GIFTED AND…: TEACHER REFLECTION AND TRANSFORMATION IN RESPONSE TO TEACHING GIFTED STUDENTS

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GIFTED AND…: TEACHER REFLECTION AND TRANSFORMATION IN RESPONSE TO

TEACHING GIFTED STUDENTS

by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

12 teachers, representing five schools in a district, shared via individual interviews their insights regarding giftedness and the needs of gifted students. These interviews explored the characteristics of giftedness and gifted education, the needs participants identified through their experiences with their students, the choices participants made regarding these needs, and the various ways participants reflected on these choices. This study used reflexive thematic analysis and transformative learning theory to make sense of the data, and a reparative approach shaped the study's approach to the collection and analysis of the data. This study found that participants tended to think in terms of students-as-individuals, using their relationships with students to identify and meet their unique needs. Knowledge of students' lives and varying constructions of giftedness informed participants' choices regarding services provided in gifted serving classrooms. Participants reflected on their choices; however, reflection was sometimes limited by few opportunities to discuss with and learn from other peers in gifted education. This study identifies implications for gifted education, teachers in gifted education, school and district leadership, and researchers. Teachers with school and district leadership would benefit by exploring ways to encourage and support peer feedback and discussions that provide opportunities to share their experiences and learn from each other. Researchers would expand the understanding of gifted education by including the voices of more stakeholders, including teachers, and better understanding the ways teachers make choices in relation to students' needs. Also, this dissertation calls for a reparative approach to research, one that focuses on potential rather than deficits.

DEDICATION

To Ryan: without his support, this work would not be possible, and without whom, all of this would not be worthwhile.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Giftedness and gifted education, like any social construct, do not exist in a pure, clearly defined form. Labels make dialogue possible, but the meaning of them is shaped by those spoken of/for and those who speak about, with those in positions of authority having the most control of both the meaning and the implications of that meaning (Lucas & Beresford, 2010). Policy makers decide the criteria for giftedness and outline gifted curriculum as evidenced by state and federal guidelines for giftedness (The Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; Southeastern State Department of Education [SESDE], 2018), and local agencies must apply these guidelines negotiated through their own contexts. This top-down system has shaped and limited professional and academic discourse regarding giftedness and gifted education by prioritizing critical approaches that deterministically accept inequity as an inevitability. Instead, this study sought to change the conversation by focusing on the local level, seeing teachers as active agents who make choices within their own contexts. This approach was not a simple reversal of the top-down model; instead, this approach sought to expand the discourse to include "multiple constructions" and "multiple realities" in the pursuit of a deeper, more complex understanding (Lincoln & Bua, 1985, p. 296).

The need to understand this multiplicity is evident in the term giftedness itself. Giftedness is not consistently identified or defined as competing theories of giftedness are in place (Miller, 2012; Stoeger, 2012; Warne, 2016; Winner, 2000). Some theories focus on intelligence, which may construct giftedness in ways that privilege specific groups (Gentry et al., 2021), while other theories aim to be more inclusive through a focus on potential and a recognition of social factors (Kuo, 2022; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). This lack of clarity is further complicated by broad federal guidelines. The Every Student Succeeds Act, a reauthorization of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965, gives a broad view of giftedness in terms of achievement in comparison to peers and places the responsibility of identifying and outlining services on the states and local agencies (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018). The uncertainty in defining giftedness paired with local control potentially leads to policies and practices that reinforce privilege and disenfranchise gifted minority and low-income students.

The evidence of this effect can be seen in the pattern of gifted classes and programs' demographics showing racial and social inequity as minority students tend to be underrepresented while White and Asian middle-class students tend to be overrepresented (Shores et al., 2020; Siegle et al., 2016). Economically disadvantaged students are underrepresented as students who qualify for free or reduced lunch are less likely to receive services, and students in schools with a high free or reduced lunch population are also less likely to receive services (Hamilton et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2019). These legitimate concerns paired with the perception that gifted students can succeed in any environment due to an intrinsic drive to learn has resulted in questioning the value of maintaining gifted classes and programs (Barnes, 2022; Peters, 2022; Subotnik et al., 2011), instead favoring differentiation for all (Lo et al., 2022). With gifted programs being under state and local agency control, the call to end gifted programs appears to ignore that these inequitable trends are likely to be mirrored in the general educational classes too.

A universal end of gifted programs or classes is unlikely. Schools already struggle to provide challenging material to the range of students in regular education classrooms (Peters, 2022b), so a reliance on differentiation in regular education as the great equalizer seems naive. In addition, communities are invested in gifted programs as suggested by New York City's initial plans to end gifted programs in favor of differentiation in regular education for all (National

Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2021; Nierengerb, 2021) that changed within a year to expanding gifted services instead (NAGC, 2022; Sgueglia & Paul, 2022). Though only one example, the abrupt change does suggest that gifted programs are likely to remain in response to public demand, so a focus is needed on their potential rather than ending them.

Gifted programs are not without potential for serving diverse populations. Though studies looking at gifted programs overall tend to show little benefit for low-income and minority students (Redding & Grissom, 2021; Wai & Allen, 2019), they assume gifted education is universal in application rather than recognizing that this lack of benefits may be ingrained in state and local policies rather than gifted education. Some gifted programs have targeted addressing the needs of underserved students, changing how they approach gifted education, and this shift in focus has resulted in increased benefits for low-income and minority students (Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017).

Horn (2015) outlines the Young Scholars Program in Fairfax County, Virgina. This program started in 2001 with the goal of addressing the underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, low-income, and multilingual students in advanced courses. The program started with development at the local level with teachers, principals, and district staff serving in Title I schools, and committees were formed to develop a program that addressed the specific needs of these schools. Rather than starting with identification, the program focused on growth for all students. Enrichment opportunities were provided, such as one school's Girls in Engineering, Mathematics, and Science club, and teachers trained in serving gifted students modeled lessons geared towards higher levels of thinking for peers to use in all classes. Those who demonstrated gifted characteristics through assessments, portfolios, and observations were served in pull-out models and eventually served through honors courses. The program has shown increased

representation as the increase from 2003 to 2014 for Black students is 565%, and at the secondary level, of the 4,432 Young Scholars in high school, 78% are in honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses.

Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2017) discuss Project Excite's success in increasing access to underserved students. The program was developed in 2000 through Northwestern University's Center for Talent and Development, and it worked with suburban districts that though the populations were predominately Black and Hispanic, gifted courses were still predominately White. The program used frontloading and additional instruction on weekends and summers to address opportunity gaps. This program focused primarily on math and science content. Students who participated in the program demonstrated growth, including higher reading and math scores on MAP testing in comparison to peers outside of the program in the district and placement in advanced math courses at a rate closer to that of their White peers and "significantly higher than that of their African American and Latino peers" who were not part of the program (p. 32).

Though only two programs were represented in these studies, their effectiveness suggests the potential for program and classroom transformation when the focus is on the unique needs of the population that is served. In both cases, stakeholders in the process developed programs that met the needs of their populations. Neither program is the same, though both work to address opportunity gaps and provide increased instruction. The Young Scholars Program (Horn, 2015) focused on increased rigor in the classroom by introducing advanced content through stages while Project Excite (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017) focused on frontloading and additional coursework on Saturdays and during summer sessions. Each used a local approach guided by stakeholders to develop and adapt to meet the needs of their population. The effectiveness of

these local approaches, in contrast to national changes, suggested that narrowing our focus to school and teacher agency was an appropriate area of focus for this study.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of current research regarding how teachers in gifted education reflect on their classroom practices in response to the perceived needs of their students. Current academic conversations focused on how teacher perceptions of gifted students may be reinforced by social norms and inequitable systems and their related classroom practices. Teachers construct giftedness based on their own experiences and values, and this construction may be influenced by how well the students' actions and behaviors align with the dominant culture (Shaunessy et al., 2007; Starck et al., 2020) and middle-class values (Hamilton et al., 2018). Also, as teachers may understand behaviors through their own constructed expectations, they may view these behaviors through their own perspectives rather than through the cultures of their students (Ramos, 2010). In addition, gifted students are perceived as being more independent and needing less support (Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Subotnik et al., 2011), which makes the label of gifted one that potentially erases other factors such as income (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018), opportunity gaps (Kuo, 2022), culture (Ramos, 2010), and twice-exceptional status (Gelbar et al., 2022) because their own giftedness may allow them to adapt and demonstrate success.

Awareness of these issues, which have been explored through a critical approach in viewing gifted education and the role of educators, provides a greater understanding of needed changes; however, the prioritizing of this approach is predisposed to focusing on critique rather than potential. This study's goal was not to exclude the role of critical lenses. Though the perspectives gained through these critical lenses have value, the predominance of this approach

in research attempts to achieve "objectivity by abstracting from all perspectives" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 55), so essentially the answers given erase the unique details of the contexts and the individuals involved. This study embraced the "multiple subjectivities" of qualitative research (Yvonne Bulk & Collins, 2023, p. 6), by expanding the conversation through the inclusion of teachers' voices to add back these details regarding their own classroom practices and how they see these practices in relationship to students' needs.

Teachers do not exist in isolation from individual, cultural, or societal factors that may influence their views on education and student ability/potential (Starck et al., 2020), so ignoring teachers' efforts towards meeting the needs of their students limits our understanding while ignoring teacher agency. The need for a fuller understanding increases the value of exploring their own reflective processes as experienced educators in gifted education and how those reflections and related classroom practices may acknowledge issues of equity or may focus on other areas not directly related to equity. If giftedness is to remain as a constructed idea that affects those identified and served, how teachers in classrooms (re)construct giftedness and their classroom practices must be understood because whether students are served in gifted classes or traditional classes, teachers' perceptions of giftedness will affect how these students are challenged and supported.

To this end, the study moved away from the isolated label of *gifted* as it is one that can be perceived to supersede any other categories or identities, even those relevant to the educational context, which potentially limits teacher thinking (Dixson, 2022). Instead, this study addressed how teachers think of giftedness in relation to other areas of students' lives by embracing the label of *gifted and…* as a way to expand giftedness to not be an isolated trait but rather one that interacts with other constructions that affect gifted students and their needs. Failure to expand

giftedness to include the whole student limits the potential effectiveness of gifted education. To better understand the potential of a shift from *gifted* to *gifted and…*, this study explored how teachers who work with gifted students have reflected on their experiences with these students and how these reflections have reinforced or transformed their understandings of giftedness and their related classroom practices. A greater insight into these constructions may provide a framework for conversations in the training of teachers of gifted students as using the voices of teachers acknowledges their agency in the process, and focusing on their interactions with students opens the possibility of students as co-creators in these constructions. Framing this study in terms of educators brings focus back to the potential for local control to equitable outcomes; however, the potential may be limited if teachers do not identify equity issues as being related to giftedness.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers of gifted students transform and negotiate their understanding of gifted education in response to their experiences with gifted students. To achieve the purpose of this study, the following questions were addressed:

R1: What are the individual, cultural, or societal needs that educators identify as relevant to effective gifted education?

R2: What role or roles do gifted students play in educators' awareness of these needs?

R3: How does critical reflection on these needs relate to pedagogical choices in the gifted serving classroom?

Conceptual Framework

Gifted education and giftedness are not fixed concepts but rather socially constructed ideas that are reconstructed with each usage to fit the specific context and values of the persons

or agencies involved. Each way has implications for classroom practices and students.

Transformative learning theory provides a means to understand part of this constructive process: reflection and transformation. As this study focuses on how teachers reflect and potentially choices regarding their classroom practices to meet students' needs, transformative learning theory provides a system and language to understand this process. Constructionism and constructivism (with emphasis on constructivism) help establish this theory's role and this study's role in broader conversations about gifted education as individual transformation is interconnected with social transformation. While critical lenses anticipate issues (Sedgwick, 2003), the study's focus on transformation requires prioritizing potential. The practice of reparative reading can meet this need as Sedgwick defines it as "additive and accretive" (p. 154), an approach that seeks to "assemble and confer plentitude" on those discussed rather than restrict the subjects of the discussion to their perceived flaws. This focus reinforces the potential for individual and social change as, in contrast to critical lenses, it supports my emphasis on the future potential of gifted programs, gifted students, and educators in gifted classes over anticipating deficits.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory outlines learning as occurring within an ongoing process of socialization and social approval. In childhood, authority figures (e.g., parents, teachers, etc.) establish patterns that children use to make sense of the world (Mezirow, 1991). Through language and social approval or disapproval, children are taught how the world is. The transition from childhood to adulthood corresponds with moments that potentially challenge the frames or schemas adults use to make sense of their worlds. When the patterns lose their effectiveness for sense-making, adults may reflect on these patterns and question the assumptions underlying

these patterns. Also, adults may confront distortions, perspectives formed on limited and biased knowledge that have become ingrained. These perspectives may rely on categorical assumptions about class, identity, race, gender, etc. As these views may be socially reinforced, adults are unlikely to reflect on them until they have experiences that disorient them and lead to potentially transformative reflection.

