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Potential for Shared Vision: What GT Middle School Teachers Say They Need in Times of Transition

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Potential for Shared Vision: What GT Middle School Teachers Say They Need in Times of Transition

Providing equitable services to the special population of Gifted and Talented (GT) students is the responsibility of educators and educational leaders throughout the United States (*Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, 2016). Many states, such as Texas, have instituted educational statutes to provide for GT student needs (Education code Chapter 1. general provisions, 2015; TEC §1.002; 19TAC §89.3). The Texas State Board of Education approved a revision of the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* in 2019 outlining provisions for identification of, programming for, educator training/responsibilities for, and administrative responsibilities regarding GT education. In 2021, the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) in association with Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG) released *The State of the States in Gifted Education* presenting a snapshot of updated GT offerings across the United States to describe the gamut of states' GT programs and services. Careful consideration has been invested toward understanding equitable practices aimed at serving this unique and often underserved student population evident in the policies that exist to support GT student needs.

However, COVID-19 pandemic presented barriers to meeting the educational and social needs of students worldwide (Fisher et al., 2022). As federal and state policy makers mandated safety protocols to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus, global and local educational leaders shifted to online “virtual” learning during the mandatory quarantine “shut down”. Strategically planning for the 2020-2021 school year, an online learning platform proved a necessary tool for many schools worldwide. Returning to many Texas classrooms during the 2020-2021 school year, students were often provided a choice between online and face-to-face content delivery depending on the school district. Despite the challenging circumstances surrounding the mitigation of COVID-19, educators attempted to deliver meaningful content in multiple modalities within an online format. As the pandemic protocols have become a matter of personal conviction rather than mandatory, Texas school districts moved forward attempting to bridge the many gaps created or accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of protocols within educational environments (*Impacts of COVID-19 and Accountability Updates for 2022 and Beyond*, 2021).

While there have been studies conducted on GT student needs from various perspectives, there is little research on middle school GT teacher perceptions of GT program implementation occurring amid the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent protocol era. Findings gathered during this unique time provide insight into the professional perceptions, wonderings, and discoveries of GT middle school teachers as they critically reflected upon their own GT program implementation. The participants' critical reflections provide a connection from the past to the present as current educators continue to strive toward bridging diverse student achievement gaps (*Impacts of COVID-19 and Accountability Updates for 2022 and Beyond*, 2021). Educators have access to GT middle school students at a pivotal developmental time that offers fertile ground for cultivating positive, meaningful experiences that can affect many aspects of learning including student achievement gaps.

Review of Literature

Adolescent Brain Plasticity and Learning Opportunities

The adolescent brain undergoes many biological and developmental changes during teenage years. Middle school students experience much change as their neural activity indicates more plasticity than a mature brain (Spear, 2013). This plasticity indicates various changes in neural construction and deconstruction as the adolescent brain maintains useful neural pathways and removes or prunes unnecessary and less used pathways (Spear, 2013). Due to the likelihood of neural pruning, adolescents may experience forgetfulness in some areas of visual recognition (Siegel, 2013) even though the “speed and efficiency of information flow across relatively distant regions [of the brain] are accelerated during adolescence” (Spear, 2013, p. S8). Adolescents tend to exhibit increased interests in social interactions with peers rather than parents, participation in risk taking, novelty seeking, and creative exploration (Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013). The significance of physiological adolescent brain activity and its effects on social-emotional processes warrant description.

According to Gotlieb et al. (2016), the executive attention network (EAN), made of multiple areas of the brain, is likely the foundation for IQ assessments used for GT identification. In addition, creativity can be linked to the “default mode network” (DMN) of the brain (p. 23). The DMN “includes psychological processes such as mind wandering, imagining, and making meaning about past or future personally or social relevant information” (Gotlieb et al., 2016, p. 24). Gotlieb et al. (2016) suggest that the partnership between these two networks is both extremely important when assessing and cultivating giftedness. Engaging GT intellect through curiosity could allow for the growth of GT students’ innovative and critical thinking skills in both the EAN and DMN (Gotlieb et al., 2016). If educators can provide unique learning opportunities that engage both the EAN and DMN, GT students may come closer to reaching their educational potential.

