

5-2020

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Abstract

Gifted education, or more specifically the gifted label, needs clarification. Labeling students as gifted leads to preconceived beliefs and ideas about students and their overall abilities. The purpose of this study was to acquire insight into how gifted students are perceived in order to better understand and meet the needs of gifted students. Through a qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions surrounding the characteristics, identification process, and needs of gifted students. Results yielded consistencies and discrepancies in the perception of gifted education, ranging from student behaviors, identification of students, and perceived understanding of the term gifted. Findings indicated the need for a revised, comprehensive, and uniform definition of giftedness across the district, along with professional development pertaining to how to accurately identify gifted students and ways to effectively differentiate instruction.

Keywords: gifted, label, perceptions, identification

Gifted education, or more specifically the gifted label, needs clarification. A label in education, especially when attached to students, can invoke a fixed description of students and their abilities (Taylor, 2015). This is the case with the gifted label. Preconceived beliefs and ideas take hold when gifted is mentioned in a conversation, especially regarding students. Self-sufficient, motivated, overachieving, and well-behaved are characteristics bantered about during discussions that focus on identifying potentially gifted students (GiftedKids.ie, n.d.), thereby establishing perceptions that become more subjective than objective. As perceptions form, the focus shifts from students and their abilities to the attached label (Gates, 2010), further highlighting the relevance in understanding how gifted is perceived among educators in order to better understand and meet the needs of gifted students.

Literature Review

Label and Perception

Within education, a variety of labels exist to classify programs, as well as learning characteristics of students, and as is the case with labels, positive and negative implications abound, in turn invoking the need for further study into the impact and justification of labels, more specifically, the gifted label. Although the gifted label may provide insight and direction on how to best meet the needs of certain students, at the same time such a label can supersede students (Gates, 2010). When the gifted label is seen and considered ahead of the actual student, misconceptions are formed, unrealistic expectations are set, and perceptions of elitism and exclusivity abound (Matthews, 2008). Students are more than the label that defines them,

So telling children they're smart, in the end, made them feel dumber and act dumber, but claim they were smarter. I don't think this is what we're aiming for when we put positive

labels— “gifted” “talented,” “brilliant” —on people. We don’t mean to rob them of their zest for challenge and their recipes for success. But that’s the danger (Dweck, 2006, p. 74).

With labels having the tendency to kindle an array of perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, the gifted label will continue to morph in undefined directions unless effective professional development is designed and supported (Szymanski et al., 2018). Several contributing factors are to be taken into consideration when establishing professional development around the topic of gifted: from determining a baseline of how gifted is defined amongst staff, to recognizing the varied areas and levels of giftedness, to overturning the belief that gifted students are a homogeneous population (Berlin, 2009), and researching the effect such a label has on students.

The Effects of the Gifted Label

The impact the gifted label has on an educator’s ability to interact and connect with identified gifted students needs to be taken into account. An educator’s beliefs and attitudes, whether intended or not, resonate in their relationships with students (Szymanski et al., 2018). From believing gifted students already receive every conceivable advantage possible (McCoach & Siegle, 2007) to the belief that the gifted label implies a sense of effortlessness (Yeung, 2014), brings to light how educators’ perceptions of gifted, whether intended or not, can have an impact on gifted students.

In a similar manner, careful consideration needs to be given regarding students’ beliefs of the gifted label. Labels have a tendency to be assigned to students based on their academic and behavioral outcomes. Very rarely will students define themselves by a label. Yet when a label is affixed to students, the pressure to either adhere to or break away from the label becomes a

significant motivator. In regards to the gifted label, students have been known to hold "... a range of definitions about the meaning of the label" (Meadows & Neumann, 2016, p. 160).

Students form generalizations about what it means to be gifted in accordance to the perceptions of their teachers, as well as from conversations and explanations shared amongst their families and peers. For students, the gifted label can become a quandary. Students either believe they should be successful in any endeavor they attempt, or they purposefully underachieve as a way to forego being identified with a label that designates a certain social, and even emotional state.

From a survey conducted by Berlin (2009) the top five positive and negative perceptions regarding students' self-perceptions of being labeled as gifted were shared. The results indicated students positively enjoyed special experiences and programming, while negatively feeling the internal and external pressures to constantly do well. Being labeled as gifted brings about its own set of emotions and expectations that vary from student to student, highlighting the need for educators to be better informed and equipped for working with gifted students.

The gifted definition has gone through a series of revisions and interpretations, starting at the federal level down to individual states and school districts. With each transition, gifted became more of a label and less about understanding the programming needs of students who are achieving at a higher level than their peers. A label has the power to succinctly categorize types of learners, yet in so doing, preconceived beliefs and misinterpretations precipitate from individual teachers to grade levels, to an entire school community. Labels should not define what a student is capable of, but rather should assist in delivering services and programming best suited to the needs and interests of students. In this era of differentiated learning, the time has arrived to ensure students who are appropriately identified (and not solely labeled), as gifted, not

only receive appropriate instruction at their level but comprehend that their learning needs are just as valid and varied as their peers.

In order to accurately identify gifted students and establish suitable gifted programming, a closer look into how gifted is defined and perceived among staff in elementary schools is relevant and pertinent. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (2019) requires *all* students be taught to high academic standards, including gifted students, a population of students who either are overlooked or are stigmatized by a label, further indicating that “From an equity standpoint, by not providing the resources so that gifted children can reach their full potential is to suggest their needs are somehow different or less important than the needs of other children” (Yeung, 2014, p. 817).

Gifted Definition

A federal definition of gifted has existed since 1972, yet it has been modified several times, with the most current version stating,

The term “gifted and talented” when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means 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 or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, 2019).

Although the federal government has one prescribed definition, individual states and local school districts, may either have modified definitions or no definitions at all, pertaining to giftedness (Yeung, 2014). As states are not required to use the federal definition of gifted,

discrepancies among definitions could be further impacted depending on whether gifted programs are mandated, and even funded, by individual states. In the case of Florida, a state where gifted programs are mandated and fully funded, the definition of gifted is, “Students who have superior intellectual development and are capable of high performance” (Florida Department of Education, 2020). While in Massachusetts, where gifted programs are not mandated and no funding is available, there is no definition for gifted (Davidson Institute, 2009). Maine’s Department of Education, Chapter 311: Gifted and Talented Students (2001), recognizes three to five percent of students as gifted, where gifted programming is mandated, but partially funded by the state, with the following definition for gifted:

‘Gifted and talented children’ shall mean those children in grades K-12 who excel, or have the potential to excel, beyond their age peers, in the regular school program, to the extent that they need and can benefit from programs for the gifted and talented. Gifted and talented children shall receive specialized instruction through these programs if they have exceptional ability, aptitude, skill, or creativity in one or more of the following categories:

1. General Intellectual Ability as shown by demonstrated significant achievement or potential for significant accomplishment above their age peers in all academic areas.
2. Specific Academic Aptitude as shown by demonstrated significant achievement or potential for significant accomplishment above their age peers in one or more academic area(s)
3. Artistic Ability as shown by demonstrated significant achievement or potential for significant accomplishment above their age peers in the literary, performing, and/or

visual arts (MEGAT, n.d.).

