies, procedures, and the implementation of programs to address the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ and other minority students in gifted programs. As a result, school districts should focus on fostering educational initiatives and systems of support to attain equity and excellence in each school. Based on the research findings of this study, the researcher proposes the following recommendations for school districts, including:

1) Identifying ways to include parents in the nomination process.

2) Helping to build district and school-wide cultures that support gifted referrals and access to gifted programming.

3) Providing professional development on giftedness and how to complete gifted referrals that are grounded in practical experience.

Findings of the current study show that Latin@ parents were not as involved in the nomination process as much as other ethnic groups. However, the literature suggests parents have an essential role in the lives of their gifted Latin@ children. Therefore, school districts should intentionally reach out to parents to make sure they are part of the nomination and decision-making process prior to entering gifted programs. Schools can be more proactive in

inviting parents to listening sessions and informational meetings where parents have the opportunity to learn about giftedness and their gifted children. Given the essential role that parents have in the lives of gifted Latin@ children, parents are the most important advocates for their children at school and in the community. They too could provide relevant information about their children's' abilities, gifted and talents perhaps not seen by their teachers. If parents have questions regarding gifted identification or testing procedures, contacting the gifted testing facilitator or school administration can provide parents with clarity and understanding. Parents can and should have a voice in school decisions, influence the school curriculum, and offer input on culturally responsive materials and instruction by joining the school leadership teams.

Second, school districts should strive to meet the needs of all learners on both sides of the learning curb by creating programs and services to meet the needs of CLED gifted students. The current research found that despite an increase in the identification and nomination of Latin@ students for gifted programs, teachers found themselves ill-prepared to meet the needs of these students. This, in addition to not having access to adequate resources and interventions at the school level to provide what gifted students need to develop their full potential. The author recommends that school districts allocate human and financial resources directed towards teachers' training, hiring experts in the field to mentor, plan, and execute a rigorous curriculum for students whose needs are not being met in the regular classroom.

School districts have to fulfill their obligation to meet the needs of all learners. The later implies not just providing schools with the resources they need to provide gifted services, but also preparing and training teachers in the use of culturally relevant teaching practices and promoting in schools the urgency to establish a culture of excellence where teachers move from remediation to talent development. Finding from this research shows that schools with a culture

of making gifted referrals may result in increasing the number of students in gifted programs. This could explain why all of the schools that participated in the TOPS program had higher than average gifted referrals.

Recommendations for Future Research

Much of the research concerning the underrepresentation of potentially gifted Latin@ students has been done from the peripherals rather than focusing on the experiences of teachers working and interacting with minority students. This study sought to provide teachers with an opportunity to tell their counternarrative stories, which adds their contributions to the field of gifted education. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations for future research.

First, due to the limitation of the teacher sample, gender and ethnicity, other studies could look whether or not teachers who share the same ethnicity with students perceive gifted students in the same way as teachers who do not share the same race as the students. For example, Mary, a Latin@ participant had a conception of giftedness that was more culturally sensitive than the rest of the participants. Scholars have explicitly alluded to the idea that teacher and student race correlation influences teachers' perceptions (Ford, 2010; Ladson Billings, 1994). However, few studies have been conducted in large urban school districts to prove or disprove this claim. Because 54% of the students in the district are African American, further research needs to look at this reality. Looking at this is extremely important because African Americans are 57% less likely to be nominated by teachers for gifted programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Anguino, 2003; Geske, 2016; Ford, 1998).

Second, data from teachers' interviews shows that teachers' definitions of giftedness (narrow and subjective) did not necessarily match their description of giftedness when talking

about gifted students. Consequently, future research could look at teachers' practices and interactions with potentially gifted minority students as they occur in the classroom to understand how teaching practices affect nomination.

Third, future research also could look at the way parents of gifted Latin@ students empower their children as well as their involvement in schools. This research found that Latin@ parents were not part of the nomination process. Yet, research shows that parents' nomination increases the probability of students being nominated and identified as needing gifted services. Perhaps finding more about why this occurs could help to increase Latin@ parent nominations of their children for gifted programs.

Fourth, finally, new literature on the topic of twice-exceptional learners or students with special educational needs and gifted has emerged in recent years (Winebrenner, 2003; Nielsen & Higgins, 2005; Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Wang & Neihart, 2015). Nonetheless, there is limited research on twice-exceptional bilingual students or students with gifted potential who have a learning disability. Future research can look at effective ways that could be implemented to increase the identification of twice-exceptional learners to meet their socioemotional and cognitive needs.

Limitations

There were certain limitations to this study including a small sample size, which limits the researcher from generalizing about how teachers' perceptions affect the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Considering this study took place in a large Midwestern urban school district (approximately 75,000 students) information from teachers' interviews does not represent the views of the general population of teachers. The research is also limited because it targeted participants from four elementary schools in which a high percentage of the

students were Latin@. As a result, this sample does not reflect the student body of the district in which 54 % of the students are African American, 27 % Latin@, 11 % White, 7 % Asian, and 1% other races.

Furthermore, there may be limitations due to a lack of diversity of the researchers participating in this study. For example, only one of the teachers was Latin@ while the remaining seven participants were white. In addition, only one of the participants was male. Thus, the sample of teachers participating in this study was not an ethnically representative of the teaching population.

Finally, as with other qualitative studies, results are limited in scope to the district that was studied. More can be done to look at how teacher perceptions correspond to the number of and inclusivity of gifted referrals.

The researcher did not intend to generalize results to other school districts or settings but can be used as a case to consider when reflecting on practices on other settings. The results of this case study are intended to shed light on the needs of the district studied and provide information useful for improving methods of gifted identification for the specific subpopulation of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

Concluding Remarks

Dewey's pedagogic creed is that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform to build a true democracy (Dewey, 1916). However, the fact that schools contribute to the current social inequality by failing to address the underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs is troublesome. The existence of unequal access to opportunities to learn, especially for minority students, in both regular and gifted programs, is a reality that runs contrary to the idea of attaining progress, social reform, and equality. Thus, fostering equality

and equal access to high-end learning opportunities that all students have the opportunity to fully develop their true potential.

In the field of gifted education, more work needs to be done to make sure that Latin@ students have the opportunity to enter these programs, which traditionally have remained as white spaces. The under-identification and under-nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students reflect the existence of teacher's bias and the inequities that remain within educational systems. The issue of underrepresentation is very complex. Yet, research shows that teachers' perceptions and biases serve as gatekeepers, placing potentially gifted Latin@ students at risk of being overlooked and marginalized. In addition, minority parents have to be seen as more than bystanders to their children's education. Parents need to be treated as experts on their children, which includes ensuring that their voices are valued when making decisions.

Critical Theory is based on the following premise, which helps us to place the issue of underrepresentation as part of a social context. That is, schools are one of the core spaces where some are privileged and others are marginalized, race and racism permeates all aspects of social life, and race-based ideology is embedded throughout society (Patel, 2011; Ortiz & Jayshree, 2010; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Thus, Critical Theory brings to the surface implicit or explicit teachers' bias and the role they play in the identification process of potentially gifted Latin@ students. Critical Theory also serves to challenges traditional deficiency models of Latin@ students by rejecting social and school norms that do not take into account the cultural capital students bring to the classroom (Yosso, 2005).

Finally, giftedness is multifaceted, as are the solutions to increasing access. Giftedness also transcends race and socioeconomic status and it is manifested in multiple forms. Gifted learners, once given the opportunity, exhibit high-performance capacity in intellectual, creative,

and/or artistic areas, and leadership capacities, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services not typically provided by schools. Furthermore, outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Consequently, it is of extreme urgency that teachers, parents, and school districts work together to guarantee that potentially gifted Latin@ students also have equal access to receive gifted services.

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APPENDICES

Research Volunteers Needed

Who: Bilingual teachers
What: participate in one 45 minutes interview, sharing your perspectives on giftedness and one 60 minutes focus groups.
Why: to best understand teacher's perceptions of giftedness.
Contact German Diaz for more information:
Phone: (414) 3646760   Email: gadiaz@uwm.edu

Interview Consent Form

January 2019

Teacher's Perceptions of Giftedness

Informed Consent Form

Dear teachers,

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by *German Diaz* a current doctoral student from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). You will be asked about your perception of giftedness as well as your perceptions of gifted Latin@ students. Please review this form carefully, taking as much time as needed.

This study will take approximately 3 hours of your time. As part of this research, you will be asked to do the following:

- First, to be open to one 45-minute interviews: one at beginning of the study. The purpose of this interview is to collect data on teachers' perception of giftedness of Latin@ students. Consequently, this interview will focus on your own perceptions of giftedness, and your personal and professional experiences with gifted or potentially gifted Latin@ students.
- Second, to participate in one 60 minutes focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to make sense of qualitative data collected after interviews. The goals are to gain input by obtaining feedback on primarily data contributing to the data analysis.

Your decision to participate or to decline to participate in this study is completely voluntary. At any time, you may stop participating in this study. The decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from this study will not affect you at any time.