Based on the plasticity of the adolescent brain and the effects its physiological changes on teenagers’ decision making, GT educators have an opportunity to capitalize on adolescents’ tendency toward novelty, social interactions, risk taking, and creativity during middle school. Middle school learning experiences, whether positive or negative, have the potential to affect individual adolescent schema (Spear, 2013). The significance of how an adolescent receives and processes information (academic content as well as social input), revolves around and leans upon an individual’s experiences (Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013). Therefore, the influence of engaging, relevant, meaningful learning experiences on adolescent schema elevates the value of intentional GT curriculum design and implementation for GT students.

Uniqueness of Gifted Middle School Students

While each student is unique, GT students possess exceptional potential giftedness in at least one identified area. Texas Education Code (TEC), Rule §29.121 describes a student who is gifted and talented as “a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who (1) exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area; (2) possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or (3) excels in a specific academic field” (*Texas State Plan for the Gifted/Talented Students*, 2019, p. 14). GT students have distinctive educational needs that can and should be met in a variety of ways to encourage, challenge, and engage their thinking through differentiation (Renzulli, 2012; Young & Balli, 2014).

The potential for intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, and academic growth during adolescence is high due to neurological changes within the teenage brain. The plasticity of the

adolescent brain (Spear, 2013) increases the importance of investing in quality GT learning opportunities at the secondary level. Siegel (2013) explains that adolescent brain development leads to “novelty seeking, social engagement, increased emotional intensity, and creative exploration” that present both advantages and disadvantages regarding decision making and behaviors (p. 7). With awareness of the plasticity of the middle school adolescent brain (Spear, 2013) and changes in behaviors as they test their boundaries, weigh risks in a different manner than an adult (Siegel, 2013), middle school GT educators and leaders can capitalize on the neural synaptic changes of their middle school GT students with a strong school-home connection (Flores & Kyere, 2021; Lockhart & Mun, 2020; Mun et al, 2021).

Cultivating a Culture of Collaborative Communication

The intentionality of school leadership toward cultivating a culture of collaboration through communication is essential in building strong GT student support at home and at school. As instructional leaders school administrators should provide clear, yet comprehensive description of their campus GT program expectations for all GT stakeholders (19TAC §149). When school leadership designs and facilitates an intentional plan for inviting GT families to the conversation about their teenager’s GT services, parents and guardians may be more likely to actively participate in their child’s advocacy (Flores & Kyere, 2021).

GT students are supported by advocates such as GT teachers, their parents, and educational leaders. Advocacy begins with communication. During adolescence, parents are a valuable resource for GT educators and administrators who strive to meet the needs of GT students equitably. Parent influence on their teenager’s self-schema begins early in life (McArthur et al., 2018). According to Lockhart and Mun (2020), positive interactions among GT teachers, parents, and administrators can create “partnerships to leverage student strengths to develop talent and support areas of need” (p.236). Aykac & Msengi (2019) found that middle school principals “strongly believe parental involvement influences students’ success” in conjunction with their own interactions and “visibility” among parents (p.85). Creating a culture of shared vision of high expectations is the responsibility of campus administrators in Texas (19TAC §149). Administrators should provide state required information (19TAC §89.3) within the context of their campus culture by laying an informative foundation that explains the GT identification process and program services offered to parents and guardians.

Cultivating a culture of open and clear communication for parents of marginalized populations requires innovation (Aykac & Msengi, 2019; Lockhart & Mun, 2020) due to barriers. Barriers preventing parent involvement such as language, understanding of GT program assessment, purpose, and process must be removed by way of innovative, informative, and collaborative strategies (Aykac & Msengi, 2019; Lockhart & Mun, 2020). Efforts should be made to include and inform parents of twice gifted (2E) students, parents of GT students learning English as a second language, and parents of students from marginalized and underrepresented populations (Flores & Kyere, 2020; Lockhart & Mun, 2020; Mun, Ezzani, & Yeung, 2021; Reis & Renzulli, 2020). Ensuring parent understanding of GT services could foster a culture of not only shared vision of high expectations, but a culture of inclusion for stakeholders through “intentional family and community engagement” (19TAC §149).

If parents are invited to the conversation and encouraged to collaborate with GT educators, teachers can learn much from parents of GT students. Insights from parents of GT students can guide GT program design to address individual student needs (Reis & Renzulli, 2020). Interestingly, parents report a decline in information regarding GT programming at the

secondary level (Mun et al., 2021), yet this crucial developmental period warrants intentional collaboration from all GT stakeholders. The joint efforts of campus and home collaborative communication could inspire individualized advocacy for GT students toward meeting their educational potential.