From individual states to a national standpoint, “While at least 37 states define giftedness in state policy, only 30 of those states require districts to apply the state definition to their students” (Woods, 2016, p. 2), thereby causing problems when it comes to purposefully identifying gifted students at both the state and national levels (Seedorf, 2014).

Another implication associated with the variations in the gifted definition is the interchangeable use of such descriptors as high-achieving, gifted, and talented, any of which can mean something different, depending on the state or school district (Woods, 2016). Identification of gifted students is being affected by the contrasting definitions and descriptors of what giftedness is, impacting teachers’ ability to appropriately identify potentially gifted students. Professional and personal experiences, or lack thereof, in regards to gifted training and services, also influence teachers’ perceptions about what giftedness is (Berlin, 2009), therefore further highlighting the importance of defining giftedness.

Although research suggests that the gifted definition has shifted from a narrow and delineated perspective to an expansive perspective where giftedness is viewed as multiple forms that develop over time (Lo & Porath, 2017), there remains a need to delve deeper into understanding how educators perceive and define gifted. Gifted has become a label shrouded in stereotypes (Gates, 2010), therefore, “Defining *gifted* and *talented* is important because the definition adopted by each education institution influences the selection of students for G/T programs and may prevent low-income, minority, disabled, underachieving, and female gifted students from participating” (Rimm et al., 2018, p. 22).

Research Purpose and Research Question

Depending on where one looks for the definition of gifted will likely determine one's understanding of what gifted means; for example, *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, the National Association for Gifted Children, and the U.S. Department of Education all have varying definitions or explanations as to what gifted could mean (Galbraith, 1999). Along with defining gifted, comes the perceptions of what gifted is, which can depend on such factors as teachers' knowledge of gifted programs and services, pre-existing beliefs (Berlin, 2009), teachers' pre-service or in-service training on giftedness (Henley et al., 2010), as well as teachers' overall attitudes toward gifted students (Szymanski et al., 2018). Gifted education has been a part of American culture since the mid-nineteenth century (NAGC, n.d.), yet questions and confusion still exist when trying to identify gifted students, due to individual states and school districts utilizing different identification protocols and tools.

The purpose of this present study emerged from the varying degrees of how gifted is defined and perceived among educators across elementary schools within the same school district. Students are being labeled, rather than identified as gifted, which brings about questions concerning the current identification process. The academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted students are at the core of understanding what gifted means. As educators, both teachers and principals alike, play significant roles in how gifted is defined and perceived within their schools, it was only natural to ask the following research questions:

How do elementary school staff define gifted students?

How do elementary school staff's perceptions of gifted education impact instruction for gifted students?

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand how definitions of gifted have developed among educators, therefore a grounded theory design was the most effective method for conducting this research. Upon identifying the area of interest, the systematic design for grounded theory was the best design as it has been widely used in educational research and provides a detailed and prescribed procedure in conducting research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Grounded theory in this qualitative study analyzed the data collected through interviews with participants who shared their definitions, perceptions, and experiences regarding what gifted means.

Procedures

Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling to intentionally select individuals who would best provide insight into how gifted has been defined by educators within elementary schools, with the prospect of creating a more refined and defined procedure for identifying gifted students in the future. More specifically, theoretical sampling provided a clearer understanding as the sampling was intentional with the focus on generating a theory about how giftedness is defined (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Participants

In order to obtain how gifted was defined at the elementary school level, a total of eight teachers, four each from two different urban elementary schools within the same school district were invited to partake in the study. Both of the elementary school principals were also invited

to be interviewed. Half of the eight teachers had been in the teaching profession for fewer than five years, while the other half were veteran teachers having taught for over 20 years. Out of the eight teachers, five had been teaching in the current school district for less than five years, while three had been teaching in the current school district for over 20 years. Six of the eight teachers had experience teaching more than one grade level. Two teachers had a special education background, with one of the teachers also having a gifted and talented education background. Two of the teachers taught second grade, two teachers taught third grade, one teacher taught a multi third and fourth grade, one teacher taught a multi fourth and fifth grade, one teacher taught fifth grade, and one teacher taught sixth grade. The principals of both elementary schools had been within the current school district for over 20 years, both having been teachers within the district before becoming principals. One principal had been a special education teacher for fifth and sixth-grade students, while the other principal taught music to students in grades K-6. One principal had been an assistant principal before becoming principal, and the other principal became principal upon leaving the classroom.

Within the school district, there are three consulting teachers for gifted education, all of whom share the responsibility of providing pull-out instruction to gifted students across the six elementary schools. Although not interviewed, the number of consulting teachers and their roles in the school district are important to note for the purpose of this study.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews ended up taking place in either teachers' classrooms or in the offices of principals. The same set of questions were asked of each participant, with a slight variation in the demographic questions depending on whether the participant was a teacher or a

principal (see Appendix A). Participants signed an informed consent form, interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and then transcribed. Interviews lasted anywhere from eight to twenty minutes. Through constant comparative data analysis codes and themes emerged highlighting the perception of the gifted label.

Data Analysis

Open, axial, selective coding was used to analyze the data. Once each interview was transcribed, attention was given to the individual responses within each interview, underlining keywords or phrases that were repetitive or significant, herewith referred to as codes. Codes from each interview were collected into one database. With codes in one database, the process to highlight similar codes became more apparent, thereby reducing the total number of codes to a more manageable number. The remaining codes were analyzed for themes prevalent throughout the interviews that provided insight into how gifted was defined within two elementary schools in the same school district. Based on the themes from the data collected, potential next steps are to consider how to best define gifted and how to best educate elementary staff about who gifted students are and the purpose of gifted education.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of the gifted label among educators in two of the elementary schools within the Auburn School Department. Interview questions were designed with the purpose of acquiring first-hand accounts of educators' experience and knowledge of gifted students in order to determine how perceptions influence the understanding of giftedness. With all participants being asked the same questions, repetitive or high-frequency phrases and responses among the participants were noted during the coding

process, leading to the development of several themes. Figure 1 categorizes the codes that emerged across the interviews into the applicable themes of student behavior, identification, instruction, experiences, communication, and challenges.