This theory's role in this study was that underlying perceptions of giftedness may include distortions, and how (and if) teachers have encounters with students that led to reflections on distortions that transformed their thinking from *gifted* to *gifted and…*, and potentially transformed their approach to gifted students and instruction in gifted classes. Demographically, educators tend to be White and come from middle-class backgrounds, and their perceptions are shaped by their own experiences (Hamilton et al., 2018). However, these perceptions may include distortions about behaviors or patterns outside of their own. For example, gifted students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds may not have been exposed to the same language or opportunities as their more affluent peers, which may result in both feeling isolated and not being able to fully engage in learning (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Also, when students do not reflect the race, ethnicity, gender, or values of their teachers, teachers may approach them through internalized distortions. Transformative learning theory provides a structure to acknowledge that teachers' perceptions are constructed through a negotiation between their backgrounds and experiences, and if their perceptions are constructed, then new experiences and information can lead to reflection and transformation (Mezirow, 1991, 2009). While attempts to address issues with gifted education tend to focus on the failing of the system, which in part denies teachers agency and tends to cast them as deficit, the transformative learning theory approach allows for a way to acknowledge issues (i.e., distortions) while expanding the

conversation to focus on teacher agency paired with reflective practices that can lead to transformation.

Constructionism and Constructivism

Underlying this study is a constructivist paradigm in that the study explored the lived experiences of the participants (Mertens, 2020). While a positivist approach assumes that reality is knowable as a measurable, universal idea, constructivism assumes that reality is constructed through complex social interactions and through individuals' interactions within social contexts. The experiences of the participants in this study provided insight into the construction of giftedness and the needs of gifted students within the reflective framework of transformative learning theory (see Mezirow 1991; 2009) and reflexive thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2022). This theory and this method both align with the constructivist paradigm. Transformative learning theory understands reality as changing and changeable as individuals interpret reality through their experiences, and that reality is confirmed or challenged through discourse (Mezirow, 1991; 2009). Reflexive thematic analysis pairs with this approach as it extends the discourse to include interactions between the researcher and the participants and the researcher and the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These interactions are part of the meaning-making process.

Transformative learning theory aligns with a constructivist understanding, but critics have challenged its relevance to constructionism (Hyde, 2021). Constructivism focuses on the individual's meaning-making process, and this individual focus aligns with transformative learning theory's focus on reflection, personal choices, and the potential of resulting changes based on personal choices. Constructionism, however, relates to a broader idea: what is socially created through discourse. Some have argued that prioritizing the individual limits or negates this theory's application to social change and understanding social construction (see Inglis; 1998,

Newman, 2014; 2021; van Woerkom, 2010). Though transformative learning theory appears to focus on the individual, which potentially limits this study's findings from providing insight into gifted education, individual reflection cannot be isolated from social discourse and the influence on that (Mezirow, 1997; 1998). Individuals are products of their discourse communities just as they are producers of them. To assume that society affects the individual but ignore that the individual affects society is a failing to understand the interconnected relationship between the two.

Reparative Reading

Sedgwick (2003) argued that "paranoid reading" is "tied to a notion of the inevitable" in that the issues of the past are inescapable (p. 147), and the human experience is understanding the proliferation of these issues. She questioned why this approach had become the dominant means of analysis. There is a deterministic bent to this type of reading in that past predicts the present and the future, which assumes a degree of causality that ignores the complexity and subjectiveness of human experiences and does not align with the qualitative paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Paranoid readings tear down their subjects–focusing on subjecting them to critique (Sedgwick, 2003). While paranoid reading has a purpose in discussing gifted education, such as critiquing social inequities in gifted education, placing our sole focus (or at least the majority of our focus) on the critique ignores the transformative potential of people and loses focus on potential positive aspects (Lassen, 2011). Reparative reading requires shifting from an expert who knows better to a participant in the process, someone open to different possibilities of understanding. While the paranoid reader anticipates and prepares for problems to be found, the reparative reading approaches through an openness to understanding (Love, 2010). Within the contexts of this study, this approach meant that I did not work in anticipation of problematic

thinking. Instead, I was open to what participants had to share and responded reflexively. Sedgwick (2003) referred to this process as one of "love" (p. 128), calling for the role of the researcher to be less about power and more about vulnerability. This vulnerability aligns with reflexive thematic analysis as I, in my role as researcher, had to be open to my own biases and assumptions in relationship to the participants and the data.

Researcher Positionality

Lived Experiences

As an educator in a gifted program, my own experiences co-existed with the participants. As a result of this co-existence, devotion to objectivity on the topic would take away from rather than add to this study as it would ignore how my critical reflection informs my role as a researcher and a co-creator in this study. To this end, subjectivity was embraced in conjunction with protocols to address researcher biases and to establish researcher credibility. Potential biases that I must be aware of include my own construction of giftedness that is influenced by my background, lived experiences, and research into equity and gifted education.

Gifted education is associated with more economically advantaged families (Sternberg & Desmet, 2022), and as I grew up in a rural area and came from a low-income household, I was less likely to be identified (Grissom et al., 2019; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). I was not identified for gifted services until high school. My own past negative experiences with access to gifted education inform some of my own views of the issues in gifted education today. Paradoxically, despite or potentially because of these past issues, I work in gifted education and advocate for improved gifted services. I am hyper aware of issues that may affect low-income students. I am a White male who grew up speaking English. Gifted education has a problematic history and present when it comes to serving Black, Latino (Anderson, 2020;

Goings & Ford, 2018; Hurt, 2018), twice-exceptional (Foley-Nicpon & Teriba, 2022; King, 2022), and linguistically diverse students (Giessman et al., 2013; Peters & Engerrand, 2016). I may be less aware as these groups do not reflect my own struggles and identities, so I used the reflexive nature of this method to address how I discuss or fail to discuss their needs within the context of the data. Also, as I recognized how my background influenced my construction and relationship to the topic, I approached the constructions of the participants with understanding in order to provide more trustworthy analysis of the data.

Constructing Educators in Gifted Education

In addition to my own experiences in gifted education, this study was also motivated and informed by my reaction to research discussing gifted education. Reading articles in the National Association for Gifted Children's *Gifted Child Quarterly*, published since 1957, and *Gifted Education International*, published since 1981, led to an uneasiness in my self-perceptions as a teacher in gifted education. I felt better informed regarding issues and areas for growth in gifted education, but how teachers were spoken of implicitly and explicitly did not match my own self-perception nor my perceptions regarding my fellow teachers, my school, or my district. However, the peer-reviewed articles I read were dominated by a narrative that gifted education was in a state of failure as it reinforced social inequities, removed resources from those in need, and relied on biased understandings of giftedness. Though the articles I read did not always directly target teachers, the issues raised were about us: diverse students' needs were not met (see Barnes, 2020; Bui et al., 2014; Redding, 2019), low-income and minority students had limited benefits (see Hines et al., 2022; Redding & Grissom, 2016, 2021; Shore et al., 2020; Wai & Allen, 2019), and norms and values that privileged White, middle-class culture were reinforced (see Hurt, 2018). While the issues they raised were systemic issues, we teachers were

implied to be part of the system, and I felt complicit. I faced my own disorienting dilemma in line with Mezirow's (1991, 2009) transformative learning theory. I had a clear perception of myself and my peers as caring individuals invested in meeting their students' needs, but academic readings challenged my prior understanding. I needed to make sense of this version of myself in comparison to what I saw reflected onto me in my readings.

My initial reactions, and even my reactions early in the dissertation process, were critical of myself, but that shifted to frustration with academics. In October of 2023, I had a conversation with a colleague about my study, and I said, "Academics don't get it. They don't live in the classrooms." I felt self-righteous at the moment, affirmed by my colleague's agreement, and of course such a statement ignored the paradox that I was someone working to join the academic conversation and that the professors in my program clearly cared about teachers and their students. In addition, such a reflection showed a failure to apply a reparative reading as I had prioritized a critical approach with an us-them opposition rather than being open to what their work offered me (Sedgwick, 2003). The reflection that led to that statement to my colleague and the accompanying feeling were surface level in that I wanted to make sense of the world in a way that allowed me to continue unchanged. Mezirow (1991) argues that a lack of critical reflection can potentially reinforce rather than transform our perceptions, and this resistance to reflection informed my initial thinking for this study despite my intentions to focus on the role of reflection.

In November 2023, I attended the National Association of Gifted Children conference in Orlando, Florida. Though I was excited to learn, my resistance to reflection was present then as I initially felt resistance as I looked over the speakers in the program. There were researchers speaking and attending that had written the articles that I felt spoke about me and for me. Prior to

the opening keynote speech, Gallagher (2023), the association's president, spoke. I wrote as she spoke. She spoke to teachers in the audience as she stated, "whether you teach kindergarten or high school seniors." In my notes I wrote, "The NAGC 23 has a vibe of celebrating teachers." She was welcoming and friendly, and she spoke of the value of "perspectives." After the keynote speaker finished, I sat in the lobby for a bit. I tried to make sense of my reactions to the studies I had read and my very different reaction to hearing Gallagher speak. She had been a teacher and a researcher, and her work in schools had not ceased with her research. In this disorienting dilemma I tried to fall back to the paradigm I used in October with my colleague by trying to think of her as more aligned with teachers than researchers. Yet as I chatted with others, attended more sessions, and heard more researchers speak, I could not use that paradigm to make sense of my experience. With reflection I came to a new, complicated way of understanding the experience. Researchers were speaking from their perspectives, from their ways of making sense of the world, and the critical lenses that structured this sense-making process made it difficult to add the voices of those perceived as part of the system. With that thought, I started to reframe in my mind my study as a way to illustrate that the togetherness and focus on potential, which I felt at the conference with the many voices and perspectives coming together, could be a powerful force in transforming and celebrating the value of gifted education.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study's scope focused on educators working with gifted students within the context of courses serving mostly gifted students, such as honors and Advanced Placement at the secondary level. As outlined in "Gifted and Talented Best Practice Guidelines: Program Models" (SESDE 2018), state funding is provided to provide K-12 gifted services. Students are served through honors courses, which require that teachers have an approved Gifted & Talented

endorsement on their teacher licenses (2023c), and guidelines imply that Advanced Placement

(AP) courses may meet service requirements. Though this is not directly stated in the current

guidelines, the program models guide states that students must be served through gifted services

during 11th and 12th grade years unless already being served through AP (SESDE, 2018), and

expectations and guidelines for AP courses are listed under "Advanced Academic Programs"

along with Gifted & Talented (2023b). Also, the school district in this study links honors courses

with AP courses: "Gifted students take honors courses and may enroll in a variety of Advanced

Placement courses" (Southeastern School District [SESD], 2017, High School section). This

association supported the inclusion of AP teachers in addition to honors teachers as potential

participants.

Though the state and district associate honors and AP classes with the service of gifted

students (SESD, 2017; SESDE, 2018), not all students in these courses may be identified as

gifted. Some students may be in gifted courses based on parent or teacher recommendations

though not officially identified, and College Board encourages AP courses to be open to a wide

range of students and not solely as a program to serve gifted students (College Board, 2023).

Within the context of this study, courses were discussed as gifted serving courses. That honors

and AP courses are not limited to gifted students and that teachers are not required to verify that

the students they discuss are identified by the state as gifted raised the issue that one or more

students discussed in this study may not be identified as gifted. However, as this study focused

on teacher reflection about serving gifted students, students whom teachers perceived to be gifted

were part of their reflective processes and related choices in how they served gifted students. In

addition, as gifted identification is based on measures that may incorporate biases and as

giftedness itself is a constructed concept (Gentry et al., 2021; Plucker & Callahan, 2014), these

unidentified students could have been identified as gifted in a different context or through different criteria.

The study included 12 participants, which aligned with prior reflexive thematic analysis studies where 12 participants allowed for saturation (Ando et al., 2014; Guest et al., 2006). As Braun and Clake (2022) and Miles et al. (2020) discouraged starting with an assumed sample size, I used 12 as a flexible goal and evaluated saturation after each interview. Saturation was achieved at 10; however, I decided to conduct two more interviews to verify saturation. No additional themes emerged, so I did not continue interviewing. The small sample size aligned with reflexive thematic analysis as it allowed for increased familiarity with the materials and for a deeper understanding of a specific context.

The delimitations of the study were as follows: the study took place at five sites within the same school district. The original goal was to select two high poverty sites and two low poverty sites; however, only five sites had volunteers for the study. These five sites did represent a range of income levels, though the highest poverty index school was not represented as no potential participants from that school volunteered. Program schools were excluded as their data was reported under the secondary schools in the students' attendance areas, which limited access to data about poverty and AP participation. A brief survey collecting demographic information (i.e., race, gender), years at the site, and years in gifted education was sent with an email outlining the purpose of the study. Based on the responses received, two high-poverty sites with at least one or more responses will be selected and two low-poverty sites with at least one or more responses will be selected. All participants had five or more years of experience working with gifted students and held the gifted and talented endorsement required by the state's department of education. The focus on a single district with common training, certification

requirements, and guidelines for gifted education reduced variables that could have affected the study and allowed for comparison between schools as they were more likely to reference common language and expectations. Requiring participants to have five or more years of experience increased their potential to have reflected and made choices based on those reflections.

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption that underlay this study was that teachers were reflective practitioners that use their experiences with students to inform their pedagogical choices. While being reflective practitioners is often ingrained in teacher-training programs and in teacher professional development (Körkkö et al., 2016; Korthagen, 2017), reflective practices are difficult to teach and student-teachers and teachers are often expected to reflect without being provided clear guidance or purpose for reflection (Chan and Lee, 2021; Svojanovsky, 2017). Teachers' reflective practices may not directly relate to changes in their classes, especially if their self-reflection has not resulted in beneficial changes in the past (Korthagen, 2017). Despite this limitation, that reflection occurs, in some form, was a realistic expectation as this southeastern state's guidelines require teachers to reflect through the yearly evaluation system (SESDE, 2023e), so teachers are likely to be familiar with the concept; however, the depth of that reflection may vary. In addition, changes may not occur in the classroom, but choices will occur, even if that choice is to not make pedagogical changes in response to their reflections. This awareness supported the study's focus on choices rather than changes.