There are no anticipated risks for your participation in this research study. The following are benefits or advantages that may occur with participation: share your personal expertise in education, feel proud to contribute to research about the issue of underrepresentation of Latin@ students in gifted programs, and finally, to advance theory in the field of gifted education. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact **German Diaz, Principal Investigator, at (414) 3646760 or (414) 902-9329 or gadiaz@uwm.edu.** If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at (414) 229-3182 or irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Statement of Consent

This consent certifies that I have read the informed consent document. I understand the document, my questions have been answered, and I agree to participate. I will be given a copy of this document for my records.

_____   _____

Teacher's signature   Teacher's name

_____

Date

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of knowledge, he or she understands the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and potential risks of participation.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide Protocol

Pseudonym _____ **Interview Date** _____
Time _____

Introduction of research initiative
You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about teaching, learning, and perceptions of giftedness in a bilingual school. This research project as a whole focus on finding about teachers' perceptions of giftedness. This study does not aim to evaluate your teaching. Rather, the primary goal is to learn more about teachers' perceptions of giftedness to best understand the decision-making process for the referral of students for gifted programs through the sharing of narratives.

Interviewee (overall information)

How long have you been a teacher? _____
_____ Gender
_____ Number of years in your current position?
_____ Number of years at current institution?
Interesting background information on interviewee:

What is your highest degree? _____

What is the grade you teach? _____

APPENDIX D

Questions

Research Questions guiding the study
5. How do teachers define giftedness?
6. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education programs?
7. How do teachers' perception of giftedness influence nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students? Do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs?
8. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?

Pertinent Interview Questions
Building rapport and background information
1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, where you grew up, (your upbringing, education, etc.)
2. Share some of your school experiences growing up
3. What motivated you to become a teacher?
4. Tell me about some of the classes or training you have received on gifted education

Descriptive questions: (perceptions, beliefs, Teacher's perception of giftedness and gifted education)
1. What does gifted education and giftedness mean to you?
2. What experiences have you had in the nomination and identification process of Latin@ gifted students, such as the process and criteria to nominate a student?
3. What kinds of teacher related measures do you currently use to determine if a child is gifted?
4. Tell me about how you decide to nominate a student for gifted services? What are your thoughts on this process?
5. What kinds of artifacts or evidence do you collect from students you consider gifted?
6. Tell me about your last three or four students that you referred to the gifted program.
7. How do you promote talent development in students who have high potential so they can shoe their true potential?
8. What kinds of teacher-related measures (criteria) do you use?
9. What do you think are some of the talents Latin@ students bring from home?
10. What behaviors would you see in gifted students?
11. Tell me a story of a Latin@ student you consider and identified/nominated as gifted? Include details or stories that exemplify these traits.
12. How do you think your participation in the identification and nomination program affect Latin@ students who are nominated for gifted services?
13. How do you think your participation in the U-STARS program influences Latin@ students to be nominated in gifted services?

Closing questions: teacher's recommendations and aspirations
1. What are your hopes for your gifted students?
2. What are your hopes for the gifted program at your school?
3. What recommendations could you provide for other teachers in referring Latin@ students to gifted programs?

4. Do you feel you refer Latinx students about as often as students from other racial and ethnic groups?
5. Are there any issues

Post Interview Comments and/or
Observations:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Welcome to this focus group. Focus groups are a popular form of qualitative data collection may be defined as a particular form of group interview intended to exploit group dynamics. The purpose of this focus group is to participate in the <u>making sense of data</u> collected after conducting several interviews regarding teachers' perceptions of giftedness. The duration of this group will be 60 minutes and it is divided into four main sections: introduction, presentation of qualitative data from interviews, feedback, and summary and conclusions.

Hand out and signing of consent form.

I. Introductions (Each research participant will take a minute to introduce themselves)

Guidelines

* If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to leave or to pass on any question. There is no consequence for leaving. Being here is voluntary.

* Everyone's ideas will be respected. Please allow sometime to process information before responding to other peoples' ideas.

* One person talks at a time.

* It's okay to take a break if needed or to help yourself to food or drink (if provided).

* Everyone has the right to talk. The facilitator may ask someone who is talking a lot to step back and give others a chance to talk and may ask a person who isn't talking if he or she has anything to share.

Review of main goals for this focus group

The goals for this focus group are as follow

- Present interviews' data on the topic of teachers' perceptions
- Discuss findings through a process of collaborative discussion
- Offer feedback and gain knowledge
- Summarize key ideas.

II. Presentation of data from interviews

Overview of the project. This qualitative study seeks to understand teachers' perceptions of giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students and its effects on the nomination process for gifted services. The following questions will guide the study:

1. How do teachers define giftedness?

2. How do teachers make decisions about which students to nominate for gifted education

    programs?

3. How do teachers' perception of giftedness influence nomination of potentially gifted

    Latin@ students? Do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing

    students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs?

4. How do teachers come to their understanding of giftedness?

Presentations of qualitative data
- Review of data collection of techniques
- Presentation of major themes

III. Questions guiding the discussion (feedback)
- What is your reaction on the preliminary data of the study?
- Which aspects of the findings do you like to comment on?
- Are there any preliminary findings that you would to have a more in-depth explanation?
- Which preliminary findings do you want to challenge or don't agreed with?

IV. Summary and conclusions

Consent Form: Focus Group

The purpose of this focus group is to present preliminary data from interviews of the current research for the purpose of sense-making, on the theme of teachers' perceptions of giftedness of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

The Department of Education at the University of Milwaukee Wisconsin (UWM) is conducting a qualitative study guided by German Diaz. You are invited to participate. The purpose of the study is to examine teachers' perspectives of giftedness. Specifically, we want to understand how teachers' perception of giftedness influence nomination of Latin@ students for gifted programs.
Procedures:
If you participate in this study, you will be in a group of approximately 8 participants. There will be a facilitator who will ask questions and facilitate the discussion and to write down the ideas expressed within the group. If you volunteer to participate in this focus group, you will be asked some questions asking for your input regarding preliminary findings on data collected through the use of interviews.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

Benefits and Risks:
- Your participation may benefit you and other colleagues to best understand the topic of giftedness as well as the issue of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. No risk greater than those experienced in ordinary conversation are anticipated.
- Everyone will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. All participants will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion, but it is important to understand that other people in the group with you may not keep all information private and confidential.
- I agree to participate in the (name of focus group) carried out by German Diaz of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, to aid with the research of Teachers' perception of giftedness.
- I have read the information sheet related to this project and understand the goals of the project.
- I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the focus group.
- I am fully aware that I will remain anonymous throughout data reported and that I have the right to leave the focus group at any point.
-

Confidentiality:

Anonymous data from this study will be analyzed by the primary researcher: German Diaz. No individual participant will be identified or linked to the results. Study records, including this consent from signed by you, may be inspected by the administrators. The final results of this study will be presented to my defense committee. However, your identity will not be disclosed. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly **confidential.** All materials will be stored in a secure location within the department of Education at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM) and access to files will be restricted to the main researcher conducting the study.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this focus group.

Participant's signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

Email to Research Participants for a Focus Group

Dear Research Participants,

First of all, I wanted to say thanks, for participating in this research. Your stories helped me to better understand how teachers perceive potentially gifted Latin@ students. All data has been coded, transcribed and analyzed.

The purpose of this email is to invite you to participate in a one-hour focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to share with all of you my preliminary findings, so you have the opportunity to respond to the topics and themes that I found. This is supposed to be a dialogue and a conversation. There will be a couple of questions for us to facilitate the conversation.

Please choose one: I am proposing two days next week. Monday 16 and Wednesday 18th. at 4:00 pm at Allen field school.

As mentioned before, your participation is voluntary. However, your participation is extremely important and appreciated. Your feedback will make sure that your voice and stories are as accurate as possible.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX H

Member-Checking Focus Group Comments

	Theme 1: How do teachers define giftedness?	
Research participants did not share the same definition of giftedness. This was found problematic, especially considering that definitions of giftedness, influence teachers' decision making about what students they should nominate and what services gifted students should receive.		
Name	**Comments**	**Action taken**
Mary	I agree with this. "It seems to me the participants define GT in the same way as the federal definition. Teacher defined giftedness as how we identified giftedness, rather than what giftedness is."	No action needed to change research results
Laura	True, teachers do have different definitions of giftedness. However, giftedness can be found in many areas. "I wonder which definition we should use."	No action needed
Cindy	"I am not fully surprised. People have different views of giftedness." "Definitions of giftedness have changed over time as not only academic but in other areas as well." "All children need to be looked at for gifted potential."	No action needed
Blanca	In my opinion, "findings are consistent with current research on gifted education and vague policies. Ambiguity can be beneficial to the identification of minority students, but it may exclude non-majority (middle, upper white), students.	No action needed
	Theme 2: **Teachers' Perceptions of Latin@ Gifted Students** Teachers' perceptions of Latin@ gifted students varied. Although most research participants reported being bias-free, data shows the existence of cultural and ethnic misconceptions (bias) about Latin@ students and their families. These included: personal implicit bias about culture and race, bias about behaviors that gifted Latin@ students should display, and cultural bias about the heterogeneity of the Latin@ community. The research also found that teachers' exposure to rich-multicultural experiences and training helped them to overcome their bias.	