Summary

The literature provides insight into the biological and social flexibility of adolescent brains (McArthur et al, 2018; Salmivalli & Peets, 2009; Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013). The plasticity of and effects on the adolescent brain highlight the importance of providing positive and engaging learning experiences during this pivotal time of impressionable GT students' lives. The pandemic, its many protocols, and environmental requirements collectively shaped GT middle school student educational experiences in positive and negative ways both directly and indirectly (Leverette, 2021). Armed with awareness of adolescent brain characteristics and behavioral tendencies (Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013), GT teachers and educational leaders have the ability and responsibility (19TAC §89.3) collaborate with parents (19TAC §149.2001) to address individual gaps presented due to the pandemic era. GT educators and school leaders are charged with providing equitable educational services to GT students who have exceptional intellectual, creative, and social-emotional needs (19TAC §89.3; 19TAC §149.2001; Gay, 1995; Mun et al., 2021; Reis & Renzulli, 2020; Renzulli, 2002; Renzulli, 2012; Young & Balli, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of COVID-19 protocols on GT educator program implementation experiences. This study sought to answer the following research question, what are middle school GT educator perceptions of COVID-19 protocol impacts on their implementation of GT services? As educators attempt to assess academic, behavioral, and social-emotional gaps left in the wake of the pandemic, the findings can offer insight from experienced GT teacher perceptions discovered through critical self-reflection and evaluation of their own GT program implementation to aid in offering strategies for designing more equitable learning opportunities for GT students.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilized Culturally Relevant Pedagogy framework (CRP) and a giftedness framework to investigate the relationships between GT teachers, their GT students, and the quality of learning experiences implemented during COVID protocols once students returned to the classroom after the COVID-19 quarantine was lifted. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy occurs when teachers support, encourage, and help students “experience academic success”, when teachers “utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” through specific, authentic cultural samples, and when teachers actively develop “critical consciousness” within students so they may evaluate “cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 160-162). Examining pandemic-affected learning experiences through a giftedness framework provides an appropriate lens to support dynamic GT learning experiences that could encourage GT students to meet their educational potential (Reis & Renzulli, 2020; Renzulli, 2002; Renzulli, 2012). Throughout the study participants couched their own implementation strategies and concerns upon statements of relational teacher-student and student-student interactions.

The framework of co-constructing meaning can play an influential part in collaborative conversations among GT students’ advocates such as GT teachers, their parents, campus administrators, as well as GT students themselves. Co-constructing meaning occurs when

dialogue and questioning brings new understanding to those speaking and listening (Bavelas et al., 2014). This concept, while coined to address conceptual occurrences in therapy, can be applicable in various conversations in education where multiple perspectives intermingle toward a common objective. The co-construction of meaning may occur at various points of reflection and discussion. Employing intentional co-construction will be addressed within the discussion and conclusion sections.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study of a purposeful convenience sample of four GT middle school teachers teaching 7th grade or 8th grade students employed in the same large urban school district in Texas at the time of the study. Participants were selected for variation in ethnicity, possession of multiple years of GT teaching experience, a variance in subjects taught (among participants), and a willingness to share their insights during such a unique time in education. The four participants held an average of 13.5 years of public school teaching service, 11.5 years in the specific district of study, and 10.75 years teaching GT students. Their collective average of teaching experience supporting GT students is notable.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Subjects taught
Kristine	Female	Black	English/Advanced English
Nadia	Female	Russian	Advanced Math
Oscar	Male	Puerto Rican	History/Advanced History/Leadership
Daisy	Female	White	History/Advanced History

Table 2

Participant Teaching Experience

Participants	In public education	In Carbon ISD	GT students
Kristine	8	5	7
Nadia	13	13	8
Oscar	16	11	16
Daisy	17	17	12
Avg. Years	13.5	11.5	10.75

Data collected in this study includes responses from a semi-structured survey, a virtual individual interview, member check questions via email, and focus group discussion. Data was collected from January 2021 through March 2021 after participants had returned to the classroom. For context, prior to and throughout this study, students were allowed to return to either face-to-face instruction or opt to continue online virtual learning beginning September 2020 after the pandemic quarantine shutdown occurred. In the district of study, some teachers were also permitted to continue teaching virtually for an extended time due to approved health considerations. All case study participants returned to the classroom during September 2020 without requesting extensions. Throughout the study, coding was iterative after each stage of data collection. Participant responses were inductively coded and categorized. Emergent themes were textually and visually represented in the final research texts. Triangulation between multiple data sources, peer review, recurrent interview times, and member checks ensure trustworthiness of this case study. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stake, 1995).