The study assumed that teachers build relationships with students that influence their classroom practices in the long term. While research shows that positive teacher-student relationships increase engagement and academic performance (Martin and Collie, 2019; Quin,

2017) and that these relationships are interconnected with teacher job satisfaction (Lavy &

Bocker, 2018), there are gaps in the research regarding the degree to which teachers seek to

develop these relationships and the potential interaction between these relationships and

classroom practices. Teachers also may perceive that they have strong student-teacher

relationships; however, these perceptions do not necessarily correlate with how students perceive

their relationships with their teachers (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). Overall, the assumption

was reasonable as the value placed on teacher-student relationships in education increased the

likelihood that participants had, to some degree, attempted to build relationships. Though teacher

perceptions of these relationships may not match student perceptions, this study focused on how

teachers have reflected on and make choices regarding their classroom practices based on their

perceptions, and this focus did not require an alignment between their perceptions and students'

perceptions.

Another assumption was that participants would be willing to fully share their

experiences with students and how they have made choices in response even though choices that

result in changes imply that prior classroom practices may have been ineffective or even

harmful. There is a vulnerability in choosing to make or not make changes and discussing them

as there may be an unspoken criticism of their choices and practices in the classroom (Bocova &

Turner, 2023; Uitto et al., 2016), and the ethical considerations for this study had to consider the

professional and emotional effects. As this study emphasized a reparative lens through which to

view the teachers' experiences (see Sedgwick, 2003), my role as researcher was to recognize and

honor their critical reflection rather than build my own critique. As an insider-researcher (a

teacher in gifted education), I reflected on my own feelings of vulnerability as I answered the

interview questions in anticipation of the interview process. Through this process, I brought

empathy to the experience and provided a supportive environment. Also, as vulnerability is emotionally challenging, I understood that not all participants may share in the same ways or to the same degrees, and in the interviews, I did not push participants to share. Instead, I invited them to share, and they had the control to end or pause the process. In addition, the focus on potential and transformation, rather than critique, supported rather than undermined their professional roles. Overall, I assumed their willingness to be vulnerable with a peer, and I recognized the potential limitations to my data in terms of how vulnerable participants were willing to be in this situation.

This study was potentially limited by the small sample size and focusing on a single district, which did not allow for the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Generalizability was not the goal of this study as this study was situated within a constructivist paradigm and guided by a qualitative method. Reflexive thematic analysis relies on a small sample size to allow for more depth, and the meaning-making process requires a degree of familiarity and reflection with the data that would be limited by a larger sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Instead, this study relies on purposeful sampling and thick descriptions to provide a rich understanding within a specific context (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saldaño, 2021). The insights gained in this study may have transferability to other contexts as readers recognize potential patterns that parallel their own (Bloomberg, 2022; Miles et al., 2020), which creates the potential for others to relate to familiar patterns that can lead to greater understanding within their own contexts.

Significance and Potential Impact

This study aimed to address a gap in knowledge as well as lead to a national conversation that focuses on empowerment and transformation rather than seeing gifted education teachers

through a deficiency lens. Current research already raises the flaws in gifted education and the related systemic issues, such as economic status (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018), opportunity gaps (Kuo, 2022), culture (Ramos, 2010), twice-exceptional status (Gelbar et al., 2022), and racial inequities (Pearman & McGee, 2022). However, even how such categories and issues are explored in research has underlying biases about race, culture, and economic status as well as showing deficit thinking and a limited focus on solutions (Going et al., 2018), which restricts these studies' potential to transform gifted education. While the goal of this study was not to shy away from these concepts and issues, part of the goal was to avoid the pathologizing of gifted educators through language that denies or at limits their agency in transforming gifted education from a focus on *gifted* to a more inclusive understanding of *gifted and...*. If gifted education is to be more effective and equitable, teachers must be recognized as reflective practitioners who make choices and potentially change and grow as they learn rather than be depicted as complacent or complicit in biased systems. This study's shift in focus was intended to encourage and support such reflective practices so that teachers continue towards transformation through reflection on their current understandings and the incorporation of new information and experiences in their classrooms and schools.

My own reflection and choices were interconnected with the significance of this study as I could not separate my experiences from the assumptions and values underlying this study and how they relate to that significance. The experience I associate with my own understanding of *gifted and...* occurred with a student named Jay. Jay was not formally identified as gifted. Jay came from a lower-socioeconomic background, and he identified has Latino and Black. He had not taken honors courses prior to high school, but his English I College Prep teacher noticed gifted characteristics in Jay's approach to thinking, and she recommended he take English II

Honors. Opportunity gaps and a lack of prior exposure to advanced vocabulary and content

presented challenges for Jay, and his grade in English II Honors stayed around the D/C area. Jay

came to visit me one day. A friend of his was in my AP Language and Composition course, and

his friend encouraged Jay to take my class. He told me he wanted to take my course because he

knew that he needed to work on his writing skills before going to college and that his friend

assured him that I'd work on his writing skills; however, Jay was nervous due to his struggles in

English 2 Honors. He was debating going back to College Prep instead during the next school

year. We spoke for a bit, and I outlined for him the course's expectations and how we could

work together during lunch and after school to develop his skills. At the end of the conversation,

Jay was leaning towards taking my class.

A few days later, Jay's English II Honors teacher came to see me after school. He said

that Jay told him his plans to take my course and that he discouraged Jay from doing so and

wanted my support in discouraging Jay as it was only setting him up for failure. He outlined how

Jay was not advanced enough for honors or AP coursework, and that Jay struggled just to pass

his class. I declined to discourage Jay, but I assured him that I would work with Jay to support

him and that if it appeared he would not pass the course, I would move him at midterm to a non-

AP course. I spoke to Jay's English I CP teacher to get her thoughts, and she had a different view

of Jay. She saw a student who had gaps in his knowledge and skills, but she also saw a student

with advanced critical thinking skills, a strong motivation to be the first in his family to attend

college, and a unique way of seeing the world that she could not label, but in her gut, made him

gifted. The differences between these conversations bothered me as I could not reconcile the two

views of Jay.

The next school year, Jay started my class. His writing diagnostic showed that he struggled with developing a clear line of reasoning, that his vocabulary choices were simplistic, and that his commentary relied on restatement rather than supporting his ideas. With reading, he scored the lowest of the class on the multiple-choice part of the diagnostic. Jay frequently came during lunch to revise his work with me, and he always participated in classroom discussions even if he clearly struggled to fully express himself at times when he could not fully explain his thinking. He showed improvements, but he was discouraged as his grade hovered around the C/B border. He expressed disappointment in himself in that he could not write like his peers. Though I assured him that he was making progress, it was clear it felt like he did not belong in the class. One day, he and another student were in my room before class started. They were disagreeing over the best NBA player and who would perform better during an upcoming game. Jay presented his claim, made multiple supporting claims, supported each claim with detailed evidence, including statistics and comparisons to other players, and presented a clear line of reasoning. His vocabulary choices used the language of sports commentators. Once the conversation was finished, I pulled Jay aside. I told him that everything he just said and did was an academic argument. I outlined what I heard from him and how that aligned with what we practiced in my class. Jay seemed surprised as he dismissed his sports talk as fun rather than academic. We outlined his argument on paper, and I encouraged him to remember and refer to this outline as we wrote in class. He did not suddenly become the writer he wanted to be, but he did have renewed confidence to try, and the realization that he had the skills helped him to rethink his prior approach to academic writing and give him a clear guide. We continued to work together, and he continued to improve.

Somewhere in working with Jay, I started thinking about the different takes on his giftedness from his English I CP teacher and his English II Honors teacher. Both teachers wanted what was best for Jay, as did I. His English II Honors teacher saw giftedness in isolation, as a clear criterion based on current performance that should be uniform with his peers. His English I CP teacher saw him different than his peers too, but that difference was that he was thinking in advanced ways. To explain this to myself, I started thinking of Jay as *gifted and...*, gifted and athletic, gifted and Latino, gifted and Black, gifted and lacking confidence, gifted and wanting to be the first in his family to attend college. All that came with the *and...* became part of my work with Jay and providing context for my reflection and subsequent choices in providing him gifted services. Our story and time together are part of this study's significance; it is the stories of teachers and students, moments of reflection, and the choices made that contribute to a greater understanding of the agency that teachers have in serving gifted students. An exploration of these stories reframes the academic voices focused on deficits into narratives about meeting challenges one student at a time, about social change one classroom at a time.

Conclusion

I cannot separate my role as an educator in gifted education from my reading of academic conversations about gifted education. These conversations have implicit and explicit criticisms of educators in gifted education and their respective programs. Though such criticism does lead to personal reflection and helps with the recognition of systemic issues that need to be addressed, the prioritizing of this critical approach cannot help but to construct views that see educators as deficient, which in turn potentially limits teacher agency and motivation. This study's goal was not to silence critical approaches but rather to expand the conversations to include reparative

approaches that recognize educators as active agents whose choices hold the potential for
beneficial change.

Terminology

Reading is an interpretive act. This study relies on a constructionist paradigm and was
part of the same meaning-making process. My definitions of the terms below should not restrict
their meaning, but they should provide some clarity to my own assumptions, which provides
context for the reader's own meaning-making process. For the terms below, I defined and refined
throughout my writing process to include multiple voices, crafting definitions that fairly
represent both the source material and my own approach in this study.

While no term can be neutral as each exists within a social and cultural context, some
terms were more complicated for me than others. *Gifted*, as a term, was particularly fraught for
me as there is no consistent definition that encompassed all of the studies or my data. In addition,
there was no definition, even my own personal one, that does not potentially reinforce social and
cultural inequities. My definition instead recognizes the complexity and problematic nature of
the term.

- **Constructionism:** The understanding that reality is not a single, universal concept.
  Instead, realities are socially constructed in interactions between individuals and society
  (Cunliffe, 2008). For this study, constructionism will be used to focus on interactions
  between individuals or the individuals and society and the output of these interactions
  (e.g., discourse) (Hyde, 2021).

- **Constructivism:** The understanding that realities are created within the minds of
  individuals (Sözcü, 2020). External knowledge serves a regularity function that affirms,
  denies, or challenges individual realities. For this study, constructivism will be used to

focus on the internal meaning-making process (e.g., reflection) (Hyde, 2021). While constructivism and constructionism are separate ideas, they are interconnected within the critical reflection process.

- **Deficit narrative:** Deficit narratives, based on deficit thinking, use language that critiques a group for perceived failures rather than addressing broader social issues and structures (Valencia, 2010). This term is typically used to identify social constructions that disempower and stigmatize marginalized groups, such as Black or students with disabilities, and using the term to discuss how educators are depicted may inappropriately repurpose a term in a way that devalues the power of the term when discussing marginalized groups. However, within the context of this study, the term feels appropriate as educators are, in the current climate, marginalized in political and academic critiques that disempower and disenfranchise them. The term is used with an awareness of its traditional use in academic writing while embracing that the term is rooted in criticizing power structures and calling for increased agency.

- **Disorienting dilemma:** An experience or encounter where one becomes aware of a disconnect between how one views the world and self and this new experience or encounter (DeAngelis, 2022; Mezirow, 1981).

- **Gifted:** A label associated with high achievement in comparison to peers, typically identified through standardized assessments as outlined by state and local policies (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018). The term is criticized for being applied in inequitable ways that disadvantage minority and low-income students (Barnes, 2022; Peters, 2022; Subotnik et al., 2011). For the purposes of this study, *gifted* will be defined as a fluid concept about academic ability and potential that emphasizes advanced

abilities, and these advanced abilities are identified within value-based systems of measurement, including standardized assessments and social desirability.

- **Gifted Serving:** Within the context of the district in this study, honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate classes may be used to serve gifted students, as indicated by the designation of these programs as places to serve advanced learners on the Southeastern State's Department Education webpage (SESDE, 2018, 2023a, 2023c). However, courses with these designations are not only for identified gifted students as they potentially serve all students. In recognition of the diverse range of students who may be served in these courses, the courses will be referred to as gifted serving classes/classrooms.

- **Critical reflection:** This process occurs when the individual reflects on his/her assumptions, considering both the appropriateness of those assumptions and the underlying causes of those assumptions (Lundgren & Poell, 2016).

- **Naturalistic inquiry:** Lincoln and Guba (1985) present naturalistic inquiry as a means to address the limitations and assumptions of the positivist and postpositivist paradigms. While positivism assumes that reality is measurable and that researchers can isolate and study aspects of reality "until, finally, it can be predicted and controlled" (p. 37), naturalistic inquiry works from the understanding that in each situation there are multiple, fluid realities that are context dependent. Based on this understanding, the goal is not generalizability; instead, the goal is to explore these realities and provide enough depth that others may use the results to spark or be part of their own meaning-making process. Within the framework of this study, the results are presented as meanings and understandings generated within a specific context and that these results do not present

the whole reality. The results should spark discussion about how gifted teachers work to serve gifted students, which should lead to additional questions and explorations rather than predictive, prescriptive answers.