Name	Comments	Action taken
Mary	I am glad teachers are overcoming bias through professional development. However, I am concerned that they are only using academic achievement to determine giftedness.	No action needed
Laura	Biases are the result of our own personal experiences. Training does help to overcome bias. However, not everybody receives that training.	No action needed
Cindy	"Be careful not to look at Latinos as one homogeneous group. Teachers must keep in mind that Latin@ students' backgrounds vary significantly. This includes their socioeconomic background, language, and cultural experiences."	No action needed
Blanca	"Findings are consistent with typical biases when working with people of other cultures."	No action needed

Theme 3: Using TOPS had a positive effect on increasing identification of Latin@ students

Using non-normative assessments such as TOPS, helped teachers to expand their conceptions of giftedness, gifted behaviors, and gifted traits, resulting in being able to increase the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.

Name	Comments	Action taken
Mary	"I am not surprised to find that TOPS had a positive effect on expanding teachers' conceptions of giftedness. I believe it is important the distinction between gifted traits versus students' behaviors as indicators of giftedness".	No action needed
Laura	This is great. Giftedness is more than academics. But, finding their true talents can take time to get to know students' strengths to pull those other skills.	No action needed
Cindy	"I believe that teachers must look at student's potential using alternatives forms	No action needed

	other than IQ tests to assess their true potential."	
Blanca	"TOPS broadened the perspective of what to look for when trying to identify giftedness in minority students. TOPS training helped to debunk some notions about negative students' behaviors which could be manifestations of gifted potential."	No action needed

Theme 4: Parents were not included in the nomination process

The researcher also found that parents of potentially gifted Latin@ students were not part of the process of nomination, which gives teachers all the power to either nominate or not students. The researcher found that cultural bias about parents' education and cultural norms served as the main explanation of why this happened. Teachers thought that parents trusted them whether or not to nominate their children for gifted programs.

Name	Comments	Action taken
Mary	Latin@ parents have parental models that differ from the norm. Yet, it is true that cultural norms of Latin@ parents, as well as social barriers such as language and lack of navigational capital, impede parents from fully participating in all aspects of their children's education."	No action needed
Laura	"Pandora's box" ... teachers don't talk to this to all parents and I don't think ALL parents recommend their children for gifted services either.	Soak clarification from this participant about the metaphor "Pandora's box"
Cindy	"I think it is hard, especially for Latin@ Immigrant parents to navigate the educational system to seek other educational opportunities for their children." "Some parents could feel intimidated considering current political and social issues, especially considering the fact that many Latin@ parents are probably undocumented."	No action needed
Blanca	"School remains very closed spaces where parents might be welcomed. But they don't have the navigational capital needed to	No action needed

	advocate for high-end learning opportunities for their children."	

Theme 5: Identified, but Neglected

The researcher found that despite an increase in the nomination of Latin@ students, most schools and teachers did not have the resources or access to adequate programs and interventions to meet these students' cognitive and socioemotional needs.

Name	Comments	Action taken
Mary	I think that the district is trying really hard to have more services accessible to gifted Latin@ children. Yet, at the elementary level, there are fewer opportunities for children to fully develop their gifts talents. In addition, if parents want to pursue access to services for gifted students, they have to either change schools or drive their children across town."	No action needed
Laura	Definitely, a lack of training adds to the fact that gifted Latin@ students' needs are not being met in the regular classroom.	No action needed
Cindy	"What is the model of gifted education? I believe there is not a unique model of gifted education able to meet the needs of gifted learners, especially bilingual gifted Latin@ students.	No action needed
Blanca	"As mentioned before, creating programs and providing services for identified gifted Latin@ students is not always the priority due to lack of resources and trained teachers."	No action needed

APPENDIX I

Theme One-Thematic Summary of Subthemes

Theme 1.1 Teachers' Definition of Giftedness
Distinctions and Similarities among Participants

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"It is something else. It's kind of an unknown. Like The X Factor right? Or who can be your X factor in the sports game. It's just something that you have. It's not necessarily definable because I think it's definitely subjective and it's individualized most definitely."	Basic	5	Subjective and Vague. Not accurate.
Briana	"I think that the word gifted that someone has an ability above and beyond the normal range should be. Gifted education will me something more specific to maybe intellectual or learning capabilities."	Minimum	12	Narrow definition. Giftedness is rare, above the norm. The norm being determine.
Blanca	"Giftedness just means a persons' natural ability or strength in an area or in a couple areas."	Intermediate	20	Traditional definition. "Natural ability" so you either have or not.
Patricia	"An extraordinary ability that students have in a certain area or another or even possibly more than one area that is above and beyond what you would expect from the normal student of that age group. It is some…. It is an ability that they show that either that they're very quick at learning, that they pick up things very quickly, that very special interest in certain things, that they could be a very good leader."	Intermediate	15	Holistic Very accurate; as giftedness can be manifested in academic and non-academic areas.
Cindy	"Giftedness is used too often. I think it's rare. True giftedness is rare.	Basic	22	Narrow and Exclusionary

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	Giftedness is when someone stands out, far beyond others. I mean it's not just the bright kid."			
Laura	"The concept of giftedness is in a way a personal interpretation… You don't necessarily see it unless you get to know each student to see them on a deeper level you know and be able to re-examine your own view of what giftedness is."	Basic	6	Subjective and vague.
**Mary	"Giftedness is a label, used for a subgroup of students that many people debate whether it's the top 5% the top 10 population. It means having the cognitive ability to process information at a faster rate compared to your average ability students."	Advanced	12	Traditional - Academically oriented.
Elizabeth	"Giftedness I think it's been considered for a long time task force, and I think that's one of the easiest ways to identify because you have these cut scores and you either make it or you don't. Giftedness is more than being good. In 20 years of teaching I can count on one hand how many kids have been accelerated."	Basic	20	Traditional

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- Basic training levels along with less years of experience seem to result in teachers (Laura & Peter) having vague and/or narrow conceptions of giftedness.
- Intermediate and advanced levels of training seemed to result in a more traditional or academically oriented definition.
- None of the definition of giftedness shared by participants was culturally inclusive or locally normed. Even when a participant (Mary) had an accurate definition of giftedness it was strictly academically oriented.
- Most participants defined giftedness in term of being rare, elusive, and an extraordinary ability.

Theme 1.2 Teachers as Advocates for Expanding Methods, if not Definitions

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when Identifying Gifted Potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"First of all, you have to look at just how they carry themselves in the classroom. I look at personality. Verbally physically, just kind of like their personality more or less. Then, I also go on to their habits, their traits such as: are they a hard worker, are they motivated, do they like to be challenged, are they leaders, are they defiant. There's a whole checklist in TOPS."	Basic	5	Emphasis on gifted traits. Gifted pleasing and non-pleasing teacher behaviors.
Briana	"If I were to look for a gifted student in any area weather be looking at different scales. I would look at classroom-based assessment, I look at their work in any sort of projects that we do, how well they work in their team… Also, kids have a lot of skills so finding out what they're really good at and looking for some specific skills they don't show when taking a regular test…If it's somebody that's a really gifted artist that a second grade level can drawing design way better than me?"	Minimum	12	Use of traditional and non-traditional methods such as observations for gifted potential in academic and non-academic areas.
Blanca	"When using TOPS, you look at how often a behavior (a gifted behavior) happens in an area and then you track how often this happens in an area or areas that are outstanding… But then you can also use more anecdotal things such as when someone perseveres with difficult problems, because perseverance or that level of mental challenge can be an indicator of giftedness. So, in sum you look at a lot of different factors about the kid, instead of a cut score at the 99th percentile, which has been the traditional criteria for students to be considered gifted, or an IQ of 140."	Intermediate	20	More emphasis on observations and students' traits in academic and non-academic areas.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
Patricia	"I keep portfolios for all of my students, but specifically for students with high potential or gifted…I do have a lot of checklists and classroom observations and things, notes that I write to myself about what I've seen in a certain child or another. I do look at the Start 360 scores and CogAT."	Intermediate	15	Use of observations, check list and traditional methods (standardized test, universal screeners).
Cindy	"I certainly use the test that we have. I differentiate assessments for higher-level Learners. I would have them do things right more things or do a presentation that other peers are not able to do yet. I'll be honest though expertise and teacher observation is important."	Basic	22	Use of both traditional methods and observations. Teacher pleasing behaviors.
Laura	"Like my students that were above the 95 % in reading and/or math. I've used START data and then, internal assessments as well. I used to think they had to be really advanced in academic in all academic areas or that they had to be on a different curriculum… a lot of {my evidence} it's been anecdotal I mean some of it is their work, like work samples."	Basic	6	A combination of both traditional and non-traditional assessments (anecdotes, and observations).
**Mary	"It depends in which area they are advanced in. It could be in a writing sample. It could be an experiments that they did. It could be a science fair project Art, a classroom, diagnostic, district assessments test. I look at the whole child but like on my conversations from the behaviors that I saw in the classroom, their maturity level or not, their cognitive abilities. A gifted student within a specific domain will be very curious and often have a lot of information in a topic. " "I use observations too, because a test doesn't tell you everything. I do use work samples because often kids were gifted writers it doesn't show up on a test. You can't test for that."	Advanced	12	Use of traditional and non-traditional assessments. Emphasis on academic abilities. Teacher pleasing behaviors.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
Elizabeth	"I know that there are things that kids are good at and kids are not as good at yet. But to me a lot says about how hard a kid is willing to work."	Basic	20	Not very specific