Findings

Four major themes emerged from the entirety of the study: (a) GT educators need a dedicated GT curriculum that encourages the application of critical thinking skills in personally relevant ways to support GT students more appropriately; (b) The GT learning environment was hindered by multiple factors related directly and indirectly to COVID-19 circumstances, but that this novel environment created opportunities for GT student growth; (c) GT Professional development should include cross curricular critical thinking application strategies; and (d) GT parents should be more involved at the secondary level to effectively communicate valuable information about GT individual student qualities, expectations, and progress throughout the year among GT parents and educators. While this study identifies four main emergent themes expressed by this case, the focus of this paper will expound on the fourth theme, “GT parents should be more involved at the secondary level to effectively communicate valuable information about GT individual student qualities, expectations, and progress throughout the year among GT parents and educators.” Findings regarding teacher perceptions of needs of increased parental understanding and support will be examined. Data reached saturation and consensus with all participants agreeing upon the perceptions presented in this section both verbally and non-verbally during the focus group discussion. Participants’ requests for support will be further addressed within in the recommendation section.

Participants shared three common perceptions regarding teacher-parent involvement to support middle school GT students’ success across multiple subjects: (a) a need for open lines of communication between teachers and parents of GT students, (b) a need for clarification of the definition of GT middle school student “success”, and (c) a need for ongoing teacher-parent communication of GT student progress at the secondary level.

What are characteristics of foundational GT communication? Based on participant responses, policy, and other literature, the need for open communication between GT teachers and parents is needed to create advocacy for often underserved GT students. “Open” communication refers to intentional, invitational communication from campus faculty or staff to GT students’ parents or guardians. Nadia, an advanced math teacher with thirteen years of service, eight of which have been spent focused on advanced math classes, stated that it is necessary to “create open lines of communication” with parents and guardians of her GT students early in the school year. During their individual interview as well as in during the focus

group discussion, participants agreed with this belief and stated their initiation of communication with parents of GT students during the first semester via email.

When asked to describe the amount or frequency of this year's parent involvement, each participant stated a varying degree of parent involvement, yet each reported parent interactions to be fairly "normal". Daisy, a veteran teacher with seventeen years of service, twelve of which have been educating GT students, noted a "pendulum" representation of GT parent involvement to include parents who are consistently involved in their teenager's progress while others are "hands-off". According to Kristine, an experienced teacher with eight years of teaching experience, seven of which she served GT students, stated of her experience with current GT parent communication, "I think it's almost more hands-off with my GT students than some of my other students". Nadia stated that she experienced about 50% of her advanced parents' involvement during the pandemic.

Parents As Valuable Resources

Why should parents actively participate in GT programs? Participant responses expressed a consensus stating they believe parent involvement as "beneficial" to the educational support of gifted teenagers. Participants' "open lines of communication" exist because of their belief in the value of parent-teacher interaction. Each teacher shared their desire to connect with parents to inform them of basic assignment information, various expectations, and student progress over time. Their communication efforts continued throughout the year. Participants stated they reached out to parents via email multiple times, and/or messaged students and parents through Canvas LMS to provide updates. Parents responded by email or Canvas messaging most often when a message was initiated by the teacher. Phone calls were not as a frequent form of parent communication by teachers or parents. Nadia stated,

I want to make sure that every kid hears from me and knows that I care, and I talked to their parents and said something positive...to make sure everyone hears from me...just an opportunity to check in on them and see how they are doing.

During parent communication, teachers gained valuable insight into parent perceptions of their teen's education. Oscar stated a desire to have more information about GT students at the beginning of each school year:

If I could go back and make sure every they identified the student's areas of giftedness and we had records following them through the years without having to go through every [cumulative] file, we would have something...We'd have some successes, and we wouldn't lose some of these kids.

Oscar's statement referenced a previous concern about marginalized GT students who possibly drop out of Advanced Placement (AP) or honors classes for various reasons including apathy, lack of perseverance, and other "socio-economic and cultural challenges". There is discrepancy between the US population and students represented in GT programs (Lockhart & Mun, 2020). Culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse GT students "are less likely to be identified for or proportionately represented in gifted programming" (Lockhart & Mun, 2020, p. 231). Students who speak a primary language other than English may not be able to fully express their comprehension of concepts due to a lack of mastery of vocabulary. Students who are identified as 2E have specific needs that may be shared in a student's individual education plan (IEP). However, GT students who are culturally, linguistically, or economically diverse will not always have designated documentation to inform educators of GT student needs (Lockhart & Mun, 2020).