Figure 1

Themes Based on Coded Data



Perceptions

As participants shared their understanding of the identification process, they were also asked to share the total number of students within their classroom or school, and to provide a prediction for the number of formally identified gifted students within their respective classroom or school. Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the results of these questions, as well as note the actual number of gifted students in each classroom and school. As shown in both tables, the majority of participants predicted a higher number of gifted students in comparison to the actual number of formally identified gifted students. This question evoked anxiety among several participants, as participant one processed out loud,

Umm... [long pause] ... I know they go, but I'm not sure who is formally identified, as like the top whatever percent that they need to be, because I know that you have to service the top certain percent, but then you can take others. So I know there's that.

Participants three, six, and seven verbally counted off the number of students they believed to be formally identified as gifted, followed intermittently by lengthy pauses and questioning looks. While participants five and eight responded, "Trick question," with participant eight upon sharing a prediction, was quick to ask, "What's the correct answer?" The manner in which each participant responded to this question, indicates a need to better define the terms, gifted and enrichment, as participants were actually counting the number of students in enrichment programs, rather than formally identified.

Table 1

Predicted versus Actual Number of Gifted Students Across Classrooms

| Participants | Number of Students | Predicted Gifted | Actual Gifted |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| A | 21 | 6 | 0 |
| B | 19 | 4 | 0 |
| C | 19 | 7 | 0 |
| D | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| E | 19 | 10 | 0 |
| F | 20 | 1 | 0 |
| G | 27 | 1 | 1 |
| H | 22 | 0 | 0 |

Note. The number of students indicates how each participant views giftedness within each classroom.

Table 2*Predicted versus Actual Number of Gifted Students According to Administrators*

| Schools | Number of Students | Predicted Gifted | Actual Gifted |
|---------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| A | 255 | 10 | 2 |
| B | 556 | 8 | 18 |

Note. School A and School B are Pre-K-6 elementary schools in the Auburn School Department.

Student Behaviors

Academic behaviors came to the forefront when teachers and administrators were asked about common traits they have observed in students they believe are gifted. Initially, participants shared positive attributes about gifted students, citing the popular vernacular associated with the gifted label: hard-working, curious, and confident. As each interview progressed, negative attributes also began to surface, with more participants feeling the need to justify why students would exhibit a given behavior.

Motivation

The majority of participants noted motivation as a defining characteristic of a child being gifted, with participant eight noting, “Students who are gifted can be more motivated, especially when they’re learning about something that they’re interested in; for example, if math is a subject they are excited about, I think they like the challenge.” Participant one shared, “They are very enthusiastic about the area they have a natural desire to like, they want to know more, they want to ask questions, and that’s kind of self-driven like nobody else has to drive their motivation, it’s just natural.” Or as participant nine noted, “They want to dig deeper into a subject that they get interested in, they might become hyper-focused on certain parts of an issue.”

Although motivation was the common thread among these responses, this type of motivation stemmed from students' having particular areas of interest, leading to speculation about the role of intrinsic motivation. Would interests alone qualify students for being labeled as gifted? Or subsequently, if students lack motivation, whether it be in one area or overall, would giftedness even be a consideration? According to the *Center on Education Policy* (2012),

Students' belief can affect their motivation. For example, students who believe they have a limited capacity to learn or feel they are unlikely to succeed often have problems with motivation. In a similar vein, students who conceptualize intelligence as a fixed quantity that one either has or doesn't have tend to be less motivated than students who view knowledge as something that can change and grow (p. 2).

Motivation, or more specifically, the lack thereof, is an attribute that challenges the identification of gifted students.

Underachievement and Perfectionism

Two contributing factors connected to motivation that impact gifted students are underachievement and perfectionism. Traits of underachievement and perfectionism started to surface as participants continued to process their thoughts throughout the interviews, yet the actual terms were never used. Participant nine shared, "I also see the flip side where sometimes they don't want to answer questions or put themselves out there because they might not be right or first." While participant three shared such insight stating, "I think sometimes their desire to have it be the best and be perfect gets in their way and they actually get in their own way from doing a great job." Mofield et al. (2016) suggest underachievement and perfectionism provide students with a sense of self-protection, ready-made excuses for poor performance, especially in

new or competitive situations. Rimm et al. (2018) noted perfectionism as being a characteristic of underachievement in gifted students, thereby impacting motivation and adding to the pressure of being successful.

Pressure

Pressure is a factor that cannot be measured or easily observed. Over time pressure has a tendency to build based on shared words and assumptions, “Because of their gifts, gifted students also tend to be more sensitive to judgments from others (both real and perceived), as well as sometimes feel overloaded and overwhelmed by information” (Education.com, 2010), which is corroborated by a statement shared by participant eight,

I do think they feel pressured in some cases to be the best. Or to always produce at a higher level. I think in some cases I’ve seen students who don’t like to make mistakes or have a hard time if they can’t figure out the right answer.

Another consideration of pressure goes beyond the work, and to the social-emotional aspect, which participant eight also mentioned,

School has been really easy for them and they haven’t been challenged and when they get to the point of being challenged, they do not know how to handle that and it all starts to crumble. I don’t know if that has to do with pressure? Pressure they put on themselves, pressure of the label, the pressure of what other kids think they are.

Pressure combined with motivation, will either encourage or deter students from showcasing their natural abilities, again questioning the impact motivation plays in identifying gifted students. As Rimm (2000) states, “There is a fine line that divides pressure and motivation. Pressure takes place when children don’t believe they can achieve expected

outcomes. Motivation occurs when children have learned the process that leads to high, but realistic outcomes (p. 1).” Based on this research, behaviors should not be considered single entities, as there can be underlying circumstances depending on situations, personalities, and perceptions. If students are being judged based on how often they participate in class, how invested they are in a topic, or how well they complete a task, in essence, their academic performance is being determined on a surface, or perfunctory level, potentially excluding students from being identified as gifted.