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- All teachers relied on using traditional assessment tools and non-traditional forms of assessments to identify Potentially Gifted Learners. This included student's portfolios, anecdotal notes, inventories, and observations.
- Most teachers included descriptors from the TOPS inventory tool.
- Observations of students' behaviors were seen as good indicators of students' potential.
- While most participants expressed traditional and narrow conceptions of giftedness, their practices reflect a wider and more cohesive way to understand giftedness.
- Several participants emphasized teacher pleasing behaviors. These included 2 with minimum and basic training (Cindy and Peter) and 1 with advanced training (Mary). One participant with basic training had an ambiguous approach (Elizabeth).

Theme 1.3. Perceptions and Manifestations of Giftedness are Influenced by Cultural and Social Norms. Yet, teachers' Definitions of Giftedness did not Recognize this.

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when Identifying Gifted Potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	Giftedness is kind of an unknown. Like the X Factor right? It's not necessarily definable because I think it's definitely subjective." I think they are in different ways bringing culture, their own culture."	Basic	5	Acknowledgement of cultural differences (at a superficial level), yet this is not reflected in their conception of giftedness.
Briana	"I think that one of the things that Latino/a students bring, and this is from my perspective, is that they bring Beauty. They also bring their culture and a lot of different cultures. They have a high regard for teachers and education. It is huge and I think it has to do with culture."	Minimum	12	Superficial understanding of culture. This is not reflected in her conception of giftedness.
Blanca	"I think that one of the things that Latin@/a students bring... from my perspective, when I started working is that they bring beauty. They also bring their culture and a lot of different cultures. Because Latin@/a, could refer to a wide range of cultures and traditions. And then with that comes language. Those are the things that I have seen since I first started teaching."	Intermediate	20	Recognizes cultural heterogeneity and her definition of giftedness does reflect that.
Patricia	"They [Latin@ students] have a little bit more of a worldly perspective, even if they have not been in many places. I just think that they have a better understanding of different groups… I also think it's really important for them to be bilingual."	Intermediate	15	Recognizes linguistic aspects of Latin@ students.
Cindy	"When I look at children I don't look at them as Latino or what not.	Basic	22	Negation of culture and

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	I try not to let the children's culture or color or gender to get in the way. I mean I think as Americans as a Melting Pot."			cultural group distinctions. Assimilation view.
Laura	"As far as language, it is an asset. They have at least two languages that they're bringing from home… So yeah, it definitely language, culture their family's culture."	Basic	6	Recognizes linguistic aspects of students.
**Mary	"Not all gifted students look the same, act the same or are gifted in the same areas. I think Latino students are unique because their parents tend to encourage education for a better future. Also, many Latino students are entering school as simultaneous bilinguals. So they come in with two languages. This language acquisition is unique because cognitively they already come in with an advantage compared to their monolingual peers."	Advanced	12	Heterogeneous conception of students' diversity. This is reflected in her definition of giftedness.
Elizabeth	"One of the things that struck me was that these kids were going to be so cute and wonderful, but by second grade, I had this experienced where the majority of the minority groups eclipsed the diversity that exists within the Latin@ community."	Basic	20	Simplistic understanding of cultural diversity of students.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions

- When comparing the participants' definitions of giftedness, the researcher found that such definitions did not take into an account the fact that manifestations of giftedness are influenced by cultural and social norms.
- Only Mary, a Latin@ teachers explicitly spoke of giftedness in a way that was consistent with her perceptions of Latin@ students. This perhaps due to her own background.
- Overall, linguistic and cultural characteristics of Latin@ students were seen as assets. Yet, this characteristics were not seen as factors that influenced (or prevented) manifestations of giftedness in CLD students.

APPENDIX J

Theme Two - Thematic Summary of Subthemes

Theme 2.1 & 2.2 Teachers' Perceptions, Bias, Misconceptions, and Homogeneity
Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"I want to avoid being stereotypical, but there's like a little more *Sabor* (flavor). I think defiance is a big one (gifted behavior which results in students being bored). I think that we often overlook this one. I currently have a student that is a constant struggle, but I think it is more of his mind wandering and a lack of challenging [tasks] because he finds school boring. I see either a student who is bored and defiant or they are in tune because they not challenged. If we are talking about academically gifted, I see that these students produce high-quality work. This includes the arts and gym, but we currently don't have any of these specials, so it is hard because students don't have the opportunity."	Basic	5	A stereotypical view of Latin@ students. Perceptions of students as having potential. Yet not being challenged enough.
Briana	"When I was growing up in school, I was taught a lot about equality and diversity, but living in a mainly white suburb it's not something I really saw. I had a lot of good ideas about diversity, but it wasn't something you really saw. I had a few Asian students and some Indian students in my schools, and there was only one African American and my whole High School."	Minimum	12	Teachers' perceptions or bias of students are shaped by being immerse in the culture of the students.
Blanca	"In my experience, every dancer that struggles in math can do geometry. These advanced students are usually the leaders in the class and sometimes they even challenge the teacher. Now, in the traditional setting, these behaviors might be seen as students with behavior problems. They are the discipline problems [students], it's because you're bored and so once you can engage their	Intermediate	20	Perceptions of high ability are likely to be seen in students who have teacher pleasing and non-pleasing behaviors.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	brains and something that really engages them, they will show their full potential."			
Patricia	"Now, in the meanwhile they bring their own culture and at the same time trying to understand and trying to learn about the culture here in the United States, and how they can kind of mold those two together to become who they want to be."	Intermediate	15	Recognizes students process of acculturation.
Cindy	"Hispanic children are not from the same place. So, they bring their own culture and a lot of the same things all children bring… I think that the bilingual aspect is one thing that students bring as part of their culture."	Basic	22	Negation of cultural uniqueness. Language is seen as an asset students bring with them.
Laura	"When I first started teaching, I had a lot of trouble with Puerto Rican boys due to their behaviors, but then, I had to question within myself, why? Why I, a White native teacher am I getting into so many issues with Puerto Rican boys typically dark-skinned Puerto Rican boys?"	Basic	6	Admits having bias against students based on gender and skin color at the beginning of their teaching practice.
**Mary	"I think Latino students are unique because their parents tend to encourage education for a better future. Also, many Latino students are entering school as simultaneous bilinguals. So they come in with two languages. This language acquisition is unique because cognitively they already come in with an advantage compared to their monolingual peers."	Advanced	12	Teacher is aware of students' cultural assets and linguistic talents.
Elizabeth	"I had the perception that all Latin@ speakers or the Latin@ community were more uniform and less diverse than what I know now. I had no idea that I had the perception coming into teaching like will there they're all Spanish speakers, of course, they're all going to get along and	Basic	20	Being immerse in the culture of the students helped her to re-examine her own bias

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	everything was going to be great. Like "you all speak the same language" right? So that was an eye-opener for me."			about Latin@ students.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- Teachers' perceptions and bias are manifested in the way's teachers perceived their students' abilities, preferred behaviors, cultural traits, and assumptions.
- One teacher (Laura), explicitly spoke as having bias against black Latin@ male students.
- Elizabeth, Laura, and Cindy indicated that working with Latin@ students helped them to re-examine their bias or cultural assumptions.
- One teacher (Cindy) thought of Latin@ students as being part of the "Melted Pot". Thus, admitting being culturally blind.
- Overall, teachers recognized language as cultural asset. This did not appear to be related to length of time in TOPS training.