- **Reparative reading:** Sedgwick (2003) proposes reparative reading as another option for academics to use in understanding the world. She argues that academics have moved critical reading from a potential option to the sole means of understanding the world, and this prioritization of critical reading, which she links with an "anxious paranoid determination" to explore each potential "horror" in regard to the present and future (p. 146), focuses on judgment rather than potential. For this study, reparative reading is the practice of critically reflecting on my own initial reactions and responses to participants and data so that I appreciate and value what participants offer. To be reparative, one must exist in "hope," even if that is a "traumatic thing to experience." This hope informs the process by dreaming of what the past could have been, leading to an awareness of what the present and the future can be. This approach does not eliminate critical reading, when appropriate, but rather requires a shift away from deterministic approaches to ones that embrace human and societal potential.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this literature review is to embed gifted education within a specific context, one that has resulted in debates into the nature of giftedness, the value of gifted education, and the potential for transformation. This literature review is structured to move readers from the dominant discourse on gifted education, which prioritizes viewing gifted education and educators through critical lenses and deficit narratives, to one that expands to include discussions of transformation and agency. To this end, this literature review explores varying constructions of giftedness and related issues with access, identification, and services. This topic is explored within the broader context of the United States and within the context of southeastern state and the school district in this study. Responses to gifted education, addressing both critical and transformative ones, are then discussed, which transitions to expanding the conversation to including teacher agency and reflection in response to serving gifted students. Finally, the potential for teachers to act as agents of transformation is discussed along with how the conceptual framework and methods of this study align to better understand this process.

Gifted Education

Gifted education in the United States, when examined on a broad scale, reveals inequitable access to services (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Attempts to understand issues of inequitable access to identification and services are hampered by inconsistent use of terms, criteria, and services (Plucker & Callahan, 2014), resulting in mixed understandings of both the issues and potential solutions. The history of giftedness does not reveal a single concept that evolved; instead, it reveals a series of contradictory and competing understandings of giftedness. Though these different constructions of giftedness consist of incompatible assumptions and assertions, they potentially merge and

overlap in public discourse. Understanding the dominant trends (and their related theories) of giftedness provides context for how teachers in gifted education may respond to giftedness in their classes and how they adapt (or choose not to adapt) their gifted classes.

Iterations of Giftedness

Inherited Intelligence

An early understanding of giftedness is that it is an inherited, fixed trait (Dai, 2018; Sternberg et al., 2021). Children are born with a fixed capacity, and giftedness is when that capacity is at the higher end of the spectrum. In this conception of giftedness, the gifted student population is uniform rather than diverse as they possess the same, identifiable characteristics (Dai, 2020). The idea of intelligence as measurable supported this idea, and giftedness became associated with intelligence quotient (IQ) as a measurable concept (Gentry et al., 2021). This understanding of giftedness and the linkage with IQ, which has historically been associated with inequity in education (Gentry et al., 2021), implies that underrepresented groups lack giftedness and this lack excuses social differences as unavoidable. This iteration of giftedness likely feeds into critiques of gifted education as elitist institutions (Dai, 2020); however, Warne (2016b; 2022) argues that contemporary researchers' refusal to acknowledge some genetic element to giftedness undermines efforts to fully understand and support gifted students.

Talent Development

Another understanding of giftedness focuses on talent development, indicated by expanding giftedness beyond test scores to include authentic assessments and performance tasks (Dai, 2018). Providing students with opportunities to develop their full potential became a focus, and theories acknowledged that context plays a role in when and how gifted children present their giftedness. Giftedness is domain specific rather than generalizable to all or most areas, and

giftedness may require specific conditions to emerge (Dai, 2020). This construction expands giftedness to include adaptability and multiple talents (Kuo, 2022). The focus on talents includes individual talents that are in the top 10% in comparison to peers and the interaction between social and environmental factors that may lead to talent development (Plucker & Callahan, 2014).

Society and educational institutions may limit or restrict talent development to academic ability, though, and not invest in giftedness as personal or social transformation (Sternberg et al., 2021). Talent development shifts giftedness from a fixed concept (achievement) to a more fluid concept (ability or aptitude) (Lakin & Wai, 2022), allowing a shift from a static understanding giftedness that focuses solely on high achievement in the present in comparison to non-gifted peers (e.g., giftedness is reflected when students are more successful than most of their peers as measured by grades and scores) to transformational giftedness that focuses on their potential to positively affect their world (Sternberg, 2022). Both the comparison to peers and the potential impact on society can be found in those discussing talent development.

Social Context/Differentiation

A conflict between giftedness as an inherent trait and giftedness as talent development led to attempts to reconcile the two (Dai, 2018, 2020). This understanding of giftedness sees biology as a factor (i.e., inherited traits) in connection to opportunities and resources at appropriate times. In this understanding, giftedness is shown when children's inherited abilities align with domains and related opportunities and is more in line with constructions of giftedness that rely on genetic characteristics as playing a factor in who is likely to be gifted (Warne, 2016b).

A more recent understanding of giftedness is that the context more tightly linked with societal inequities rather than biological differences (i.e., genetic) in that giftedness is more about exposure to opportunities and access to resources than inherited characteristics (Dai, 2018). In this understanding, differences between gifted and non-gifted students are predominately related to inequitable conditions. All students have talents when given appropriate access to resources and opportunities (Dixson et al., 2021), even though all talents may not fit within areas traditionally recognized in school curriculums or academic measurements. In this approach, giftedness may be a temporary rather than long-term identification, as giftedness is specific to a domain and time. One student may be more gifted in reading than mathematics and another may be on pace with most peers now but at a point in the future need access to more advanced concepts. This shift away from a standardized approach to giftedness lends itself to a focus on differentiation for all in general education or calls for gifted for all, but it can also present itself as calls to reject the gifted label as a harmful or limiting construct (Dai, 2020; Dixson, 2022; Lo, Lin-Yang, & Chrostowski, 2022). This understanding aligns with the previously discussed Young Scholars Program (Horn, 2015; see Chapter 1), which focuses on increased rigor and differentiation for all and giftedness as those who need increased rigor at a pace above their peers. However, such an approach does not resolve why those with the same levels of access may include gifted and non-gifted students if access is the primary difference (Warne, 2022), and this unresolved issue may suggest that there is a complex interaction between access and measurable intelligence that requires further research to better understand.

Complications with Giftedness

Undercutting definitions of giftedness is that they are driven by comparing students to an assumed norm based on age and measurable skills identified as valuable by society, yet some

definitions fail to capture giftedness in its fullness by reducing it to fixed characteristics (Smith, 2021). The vague nature of giftedness has resulted in issues identifying it through consistent and equitable means, and such vagueness may reinforce limited understandings of giftedness that perpetuate inequalities. Though gifted research has mostly rejected the notion of giftedness as an inherited trait, shifting testing from identification to diagnostic, educational institutions still rely on testing (and thus early concepts of giftedness) for identification rather than as a tool to target developmental needs (Dai, 2020), so even if academic conversations about giftedness have shifted to more talent development or context specific, gifted programs, identification is still working through the tools of giftedness-as-an-inherited-trait thinking.

Federal and State Guidelines

While the differing abstract understandings of giftedness influence gifted education, they exist in relation to the legal definition of giftedness as it outlines how states and local agencies serve gifted students. Giftedness was legally defined through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in terms of high achievement (Rinn et al., 2022), a construction of giftedness that prioritizes current performance in comparison to peers rather than potential performance. This definition was reauthorized through No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). NCLB prioritized addressing underperformance, which indirectly impacted gifted programs as underperforming districts were more likely to reduce gifted services (Hodges & Lamb, 2019), creating an opportunity gap for gifted students in low-performing districts and schools. Reinforcing this opportunity gap, higher performing districts expanded gifted services at the same time. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, requires states to

include in their plans ways to meet the needs of all subgroups, including gifted students (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018).

However, in all cases, giftedness is still federally defined in broad terms of higher performance, which leaves states and local educational agencies with the tasks of creating criteria for giftedness, outlining identification practices, and specifying services (Hafenstein et al., 2022; Rinn et al., 2022), which may result in inconsistent access based on socioeconomic and racial demographics of the schools (Kettler et al., 2015). Though this gives states the freedom to identify their own needs, this lack of consistency may contribute to unequal access as giftedness may be defined in ways that reinforce state and local biases, such as disproportionately higher rates of identification for White and Asian American students (Gentry et al., 2021; Peters, Gentry, et al., 2019; Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019) and inconsistent access to funding (Hafenstein et al., 2022; Hodges et al., 2021; Kettler et al., 2015). The inconsistencies between districts within a state and between states makes focusing on a single district important as it allows giftedness to be understood within context.

Identification as Barrier

Though identification is not an area addressed by this study, the identification process (and the assumptions and issues underlying these processes) play a role in construction(s) of giftedness with which educators are interacting when making choices about their classroom practices. The interactions between educators and social constructs that influence their understanding of giftedness and gifted education are important in understanding potential assumptions and perceptions teachers use when making their pedagogical choices. As testing is likely to reduce or limit access to gifted education, those underrepresented in the classrooms may inform teachers' perceptions of giftedness. For example, potentially, the underrepresentation of

low-income students in gifted classrooms as a result of testing may result in decreased awareness of the needs of low-income students. A broad understanding of how testing may affect the demographics of gifted classrooms provides contexts for why some groups (e.g., Black, low-income, multilingual) may have needs that are not as apparent as they affect fewer students in gifted programs.

Testing

With the variations in state and local practices of identification, different pathways to identification potentially affect access to gifted services. Because giftedness is often associated with intelligence, tests measuring intelligence are likely to be part of the process, but these assessments are commonly shown to be inconsistent with identification within some subgroups, such as Latino, Black, and low-income students (Gentry et al., 2021). When gifted programs are more restricted and limit the available spots, underrepresented groups are less likely to gain access (Young & Young, 2022). Non-verbal assessments have been suggested as alternatives that are more inclusive, but they also have inconsistent results (Giessman et al., 2013). While assessment creators are directed to improve their assessments regarding subgroup identification, those creating the assessments tend to defer responsibility for equitable application of their tests to state and local agencies (Gentry et al., 2021). Though the issue of unequal access is often associated with flaws in testing, unequal opportunities, rather than a clear testing bias, may explain the differences between subgroups in testing (Peters, 2022b). Whether testing has limited effectiveness due to flawed testing, unequal access to enrich opportunities, or a combination of these, educators' experiences with gifted students and giftedness are based on student populations filtered through testing.

National vs. Local Norms

In addition, with assessments, national norms are often used to identify giftedness, but national norms tend to disadvantage students in low-income areas. Alternatively, using local norms may better identify students as local norms are more likely to account for access and opportunity gaps (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019). However, local norms do not fully address issues with identification. Multiple paths to identification may prove more effective (Peters, Gentry, et al., 2019), with local norms being part of this process. To support identification, whether using national or local norms, universal screening increases identification and access (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Plucker & Peters, 2017, 2018); however, even with increased identification, the efficacy of the assessments remains an issue.

Race

Race is one area where the efficacy of testing is challenged. The demographics of gifted programs and identification do not correlate with the student population as Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented while White and Asian-American students are overrepresented in relation to their percent of the student population (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Studies suggest that the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students is connected to biased testing (Flynn & Shelton, 2022; Gentry et al., 2021), teachers being more likely to identify giftedness when the students are the same race as them (Grissom & Redding, 2016), and teacher's holding deficit narratives about students (Hurt, 2018). These underlying factors potentially explain why even if controlling for other factors, such as reading and math performance, Black and Hispanic students are less likely to be identified as gifted (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019).

Though Warne (2022) argues that race and the intersections with race and poverty do not explain the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students, most research argues that race and economic status are interconnected in unique ways that also reduce access for Hispanic and

Black students (Goings & Ford, 2018; Peters, Gentry, et al., 2019), as these subgroups are more likely to experience poverty, which reduces the likelihood of gifted identification and services (Shores et al., 2020). Though clearly race plays a role in access, economic differences, associated with differences in available opportunities, may be a more consistent means of understanding inequitable access to gifted education (Peters, 2022b). In a climate where the public and politicians are attacking mentions of race, economic issues may provide a way to address racial needs without the current political resistance.

Poverty

Gifted identification is less likely for students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and less likely at schools with high percentages of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches (Hamilton et al., 2018; Peters, Gentry, et al., 2019). The opportunity gap for low-income gifted students continues to increase despite efforts to address this issue (Plucker & Peters, 2018), with low-economic students being less likely to receive gifted services in comparison to their higher-income peers (Grissom et al., 2019).