Pace

Students believe in order to prove they are smart, tasks need to be completed at a faster pace than their peers, a common association with students labeled as gifted. Participant two shared, “In their mind it’s about being fast and correct, not the strategy they use or how they got there. They just want to know they’re right and they were fast.” While participant one offered another perspective, “I feel like they want to go fast because they think they get it fast, but sometimes slowing down and really thinking about it a little bit more, might be a challenge.” These comments can be viewed from two angles: 1) completing work quickly equates to being smart, and 2) completing work quickly creates an illusion for when students are feeling challenged. Although “Research has found no consistent link between speed and intelligence, and in fact, some research even suggests that taking extra time to learn can result in information being processed more deeply, which leads to greater accuracy down the line” (Stenger, 2014), students learn from what they observe and hear. When praise is offered for completing work quickly, students begin to internalize pace as an indicator of being smart. “Praise has long term effects. Students value what we praise” (Byrd, n.d.), therefore students end up valuing the

emphasis placed on pace rather than ability, further cementing the belief that being quick and gifted are synonymous, when in actuality, “Fast does not always equal smart, and slow doesn’t necessarily mean stupid; it all comes down to how you learn best.” (Stenger, 2014, p. 1).

Problem-solving

Another facet of gifted behavior as perceived by participants in this study had to do with problem-solving, primarily in conjunction with math. Participant six shared,

The kind of thinking that goes outside of the box. Math students who don’t just look at a problem and solve it your typical way, but can explain it in their own way or solve it in a way or show a deeper understanding.

A similar response was shared by participant nine, “Creative, out-of-the-box thinking... great problem-solving skills.” Both responses mentioned out-of-the-box or creative thinking, indicating students go beyond offering a basic response or explanation when solving a problem. While one participant provided specific details as to what classifies creative thinking, the other participant mentioned the term, yet did not provide evidence on how creative thinking was perceived or evaluated. Upon further analysis, both participants were actually referring to creative thinking rather than problem-solving, alluding to the fact that good problem solvers are also creative thinkers. The question now becomes are the two phrases interchangeable? For instance, does a good problem solver possess creative thinking skills and are creative thinkers effective problem solvers? Based on the two varying responses, there is no definitive answer, yet creative thinking and effective problem solving can be viewed as subjective in terms of individual perceptions, further highlighting the relevance of having consistent criteria in determining what constitutes giftedness.

Identification

Standardized Testing

Performing well on standardized tests was noted by all participants as being a contributing factor in identifying for giftedness. While some participants identified specific standardized tests, other participants were vague in their descriptions, as shared by participant two, “Umm, I know they use a lot of standardized testing.” Standardized testing mentioned included a statewide assessment, an abilities test, and a district-wide assessment.

Maine Educational Assessments (MEAs) “...which measure the progress of Maine students in the areas of English Language Arts and Literacy, Mathematics, and Science” (Maine.gov, 2020) from third to eighth grade, was mentioned by a couple of participants. At the time of interviews, participants had not yet received MEA scores for their previous class, indicating MEA data as ineffectual. Anecdotal notes surmised the delayed release of student scores from the state caused participants to question whether the MEAs were still a viable source for identification purposes.

The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) used to measure academic aptitude and giftedness (TestPrepOnline.com, 2020), was mentioned during interviews, although with some uncertainty, as shared by participant one, “Well, they’re given... Gogat? Yes, Gogat, there might be something different, it might be called something... I don’t know what it’s called, but I know they’re given something.” Participant eight provided a little more information, “I believe we test... well, I don’t know if this is law or not, but third and fifth grade for formal identification using the CogAT.” Anecdotal notes made the connection between the role of participants and

the mention of the CogAT. Only participants with a connection to the assessment, either through students or the district's formal identification process, acknowledged the CogAT.

STAR, Auburn's district-wide standardized testing platform for all elementary school students, was a common response. Participant six shared, "STAR data, which is district-wide, and kind of our benchmarking system," provides progress benchmarks for students, as determined by the school district. STAR was the one identification tool each participant felt confident in sharing, primarily due to consistent use of the test across the district over the past ten years. STAR assessments consist of students completing multiple-choice tests in reading and math once each trimester. Data provided from each test indicate where students are in their learning compared to that of their peers and grade level. Percentage benchmarks are referenced to determine student growth. Students scoring seventy-five percent and above are considered exceeding the standard. Students' adequate yearly progress (AYP) is also measured and used when determining goals and future learning pathways. "Standardized tests are reliable and objective measures of student achievement" (ProCon.org, 2019), yet it can be argued that standardized testing, such as STAR, provides only a glimpse into students' true abilities, which participant two was quick to note,

A number on a page only tells you so much about anybody. How you score on STAR in one 30-minute moment of your day isn't necessarily who you are as a math or reading student. Sometimes kids score higher or lower than they should for a whole lot of reasons.

Maine's Department of Education, Chapter 104: Educational Programs for Gifted & Talented Children (1996) states for the purpose of screening and identifying gifted students,

“Each school unit shall establish a procedure that uses a minimum of three assessment methods for each of the three categories in which gifted and talented children are identified.” With the expectation that STAR is administered three times a year, it stands to reason why all participants within this research cited STAR as a primary identification source, along with a characteristics checklist.

Characteristics Checklist

According to participants, a characteristics checklist (Appendix B) is another element in the screening process of identifying gifted students. Participant seven shared,

“I feel like I can answer this one. At the end of the year we look at students and different traits and we scale them. I believe it’s one to four for different traits for characteristics. GT teacher takes that into consideration and also look at testing.”

Other participants mentioned completing recommendations or surveys to screen for gifted students. Participant eight said, “There’s a teacher recommendation piece that looks at classroom performance,” and participant two shared, “Classroom teachers fill out surveys, get a number showing strengths in different areas.” While participant one mentioned a combination of using a checklist and recommendations,

Given a list of our kids at the end of the year. There is a list of characteristics that we check off if seeing them in students. We determine kind of recommendations for next year and can include any notes that way the start of the following year comes, they can kind of be on the radar.

Checklist, recommendation, and survey are being used interchangeably to describe the same screening tool. Furthermore, the underlying comprehension of each term may differ

among participants, potentially complicating the purpose of the given screening tool. The actual tool used in the screening process is considered a checklist where teachers are asked to consider the given characteristics and rate students according to a provided key. Based on the perceptions of the participants, there needs to be clarification around the purpose and use of the tool.