Theme 2.3 Giftedness Goes Beyond Academic Areas

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"In order to identify potentially gifted Latin@ students I could no longer rely just on standardized scores… my art student is clearly gifted. She should be in an art school, and I wish she could go to one...I just personally think that these students don't belong in the regular classroom."	Basic	5	Giftedness exists beyond academics.
Briana	"I would assume other teachers are going to pick their well-behaved students that help other student, students that cooperate, and students that don't get upset easily when something doesn't go that way, maybe someone with a more mature attitude. However, I think there can be many different behaviors. For example, I had a student who was autistic. This student was completely different. There were a lot of behaviors, awkwardness, but that kid was genius… kids have a lot of skills so finding out what they're really good at and looking for some specific skills they don't show when taking a regular test."	Minimum	12	Giftedness is found in many areas and could be displayed in various ways even among students with learning disabilities.
Blanca	"Also, kids have a lot of skills so finding out what they're really good at and looking for some specific skills they don't show when taking a regular test. . If (a child) is artistically gifted in an artistic area, then you see that as a talent. The kids that are (artistically gifted) you know, choose always to illustrate something or to create something, or to dance and sing or play their instruments. Now, this is not measurable when taking a test, you can only see it, you observe it, if you are looking for it. If you don't look for it, you won't see it."	Intermediate	20	Standardized tests do not always identify gifted potential in nonacademic areas such as the arts.

Patricia	"I've seen a lot of creativity as I mentioned before. Another characteristic is being a problem solving, just learning how to solve problems in a different way or making kind of make it up to their own way to do it. I've seen a lot of leadership and sometimes that shows itself in positive ways and sometimes not so positive ways…a single test cannot be used to measure their full capability."	Intermediate	15	Creativity, problem solving, leadership, and both positive and non-positive behaviors are indicators of giftedness.
Cindy	"I'll be honest though expertise and teacher observation is important. At [my school] we use TOPS…So looking at using the chart that's provided by TOPS went on looking for their areas of strength in order to capitalize on them."	Basic	22	Talents are found in students' areas of strength .
Laura	"I used to think they (students) had to be really advanced in all academic areas or that they had to be on a different curriculum which meant that they had to excel in reading and math."	Basic	6	Giftedness manifests itself not just in academic areas.
**Mary	"A gifted student within a specific domain will be very curious and often have a lot of information in a topic…For example, an artistically talented student may exhibit very creative solutions, ideas, or analysis to a problem. A mathematically gifted students tends to prefer a logical or structured way to present information."	Advanced	12	Giftedness traits are present in students who exceed in specific domains.
Elizabeth	"At the school level, I know there is the TOPs inventory done with students to identify gifted behaviors of potentially gifted students. I think that the way you do it is you keep tracking of so and so. For example, he or she has good leadership skills."	Basic	20	Gifted behaviors in leadership.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant   **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions

- All teachers advocated for the identification of giftedness in academic and non-academic areas such as the arts.
- Teachers' perceptions of students gifted traits, expanded from narrow to broad, but not their definitions.
- Overall, teachers demonstrated a progressive understanding of giftedness beyond academics when talking about gifted students' abilities. This, despite the fact that when

participants were asked directly about what giftedness was they gave a narrower and less robust definition.

Theme 2.4. Teachers Training Can Help Overcome Bias (Change in Mindset)
Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"I like that there were also other aspects than just academics. TOPS had a positive effect on helping me to see gifted behaviors in a different way."	Basic	5	Change in mindset.
Briana	"I feel as if though I am just scratching the surface of gifted education and how to work with gifted students."	Minimum	12	Training on GT opened teachers' perspective.
Blanca	"I recommend teachers receive training on gifted students, particularly on introduction to giftedness, differentiation, best teaching practices, social-emotional development of gifted students."	Intermediate	20	Meeting the needs of gifted students goes beyond academic rigor.
Patricia	"I really have learned a lot…I understand that there are so many different areas that a kid could be gifted or show talented abilities. So, it has really opened my eyes to look not just at the academics. To look more at the whole child and see what sort of things are sticking out as a strength…The use of the TOPS helped me to be more open-minded about the topic of giftedness."	Intermediate	15	Change in mindset. More open minded to recognized gifted potential.
Cindy	"I do think that my participation in the GT training made me a more self-aware and better teacher, thinking about how I can help develop these abilities in children."	Basic	22	Training resulted in becoming a better teacher.
Laura	"Training on gifted education made me more aware of how gifted students need specific services to meet their needs."	Basic	6	Training develops awareness of GT students' unique needs.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
**Mary	"GT education is essential to know what you are doing. That is what makes me able to see the traits and characteristics of gifted students. Gifted Education is more specialized with a lot of more in-depth research-based instructional strategies that have worked."	Advanced	12	GT training is fundamental to meet the needs of GT students.
Elizabeth	"I would say my training in gifted education has been basic. As an undergrad, the only thing I can remember is in our assessment class, we just talked about how to make sure that your assessments are varied. But, we didn't talk specifically about gifted kids. In my graduate with the reading and learning disabilities, we did talk a little bit about giftedness. Later while working here, I started the gifted program training, but they were offering through MPS, but didn't feel that the people who are leading the classes really knew a lot about Urban education."	Basic	20	Training in GT education was not part of her formal training. She felt traditional training in GT was not applicable to urban education.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions

- Not all participants had formal training in GT educations as part of their formal training.
- Most (seven participants) said there were benefits of enrolling in training in GT education. This helped them to expand their understanding of giftedness.
- One participant (Elizabeth) did not think training on GT was applicable to urban schools.
- Teachers who saw the benefit of training (n=7) felt their teaching practices and perceptions of potentially gifted students changed.

APPENDIX K

Theme Three - Thematic Summary of Subthemes

Theme 3.1 Training Using TOPS Had a Positive Effect on Increasing Identification of Latin@ Students

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"First of all, you have to look at just how they carry themselves in the classroom. I look at personality. Verbally physically, just kind of like their personality more or less. Then I also go on to their habits, their traits such as: are they a hard worker, are they motivated, do they like to be challenged, are they leaders, are they defiant. There's a whole checklist in the U-Starts that I used to follow. I basically went through that and yes, and no kind of, on each one of those areas and then you look at classwork."	Basic	5	Changed teachers' perspective.
Briana	N/A	Minimum	12	This teacher had minimum training using TOPS. She did not feel comfortable commenting on its usage.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
Blanca	"I feel like in schools like ours gifted and talented was kind of not a priority… most of the time it isn't a priority. So, I'm glad that we have changed that focus over the past few years and that we have been really intentionally nominating more students [using TOPS]. Sometimes for teachers, it's very obvious to identify students if gifted in one or more academic areas. However, that is not the case for students who have not been identified or who are gifted in non-academic areas. That is why I like the TOPS tool to look for other possible areas of giftedness."	Intermediate	20	Nomination using TOPS had been intentional at her school.
Patricia	"TOPS really opened my mind that there are so many other different areas of giftedness, such as areas of leadership, curiosity, and creativity. It really opened my mind towards those other areas as opposed to just the simple doing well in academics."	Intermediate	15	TOPS: A change in mindset. Expanded her views of giftedness to non-academic areas.
Cindy	"I mean, you just kind of knew how to identify in some ways a gifted child. True giftedness is rare". At I have done work to identify children in our classrooms and we certainly do have a higher population of Latino students. But, not all students are Latino. However, certainly many have been nominated throughout the years. So looking at using the chart that is provided by TOPS."	Basic	22	This participant did not directly comment in the use of TOPS. Nonetheless, she is aware that her school (Almond Elementary) has used TOPS effectively to increase nomination.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
Laura	"The use of the TOPS helped me to be more open-minded. I would recommend to [teachers] to use the TOPS tool at least to challenge their mind. If they don't identify students, at least to open their minds as to how to looks for students with different abilities, as opposed to just focus on academics."	Basic	6	Change in mindset. TOPS served to challenge traditional approaches to identify students' gifted potential.
**Mary	"Working in the bilingual program, I feel there's more of an opportunity to look at different aspects of Latin@ students, that perhaps other teachers would not look at. I personally use TOPS. I'm glad that we have it here at this school because we do get more of those Latin@ students that otherwise wouldn't be represented or nominated."	Advanced	12	TOPS help to increase the nomination of Latin@ students.
Elizabeth	"I know there is the TOPs inventory done with students to identify gifted behaviors of potentially gifted students. I think that the way you do it is you keep tracking of so and so. For example, he or she has good leadership skills and then, you just kind of keep a little bit of a tally, and anecdotal notes to so to support this kid is has gifted potential or not."	Basic	20	TOPS descriptors serve as indicators of gifted potential.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions
Note: The purpose of TOPS as described in its guidelines involves a shift in perspective when working with culturally, linguistically diverse and economically disadvantage children. This implies moving to an "at-potential" mindset rather than seeing these students from a deficit or "at risk" point of view (Coleman & Shah-Coltrane, 2010).
- Most (six participants) explicitly commented in the benefit of using TOPS in their schools.
- The benefits of using TOPS included, a change in mindset, an increase in the nominations of Latin@ students, and a wider perspective of giftedness.

- Two participants (Briana and Cindy), with minimum and basic training, did not explicitly comment on how TOPS influenced their identification and nomination practices. This despite being aware of the positive feedback offered by other teachers. Thus, training seems to be a factor an implementing TOPS.