Testing may be less effective in identifying giftedness and more effective in identifying if students have had access to resources and enrichment opportunities outside of school. Minority students and low-income students may have less access (Bassock et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2020; Lombardi et al., 2021), so these tests may reflect a bias towards privileged groups with increased access prior to and outside of school (Hurt, 2018). In contrast, Warne (2022) argues that race and socioeconomic status are not sufficient to explain all performance differences as initiatives to address economic barriers have not consistently corresponded with increased performance. Warne challenges Peters' (2022a) assertion that a clear relationship can be drawn between the two because when adjusting the incomes for taxes and the "wealth transfer to low-income

households" (2022, p. 98), the income gap has lessened while the educational gap has not. Warne (2016b) instead argues that intelligence is a more likely explanation, and higher intelligence individuals are more likely to be financially successful and increase their access to resources. His argument though stands in contrast to the consensus on this topic as research indicates that there are likely links between income and access to gifted education. Students living in poverty are likely to experience more negative mental and physical health effects (Plucker & Peters, 2018), which may reduce the likelihood of gifted identification and success if identified. Even when low-income students enter school with higher levels of academic achievement, they, in comparison to their higher-income peers, are less likely to continue with higher levels of achievement as they advance grades (Grissom et al., 2019; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018), which suggests that the lack of resources and enrichment outside of school affects their ability to maintain the same level of growth as their higher-income peers. That gifted identification practices are more likely to identify access to resources is supported by the trend that low-income students are less likely to be identified even with comparable reading and math achievement levels, and schools in low-income areas have lower levels of identification (Hamilton et al., 2018; Shores et al., 2020).

These patterns suggest that current assessments are not sufficient at identifying giftedness for all subgroups of students and that the standard criteria for giftedness feeds into dominant narratives that privilege higher-income students. Though these patterns may suggest reducing the criteria for giftedness so that more subgroups are included, this approach may reinforce these dominant narratives as low-income and minority students are presented as unable to meet the same guidelines as other students (Flynn & Shelton, 2022), so investments in better tests or

criteria for giftedness that are more targeted to potential rather than past performance may be more effective and equitable.

Universalizing

Though demographic information is useful in identifying issues with access to gifted programs and services, as demonstrated in this section, there are underlying assumptions that a shared demographic trait (e.g., race, economic level) equates to shared experiences and needs. Demographic identifications such as Black or Asian group a wide range of experiences. As Peters (2022b) outlines, Black may include "voluntary immigrants from the Caribbean as well as refugees from Somalia" and Asian may include "Hmong farm workers in rural Wisconsin who are homeless and speak English as a second language as well as children of tech sector employees in Fortune 100 companies" (p. 82). Within the context of this study, though subgroups will be spoken of in terms of commonalities, it is important to recognize that these generalizations may miss out on the individual, unique needs and experiences of students. With that in mind, the reflective process in this study must bring awareness to potential biases and narratives that attempt to universalize the experiences of those in these groups.

Access to Testing

Teacher and Parent Recommendations

One path to testing is teacher referrals. While teacher referrals for gifted testing can be effective, implicit biases and perceptions of giftedness rooted in middle-class values may contribute to rather than address underrepresentation (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Starck et al., 2020), and teachers may mis-identify students based on current academic performance rather than on academic potential (Card & Giuliano, 2016). Teachers' demographics do not reflect student demographics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a, 2023b), which may affect

students' willingness to perform in ways that indicate giftedness as they may be more reserved with teachers who are a different race or ethnicity than their own (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Also, while teachers are the traditional access points for consideration into gifted programs, underrepresented students may be more likely to seek guidance and support from non-traditional access points, such as peers, staff members, and club advisors (Witenko et al., 2017). As these pathways to access do not include teachers, the focus on teachers for recommendations can limit access. While these patterns indicate that implicit biases may limit access to gifted programs, they also suggest that working with educators may present a path forward to increased access.

Universal Screening

The challenges with identification begin prior to assessment, creating barriers for students that may result in them never being assessed in any manner. Alternatively, bypassing parent and teacher recommendations through universal consideration, increased identification of underserved students is likely (Peters, 2022b). Though this process will not address systemic issues that limit identification, universal consideration does increase the likelihood of identifying students who might have been missed through teacher and parent recommendations.

Universal screening increases the likelihood that underserved subgroups will be identified (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Plucker & Peters, 2017, 2018) if the assessment used is effective in identifying that subgroup. However, even with universal identification, students of subgroups may be reluctant to be served in honors courses as they may perceive themselves as not belonging (Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017; Witenko et al., 2017).

Southeastern School District and State Policies

Now with this understanding of identification on a broad scale, this southeaster state's policies and how the Southeastern School District implements their version of these policies can

be understood. The state tests all students during second grade with the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) and Iowa Assessment (IA) (SSDE, 2023c), which does implement the universal screening recommended by equity advocates. Students must meet two of three criteria:

- 93rd national age percentile or above in reasoning via CogAT,

- 94th national percentile or above in reading and/or math via CogAT or IA, and

- A score of 16 or higher on the verbal or non-verbal Performance Task Assessment (PTA).

Student scores from these CogAT and IA may be entered into the Gifted Identification Forms and Tasks (GIFT) program for identification as gifted or identification as a student who may need to be screened again at a future date.

Though universal screening increases access (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Plucker & Peters, 2017, 2018), it is less effective when the score requirements are based on national norms rather than local norms (Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019). So, while the state's policies implement universal screening, the reliance on national norms may leave out gifted students experiencing opportunity or education access issues.

The Southeastern School District, in accordance with state policy, follows these guidelines and tests during the second grade (n.d.). Students are assessed using CogAT, and those with a 96th percentile or above composite score are identified as gifted through aptitude (SESD, n.d.). Those scoring at the 93rd percentile or above in one or more areas will be screened for achievement, which can be shown through MAP or the state's college and career readiness assessment. Starting in the fifth grade, students who are identified via aptitude through 93rd percentile or achievement through MAP or the state's college and career readiness assessment but not through both can be evaluated based on performance using the Performance Task

Assessment or having a GPA of 3.75 on a 4.0 scale. During grades 3-11, students may be recommended for screening by a parent, teacher, administrator, or student self-referral. A previous district identification plan included that students were again evaluated in fifth and eighth grades; however, this plan changed two years ago to shifting universal testing in these grades to following the district's guidelines established for grades 3-11 identification (P. Gravitte, personal communication, November 1, 2023).

<div align="center">

Gifted Services

</div>

Post-Identification Barriers

Even when students are identified through testing or enter gifted programs through teacher recommendations, additional barriers are present. Students may not see themselves reflected in the demographics of the gifted program, and this may create perceptions of not belonging and increase the chances of returning to general education classes (Hurt, 2018; Jeffries & Silvernail, 2017). In addition, the fear of failure may reduce the likelihood of students taking on more challenging courses, and this fear may be reinforced by the lack of representation in gifted courses (i.e., if students do not see others like them, they may internalize the message that those like them are not capable), which then reinforces and internalizes deficiency narratives about low-income and minority students. Creating a culture that values diversity and encourages a growth mindset may help address these concerns (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017), but a cultural shift in gifted education is not enough of a change to address opportunity gaps connected to minority and low-income students' academic growth.

Responses to Giftedness

The tendency for constructions of giftedness to focus on exclusion rather than meeting students' needs has resulted in calls to remove the gifted label entirely or to identify the

giftedness of each student through differentiation (see Barnes, 2022; Dixson, 2022). Studies on academic growth for students in gifted programs are inconsistent, with low-income students and minority students showing little growth (Redding & Grissom, 2021; Wai & Allen, 2019). Wai and Allen (2019) reviewed the data for 482,418 academically advanced students to compare ACT scores from seventh grade to 11th and 12th grade. While they overall found higher levels of achievement for students in honors and AP courses, they found that low-income, Black, and Hispanic students had lower levels of growth; however, they do note in their conclusions that their findings do not dismiss the potential value of advanced academic work for these students. Grissom et al. (2019) links access to benefits to economics because they found in nationally representative data of elementary schools from 1990 through the 2010s that access to gifted programs was aligned more with economics than performance, and the overlap between economics and race means that those benefits tend to be concentrated on White and Asian middle-class students rather than benefit minority and low-income students (Grissom & Redding, 2016). This pattern has led to arguments that gifted education is inherently racist (Barnes, 2022) and that the gifted label is too restrictive and problematic to use (Dixson, 2022).

The reduced growth and lack of clear benefits for some subgroups may relate to programs not being designed to meet the needs of these students, or the reduced growth when looking at national data may result from inconsistent approaches to gifted education that may lead to insufficient exposure to enrichment for low-income and minority students (Redding & Grissom, 2021). A survey of gifted programs shows wide ranging models of gifted services that are not aligned with research-based practices and that apply a single concept of giftedness (and the related needs) to all students (Callahan et al., 2017), yet grouping gifted students together has shown overall benefits to their acceleration in that they demonstrate greater growth than their

non-grouped peers and have increased engagement (Feuchter & Preckel, 2022; Lavrijsen et al., 2022; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). This discrepancy between practice and the outcomes of some programs reinforces that the issues may be in implementation rather than gifted programs being incapable of serving all gifted students well. There are gifted programs focused on addressing opportunity gaps and front-loading content to better support academic potential (Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017). The success of these programs reinforces that program design and implementation are an important part of how gifted education serves (or fails to serve) low-income and minority students.

Effective Service

Effective service through gifted programs is possible when programs focus on providing appropriate interventions and services based on students' need rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all model of gifted education (Peters, 2022b), as indicated by studies focusing on targeted school-level choices regarding gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2014; Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017). Card and Giuliano (2014) examined a single school district where low-income and minority students who were not identified as gifted through traditional testing, such as CogAT, but were placed in gifted classes based on past classroom performances. These students demonstrated higher performance on standardized assessments. Though the study does not address how teachers adapted their classroom practices to meet their needs, it does suggest that what occurred in those classes benefited those students academically. Horn's (2015) examination of the Young Scholars Program and Olszewski-Kubilius et al.'s (2017) examination of Project Excite both demonstrate small-scale program's ability to increase access to gifted classes, show improvement in standardized scores, and increase overall academic achievement.

However, gifted education as a whole may not be geared to target specific students'
needs but rather generalize the curriculum to higher performing students (Bui et al., 2014).
Redding and Grissom (2021) used national data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study,
and they found small gains overall for students in gifted programs and little to no gains for Black
students and students from low-economic backgrounds. Bui et al. (2014) looked at a single
district of 200,00 thousand students and found that in terms of testing, little to no benefit was
shown for students. However, Bui et al. also notes in their conclusion that their data is unable to
make a connection between these results and how the schools and district serve these students.
This whole-scale approach of large data sets may identify an overall trend, but they do not
provide details about the contexts, such as how teachers and schools are modifying their
programs to improve outcomes and meet students' needs. The data becomes the sole measure
while the schools' cultures and programs are not included to provide context. Studies that focus
on context may occur where there is an increased awareness in the schools of what services they
are providing as those studies were initiated to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. This
may be why small-scale studies or smaller programs identify benefits to gifted students while
large scale studies tend to find little to no clear academic benefit (Redding & Grissom, 2021;
Warne, 2016a). That large-scale studies find marginal to no benefit while small-scale studies of
targeted interventions find benefits does suggest that transformative actions are at the school
level when there is an increased awareness of meeting diverse students' needs and that is
supported by school and district initiatives.

<center>**Transforming Gifted Education**</center>

Calls to end gifted programs in favor of serving all students through differentiated
learning in general education classes often assume that gifted students will achieve even in the

absence of gifted programs (Peters, 2022b). This assumption may hold true for many economically advantaged students whose parents/guardians can more easily afford to access enrichment or resources outside of school; however, this generalization takes for granted that this happens and that all middle-class families are financially stable enough to purchase access. In addition, though a reasonable assumption is that underserved students are less likely to have access outside of school and their achievement is more likely to be linked to the resources provided in the gifted programs, such an assumption does generalize all low-income families without the data to support these assumptions. Though there must be caution in making these assumptions, economic resources and geographic location must be considered in transforming gifted education, both in identification and access, and future research should include the voices of parents/guardians to be better inform these assumptions. Patterns that may affect access to gifted education include school policies and responses to discipline issues (Shores et al., 2020), which reinforces that the potential for change rests within the schools and the choices made by stakeholders in those schools. Transformation requires creating school cultures that emphasize diversity (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017).

Intersections with Giftedness

The calls to end gifted programs make problematic assumptions. One assumption is that gifted students' academic abilities will not suffer in the general education classroom; however, this assumption ignores that opportunities for differentiation in general education may not challenge gifted students appropriately and that teachers may target their focus more on struggling and at-risk students while assuming that gifted students are succeeding based on their grades (Lamb et al., 2022; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). In addition, the assumption that low-income and minority gifted students cannot show growth or success in gifted programs

incorporates deficit thinking (Fords & Goings, 2018). Instead, an increased awareness of the unique needs of gifted students may be beneficial. Instead of thinking in the limited terms of gifted, shifting focus to *gifted and…* may help recognize that giftedness may manifest in different ways and need differentiated services based on unique factors. Economic status (Goings & Ford, 2018; Grissom et al., 2018), race and ethnicity (Anderson, 2020; Goings & Ford, 2018; Hurt, 2018), gender identity (Kerr & Multon, 2015; Lo, Hu, et al., 2022), and twice-exceptional status (Foley-Nicpon & Teriba, 2022; King, 2022) are all potential factors in being *gifted and…*, and while it may not be realistic to expect gifted programs to be prepared to address all unique intersections with giftedness, an increased awareness can potentially support changes to school and classroom cultures. As federal policy directs states and districts to take the lead on gifted and talented education (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018), the power to individualize programs is realistic and empowers educators, administrators, and district staff to work towards more equitable outcomes.