Communication

Collaboration

Over the course of a week, each consulting teacher divides time between at least two schools, thereby limiting time for meaningful collaboration with classroom teachers and administrators, as noted by participant eight, “A full-time person would allow for communication, common planning or meeting time. More purposeful. Collaborate more.” Seeing that consulting gifted teachers are temporary fixtures within each school, participant nine shared, “A need to collaborate and get ideas for any student. Knowing where their boundary is, like how far to push. What’s appropriate, just because they can read several levels ahead doesn’t mean the material is appropriate.” Teachers and administrators alike, are looking for help in differentiating for their gifted learners, yet are noting the need for consistent collaboration, rather than grasping for fleeting moments when a consulting gifted teacher is within the school.

Conversations

Conversations between consulting gifted teachers, classroom teachers, and administrators are key in being able to provide and support the best learning environment for gifted students. Finding time to converse has to be a concerted effort, which participant six shared appreciation for,

You are the first gifted and talented teacher I have actually had a working relationship

with, where it's not just they leave the room, go, and come back. You keep us informed about what they're doing, how it pertains, and even offered to adjust your programming based on what we're doing. You've given me copies of things. My experience with this program has been better than what I've had in the past.

When it comes to gifted education, conversations are vital as the expectations of gifted students span beyond the walls of the classroom, as participant one commented, "Communication, especially in being prepared in how to best share next steps/levels with parents." Parents of gifted students, or assumed gifted students, are known to be more involved in their child's learning, questioning the relevance of certain assignments and next steps; therefore, conversations between the classroom and consulting gifted teachers are important in providing a consistent and accurate message to parents. Conversations can be the key to enlightening all stakeholders on the benefits and needs of gifted students,

In this era of budget cuts, minimal to absent funding for gifted, and competing education priorities, we must find the time to expand the number of conversations about how we must and can meet the needs of high ability students (Danielian, 2017, p.1).

Professional Development

Each participant was asked if there was anything they needed in meeting the needs of their gifted students, and the majority of responses centered on receiving some type of professional development. Participant three shared how a professional learning community (PLC) centering around gifted students would help, "So that classroom teachers would understand how they could also implement strategies and differentiate for gifted students," going a step further in sharing,

Now I can be more intentional about why I'm extending it, not just extra work, it's the challenge that they need, it's the extension that they need beyond. So I think a lot of classroom general ed teachers unless they pursue that on their own, they don't have that knowledge, and it would be good for them to have that knowledge, cause we also focus so much on differentiating down. We don't... we're not encouraged, we're not required to differentiate up. I think it is kind of assumed that we will, but it's not talked about.

The mention of differentiation highlights the importance of making sure educators are provided with the same quality information and resources connected to gifted education as with special education. Teachers are looking for ways to help their gifted students achieve and excel at their given levels, as participant two shared, "Always looking for ideas and ways to challenge kids to think differently. Anytime the GT consulting teacher has given supplies has been helpful." With six elementary schools and only three consulting gifted education teachers, classroom teachers are feeling the need for, as participant one shared, "Keeping in connection with the GT teacher." In order for professional development to be purposeful, communication and collaboration are needed, hence Eckert and Robins (2017) note, "When developing a professional development plan for the needs of gifted and talented learners, planners need to take into account where their goals fit within the school or districts' overall goals and capitalize on this opportunity" (p. 178).

Instruction

Integration

Gifted programming in Auburn's elementary schools consists of pull-out classes for students in grades three through six, with the primary focus on math and English Language Arts (ELA). Students leave their classrooms once or twice a week to attend an hour-long enrichment

class where they are engaged in problem-solving strategies, mathematical simulations, literature discussion groups, or a specific unit of study. Participant one shared insight about how integration should be between a pull-out class and classroom instruction,

Like to know what they are working on so can make connections. They know what I know and it's not like they are leaving and coming back and leaving everything at the door. They should feel like they're continuing the exploration in some way, even in this classroom. It's part of their academic program, there's differentiation.

Although pull-out classes allow for small group instruction and interaction among students of similar abilities, classroom teachers were having their own revelations as shared by participant three, "Also, realizing that when kids are gone to GT, they shouldn't be making up work they're missing, because they're doing their work/learning." The general consensus has been that gifted students needed to make up the work they missed while out of the classroom, causing frustration, and even anxiety, among teachers and students. Participant eight shared,

I would like to continue to look at how we can serve students so we're not adding more to their plate. Meaningful instruction at their level and rigor they need in conjunction to what they are doing in the classroom.

Classroom teachers are tasked with providing meaningful instruction to all of their students regardless of the varying levels of academic abilities, yet the focus tends to be on one end of the spectrum in comparison to the other end, as participant six shared,

Interventions for kids that are struggling are at the forefront, so my struggle with high-flying or gifted students is that they always kind of get pushed to the side. We need to treat those kids with gifted abilities with just as much importance as students with

struggling abilities.

Unique challenges are to be found amongst all levels of learners, yet integrating lessons and materials for gifted students into everyday planning requires time for the classroom and consulting gifted teachers to collaborate and coordinate learning targets, goals, and overall expectations. The integration of instruction for gifted students connects back to the importance of communication noted earlier in this study, and to the challenges presented later in this study.

Purpose and Pace

Behind all learning tasks a purpose abounds, although, for teachers with gifted students in their classrooms, the biggest concern is providing meaningful instruction and activities, a feeling that was shared by participant six, “Worry that some kids aren’t getting pushed hard enough and as a classroom teacher it’s sometimes really hard to get those multi-levels. Need something in place for those kids.” Busy work is a phrase teachers tend to use when discussing work assigned to gifted students. When gifted students complete tasks ahead of their classmates, teachers feel pressured to assign more work, which essentially ends up being work to keep students busy until the teacher can meet with them. Busy work can create a belief within a gifted student’s mind that their original work was exceptional with no need to take their learning to the next level, as noted by participant two,

Getting them to understand that just because some things are easier for them doesn’t mean they don’t have to work on them anymore. They might be in the highest reading, math, or spelling group, but that doesn’t mean there’s no challenge for them.

Differentiation with rigor, requires depth and breadth, which can often be integrated into the original tasks assigned to gifted students, just as participant one surmised,

They feel like they want to go fast, they think they get it fast. Slowing down and really thinking might be more of a challenge. Independently, the drive to add more, say more, or explain more on paper isn't necessarily there.

There is a purpose behind every lesson being taught, and for gifted students, they are used to completing tasks quickly and easily at least at the surface level, but ask them to delve into the complexities of their minds to explain or document their thinking, not only has rigor increased but as have the expectations.