Theme 3.2. Decision Making Criteria

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"First of all, you have to look at just how they carry themselves in the classroom. I look at personality. Verbally physically, just kind of like their personality more or less. Then I also go on to their habits, their traits such as: are they a hard worker, are they motivated, do they like to be challenged, are they leaders, are they defiant. There's a whole checklist in the U-Starts that I used to follow. I basically went through that and yes, and no kind of, on each one of those areas and then you look at classwork." "Just observations in General or any sort of other areas and I think that too is another ways to start identifying these kids."	Basic	5	Observations. Critique of the systems of identification. The process a very subjective. No school culture that promotes giftedness.
Briana	"If I were to look for a gifted student in any area weather be looking at different scales. I would look at classroom-based assessment, I look at their work in any sort of projects that we do, how well they work in their team, and then just observation, which is something you do every day. Also, kids have a lot of skills so finding out what they're really good at and looking for some specific skills they don't show when taking a regular test." "I like to do a lot of inquiry-based and experiments, any of those sorts of projects that that that aren't	Minimum	12	Various scales. Classroom assessments. Observations of students' interest . Inquiry based.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	necessarily paper-and-pencil smart, but that you could show great skills in other areas. They have excellent skills that at times a test does not show." "I don't think there is a behavior that I could say is the behavior of gifted child. I have who is super smart, but super quiet. And then, it had other gifted kids that are just the most social and can hold adult conversations, and can ask questions in can lead groups, and can make announcements so I don't know that there's a set behavior for a gifted student in general."			
Blanca	"I think that traditional methods miss out on a lot of kids, because the CogAT. Some years with the CogAT test we've had a lot of kids identified like seven or eight kids and then other years it's one. And it seems to favor Boys in our school over girls and I don't know why?" "Academically, we use Start 360 (Formal assessment). I use observations too, because a test doesn't tell you everything. I do use work samples because often kids were gifted writers it doesn't show up on a test. You can't test for that. It's just their ability is there, their interest is there, so you see their work samples to find their talent. If (a child) is artistically gifted in an artistic area, then you see that as a talent. Now, this is not measurable when taking a test, you can only see it, you observe it, if you are looking for it. If you don't look for it, you won't see it." E.g. So Jose [student} got to third grade they did their START TESTING in the fall and he was just	Intermediate	20	She critiques current district practices. Traditional assessments missed out a lot of Latin@ students. She also uses students' work samples. Parents were informed. The psychologist was involved The student was accelerated. Her school has a strong school culture that promotes identification "celebration."

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	chuting and Ladders. In addition the psychologist did the testing and we were good. We move him a whole grade level ahead			
Patricia	"I keep portfolios for all of my students, but specifically for students with high potential or gifted, I would say that I try to keep more of their projects that we do in the classroom…I write to myself about what I've seen in a certain child or another." "The first thing I usually do is a whole class observation to see what sort of abilities I'm seeing, what sort of talents I've seen from some of the kids. And that just helped me get a little bit better grasp with relation to certain areas. What I'm seeing from his children helps me focus my observation a little bit into those areas. After the whole class observation, I od the TOPS observation. Doing the latest help me really drill down and see what's going on with that child, and what certain areas they're showing some abilities. It shows me their strengths."	Intermediate	15	Focuses on students' behaviors. Collects students' work and write notes. It is part of the school culture.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
Cindy	"I certainly use the test that we have. I certainly differentiate assessments for higher-level Learners. I'll be honest though expertise and teacher observation is important. I mean that's what you're going to see first and going back to the gazelle example, you see it. And you know you see it because you've seen enough of the other thing and it is pretty amazing and that's why I think teacher observations, teacher's expertise and knowledge of what students should be able to do with their grade level and experience in the field. I think those really truly gifted kids they pop out. Almost anybody will not miss them, but then when do you work with them." "Over the years I have collected samples they have done. Keeping samples of their artwork. Keeping portfolios, writing samples, some math that shows their thinking not just memorizing facts. Thinks that show their high level thinking. These examples are also good to show parents."	Basic	22	Test and observations. Students work overtime.
Laura	"So, at the beginning of the year, after getting to know all the students, I do look at their test results are. I observe them over a period of a couple months. I also use that checklist and then I make my list depending on what I see, I collect work student work if it's applicable and then, that's when I would make my decision after a couple months." "So a lot of it is anecdotal just observing my students. some of it is their work, like work samples. Like my students that were above the 95 % in reading and/or math."	Basic	6	She follows district procedures. Her decision is informed by using various measures (standardized assessments, anecdotal notes, work samples). Students behaviors.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	[Students] like Oscar might display negative behaviors like being "bossy" but, he was really high in math on STAR. I also just observing him in math and saying his reasoning reading as well he was able to reason faster than other students.			
**Mary	"So after gathering a lot of data, including the things I just mentioned, then I feel more secure about who I am going to nominate. I look at the whole child. All of that together, I feel like oh okay, yeah, this could really stand out and maybe they need to receive some special services. And that is how I make the decision." "The formal nomination process which start in September for about two weeks. That's where it's more intentional, offering a lot of project-based and problem-based learning. Then I make a formal nomination followed by flagging these students on Infinite Campus, and purposefully plan. I do a lot of good projects and I purposefully plan for those students to be able to work together, but also working in other groups. Creating this homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Then, I will continue with this throughout the year. This is for academically gifted kids." "I rely on what the district and the state require. But, when they are referred for special end, schools traditionally request an IQ test. I use my own anecdotal notes, class observations, student levels of intrinsic motivation, opportunities to learn and apply special	Advanced	12	Data qualitative and quantitatively. Observations over time. Relies on what the district requires.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	skills/talents, conversations with students, etc."			
Elizabeth	"I collect for all the students and so writing samples, anecdotal notes, and those are the things that I used at a parent teacher conferences." "For example, he or she has good leadership skills and then, you just kind of keep a little bit of a tally, and anecdotal notes to so to support this kid is has gifted potential or not." "At the school level, I know there is the TOPs inventory done with students to identify gifted behaviors of potentially gifted students. I think that the way you do it is you keep tracking."	Basic	20	Partially the presence of a school culture that promotes giftedness. Collection of students' work, observations and anecdotal notes.

All participants are white females except the following *Male participant **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions

- All participants believed that in order make the right decision; it is something that needs time.
- All participants argued that students' observations are good predictors of students' abilities.
- Standardized assessments and observations are used to collect data of gifted potential in students.
- A strong school culture, that promotes giftedness had a positive effect on teachers increasing their willingness to identify and nurture students' talents.

APPENDIX L

Theme Four - Thematic Summary of Subthemes

Theme 4 Latin@ Parents were Not Included in the Nomination Process

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"I guess that Latin@ parents tend to trust the teacher's criteria and they appreciate that. I believe parents are respectful in part because I have a good relationship with parents. I really tried."	Basic	5	Parents trust teachers as effective decision makers.
Briana	"If the teacher does not play a key role in the nomination, who is going to do it? I don't think the parents are going to come and say "hey my kids really smart you know, do something for them" maybe some do. I think in my school I would be the first person to say, "This kids really got it going on."	Minimum	12	Paternalistic view of parents. The teacher believes she has to nominate not the parents.
Blanca	"Our parents are very involved here. Some parents come into the building and go to the Parent Center and they work in the Parent Center all day. A lot of them stay almost the entire day in the Parent Center. They will prep materials, they will create decorations, they have their PTO meetings they have education classes, but every day there are between 5 and 25 parents in the Parent Center. These parents want to be part of the school and their child's education and support the school. So, they know that once they leave here, they don't have that opportunity."	Intermediate	20	Parents perform managerial duties at schools, but they are not part of the decision making process.
Patricia	"I am not very sure other parents of other identified students do, or perhaps they don't exactly know how to nurture that [giftedness]. I think maybe as a whole, our school could do a little better having some meetings with the parents, explaining what it means for them, and how they can help nurture it at home. I	Intermediate	15	Teacher sees parents as being unable to meet the academic needs of their potentially

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	do think our school could do a little bit better of a job with that."			gifted children.
Cindy	"When you have a child that is exceptional in some areas, it is important for the parents to really understand that. Especially if we think about the different levels of education that our parents in this community have. These might include language barriers, their inability to read, speak, or understand English. It is the role of the teacher to become an advocate for these children and for all children. And today, it is really become more and more. As parents have more challenges in society, I believe it is our role to advocate for them and their children. It is our job to help parents understand their own child."	Basic	22	Deficient parental models. The researcher points out some of the barriers parent might face. She sees her role as been an advocate. Not necessarily empowering parents.
Laura	"I nominate my students based on different criteria."	Basic	6	Did not explicitly comment on whether parents are involved. Based on her narrative about nomination, it is inferred she is the person in charge.
**Mary	"Parents tend to openly transmit their personal struggles, hardships, and encourage education for a better future."	Advanced	12	Parents are assets. Yet, they are not part of the nomination process.
Elizabeth	"I guess parents really stressed the idea of the importance of school and the fact that it is a huge opportunity for them… but administrators make these decisions for them. So the same can be said for when a child is gifted. It is often the teacher who decides whether or not to	Basic	20	Only teachers and administrators have the power to nominate.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	refer students for gifted programs. This is certainly true in the Latin@ community where many parents trust the teacher as the expert in educational decisions."			Parents trust their teachers.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- All teachers manifested that parents did not play an active role in the nomination of potentially gifted Latin@ students.
- Only one participant (Blanca) mentioned parent's involvement. Yet, it was more about doing managerial tasks such as making copies and preparing decorations.
- The one Latin@ participant (Mary) explicitly described parents as assets.
- While all teachers indicated the lack of parent involvement, two teachers (Briana and Patricia) took a more extreme view and perceived parents as being "unable" to understand giftedness and how to meet their children's academic and socioemotional needs.