Gifted Students with Opportunity Gaps

For example, depending on the student demographics, it may be appropriate to identify a specific area of focus, such as income status and its related factors. If gifted programs remain places that focus on giftedness in ways that privilege higher-income students and dominant groups, they will continue to fail low-income and minority students. Gifted programs must not only invest in more inclusive identification practices but also invest in producing supports for gifted students who have experienced opportunity gaps due to a lack of educational resources and external factors, such as access to health care, both associated with poverty (Peters, 2022; Plucker & Peters, 2018; Wells & Plucker, 2022). Programs that focus on STEM based education and access to advanced coursework have shown growth for some subgroups, though the growth

is less consistent for low-income students (Crabtree et al., 2019; Wai & Allen, 2019). Gifted

programs should consider additional enrichment opportunities and academic services (Ecker-

Lyster & Niileksela, 2017; Peters, Rambo-Hernandez, et al., 2019). In addition, helping students

develop confidence in their own abilities and giftedness can potentially increase the effectiveness

of gifted programs (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Though state guidelines may affect how

choices are made, these choices are more within the control of districts, schools, and educators,

increasing their agency to create more inclusive and supportive gifted programs.

However, shifting to addressing opportunity gaps raises the question of how growth is

measured. Performance on standardized tests (e.g., SAT, ACT) may not show the same level of

achievement for low-income students, but high-achieving, low-income students who attend

selective universities demonstrate long-term success in their programs (Hoxby & Avery, 2013),

suggesting that success for these students may need different measurements. Continuing to

measure student and program success with assessments that may measure access to resources

rather than growth or potential may undercut these efforts and reinforce deficiency narratives

(Smith, 2021). As gifted programs work to develop more inclusive and supportive guidelines,

they may need to consider additional methods for measuring progress towards student growth in

order to evaluate program effectiveness in a way that does not fully rely on potentially biased

assessments, including dynamic assessments, which focus on growth after targeted instruction,

and long-term achievement, such as college graduation rates (Cao et al., 2017).

Teachers in Gifted Education

As this study centers around teachers in gifted education, the construction of *teacher* as it

relates to the topic must be explored. Each teacher has a meaning-making process based on

individual context, which includes lived experiences, social norms, and culture. The context

shapes and reinforces biases regarding giftedness and gifted education, and a lack of teacher

diversity may reinforce biases connected to race and economic status. However, though biases

exist and must be addressed, prioritizing teacher deficits rather than potential undermines the

goals of transformation. With that understanding, though this section will explore biases and

their negative impacts, they are for context that will then allow a shift to a focus on potential and

teacher agency. In addition, transformation must be mutually beneficial. Prioritizing viewing

gifted education through critical lenses frames teachers as enforcers of systemic issues with

equity, which devalues their own efforts and potential. Instead, this section will create space to

explore issues as they relate to teachers within a reparative framework that acknowledges and

recognizes transformative potential.

The Role of Teachers

Teachers' interactions with students can affect student engagement, with increased

positive interactions resulting in increased engagement (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Martin

& Collie, 2019). In addition, when there are more positive interactions than negative, not only

are students more engaged in terms of "participation, enjoyment, and aspirations" (p. 872), but

higher levels of positive interactions can outweigh negative interactions. The relationship

between positive teacher-student interactions and increased student engagement reinforces that

calls to transform gifted education need increased focus on the role of teachers. That teachers

invest in these relationships is likely as positive teacher-student relationships correlate with

higher job satisfaction (Lavy & Bocker, 2018; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020).

Reflective Practitioners

To better understand underrepresented students in gifted programs, research must be on

individual contexts. Identifying gifted programs or giftedness as a concept overall as flawed,

universalizes gifted programs and educators without considering the unique needs of gifted students or the potential of gifted programs when done well. Supportive gifted programs with relevant professional development can benefit the performance of low-income students (Fischer et al., 2020). Coursework targeted for educators to serve gifted students is lacking, and additional training is needed to better target the needs of diverse gifted students (Ford et al., 2021; Frazier-Goatley et al., 2022; Plucker & Peters, 2018). The characteristics of this training are unclear as various understandings of giftedness are in play, and the universal needs of gifted students are unclear and inconsistent in the studies. One way to work towards a greater understanding is to move away from the large scale (e.g., national norms, demographics, state assessments) and focus on individual school communities where educators potentially have more agency to affect school culture and classroom practices.

Teacher Agency

While teachers do not have direct control over identification practices as they are governed by state and district plans in accordance with ESSA (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018), teachers as reflective practitioners do have agency in their own classrooms and how they work with multiple constructions of giftedness (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Teachers may limit giftedness to cognitive skills (Baudson & Preckel, 2013; Yazici et al., 2017), but through understanding how/if experienced teachers have reflected and transformed their understandings of giftedness and the related teaching practices, gifted programs through collaborative discussions among teachers may provide opportunities for transformation. Collaborative professional development has increased value for educators of gifted students (Plucker & Peters, 2018), and focusing professional development on reconstructing giftedness in terms of appropriately challenging students rather than a universal idea of giftedness could benefit all

students (Hertzog, 2022; Peters, 2022). However, to avoid recreating the same problematic patterns, professional development must raise awareness of the overall issues in gifted education raised by research.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Transformative Learning Theory</h2>

Transformative learning theory outlines a process for reflecting on and challenging current understandings, potentially transforming one's understanding. This process is particularly useful for this study as teachers will be asked to share how they have made choices regarding if they should adapt their gifted classes in response to reflection. Within this process, adult learners encounter a disorienting dilemma where their present meaning-making process is not adequate (Mezirow, 1981; 1991). This awareness leads to seeking alternative understandings, which potentially results in adult learners

1. Being aware that new information or approaches may provide new ways of making sense of the problem,

2. Developing an increased understanding of their prior understanding, including the causes, context, and consequences,

3. Reflecting on the assumptions underlying their prior understanding,

4. Testing out their new understanding,

5. Facing uncertainty about applying this new understanding, and

6. Finally, acting on this new understanding (Dirkx et al., 2006).

This process is not merely incorporating new information into existing understandings but rather the development of new understandings, thus transformation rather than adaptation (Mezirow, 1981; Walker, 2018). These new understandings come from a deeper understanding of the causes and assumptions underlying prior understandings. Through this process, adult

learners (and within the framework of this study, educators serving gifted students) will make choices while "building competence," "acquiring knowledge and skills," evaluate through reflection and feedback, and finally incorporate this new understanding within their broader community (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7). People are social beings, both in that they interact with others and in that the individual is shaped by society (e.g., culture, norms, values, history, etc.) and society is shaped by individuals (Mezirow, 1998). The process of incorporating new information and developing new understandings is not limited to individual transformation. Though transformative learning theory focuses on the individual in this process, as social beings, people share their new understandings with peers and society, potentially creating social change through individual transformations. As Mezirow (1997; 1998) argues in critiques of his work, a focus on individual transformation does not exclude social action; it simply does not require it. Instead, transformation learning theory opens the discourse to social actions while also recognizing that individuals are social beings whose transformation has social effects.

While collective social action is an appropriate means to address issues in gifted education, it is not the sole means, and limiting it to the sole means reduces teacher agency as only efforts on a societal scale are effective and relevant. Critiques of gifted education frame responses within these terms by predominantly focusing research on large scale responses. While equity is an issue in gifted education, critiques demand that gifted education fully address these equity issues with more recent critiques calling for the end of gifted programs in favor of differentiation for all. Such calls assume that equity can then be achieved within general education for all. Rather, Mezirow's transformative learning theory provides a means to increase teacher agency and recognizing that though society is a unit, it is a socially constructed unit made up of and shaped by these individuals.

Reflection

Mezirow's conceptualization of reflection presents a complication as throughout his writings, he has refined and clarified reflection (Lundgren & Poell, 2016); however, this has resulted in various understandings of reflection within transformative learning theory.

Mezirow defines reflection as a rational process that requires awareness of and critical understanding of how knowledge is constructed, prioritizing the actions and their effects that result from that knowledge (Dirkx et al., 2006; Lundgren & Poell, 2016). New understanding should be empirically tested rather than intuitively accepted, and critical reflection (also referred to as premise reflection) brings awareness to, and allows testing of, assumptions underlying the old and new understandings. Mezirow (1981) describes theoretical reflectivity as expanding the awareness that context affects the meaning-making process (i.e., discriminate reflectivity) to understand that context is culturally and socially created.

Reparative Reading

With an awareness that context is a product of cultural and social factors, this study will use a reparative reading that prioritizes teacher potential and agency within an inequitable system rather than critically positioning teachers as upholders of the system. Reparative reading, in contrast to critical (or paranoid) reading, has its origin in the AIDS epidemic and queer theory (Lassen, 2014), as Sedgwick (2003) explored the notion that critical readings prioritize a focus on flaws at the expense of exploring different ways of repairing or approaching the situation. Within the contexts of the AIDS epidemic, knowing if the government was complicit in disease's impact on African American and queer communities (a critical lens) does not address how those impacted respond and seek reparative actions. While reparative readings do not deny the need for

critical lens, Sedgwick argued that critical reading has, and continues to, dominate academic discourse.

Critical readings potentially position the subject within a dichotomy where one is the repressed or the repressor (Huffer, 2012), and the assumption underlying this approach allows little space or flexibility for teachers to enact their own agency. If teachers are not clearly oppressed in an educational system, the role left for them through a critical lens is that of oppressor. Reparative readings allow for complexity in that teachers navigate the boundaries between a system with inequities and students affected by them.

<p style="text-align:center">**Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Gifted Education Research**</p>

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) focuses on reflection and transformation, but it expands the process to include the researcher in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For this study, the assumptions of this method align with the assumption of transformative learning theory and provide a means for using reflection to check biases that potentially limit service and address potential power imbalances.

Currently, there are no studies using RTA within the context of gifted education. RTA started as a method in clinical studies, one which focuses on the role of the researcher in the meaning-making process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For example, Kua et al. (2022) examines how physicians work with geriatric patients and adapt their responses to their patients based on intra-personal relationships. Physicians use reflection and transformative thinking to adapt their practices to better meet the needs of their patients rather than rely solely on prior technical knowledge. Similarly, Taye et al. (2022), examined the care of patients with chronic pain and how care providers built relationships with patients as part of identifying ways to meet their needs while also using self-reflection to avoid biases during treatment. Though both studies are

in the medical setting, there is a similar relationship to the teacher-student one. Both medical care providers and teachers are in a potential power imbalance with those they serve, as their choices may have direct short-term and long-term impacts on their patients/students without clear impacts on the medical care providers/teachers. Also, biases may affect their practices and approaches to those they serve, and through self-reflection and transformation informed by the relationships built, greater service can be provided to the patients/students.

Studies in gifted education that come close to the design of this study focus on perceptions regarding gifted students. Weyns et al. (2021) examines pre-service teachers' perceptions of gifted students, and they found that pre-service teachers are likely to hold negative perceptions about gifted students, including their lack of social skills, neediness, and emotional instability. The findings of this study may suggest broader social views on giftedness rather than actual giftedness as more experienced teachers may have different views (see Miedijensky, 2018). What this study does suggest in terms of this dissertation topic is that teacher experience with gifted education is a variable that must be considered.

Miedijensky (2018) examined "outstanding" gifted educators and their perceptions of gifted children and gifted education (p. 222). These more experienced gifted educators discuss the students in terms of maturity, achievement, and diverse and varied interests. In terms of the learning environment, and of particular interest to this dissertation, the study identifies that educators of gifted students must be able to meet the intellectual and emotional needs of students. Though this study does recognize that gifted students may have unique needs that must be addressed (e.g., social and emotional), the study also generalizes gifted students rather than focusing on teacher-student relationships and the individualized approach to gifted students' needs generated from those relationships.

In terms of this study, RTA is appropriate when considering potential power imbalances where expertise places a person in a position to make choices that directly and indirectly impact others. In the clinical studies (Kua et al., 2022; Weyns et al., 2021), the health care providers have the power of expertise in their field and their patients potentially have limited agency in how the services are provided. This parallels the educational system where gifted students will be served by a teacher who is placed in the role of expert serving gifted students. Both clinical studies focus on reflection and relationship building (with the assumption that meaning making is an interconnected process rather than a one-directional process) to meet the needs of those served and to tailor that service to those individual needs. The non-RTA studies (Miedijensky, 2018; Weyns et al., 2021), while both more directly aligned to gifted education, lack focus on relationships, reflection, and the resulting transformation on which RTA focuses.

Summary of Literature Review

The differing iterations of giftedness and inconsistencies between federal and state guidelines for identification and services sets up the challenges for any study that addresses gifted education as district, and potentially each school, may present a unique combination of variables that lack generalizability on a larger scale. Though this study does not deal with the issue of identification, understanding gifted identification provides context for the population that teachers in gifted education may serve. As some subgroups are less likely to be identified, teachers in gifted education are less likely to become familiar with their needs, and the absence of those subgroups may affect teachers' constructions of giftedness and gifted education. Understanding the potential needs of students who are identified, including those from underserved populations, provides potential patterns or areas that teachers may identify in interviews. In addition, if these needs are not identified in interviews, that lack can reveal a

disconnect between the voices of researchers in this area and practitioners in the field. Outlining

transformative learning theory and reflexive thematic analysis establishes their shared

characteristics, including reflection, relationships, and transformation. This alignment paired

with clinical studies using reflexive thematic analysis shows the appropriateness of this method

as it provides a means for provider-client/teacher-student relationships to be explored in a way

that encourages reflection to challenge bias, assumptions, and power dynamics affecting those

involved. Within this study, the purpose of which is to explore how teachers of gifted students

transform and negotiate their understanding of gifted education in response to their experiences

with gifted students, the method and methodology must recognize the participants' relationship

with these areas (e.g., biases, power dynamics, reflection, transformation) as well as the

researcher's connection to them. The methodology is described in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research seeks a deeper understanding through the exploration of subjective experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leavey, 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2020), and it embraces that the meaning-making process exists between the participants and the researcher within a specific context (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Research driven by positivist and postpositivist paradigms prioritize generalizability to the point that the studies' outcomes become predictive and deterministic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the context-specific nature of this study, a qualitative approach was the more appropriate for data collection and analysis. Though this study aimed to change on-going conversations about gifted education, the outcome of this study was not to reduce all gifted services and teachers to a single, restricted understanding.