Multiple participants stated a need for parent input due to the lack of GT information provided at the secondary level for several reasons. GT teachers found minimal information available in GT students' cumulative folder. Oscar stated that when asked, "GT students don't always know which area they are gifted in." Parents often know their child's interests. While teenagers choose to gravitate away from parents during middle school (Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013), parents have had opportunity to get to know their child for years. Teachers observe the current student actions/progress and can make inferences based on their experiences as GT teachers, but the exceptionality of a GT student could be supported more fully with the addition of more awareness of GT student interest and prior progress information. Parents have seen their child's previous actions and progress even if they are not aware of their teenager's current interests. Gathering parental perceptions can benefit the GT teacher in designing customized curriculum challenges for individual students, thus directly benefitting a GT student by experiencing more equitable learning opportunities. Participants desired more individual GT student information. Parents could potentially shed light on multiple aspects of a GT student's strengths, weaknesses, or areas of interest.

Although GT teachers state they open the "door" of communication to parents, participants state that parent responses vary widely as Daisy described a "pendulum" of parent participation. Despite many parents physically being at home with their children during the pandemic, parent involvement did not increase during Covid for the participants. In fact, GT parent involvement seemed lower than during previous years for Kristine as she stated, "Honestly, I haven't seen a lot...and I think it's almost more hands-off". Participants identified concerns surrounding parent involvement to include (a) potentially unidirectional flow of information, (b) unreceived information, and/or (c) misinterpreted information. Multiple causes for infrequent parent involvement during or prior to Covid are possible.

Parents of "twice exceptional" (2E) gifted students who have a disability in some area while simultaneously being gifted in another area should play "an active role" in developing their teenager's "individual education plan (IEP) or 504 plan" (Reis & Renzulli, 2021, p. 46). Communicating with parents of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse GT students is essential. The power of campus-home connection provides GT students advocacy through increased communication, understanding, and expectations (Aykac, & Msengi (2019); Flores & Kyere (2020); Lockhart & Mun (2020). Educating 2E students via CRP may increase student engagement, comprehension, and self-worth (Reis & Renzulli, 2020; Renzulli, 2012).

Barriers to Parent Involvement

The Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students (2019) mandates that each school district provide a parent information session to explain GT learning opportunities and other required information (*Guidance for interpreting the expectations of the Texas State Plan for the education of gifted/talented students*, 2021). However, simply disseminating state required GT information may not address teacher and parent differences in secondary GT expectations of student success due to the variance in individual human perceptions and campus demographics, needs, and culture. Multiple barriers to receiving and comprehending GT program information exist.

What causes barriers that decrease parent involvement? Communication received by parents may be consciously and/or unconsciously ignored or misunderstood. Parents of GT students may speak a language other than English at home (Aykac & Msengi, 2019). The level of parent comprehension of GT vocabulary may be hindered by lack of exposure to GT definitions

and processes in their own experience. Parents in lower social or economic situations may be unfamiliar with GT purpose, goals, program characteristics and/or expectations, or other aspects of their GT child's educational services possibly lowering their self-efficacy perceptions toward supporting their GT teen's education (Lockhart & Mun, 2020; Mun et al., 2021). Aykac and Msengi (2019) noted examples of barriers principal experienced in attempting to build communication and relationships with parents that include "parents' works schedules, not having up-to-date contact information, parents getting upset with rules and regulations, lack of time, lack of knowledge among teachers, and family issues" (p. 86). Due to the multitude of barriers preventing parent involvement in GT programs, clear and innovative methods of communication are needed to connect parents to their gifted teenager's learning. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) denote that the older a GT student is, the less likely parents are to be actively involved in their education. Other barriers to parent involvement include students' learning differences, as well as giftedness. When parents identify conflicting teacher perceptions from their own concerning their child's giftedness, or when GT students become disenchanted with school when unchallenged and bored, and in turn act out behaviorally, parents may reduce their involvement due to a lack of confidence in the teacher, school, or educational system (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Participants identified another invisible barrier to parent involvement.