Experiences

Students

Classroom teachers work with a multitude of students over the course of their careers, and yet their experience with gifted students continues to amaze as well as confound them, as suggested by participant one, "I don't always know what it means for a child to be gifted. If it's their academic...based on their academic ability, or is it other things?" While participant four honestly shared, "I don't know to what extent I have experience with gifted students." With each participant's response, their thoughts became more of internal dialogue as they processed what was being asked of them, the exception being participant seven, who shared, "I love teaching gifted students. I think it's a lot to learn myself, because it's a different way of thinking, teaching." A contributing factor in these responses appeared to connect with how long participants had been teaching and in what capacity. From changing grade levels or school districts to having multi-leveled classrooms, or moving from the position of teacher to administrator, impacted the level of interaction and involvement with gifted students. Participant ten shared, "Mostly experience with gifted students comes from talking with you and being in

the school department.” This insight provided by all of the participants highlights the diversity of experience and understanding of gifted students and the relevance of this study.

Training

When participants were asked about their gifted training experiences, nine out of the ten participants noted their lack of training, as participant one candidly shared, “No gifted training; I don’t know what that is,” and participant six commented, “Have never been offered or participated in any gifted training.” Similar, succinct responses were shared by six other participants, all of whom shared gifted training was not something they had considered until being asked. In contrast, participant three shared, “I didn’t know that gifted education was part of the special education spectrum until I started taking gifted courses.” For the past year and a half, participant three had been working on completing the endorsement requirements to become a gifted and talented teacher, thereby offering a perspective of how training influences perceptions. Participant eight noted, “Gifted training... my experience is in this district. There is a team of teachers who work together, they share schools, plan together, and are led by the curriculum director.” The response from participant eight varies from the other responses, sharing the elements of the district’s gifted and talented program, rather than the training required to teach gifted students. The differences in responses indicate, “It is important to understand teacher’s initial understanding and attitudes to create targeted professional development that will result in lasting change” (Symanski et al., 2018).

Laws

Consternation emerged when participants were asked to share their knowledge of gifted laws or mandates. Anecdotal notes written during each interview highlighted lengthy pauses,

participants muttering to themselves as they internally processed their background knowledge, and casting glances toward the interviewer for guidance. Participant seven honestly stated,

Regarding laws and mandates, I only know from talking to GT teachers. Interesting because I think a lot of people don't realize and don't know. And I think even as a teacher, I think that would be... as a newer teacher I should say, that would be something that would be important to know, cause I think a lot of classes, even in college, they like to push the laws, for you know, special education and programs, and other programs, like physical education, and all those things, but I think that the gifted laws kind of slips away in a little aspect.

While participant five commented, "I know you know the laws around meeting the needs of the students." This broad response designated confidence in the consulting gifted teacher, without providing specific knowledge about gifted laws. Participant eight shared more information, although laced with uncertainty,

Gifted laws and mandates [pause] not up on as I should be, but I believe we are identifying five percent of the school, no district, population. I don't believe we have to write plans for them anymore [pause] not sure.

The responses shared by other participants fell in between the previously shared responses, with the majority unaware that laws or mandates existed for giftedness. For educators within the Auburn School Department, the biggest concerns are the identification of and instruction for gifted students, while the finer details, such as state requirements, fall upon the consulting gifted teachers and curriculum coordinator to implement and enforce.

Challenges

Balance

Having gifted students within a heterogeneous classroom setting creates a challenge for teachers and students alike. Teachers are attempting to provide quality instruction for all students, meaning gifted students are expected to prove their understanding of all basic content before being allowed to move ahead. Some gifted students struggle with completing all assigned tasks and question the need to prove what they already know, which participant eight shared, “I’ve worked with gifted students who think they’re better than the rest and are unmotivated.” Some gifted students complete what is expected of them, but will not go above and beyond, as shared by participant one, “They don’t necessarily go the extra mile to feel like they need to go back in the book.” Classroom teachers are also trying to find a balance integrating lessons and work assigned by consulting gifted teachers into their daily routine of their gifted students, with one suggestion shared by participant one, “Having an outline to be aware of what’s happening and potential next steps.” Teachers are looking to find a balance in their lesson plans, as well as for students, who are being asked to complete twice the amount of work of other students.

Expectations

Expectations coincide with balance, especially as teachers and administrators determine how to teach the specific targets at each grade level while determining appropriate target levels for gifted students. Classroom teachers are left wondering which would be the better option: to increase rigor across grade level targets or allow a natural progression from one target to the next, even from grade level to grade level. Participant nine shared the ongoing struggle, “What’s the progression? What would be a normal progression? Umm, or how can I help them dig

deeper with the targets that I'm working on without pushing them ahead to a new target?" The academic needs of gifted students differ from other students, yet a similar statement can be shared about students who have learning disabilities. A preconceived belief has developed over time that gifted students need an elaborate assignment or activity in order to challenge their learning, leaving teachers frustrated and looking for help. Participant ten straightforwardly shared, "As for gifted students, it was almost a relief to have you come in and take those kids because I felt like you were supplementing what I was doing in the classroom." Upon reviewing anecdotal notes of each interview, similar feelings to those of participant ten were expressed among several other participants, sharing how for even one hour there was a period of reprieve where they could review concepts without the pressure of keeping their gifted students engaged at the same time. Teachers' perceptions of gifted students end up inadvertently influencing instruction, yet it does not have to be the case, according to Winebrenner (2012),

Differentiation is not about adding responsibilities to your already crowded schedule.

Rather, it represents a holistic way of teaching that, in many classrooms, has replaced more traditional methods of treating subject areas separately. Time and again, strategies designed to benefit gifted students have found application with all students (p.163-164).

Materials

Differentiation for gifted students can happen using a variety of methods, yet in order for them to be effective, gathering pointed feedback from classroom teachers would be an essential first step. For this research, all participants were asked if there was anything they needed to meet the needs of their gifted students, to which participant ten responded, "A template of what you do with those students. Sort of an idea of what you do with the higher reading kids." Teachers are

looking for meaningful materials to be shared while meeting two criteria: 1) the material effectively integrates into what is being taught in class, and 2) the material provides an outline of how consulting gifted teachers plan for gifted students. While materials created or offered by a consulting gifted teacher would be welcomed by the majority of participants, participant seven shared a different need,

It would be cool to have a classroom observation by the GT teacher, who could see what things I could be doing different in the classroom to meet the needs of gifted students.

Also to observe the kids they [the GT teacher] sees as well as observe other kids who aren't on the radar, but possibly could or should be.