Theme Five - Thematic Summary of Subthemes

Theme 5. 1. A School Dilemma: Equity Versus Excellence
Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"I think that's what we should be pushing for education, to make schools a very efficient system where all students' needs are being met and not just some (special end) because there is a federal mandate that says we have to. The problem is that schools still follow the assembly line model in which access to a grade is based on age only. It's sad that we are fighting over scraps to educate kids who need more."	Basic	5	Schools do not provide equal access to leaning opportunities for all students. Limited resources.
Briana	"It is something that we always discussed, but I don't think the school has a plan or knows what to do with these students. My impression is that there is the believe that these students are doing fine so we just want to keep them there."	Minimum	12	Not clear if schools have a plan to foster equity and excellence.
Blanca	"We are looking at a program where kids are able to learn through multidisciplinary themes [using] a hands-on format. I think it's just going to take us to a different level. And so hopefully, then we will see kids, excelling in other areas more than reading math and the arts. Hopefully we'll see more leadership from more students at younger ages."	Intermediate	20	School culture: emphasis on nurturing and developing talent.
Patricia	"Those [identified] students get to participate in some Saturday Academies as long as the school has the money to run these camps. From my perspective, we [the school] just try to nurture not only for them, but for all students more of the project-	Intermediate	15	Extracurricular activities are provided if schools have the money to do it.

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	based curriculum learning, open ended things even science. We are trying to implement a lot more of that and be more thoughtful about that. I've done a lot more of that in the past couple years than I ever have. As a teacher, I'm just trying to foster those abilities and help move those children along, so they have an opportunity to show more of their abilities throughout those project-based activities."			
Cindy	"I wonder, is it just to put everybody in the same room that's not able to compete at the same level? Is that just, I am not sure that I think it is. For any of them. This is related to the whole issue of equity versus excellence."	Basic	22	Schools are sacrificing excellence to attain equity.
Laura	"I feel like in schools like ours gifted and talented is kind of... most of the time isn't a priority."	Basic	6	Fostering excellence is not a priority.
**Mary	"All students deserve to be in rich learning environments, regardless of their abilities."	Advanced	12	The dream is equity and excellence. We are not there yet.
Elizabeth	"I personally have witnessed that administrators and psychologists do not understand what to be gifted is. Often they did not allow students to be accelerated. This is the case of Oswaldo, who should have been accelerated last year and he was not. Then I would see him in my room reading other books or doing something else to stimulate himself, because he was bored, because he was done with his assignments."	Basic	20	Administrations are not onboard bout fostering excellence.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions
- Overall schools focused on equity not excellence.
- Only one school had a school plan in place to nurture sand develop students' talents.

- Gifted education is not a priority. It all comes down to resources.

Theme 5. 2. District's Lack Programming for Gifted Elementary Students
Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"Students in schools like mine don't have access to enrichment opportunities or specialized gifted programming to meet their needs. "Gifted" is just a label. I think all of it is superficial as far as identifying kids. I don't think we're alone in that."	Basic	5	Students with high potential do not have options. Gifted is just a label.
Briana	No comment	Minimum	12	Participants did not comment on it.
Blanca	"We are a gifted schools. We do subject as a whole school in math. from K4 through second grade is accelerated one whole year. And then, in English reading they can accelerate individually as high as they want to go. They keep moving in reading groups, it doesn't matter what their grade level is. They can keep moving into a higher and higher and higher group."	Intermediate	20	This school (Alliance) has a gifted program with emphasis on providing enrichment through the arts.
Patricia	"We haven't had a lot of training in the iStation (these are other intervention programs mostly for struggling students, not really a program for advanced learners) and things like that."	Intermediate	15	Teachers received training on using interventions only for struggling learners.
Cindy	"I think that some children should be in these programs [gifted programs]. Really gifted children. But, I think a lot of people when looking for gifted children, unfortunately in urban environments I feel that these students fall between the cracks. And sometimes when being in a public school they somethings do get lost."	Basic	22	There is an increasing need for gifted programs in urban schools.
Laura		Basic	6	In urban schools,

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	"I think unfortunately in it's the nature of Education today particularly Urban education dealing with so many other issues that it gets a little put on the back burner and we haven't really been intentional about identifying these students."			gifted students fall through the cracks.
**Mary	No comment	Advanced	12	Participant did not mention what opportunities are there for gifted learners.
Elizabeth	No comment	Basic	20	Participant did not comment on the issue.

All participants are white females except the following:*Male participant **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- Most (seven) participants indicated there is was not a system in place at their school site to meet the needs of gifted learners.
- Only one school had a gifted program in place.
- Only one teacher (Blanca) shared that her school (Alliance) had a system in place to meet the needs of gifted learners. This included subject and grade acceleration.
- Cindy and Laura spoke in favor of the creation of gifted programs.
- Mary, Elizabeth, and Briana did not comment about any existing gifted programs at their school.
  schools.

Theme 5.3. Whose Responsibility Is It?

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when Identifying Gifted Potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"So, in conclusion, all this falls on the teacher and if the teacher does not do it then no one will notice, because our focus is on struggling students. On the other hand I think that teachers sometimes get disillusion from our jobs and the state of education and the stress, and the workload that we kind of put blinders (Meaning it is not the priority to meet the needs of students who are doing fine)."	Basic	5	The responsibility falls on the teacher. Techers feel helpless.
Briana	"I talked to one of the architects and when he saw how good this student was, an amazing artist, and also good at math, I recommended him to be mentor. In other words, I recommend this students because I do the program I put them in the programming."	Minimum	12	Teachers go out of the way to provide GT students with access to opportunities.
Blanca	"My hopes are that they would be more than a label. I would hope that teachers then would see the gifted students for what the gifts are and use that in the teaching. Because if the child has a has a gift in something and it's not nurtured and it's just going to be stagnant."	Intermediate	20	Meeting the needs of GT students falls on the teacher.
Patricia	"In second grade we are also responsible for administering a portion of the CogAT. I keep portfolios for all of my students, but specifically for students with high potential or gifted, I would say that I try to keep more of their projects that we do in the classroom."	Intermediate	15	Teachers are responsible for identifying and providing services.
Cindy	"often if there are interventions available there are only available in English, which means that this leads to the exclusion of students whose English language is still developing."	Basic	22	Teachers carried out intervention only for struggling students.
Laura	"I have 28 students it's hard to have them one-on-one that often, but I think it was	Basic	6	Teachers are in charge of meeting the

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
	when I was reading with him one-on-one when that it would really click for me. I keep an eye on more on those students after I am tipped off to something you know on that inventory potentially being gifted."			needs of ALL students, including gifted learners. But How?
**Mary	"I think, we haven't really been intentional about serving these students."	Advanced	12	Teachers have not been intentional about serving GT students, it is also the schools' responsibility.
Elizabeth	"High achievers if they are mature enough and they have the desire, they can stimulate themselves. If they have the potential to work they will be fine. But they will not exceed."	Basic	20	High ability students are expected to do well on their own.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- All teachers indicated that it was their responsibility to identify, nominate and serve GT students without much support from administrators.
- Only one participant (Brenda at Alliance school) expressed that her school had a system in place to provide adequate interventions for students with gifted potential.
- There was a sense among participants that high achievers were doing fine on their own.

Theme 5. 4. Remediation Only: Who Do You Save First?

Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"Identifying and working with students who exceed beyond is tough, especially with the focus on remediation, the ones lagging behind are the majority of the population. I find it very tough because I know of some students who are gifted and try to challenge them and provide additional work, responsibilities. But I find it one of the big challenges. Especially in urban education or with any sort of minority group identifying in giving them appropriate challenges in the classroom environment."	Basic	5	Emphasis on remediation only for the majority of students.
Briana	"I don't know if the [Behavior Intervention team] BIT team keeps track of then [GT students] so their needs are met. It is something that we always discussed, but I don't think the school has a plan or knows what to do with these students."	Minimum	12	It not clear if school leaders are doing anything to meet the needs of GT learners.
Blanca	"My hopes are that they would be more than a label."	Intermediate	20	Giftedness becomes a label if students' needs are not being met.
Patricia	"In reality, in my experience as a teacher, this has not been one of the priorities or interest in my school, but rather on making sure struggling students or students below grade level show progress."	Intermediate	15	Schools' priorities orbit around the issue of remediation.
Cindy	"There's only so much money and again, do you save your best swimmers when the boat is sinking? It is not a priority."	Basic	22	Lack of resources and teachers' disposition contributes to

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
				remediation practices.
Laura	"So I mean, a teacher in another setting might still recognize him[a non-traditional gifted student] because his test results were so high. At the same time, if he doesn't feel safe and like I said he gets very, very nervous and anxious if he doesn't feel safe he wouldn't perform at that same level I don't believe. So would he be recognized as gifted? Not necessarily, I don't think."	Basic	6	If students from a specific classroom they might not receive the same services in their new classroom. It all depends on the teacher.
**Mary	"My experienced as a Latin@ Teachers wouldn't differentiate like we do now. But, my 4ht grade teacher pointed out that I was different and that I couldn't do ok in schools academically, because I was, as we know it today as a simultaneous bilingual. That there is no way I could master English. So, Because of that, they started to place me in remedial groups. But they insisted that I could not be as smart as the other kids because I grew up in a two language home."	Advanced	12	She experienced being in remedial classes for being a simultaneous bilingual (misconceptions about language and bilingualism).
Elizabeth	"I don't exactly we as a school, as a community exactly know how to deal with that. I also have had students who don't know what to do with their giftedness. Sometimes I feel these students are so used to turning something in, and they get praise for being smart. I personally have witnessed that administrators and psychologists do not understand what to be gifted is."	Basic	20	Schools are ill prepared to deal with GT students. They are not being challenged. Administrators are not on board.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant
Similarities and Distinctions
- Schools were not being proactive to meet the needs of gifted learners.

- Teachers felt schools' practices on remediation contributed to the neglect of gifted learners.
- All teachers showed concern about the reality that gifted students' needs were not being met.
- Only one school used acceleration and curriculum compacting to allow students move ahead in the curriculum.

Theme 5. 5. Lack of Opportunities to Learn
Distinctions and Similarities among Participants when identifying gifted potential

Name	Exemplary Quote	TOPS Level	Years of Teaching	Analytic Note
*Peter	"I see either a student who is bored and defiant, or they are in tune because they not challenged." "If we are talking about academically gifted, I see that these students produce high quality work. This includes the arts and gym, but we currently don't have any of them, so it is hard because students don't have the opportunity."	Basic	5	Not meeting the needs of high achievers might manifest in having students misbehave and act out. GT students in urban schools do not have access to OTL.
Briana	"Their English reading and writing exceeded the rest of my class and we have a teacher in our building whose job it is to do reading groups. She pulls the specific students and so I asked if these students could receive some kind of intervention. She doesn't usually serve the bilingual classroom, so I went and said I had these two girls and I would love if you could put them in a group somewhere. So they were able to do English reading outside of what we did in my classroom."	Minimum	12	Teachers have to be creative and ask others for help to meet the needs of gifted learners.
Blanca	"It helps that we are an ARTS school, so you see it and you nurture this right away in the kids when they are little."	Intermediate	20	This school nurtures and develops students' talents.
Patricia	No comment	Intermediate	15	Teacher did not comment on the issue.

Cindy	"I teach second grade, and I have a child who has special needs. I have a child who literally functions in some areas at like three year old or K4. And then I have a child in my classroom who is off the charts. He is a very bright child, but he can score or things like in fourth grade in a standardized test. And I mean he's so... I mean the range is pretty unbelievable. It makes it very difficult for a teacher to meet all of those needs without the other types of assistance."	Basic	22	A sad reality. Teachers are forced to decided which students' needs count.
Laura	No comment	Basic	6	Teacher did not comment on the issue.
**Mary	"I have gained a greater sense of how I need to teach in my classroom so that my students are provided an opportunity to exhibit their exceptional traits. As my teaching practices improved, so did my student outcomes. All students benefited, but my students that I would nominate were consistently challenged."	Advanced	12	The responsibility of meeting students' academic needs falls solely on the teacher. Thus, some high achievers are nurture and challenged, depending on the teacher.
Elizabeth	"I think our kids come with so much stuff so, looking at kids and saying like oh, well this kid does this because their families is like this. I definitely think their kids in our school that are considered the naughty, but that is because they are not getting their needs met here ta school or at home."	Basic	20	Lack of OTL showed that students needs are not being meet. Sometimes schools blame families.

All participants are white females except the following: *Male participant; **Latin@ participant

Similarities and Distinctions

- The majority of participants (six of them)) commented on the lack of access to high-end learning opportunities to learn. They argued that if talents were not nurtured then they would not be developed.
- Teachers (seven of them) felt they were solely responsible for providing adequate interventions to gifted learners. This without any support from their schools.
- Blanca felt that her school had a system in place to meet the needs of gifted learners.

GD

GERMAN DIAZ

OBJECTIVE

Obtain a teaching position at the university level in the department of education.

KEY SKILLS

- Exceptional experience teaching advanced learners from diverse backgrounds
- Advanced skills as a trainer, presenter, mentor, researcher, and educational leadership
- Excellent problem solver, outstanding team player, and very resourceful

WORK EXPERIENCE

Javits Grant Teacher Coach · Milwaukee Public Schools   2020 – present
Advanced Academics Dept. Curriculum & Instruction

Adjunct Faculty · University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee   2016 – present
School of Education, *Multicultural Studies*

Adjunct faculty · Springfield College   2016 – present
Milwaukee Campus, *Early Childhood Education*

Bilingual Teacher · Milwaukee Public Schools   2009 – 2019
Allen-Field Elementary School

Director of Religious Education · Prince of Peace Parish   2005-2008

Multicultural Ministry Coordinator · Marquette University   2005-2005

KEY CERTIFICATIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

2019UWM Scholarship Recipient of the "The Chancellor's Award" 2019.
- Gifted & Talented - Instructional Program Coordinator License #5013
- Lifetime Licenses in Bilingual #1023 & Regular Education #1777
- **2019** National Society of Academic Excellence Award winner
- **2017** WATG Board of Directors
- **2017** WIABE Bilingual Teacher of the Year

GD

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- **Fall 2019** – NAGC conference presenter on Engaging Minority Families: Five Strategies to Connect with Parents, *Albuquerque, NM*
- **Fall 2019** – Participant in Discovery World's Program for Inquiry and Science Instruction (PISI)
- **Summer 2019** – Co-facilitator in DPI's 9 CESAs Gifted & Talented Workshop on utilizing TOPS as an identification tool for underrepresented students, *Stevens Point, WI*
- **Fall 2018** – Co-facilitator in DPI's GT Symposium on utilizing TOPS as an identification tool for underrepresented students, *Wisconsin Dells, WI*
- **Fall 2018** – NAGC conference presenter on From Start to Finish: Dissecting the Student-Created Museum Project, *Minneapolis, MN*
- **Summer 2018** – Reviewer in DPI's Literacy & Mathematics, ELA Instructional Practices Curriculum, *Madison, WI*
- **Spring 2018** – Presenter at Wisconsin Association for Bilingual Educators on Identifying and Nurturing Potentially Gifted Latino Students in the Regular Classroom , *Wisconsin Dells, WI*
- **Spring 2018** Presenter at the Minority Student Achievement Network on Nurturing and Sparking Creativity in Underrepresented Students, *Madison, WI*
- **Spring 2018** Category judge for the Wisconsin Science Education Foundation Annual Badger State Science and Engineering Fair, *Milwaukee, WI*
- **2017 – 2019** – Making Sense of Science grant project
- **Spring 2017** – Presenter at American Educational Research Association on Dissertation Proposal, *San Antonio, TX*
- **Fall 2017** – WATG conference presenter on Power of Culturally Responsive Teaching, *Wisconsin Dells, WI*
- **Spring 2015** – Presenter at Wisconsin Association for Bilingual Educators Effective Teaching Strategies for English Language Learners, *Wisconsin Dells, WI*
- **Fall 2016** – WATG Conference presenter on Nurturing Culturally, Linguistically Gifted Learners, *Wisconsin Dells, WI*
- **Fall 2015** – WATG Conference presenter with Dr. Mary Ruth Coleman on USTARS Framework, *Wisconsin Dells, WI*
- **2014** – Participated in the Grant Implementation for the Margaret A. Cargill Summit Partnerships between Arts @ Large, MPS, and Cardinal Stritch University

EDUCATION

Administrative License Leadership program • MPSU & Edgewood College	2019 – Present
Doctorate of Philosophy in Urban Education • UW-Milwaukee	2015 – Present
Master of Arts in Bilingual Education • Lakeland College	2009 - 2011
Certificate in Leadership & Non-Profit Management • UW-Milwaukee	2007 - 2008
Master of Theology & Pastoral Studies • Saint Francis Seminary	2000 - 2004
Bachelor of Arts in Education • St. Thomas Aquinas University, Bogotá, Colombia	1999 - 2000
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy • Cristo Sacerdote University, Antioquia, Colombia	1996 - 1999