Are GT teachers and parents on the "same page"? Participants identified a dichotomy in teacher and parent definitions of GT student "success". The GT teachers in this study described student "success" as "growth" evidenced by "persevering through challenge or difficulty" and acquiring "new understanding" once the student mastered the challenge. Participants expected GT students to struggle with understanding some concepts during the year and therefore did not expect GT students to achieve one hundreds for all assignments. All participants voiced concern about contrasting parent perceptions.

Describing an overview of parents' perceptions of GT student success, Oscar stated, "They are concerned about their grade, but that's pretty much it. That's it. The grade is all that matters." Participants perceptions were derived from observations of similar parent conversations when parents stated expectations that reflect their teenager's previous academic experiences when their GT child consistently earned "100s" throughout elementary school. This parental elementary expectation caused participants to question students' growth during elementary school. Based on her interactions with parent expectations, Nadia reflected: If students were "mastering each assignment" by making one hundreds on all assignments attempted in elementary school, "how can there be growth?"

Associating the need for open communication and the discrepancy in teacher and parent understanding of student success, Nadia's stated her perception of a cause in this contrast: "There's no education [provided to parents] for why kids are in the advanced classes. What is the goal of advanced classes? And I think this is kind of the big disconnect." Literature supports participants' perceptions that students must fail in order to grow (Nissim-Matheis, 2021). During the focus group, participants concurred when Nadia presented her feedback to the question: "What do you wish parents of GT learners knew and how do you help them understand that?" Nadia's answered, "Informing parents of challenges, actual challenges," and "building opportunities for failure". All participants agreed with nods of affirmation and multiple "yes" responses after her input. The opportunities for growth do not look the same for GT teachers as they seem to appear to parents. This disconnect is problematic for GT students on multiple levels. This will be addressed later in the discussion section.

According to participants, GT teacher and parent perceptions of “student success” often do not align. Participants shared a concern during the focus group discussion that parent expectations of junior high students’ grades are “not realistic”. GT teachers stated that parents often have specific expectations of their GT teenager to maintain perfect scores on all assignments in continuation of their elementary school performance. Had parents been informed of secondary middle school expectations? For some parents, who attended previous 6th grade parent nights, the answer is yes. Nadia spoke at a previous 6th grade parent nights prior to new 7th graders attending her campus to share an overview of advanced math expectations, yet she wondered “I’m not sure if the parents *hear* me”. Many hypotheses and inferences can be made but the answer to this concern will be left to future research.

All participants recalled hearing parents state concern about their child’s current grade of less than one hundreds. But as Nadia noted, “Being ‘GT’ doesn’t mean a student always makes one hundreds.” Oscar stated, “[Parents] are concerned about their [child’s] grade, but that’s pretty much it. That’s it. The grade is all that matters” to the GT parents. Nadia’s explained, “So the biggest challenge for me this year when I’m working with these kids [is] to teach them how to think in a variety of ways-realize that if they are not challenged, they truly are not growing.” Parents and teachers may not always share the same understanding of student success. The participants identified an awareness of this discrepancy of parent perception of success versus the teacher definition of success during the focus group conversation. For the participants, when students showed growth by meeting and surpassing a challenge, then a student succeeded. Even after explanation, teachers and parents were not always in agreement. Nadia shared “some “parents [sic] are still not being realistic about their kid’s expectation or results and they are just not hearing my message.” While open lines of communication cannot ensure parents and teachers share perspectives, “effective communication can decrease miscommunication between parents and schools” (Aykac & Msengi, 2019, p. 85). Ongoing communication also has the potential to increase awareness of GT student progress.

An unexpected windfall that emerged from within this study is the addition of surprising perspective that all participants brought to the conversation. Each participant spoke from the lens of a parent of children in current and/or previous GT programs in the district while teaching during their children’s educational career. Ongoing communication with parents offers evidence of GT services. Daisy recalled the communication she experienced as a parent of students in one district high school. The communication was informative, but not exhaustive. In Daisy’s parent experience, most high school AP teachers for her own teenagers had a “sink or swim kind of attitude” toward student success. When beginning to recall her experience, Daisy expressed a concerned tone regarding her perception of AP teacher attitudes, but then stated that “teachers provide proof of challenge for GT students” in a moment of realization with a more positive tone ending on a higher note both literally and figuratively. GT teachers provide information regarding requirements, expectations, and progress to parents. There were differing amounts and frequencies of parent involvement at the middle school level according to participants. Without parent responses to teacher-initiated communication, parent perceptions are unknown to GT educators. Providing “proof of challenge” is merely one perspective in the evolution of a student’s success. To have a more comprehensive picture of a GT student’s growth, parents and students need to contribute their ideas toward the design of their GT teenager’s learning experiences.