Although research-based programs, reproducible books, professional readings, and websites are a few resources made available to teachers when unknown or challenging learning circumstances present within classrooms, participant seven provided insight into the relevance of professional observations and feedback, especially in connection to gifted students.

Staffing

When this research was conducted there were three and a half consulting gifted education teachers within the Auburn School Department, with one open vacancy. The half position was covered by an educator with the gifted endorsement, but who also had to split time between other responsibilities within the district. The three full-time consulting teachers divided their time across six elementary schools, with varying populations and demographics. Three days would be the maximum number of days spent at one school, thereby gifted students received pull-out instruction once or twice a week depending on given circumstances. Participant eight offered insight into the impact of insufficient staffing,

My experience is we've always had a gifted program at school. I guess it's an added supplemental program to some degree. It provides some extension for kids, kind of at a minimal level, because we don't have enough staffing; for example, it's one time a week or twice a week. I wish the program could offer a little bit more for those kids and be more consistent.

A general consensus among the participants in this study indicated a preference for having a full-time consulting gifted teacher within each of their schools, as exhibited by participant ten who shared, "So to have time maybe to spend with you and pick your brain on you know, what I can do for my high-flyers." Teachers, just like students, are navigating between what they know and what they need, and in the case of giftedness, they need permanent, not itinerant, gifted education teachers, as noted in *Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards*, Standard Five, Section 5, gifted programming needs to be "adequately staffed and funded to meet students' interests, strengths, and needs" (NAGC.org, 2019).

Discussion

In essence, the gifted label is often used, yet rarely understood, leading to the purpose of conducting a study where elementary teachers and administrators were interviewed regarding their perceptions of giftedness. Lo and Porath (2017) suggest giftedness as being defined by societal constraints, thereby manifesting into a broad label comprised of various perceptions and beliefs. Students affixed with the gifted label have a predefined set of expectations to aspire to based on perceptions that gifted students are hard-working, confident, and intelligent, yet Matthews (2008) noted, "Explain giftedness to the child (and think of it yourself) as a temporary designation of a learning need or strength in a certain subject area, NOT a permanent condition

or a sort of endowment reserved for some special children.” Labels have become an integral component of the educational system, a rationale explained by Gates (2010), “By labeling a child, educators hope to be able to explain that child’s needs or strengths. It is this hope, coupled with a product-driven educational system, that perpetuates this emphasis on labels” (p. 200). Although the purpose of attaching labels to students may help educators determine adequate goals and plans, as Gates (2010) later surmised, “Labels become the primary focus and the child seems to be forgotten” (p. 200). Students are not requesting labels, yet educators are expecting students to adhere to given labels. In the case of the gifted label, presumptions are made and mindsets become fixed, Lambert (2010),

The ‘gifted and talented’ term, however, refers directly and unashamedly to the perceived nature of the learners themselves. It carries no implication of need, nor the suggestion of a continuum or of the possibility of temporary status - only a learner’s inherent and undeviating condition (p. 101).

Findings from this study indicate educators have a tendency to apply the gifted label to students based on their own personal and professional observations and beliefs of what giftedness looks and acts like within their classrooms and schools. The term gifted has become interchangeable with such terms as high-flyer, overachiever, hard-worker, and enrichment when in actuality, the term gifted is applicable to a small percentage of students (NAGC.org, n.d.) determined by the identification procedures of individual states and school districts. In order for an accurate and inclusive identification process, purposeful professional development is needed, especially around the varied characteristics of gifted students. Due to perceptions garnered over time in conjunction with limited gifted training, educators have a propensity to rely primarily on

their observations of cognitive characteristics, without considering the affective, and even atypical characteristics gifted students can potentially exhibit. Furthermore,

Unless prepared to teach gifted students, most teachers have had little or no background on strategies to cope with these creative and fertile minds. They need information about how to provide intellectual stimulation through problem-based learning or higher-order thinking or a variety of differentiated programming” (Gallagher et al., 1997, p. 136).

Whether through PLCs, teacher workshops, or individual meetings, the need for professional development in gifted education is needed, yet it will remain a minor priority until discussions on a larger scale take place across the district, more specifically with the curriculum coordinator and administrators.

Limitations

During the interview process, several participants expressed anxiety over being able to answer questions correctly, although reassurance was provided that all responses contained value, participants remained cautious. In the course of one interview, a participant actually mouthed whether it would be all right to share a specific name and if there was anything else that should be shared before returning to an audible voice. Another participant contacted a participant who had been previously interviewed to determine if any ‘trick’ questions would be asked before formally being interviewed. Although the previously described actions depict certain levels of anxiety, the actions could also indicate how infrequently gifted students and programming are discussed in Auburn elementary schools. Furthermore, while participants were being interviewed, they fluctuated between processing their thoughts out loud to being very succinct. Anecdotal notes taken during each interview indicate natural, free-flowing

conversations occurring after audio-recordings ceased. Participants were open about their own thoughts, limitations, and even biases pertaining to giftedness. In some cases, the quality of information shared off the record was more transparent than the responses that were recorded.

Another limitation came in the form of the questions asked during the interviews. In an attempt to keep within the time frame allotted for each interview and simultaneously taking notes, clarification for some responses was needed, yet was not noticed until reading through each transcribed interview. Transcribed interviews highlighted follow-up questions for some, but not all participants. In hindsight the inclusion of the question: What is the difference between enrichment and gifted and talented? would have been pertinent in further determining perceptions of giftedness, as the terms have been used interchangeably across the two Auburn elementary schools that were a part of this study.

Lastly, pre-K, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers were not a part of this study as they receive consultation services, rather than pull-out services, for students showing signs of giftedness. Insights from teachers at these grade levels could have indicated whether perceptions differ around what characterizes giftedness and the identification process compared to the perceptions of their peers who teach second through sixth grade.

Implications for Practice

Implications of this study suggest giftedness is not a black and white concept. Characteristics of gifted students are not one size fits all mold. Assumptions were made around testing benchmarks and gifted students' abilities. Differentiated instruction was acknowledged, while implementation was lacking. Communication and professional development around gifted education is needed, yet not a priority.

Based on the responses from this study, characteristics of giftedness shared with Auburn educators need to be revised to include the negative attributes, along with the positive. Positive traits were recognized far more often, while negative traits such as being disruptive, judgmental, and socially inept (Trix, 2009) were rarely discussed. Resources about the varied characteristics of gifted students need to be provided to teachers and administrators to ensure accurate data is being collected for formal identification purposes.