Instead, this study aimed to provide enough detail and context so that readers discover familiar experiences and themes that potentially provide insight into their own contexts (Braun & Clark, 2022), and the comparison between this study and a reader's context should not be determined by me through statements about the generalizability. While I as the researcher had agency in the meaning-making process, the transferability of the study's findings will always be "vested in the person seeking to make the transfer" who is informed by the trustworthiness of the researcher and the depth of data that allows such a comparison to occur (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 216).

Reflexive thematic analysis was an appropriate choice with this understanding of qualitative research as the data collected was rooted in the subjectivity of the participants and the researchers and as the data analysis was specific to the researcher (Braun & Clark, 2022), which was appropriate as I and my participants were experienced teachers of gifted students. This

shared identity, though unique to each teacher's context, guided the development of my research questions and interview protocols. I designed my questions to explore teachers' perceptions of gifted education, focused on what needs they identify in their students, how their experiences with their students informed their perceptions about these needs and on the choices they made in their classroom practices in response to these. The interview questions were also informed by the shared identity and the assumptions underlying qualitative research. I designed the questions to provide opportunities for teachers in gifted education to share their experiences and perceptions, using questions to invite the sharing of narratives about their experiences with gifted students. The questions were designed to guide the conversation to potential disorienting dilemmas that occurred as they perceived their students' being *Gifted and*....and then making choices in their classroom practices to meet their needs that exists with or in addition to their giftedness.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers of gifted students transform and negotiate their understanding of gifted education in response to their experiences with gifted students through the following research questions:

R1: What are the individual, cultural, or societal needs that educators identify as relevant to effective gifted education?

R2: What role or roles do gifted students play in educators' awareness of these needs?

R3: How does critical reflection on these needs relate to pedagogical choices in the gifted serving classroom?

Research Design

This qualitative study used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022). Underlying this method was the ontological position of relativism. As Mezirow (1991, 2009)

presented transformative learning theory as a process of reflection and potential transformation based on experiences, relativism's focus on knowledge being shaped through experiences and within a specific context aligned with this theory (Relativism, 2009). Reflexive thematic analysis allowed a focus on reflective practices in which the researcher took a role in producing the knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022), so the epistemology for this study was constructivism as both the participants and the researcher had roles in shaping this study's findings.

Approaches that look to reveal the meaning of what participants have said work on the assumption that language conveys meaning, while the assumption underlying this approach was that language is situated within a context and that meaning making is a process that occurs with the speaker and the listener both co-creating that meaning (Byrne, 2022). This aspect aligned with transformative learning theory in terms of communicative learning as both recognized that discourse is part of the meaning-making process rather than language existing in isolation (Mezirow, 1991, 2009). From this assumption, I, as the researcher, brought to the context my own experiences and background, and through my own reflexive inquiry process, I worked to understand my own positionality and how it contributed to the meaning-making process during the study.

Settings and Participants

This study took place within a single school district. Targeting one school district helped focus the study as the constructions of giftedness shared some common elements from district level initiatives, professional development sessions, and common guiding documents regarding work with gifted students, such as the Southeastern School District's *Gifted and Talented* webpage and curriculum materials that provided differences between College Preparatory courses and Honors courses (Southeastern School District [SESD], 2023a, 2023c). Selecting

schools and participants with these common elements allowed for the use of these materials for context to clarify the data and support analysis. Also, the focus on a single district with common training, certification requirements, and guidelines for gifted education reduced variables that may have affected the study and allowed for comparison between schools as they were more likely to reference common language and expectations.

Settings

This study occurred at the secondary level of a school district in a southeastern state of the United States. To maintain anonymity, the district was identified as the Southeastern School District in this study and in the references, and the state was referred to as the Southeastern State. In places that abbreviate the district or state, the district was identified as SESD and the state as SES. The district contained fifty-seven schools, including three charter schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). During the 2022-2023 school year, the district served 47,357 students with a teacher population of 2,857 (SES School Report Card, 2023a). At the secondary level, there were eleven high schools, two academies, and one secondary charter school at the time of this study (SESD, 2023d). The size of the district provided increased opportunities to explore gifted education.

I initially started with all nine secondary high schools, the two academies, and three program schools in the district as potential sites for this study, a total of 14 potential sites. Though my study assumed commonalities in terms of some shared experiences and training, my sites also had unique experiences and characteristics represented in publicly available data shared via state-run agencies. I collected available data to enhance my understanding of the potential sites (see Table 3.1), which helped me to understand the potential sites in relationship to the literature on gifted education. The data collected focused on Advanced Placement (AP) courses at each school,

looking at the number of students in the most recent graduating cohort who achieved College Readiness based on AP scores and on the percentage of test takers during the most recent school year who earned an AP score of 3 or higher. I also collected state data showing the poverty index of each school (SES School Report Card, 2022).

AP data as context for studying gifted services may seem unrelated as AP is not a program solely for gifted students; however, the state in this study associated AP courses with gifted services as indicated in this context by the Southeastern State Department of Education (SESDE) linking AP and gifted services together under Advanced Academic Programs and the inclusion of AP within the framework guidelines for gifted education models (2018, 2023b) and by state guidelines for teacher credentials listing AP and honors bearing courses under the same heading, which outlined the additional endorsements required for each, which included College Board approved training for AP courses and the Gifted and Talented endorsement for honors courses (SESDE, 2023d). This link was reinforced by district curriculum guides, current at the time of the study, that included an honor credit bearing course in the fall semester for courses paired with an AP credit bearing course in the spring semester, such as Biology Seminar Honors in the fall semester paired with AP Biology in the spring (Southeastern School District, 2023a). While the number of gifted students at all potential sites was not publicly available, the available AP data provided context for which sites likely had multiple teachers with the Gifted and Talented endorsement and potentially some shared understandings based on AP training, which allowed for increased commonalities in their constructions of giftedness.

I included information from the state's poverty index for its public schools (SES School Report Card, 2022), which provided additional context to potential needs that intersect with poverty and access to resources. The literature relating overall student population's economic

status to access to AP participation and gifted education indicated that a higher poverty index school was less likely to offer AP courses and less likely to identify students as gifted (Goings et al., 2018; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Plucker & Peters, 2018; Xu et al., 2021), so this additional information with AP participation provided context about the district's secondary schools overall and the individual sites of this study.

Outliers and Site Selection

The site selection excluded two program schools. Though both program schools offered AP courses and served gifted students, their AP data was not reported to this southeastern state's department of education under their schools' names. The students at these schools were linked to their attendance-area schools, so student data was reported via the attendance-area schools instead. Though these programs maintain internal data on AP participation, that data was not available to the public, so it was excluded from the recruitment process as the additional context this data would have provided was missing. In addition, Site 10 and Site 12 were excluded. While both are secondary schools, each has a unique focus that does not include AP participation. Site 12 does show 2.1 percent of students in that cohort earned College Readiness through AP scores; however, this was likely due to students reporting the incorrect school number on their AP exams or the students completing an AP course prior to attending the school. The low number suggested the site had limited opportunities for finding participants relevant to the study.

Site 11 was included automatically. Site 11 was an outlier in that the school was designed to serve advanced students (McQueen, n.d.), which explained the high percentage of students completing AP exams. Though Site 11 was considered for exclusion as an outlier, the school's role in serving gifted students was relevant in understanding the district's construction of gifted education, and exclusion would have limited the understanding of how gifted students are served

in this context. This site's information is incomplete on Table 3.1 as the school recently transitioned from a program school to a high school, and the 2023-2024 school year data will be the first year of the school including ninth-twelfth grade levels in their reported data. The school's current status as a high school and the school's purpose in serving a highly gifted population supported its inclusion as leaving it out would have excluded this unique context.

Sites

Based on the district's data and the need to provide a diverse range of perspectives, my original goal was to have four or more sites represented. Site 10 and Site 12 were excluded, as discussed above. Site 6 and Site 9 did not give approval for the study. Site 1, Site 4, and Site 5 gave approval for the study, but despite multiple attempts to recruit participants, no participants volunteered from these sites. Site 11, the gifted program, was included because qualifying participants from this site volunteered. Four other sites were included as participants volunteered at each of them: Site 2, Site 3, Site 7, and Site 8. Information about the sites represented in this study is below. The data is already represented in Table 3.1 but has been restated below to better link the data with each site. Additional information included here was collected from their school websites, and to maintain their anonymity, their websites were not cited.

Site 2

This site had a student population of 1,643 during the 2022-2023 school year, and 54.6% of that population was identified as living in poverty during the 2021-2022 school year. During the 2022-2023 school year, 15.3% of the graduating cohort met college readiness through scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam, and 74% of students who took an AP exam during that school year earned a 3 or higher. The school's webpage included that the diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and student agency are guiding values.

Site 3

This site had a student population of 1,713 during the 2022-2023 school year, and 68% of that population was identified as living in poverty during the 2021-2022 school year. During the 2022-2023 school year, 11.2% of the graduating cohort met college readiness through scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam, and 68% of students who took an AP exam during that school year earned a 3 or higher. The school's webpage included the school's history, including that the current school was the merger of two high schools after desegregation. The school's "About us" section emphasized community involvement in the school, including the role of parents.

Site 7

This site had a student population of 1,719 during the 2022-2023 school year, and 51% of that population was identified as living in poverty during the 2021-2022 school year. During the 2022-2023 school year, 21.9% of the graduating cohort met college readiness through scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam, and 76% of students who took an AP exam during that school year earned a 3 or higher. Their "Welcome" page emphasized the students' future roles, such as being contributing members of society and being prepared for their careers. The webpage also had value statements concerning family involvement in the school and celebrating the diversity of their population.

Site 8

This site had a student population of 3,059 during the 2022-2023 school year, and 49.2% of that population was identified as living in poverty during the 2021-2022 school year. During the 2022-2023 school year, 23.4% of the graduating cohort met college readiness through scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam, and 76% of students who took an AP exam during that school year earned a 3 or higher. On the school's webpage, the "About us" section made value statements

about career preparation and the rigor of coursework. That section also described the school as having a diverse population.

Site 11

This site had a student population of 131 during the 2022-2023 school year. As this school was transitioning from a program to a high school, this number only represented the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades classes. 21.1% of that population was identified as living in poverty during the 2021-2022 school year, and due to the transition, this data represented ninth and tenth grade students during that school year. During the 2022-2023 school year, there was no data for the percentage of the graduating cohort who met college readiness through scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam as seniors were not included in that year's data. 96% of ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students who took an AP exam during the 2022-2023 school year earned a 3 or higher. On the school's webpage, the "Principal's Message" section included the school's partnership with a local university, the focus on AP and dual-enrollment courses, the school's emphasis on academics, and potential opportunities to work on research projects with professors at the local university.

Participants

The participants were selected through purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling allowed for a focus on individuals with relevant experience that related to the study (Klem et al., 2022). In this case, as the study focused on gifted educators and the relationship between their (re)constructing of giftedness and their classroom practices, selecting gifted serving educators at the sites was the most relevant. While including students, administrators, and other school staff would have been useful to expand the understanding, this study focused on educators, so the criteria identified the educators with relevant experience and background in gifted education. 12 participants were sought for this

study. Initially, 15 participants volunteered, but two were excluded for not meeting the criteria and one was excluded as the site was already represented by three other teachers.

To achieve this, participants had to meet criteria for inclusion. The participants were required to be at the secondary level at one of the sites where permission was given for recruitment in the Southeastern School District. Each teacher had five or more years of experience teaching honors courses, which allowed for them to have a wealth of experiences to reference during interviews. This southeastern state required that all teachers of record for honors or AP courses have the related endorsements on their state issued teaching certificates (SESDE, 2023b). Schools could assign teachers to an AP or honors level course for one school year without this endorsement, so the requirement that participants had at least five years of experience in honors or AP allowed for all participants to have this endorsement. The endorsement included training related to working with gifted students and functioned as part of the teachers' construction of giftedness, and this endorsement with at least five years of experience allowed for participants to discuss changes over time and have some shared understandings of giftedness based on meeting the endorsement requirements. These requirements excluded two potential participants as neither had five years of experience in the gifted classroom.

Participants included a mixture with some having exclusively taught honors courses and teachers that taught a mixture of honors and college preparatory courses. Though this mixture introduced an additional variable, such as the effect of different preps on their constructions of gifted education, limiting the study to teachers who only taught honors courses would have left out a unique perspective, including the potential recognition of identified and unidentified gifted

students being served in non-honors courses and comparisons between general education and honors courses based on their teaching experiences.