Ongoing Communication of Student Progress

GT Teachers provide much information throughout the year through emails and apps such as Remind. Purposes of routine information include upcoming assignments, evidence of student progress, grade updates, individual areas of needed academic or behavioral growth. The “proof of challenge” Daisy stated was important to note for secondary GT programs. Secondary GT programming is made of different versions of challenge including Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, dual credit courses, and other “honors” courses as provided by an individual campus. Compared to elementary school GT programming, secondary GT programs seem less uniform throughout districts (Callahan et al., 2017). This may present itself in the variations of communication at the middle school and high school level.

Secondary teacher attitudes may become less nurturing during high school. Daisy’s perception of high school teachers’ mantra of “sink or swim” was originally told with a negative tone. However, her next sentence stating that those same high school teachers were “proof of challenge”, indicated a potential shift of perception in the moment. The identification of *difficulty and struggle* her teenagers endured *was the proof that they were being challenged*. High school teachers’ “sink or swim” philosophy may cause students to take on ownership of learning.

Reflecting upon the participants’ concern about a potential a lack of challenge at the elementary level, their identification of a dichotomy regarding the need for struggle in middle school, and an awareness of independent students’ struggle in high school, the progressive incremental challenge may not be at a fast enough pace for GT students early on. With the plasticity of adolescent brains in mind, GT educators and school administrators have access to a unique time following the pandemic to potentially close achievement gaps and allow GT students to explore farther and think more creatively than they have been allowed to in the past. The GT middle school teacher participants in this study attempted to change the parent expectations to include challenge and rigor to allow students to struggle thereby engaging their problem solving and critical thinking skills to find solutions yet met opposition. Just as high school teachers seem to shift the onus of learning onto the student, GT middle school programming can begin this process sooner to cultivate and expect change sooner as well.

Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to gather GT middle school teacher perceptions during pandemic era education through the lens of CRP. GT teacher participants stated the following needs regarding middle school GT teacher-parent interactions: (a) open communication between teachers and parents, 2) parents understanding of teacher perception of student success, and 3) ongoing teacher-parent conveyance of student progress at the secondary level. Participants stated a common theme of GT teacher-student relationship that supports CRP within GT implementation programming.

Based on participant responses, culturally relevant teacher-student relationships invite foundational support for GT students. In conjunction authentic teacher-student relationships, positive and ongoing GT teacher and parent communication has the potential to create advocacy for GT students. When GT teachers and parents share the overall goal of supporting a GT student, they can collaboratively work together to develop learning opportunities designed to meet the specific needs of their individual GT student more effectively through academic (Reis & Renzulli, 2020; Renzulli, 2002; Renzulli, 2012) and social-emotional learning opportunities through school and home support (Gotlieb, 2016; Young & Balli, 2014). CRP focused teacher-

student-parent partnerships can champion GT students toward meeting their unique educational needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Once intentional dialogue is established between GT teachers and parents, clarification of perceptions and expectations can be shared. As GT teachers and parents present their own unique perceptions of a GT student's interests, progress, strengths, and areas of potential growth, the opportunity to co-construct new meaning of the student's strengths, areas of needed growth, and to set appropriate goals for the GT student arise (Bavelas et al., 2014). Contributing to a more holistic view of a GT student's needs, strengths, and goals, GT teachers and parents can create a shared vision. A shared vision at the classroom level can offer individualized learning opportunities designed specifically for a unique GT student.

Intentional, meaningful, and ongoing teacher-parent communication is therefore a tool to be leveraged toward the advocacy of GT middle school students who experience much physiological and developmental change during adolescence (Spear, 2013) along with their perceptions of novelty, risk, creativity, and social interactions (Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013). The rate of change within the adolescence brain is significant (Spear, 2013). Capitalizing on the development of GT student potential in middle school could stimulate substantial critical thinking, imaginative, and intellectual growth. The investment in such a crucial time seems indispensable. What then can be done to support GT growth?