Although standardized testing was mentioned as a component of the identification process for giftedness, there were inconsistencies in the interpretation of scores. In the case of STAR testing, the benchmark of 75% and above indicates students are exceeding the standard, suggesting the same benchmark is used in determining giftedness, when in fact it is not. Consulting gifted teachers in the district use 95% or higher as an indicator of potential giftedness. Transparency is needed in how test scores are used in the identification process, as is the purpose of the CogAT test. Although some participants in this study referenced the CogAT, there are implications that little is known about why such a test is used. Background information, along with a sample of a CogAT test would help Auburn educators understand the difference between an abilities test and a comprehensive test, such as the MEAs. Conversations about testing would also lead to why testing is necessary according to Maine's Department of Education, Chapter 104: Educational Programs for Gifted & Talented Children (1996), which shares the need for objective assessments to be included as part of the identification process.

Communication, or the lack thereof, between the classroom and consulting gifted teachers is something that can not afford to be overlooked or minimized due to busy schedules. As Davies (n.d.) summarizes, "Communication not only conveys information, but it encourages

effort, modifies attitudes, and stimulates thinking. Without it, stereotypes develop, messages become distorted, and learning is stifled” (p.1). Gifted students are paying the price for ineffective communication between general and gifted education teachers, and administrators within the Auburn School Department. Implications from this study suggest meetings need to be arranged with elementary administrators for a couple of reasons: 1) to discuss the relevance of conversations focusing on areas of giftedness, and 2) to collaborate on creating common planning times for classroom and gifted teachers to meet, perhaps on a weekly or monthly basis. Establishing PLCs would improve discussions and benefit the incorporation of best instructional practices for gifted students.

Instructional practices and communication go hand in hand. Classroom teachers are looking for advice on how to differentiate instruction for their gifted students, in a manner that aligns to their learning targets while also providing rigor. Although gifted teachers could create plans and materials to pass on to classroom teachers, there is a call for integration. Integration between what is being taught in the classroom and what is being taught in gifted pull-out groups would provide a more accurate picture of students’ strengths and challenges. Teachers, both classroom and gifted, would have a better understanding of how to differentiate instruction without overwhelming gifted students.

Further implications of this study suggest the need for future conversations with Auburn’s Curriculum Coordinator, who oversees the district’s gifted and talented program, and who represents the consulting gifted education teachers at district administrative meetings. Discussions with the Curriculum Coordinator and all of the elementary school principals would provide consulting gifted education teachers the opportunity to create a uniformed,

comprehensive definition of gifted to be formally shared with Auburn educators. Upon the development of such a definition, professional development opportunities need to be created to ensure educators receive quality information, materials, and support for identifying potentially gifted students. Educators need to be aware that, “Unfortunately, research has shown that teachers often overlook atypical gifted students and refer a disproportionately high number of European-American children with “teacher-friendly” characteristics such as good behavior and high achievement to gifted education programs” (Manning, 2006, p. 67), suggesting there is more to defining the characteristics of gifted students, a logical and sequential next step in preparing professional development opportunities.

Another implication of this study focuses on the need for a gifted consulting teacher within each of the six Auburn elementary schools. Strong reliance has been placed upon consulting gifted education teachers to be experts in all areas pertaining to giftedness, inadvertently providing a false sense of security that teachers and administrators do not have to be current on gifted procedures and mandates. Participant five stated,

Uh, you know I rely heavily on [pause] when it comes to programming, the trained teacher in those programs to really deliver... you know the necessary curriculum. As far as being trained myself, or the laws and mandates, I have, you know, no formal GT training, certainly just know you know the laws around meeting the needs of the students.

Participant five’s candidness is further corroborated by Besnoy (2005),

In order for gifted students to maximize their potential, gifted and general education teachers must meet their unique needs. Unfortunately, many general education teachers, administrators, and others outside the realm of gifted education have not been exposed to

the issues surrounding gifted education (p. 32).

A fully endorsed consulting gifted teacher within each school would allow for: observations of students presenting atypical behaviors associated with giftedness, differentiated instruction for gifted students, and an overall advocate for gifted students and programming.

Implications from this study have emphasized the importance of continuing to advocate for gifted students and education in the Auburn School Department.

Future Research

Implications for future research indicate expanding this study to educators in all six of the elementary schools within the Auburn School Department. The six elementary schools vary significantly in terms of demographics and in the total number of students enrolled, suggesting a more diverse range in how giftedness could be perceived amongst teachers and administrators. Research into the types of gifted programs and services implemented in Maine school districts similar to the Auburn School Department would allow for an analysis of strengths and challenges in preparation to devise a strategic plan for gifted education in Auburn schools. Further research into the expectations the Maine Department of Education has for gifted programming in public schools would be beneficial in the development of the aforementioned strategic plan.

Conclusion

Gifted education is going through an identity crisis. Perceptions have taken precedence over research, causing giftedness to become an enigma, with the ultimate effects impacting students. The *label* of gifted suggests a natural ability or talent, while the *ability* of gifted encompasses a range of cognitive, affective, and atypical characteristics. Students are not asking to be labeled gifted, but they are looking to educators for guidance in recognizing, understanding

and supporting their unique learning needs. Essentially, educators need the training to see beyond the label in order to acknowledge and embrace the diversity of giftedness.

Looking beyond the gifted label will take time, research, and perseverance, yet students with gifted abilities deserve the right to navigate their learning experiences without a label creating illusions about who they truly are as learners, and even individuals.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions Pertaining to the Gifted Label

1. What are some common traits you observe of students you believe are gifted?
2. Upon hearing, reading, or using the term gifted (as it pertains to education), what initial thoughts come to mind?
 - If needed: How would you define gifted as it pertains to students and education?
3. Describe your experience with gifted students, gifted programs, gifted training, gifted laws/mandates.
4. Share your understanding of the identification process when it comes to formally identifying gifted students.
5. Is there anything you need when it comes to meeting the needs of gifted students?
 - If yes, please explain in detail what you need and why.
 - If no, please explain why there is no need.
6. What is your current position in the school you are working in?
7. For teachers: What subject(s) do you teach?

For principals: What is the grade span within your school? (Ex: K-6, Pre-K-6, etc.)

8. For teachers: How long have you been teaching?

For principals: How long have you been a principal?

9. For teachers: How many students are in your class this year?

- How many formally identified gifted students are in your classroom this year?

For principals: What is the total number of students in your school?

- Approximately how many students in your school are formally identified as gifted?