Recommendations for GT Teachers

The literature and data from this study support a recommendation for teachers to support secondary GT students by intentionally reaching out to parents of GT students and continuing to present student progress throughout the year. Middle school GT teachers should communicate with their campus leadership to request parent trainings prior to the start of each school year for the purpose of providing clear expectations of GT student challenge, struggle, growth, and their success. Where possible, teachers can create advocacy with parents of GT students to design more equitable and individualized learning experiences tailored for unique GT students' interests, levels of understanding, and readiness for new challenges. (Gay, 1995; Reis & Renzulli, 2020; Renzulli, 2002; Renzulli, 2012) By providing communication, clear expectations, and advocacy opportunities, GT teachers can create strong support for their GT programs with parents as valuable resources. GT teachers will need backing from their campus administrators to create a potential shared vision across a campus of high expectations for GT communication and its potential advocacy.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

Working toward bridging home-school relationships can be seen as opportunity for administrators (Flores & Kyere, 2021). The literature and data from this study support a recommendation for educational administrators to actively support secondary GT programming by (a) evaluating current GT communication practices, (b) initiating GT campus-school communication where needed, and (c) facilitating and/or fostering intentional avenues of ongoing school-home communication among teachers and parents of GT students. By implementing and sustaining consistent GT home-school communication, administrators can promote awareness of GT student strengths and progress to GT stakeholders. Open dialogue can promote understanding of various perspectives among GT parents, students, and teachers (Bavelas et al., 2014). By facilitating teachers' and parents' acquisition of a fuller understanding of GT students' strengths, needs, and progress toward educational goals, administrators can

reinforce advocacy for the GT student population (Aykaç & Msengi, 2019; Flores & Kyere, 2021; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lockhart & Mun, 2020; Mun et al., 2021; Reis & Renzulli, 2020). The recommended supports could encourage more equitable learning opportunities for individual GT students during a critical time in their potential intellectual growth (Siegel, 2013; Spear, 2013). Campus administrator communication facilitation and direction can positively affect those GT students who are 2E, English language learners, or have other deficits that may prevent their interactions without administrative guidance (Aykaç & Msengi, 2019; Flores & Kyere, 2021; Lockhart & Mun, 2020). When efforts to incorporate parents into the design of GT programming for GT students is sought from CRP mindset, multiple GT stakeholders benefit from the authentic, customized nature of meaningful strategies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lockhart & Mun, 2020; Mun et al., 2021).

Through ongoing dialogue, campus administrators may co-construct meaning (Bavelas et al., 2014) to gather insight into effective campus-home communication strategies across districts or profession. As administrators connect with their administrative networks, they could share strengths and strategies for supporting GT programming at the campus level. Actively reviewing the integration of CRP practices as they relate to GT programming, may spark new insights into addressing the diverse needs of the GT student population and their families. The synergy of collaborative dialogue may have the potential to create new individual understandings (Bavelas et al., 2014) for best GT practices. Through co-construction, campus administrators may find viable strategies to address their particular campus needs for their GT student population.

Conclusions

Communication among GT teachers, parents, students, and administrators is a vital component of equitable GT programming. Communication founded on authentic CRP practices builds connection among GT stakeholders. However, because not all parents of GT students share the same awareness, understanding, success goals, and/or expectations of GT services for their GT teenager, it is necessary to provide intentional, innovative avenues of ongoing school-home communication that provide parent GT program expectation discussion. This is possible when CRP practices are intentionally employed by GT faculty and administration. School administrators can cultivate shared vision for high expectations of GT programming that encourages ongoing parent-teacher communication to promote GT student progress over time. Purposely including parents in the design of CRP based GT learning experiences fulfills legal educational responsibilities, promotes CRP best practices for inclusion of consistently underserved student populations, and creates shared vision while building stronger relationships among campus stakeholders.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study represented a small sample size of middle school GT educators from the same large urban district. While the researcher sought out a variety of GT educator ethnicities and subjects taught, the sample is limited to these case perceptions. The study focuses on middle school GT teacher perceptions rather than including high school GT educators, parents, students, or administrators.

Future research that includes elementary GT teacher perception specifically could help define any variations in teacher perceptions among elementary and secondary GT programming. Furthermore, it may prove useful to discover parents', students', and campus administrators' perceptions of the quality of GT communication, their perceptions of student "success", and their

perceived advocacy or lack thereof for GT students. GT stakeholder perceptions could provide a larger understanding of secondary GT programs to aid in evaluation of GT communication, services, and GT student support. School leader and district GT personnel perceptions and applicable empirical data should also be gathered to evaluate the effectiveness of GT programming in the current pandemic-affected educational era.

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