The guidelines for purposive sampling and reflective thematic analysis discouraged starting with a fixed sample size (Braun & Clake, 2022; Miles et al., 2020). Instead of a predetermined sample size, sample size should be determined by the achievement of data saturation, the point where no new information is collected. However, in other reflexive thematic analysis studies, researchers found saturation achieved at twelve interviews and that additional interviews only led to small refinements rather than important changes (Ando et al., 2014; Guest et al., 2006). For this study, data collection assumed that the same pattern would apply with 12 participants allowing for saturation. Data from the interviews were transcribed and reflected on to evaluate saturation, and saturation was achieved with the tenth interview as no new patterns emerged. Unique characteristics of the tenth interview were related to the participant's unique experiences, such as family life and her experiences as a student, instead of to the research questions. At this point, three potential participants remained: two from Site 11 and one from Site 3. Site 11 and Site 3 were already represented by two participants each, so I selected two more participants based on their potentially unique perspectives. Site 3's participant was a coach, male, and taught social studies. At Site 11, both were female, and one taught social studies and one taught science. After examining the characteristics of participants (see Table 3.2), males were underrepresented, and while one participant (Reese) mentioned coaching a team not affiliated with his school, I decided that Sean (Site 3's remaining participant) might add his experience as a coach for a team affiliated with his school. For Site 11, no science teacher was represented at that point in the study, so I decided to include Laura from Site 11. After these two interviews took place, I reaffirmed saturation in the data related to my study. While Laura did

make content-specific references, no new patterns emerged. Sean did discuss athletics in gifted

serving classes and the need to balance demands inside and outside of the classroom, but this

pattern had been present in prior interviews. Due to reaffirming saturation, I excluded the

potential thirteenth participant.

Each participant shared via the Qualtrics Survey (Appendix A) information about their

teaching experience, and during the interviews (Appendix B), they shared what they wanted me

to know about them. I have compiled this information into profiles of each participant, and I

have included Table 3.2, outlining additional data about the participants.

Amanda (Site 2; Social Studies)

Amanda stated that her whole teaching career has been honors and AP courses. During

the interview, Amanda shared that she graduated from a high school in the same district in which

she currently taught. She also mentioned that she was a gifted student, which informed her

understanding of her students' giftedness.

Rachel (Site 3; Social Studies)

Rachel shared that she has taught honors courses since she started teaching seven years

ago and that she started teaching AP US History during the most recent school year.

Jimmy (Site 3; Math)

Jimmy shared that his mother had been a teacher and that his wife was also a teacher. He

taught at multiple schools and districts, and most of his career was in AP and honors classes. He

shared that he had experience in the middle and high school levels and that his daughters are

gifted students at the elementary school level.

Sean (Site 3; Social Studies)

Sean shared that he has taught honors, AP, and general education courses. He said that most of his teaching career has been in honors and AP courses. He shared that he taught at the same high school from which he graduated, and that he was an athlete in high school and that he currently served as a coach.

Jesse (Site 7; English)

Jesse shared that she had taught "about every English course that exists" at all levels, from "low level" to "high level." She had taught media courses, including journalism, and that the shift to gifted has been the "second half of my career." She listed her current courses as ninth grade and twelfth grade IB courses. In addition to these experiences, she shared that she has a doctorate and AP Literature certification.

Elle (Site 7; English)

Elle shared that she has taught overseas through a non-profit and in another state. She listed AP English Language and IB courses as her current courses. She has served as the advisor for her school's Academic Team. She also shared that her husband worked in education, and she discussed her daughters who are gifted students at the elementary level.

Rebecca (Site 8; English)

Rebecca started in a previous state. She said that she has "taught every level of high school English," and she has taught yearbook and journalism courses. She shared about herself that she was married with three daughters. During the interview, she also shared that one of her daughters was identified with ADHD.

Karen (Site 8; English)

Karen shared that the majority of her career has been in gifted education. She also identified that she has worked in high poverty schools, which she said "shaped my perception" of

education. During the interview, she shared that her readings about brain science informed her understanding of giftedness. In addition, she mentioned her nephew who she identified as dyslexic and a first responder. She expressed that his giftedness is in "putting your life on the line," and that education systems do not fully capture the different ways giftedness exists.

Tina (Site 8; Social Studies)

Tina shared that she taught AP and general education courses and that she teaches both in-person and virtually. She also shared that she worked for a curriculum development company. She had experience teaching in middle school and high school, having taught grades seven through twelve. She mentioned two sons, one in middle school and one in college, with both identified as gifted.

Chris (Site 11; English)

Chris shared that he taught AP English Literature, and he served as the English Department Chair at his school. He started in another state teaching eighth grade reading, but he transitioned into AP and pre-AP courses. He identified himself as having worked with gifted students "my entire career." During the interview, he shared that he identified with gifted students, and that he felt he was an underserved gifted student who was bored in school.

Resse (Site 11; Social Studies)

Reese shared that honors and AP courses have been most of his career. During the interview, he discussed his two sons, both of whom are gifted and have shaped choices in his classroom. Also, he mentioned that he grew up in a rural, low-income area, so he often identified with students who shared that background.

Laura (Site 11; Science)

Laura shared that she was "born with a piece of chalk" in her hand, referencing that she has always seen teaching as her calling. She has worked in the classroom and at the district level, and she noted that she took time off to raise her daughters. In her previous district, she helped to develop a STEM program to better serve the needs of highly gifted students.

Recruitment

I obtained approval to proceed from the dissertation committee on November 3, 2024 (Appendix C), Coastal Carolina University's IRB committee on November 27 2024 (Appendix D), and the school district on November 28, 2024 (Appendix E). I then contacted via email the principals at each site (Appendix F). I identified principals as stakeholders in this process as data was being collected that may reflect on their schools, and though they were not potential participants or directly part of the study, seeking their permission acknowledged their roles as school leaders and potentially increased teacher comfort knowing that their principals were allowing participation. I introduced myself as an instructional coach and teacher, hoping these would establish credibility. My prior working relationship with many administrators in the district due to my 15 years in this district, my work with curriculum committees and professional development, and my current work as an instructional coach eased this process as the administrators either worked directly with me or were familiar with me. However, I used my Coastal Carolina University email account for this contact and included the information that through approved by the district my study was not affiliated with the district to maintain a distinction between my relationship with the district and my role as a researcher. My contact with principals outlined my study, including my goals for developing my findings into professional development and my respect for school and teacher anonymity. I asked for

permission to contact teachers at their schools via the instructional coaches, and I made clear that all data collection would occur outside of school hours so as not to interfere with school routines and teachers' responsibilities. Site 6 and Site 9 did not reply to the initial request for permission, and their administrators did not reply to a follow-up request. In both cases, I spoke in person to a person on the leadership teams for those schools, and they stated they would follow up. Also, my administrator followed up with the administration at those sites via email, but there were no responses, so these sites had to be excluded from further recruitment.

After permission was given, I contacted the instructional coach for those sites. I contacted the instructional coaches at each site as I was able to build on my relationship with them to develop trust and rapport with potential participants. While I did not have a prior relationship with all potential participants, I had some form of relationship with all current secondary level instructional coaches due to my work as one. As potential participants were more likely to have a prior relationship with their instructional coaches than with me, their willingness to forward on my request for participants to their teachers potentially increased the likelihood of participants' willingness to participant and indirectly contributed to increased trust and rapport between the participants and me. Instructional coaches were provided with the same permissions and information as the principals (Appendix G), but they were also given a recruitment flyer to share with those teaching honors courses (Appendix H). This recruitment flyer outlined the study, potential benefits, and included a recruitment link. The recruitment link took teachers to a survey in Qualtrics XM (Appendix A), and this survey included details about the study. The survey collected the following information about potential participants: demographic information, including race and gender; years of teaching experience; years teaching in honors courses; years at their current schools; if teachers have mostly taught honors, mostly taught college preparatory,

or a mixture of the two over the past five years; the study consent form (Appendix I); the audio/video/image consent form (Appendix J); contact information; and information about best times to complete interviews.

Incentive

All participants who were selected and completed the interview process were entered into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. $25 as an incentive provided a potential reward for participation without placing pressure on teachers to participate as the chance for $25 to Amazon was not likely to be essential to meeting their needs. This was advertised in the recruitment material. In the Qualtrics XM survey, participants indicated if they wish to participate in the study but not be included in the drawing. Of the 12 participants selected, one declined to be in the drawing. The 11 remaining participants were assigned a random number, and the winners were selected using Google Sheet's random number generator. Participants were notified via email if they won a gift card or not (Appendix K; Appendix L), and the gift cards were sent directly from Amazon.

Potential Limitations

Contacting the principals and then the instructional coaches before contacting teachers created some recruitment limitations. This process placed two more gatekeepers in a position to reject or ignore the study, as shown by two sites being excluded from recruitment due to principals not responding. Also, the delay between responses delayed data collection time. I assumed that instructional coaches would forward the recruitment information to all teachers who teach honors courses when instead they may have been selective in choosing to which teachers they forward the recruitment information, which means some voices may been vetted prior to my recruitment. While these concerns were present, the benefits outweighed them.

Principals and instructional coaches were stakeholders in this process and informing them acknowledged that and gave teachers people in leadership with whom to discuss the study and their potential participation. This provided teachers with a chance to discuss with others in their school community if they should participate and to ask questions about consent forms and the nature of the study to those with whom they have preexisting relationships. Also, school leadership permission potentially increased willingness to participate, and the existing relationships that teachers had with their instructional coaches may have increased willingness to participate too.

My School

One site for recruitment was the school where I served as the instructional coach. Instructional coaches are considered part of the school's leadership team, though we do not have a role in formal evaluations, hiring, or the issuing of contracts. I went through the formal process of emailing and requesting permission from my school's principal, but I modified the next step for this site as my positionality and my insider status were different in comparison to other sites. My modification was that though I used my Coastal Carolina University email to maintain the distinction between my roles, I replaced contacting the instructional coach with contacting department chairs (Appendix M). This provided an alternative person who served in a support role for teachers at the department level so that teachers could discuss if they wanted to participate without feeling direct pressure from me. However, I acknowledge that despite this change, teachers may have felt an increased pressure to participate because though my role was in teacher support rather than having the authority of an administrator, my prior relationships with the teachers may have led to them agreeing to participate either for perceived professional benefit or in the desire to be supportive of my Ph.D. journey. When teachers at my school

approached me about my study, I attempted to stress the volunteer aspect and my appreciation of them considering participating. No department chair or teacher expressed any concerns to me about the study, and I was not informed that any teacher discussed with their department chair or the principal concerns regarding pressure to participate, so I assumed I was appropriate in my approach.

This assumption was also supported by how my role at the school was structured. As I was in a support role rather than an administrative role, I had not been part of formal evaluations or the issuing of contracts, so I had no direct bearing on teachers maintaining their jobs. My support role was that of teacher advocate as I shared the concerns and needs of teachers with administration. From the administrator side, my role was not to decide if a teacher remained in a position. Instead, my role was to provide support to teachers in meeting administrative expectations. There was no clear professional benefit to be gained from me by participating in the study as our schedules and assigned courses rarely change due to our school size and the specific certifications required for the Advanced Placement courses offered, so there could be no preferential treatment there. Pay was based on a district formula, so I had no influence in that area. One potential participant was excluded from the study as he was my spouse, so it was decided that the closeness there would be inappropriate for data collection. Due to the lack of personal and professional distance between me, the site, and potential participants from this site, increased efforts were made in transparency of the process at this site, in emphasizing the voluntary nature of the study, and in maintaining boundaries between my professional role and my role as a researcher. Also, as the student population at this site was gifted students, a study designed to give voice to teachers serving gifted students and reflecting on their experiences with them aligned with our school's goals and what was already a routine practice in our building, so

teachers at my site had more direct potential benefit as I will be able to share my findings and develop professional development related to my findings more immediately with teachers at my site than others in the future.

Data Collection

Data collection only occurred after all permissions were given and participants volunteered. Participants indicated how they wanted to be contacted, so I used the means given, such as email or text. The initial recruitment information shared by instructional coaches outlined the study and provided study recruitment material (Appendix E). A brief interest survey asked for their years of experience in gifted education, and in line with purpose sampling's focus on selecting those with the backgrounds needed to inform the study (Klem et al., 2022). I originally intended to use this data to select participants in addition to providing context; however, as only thirteen potential participants met the study's criteria, the criteria was only excluded one participant as saturation was achieved. Past research indicated that the teachers are more likely to be White (Hamilton et al., 2018; Shaunessy et al., 2007), and that held true for the participants in this study, which limited the data in that it did not include the perspectives of participants who identify as Latino, Black, Indigenous American, or other than White.

Southeastern School District Guidelines

Southeastern School District (2023b) provided specific guidelines for submitting a study for approval. In addition, the district Director of Assessment and Program Evaluation outlined several guidelines for district employees conducting unsolicited research as part of their dissertation process (personal communication, September 26, 2023). With data collection, data could not be collected during school hours and could not interfere with the normal running of a school day, so data collection was completed so as to not interfere with the participants' work

schedule nor with my work schedule. In addition, contact from the researcher had to come from a non-Southeastern School District email address so as not to imply that the study was through the district. While some participants chose to respond to messages during the normal school day, I waited until after school hours to send or reply to messages related to the study. Data collection occurred after school hours. The findings of the study will be shared with the Director of Assessment and Program Evaluation, and the district reserves the right to use the findings in future professional development, promotional materials, and training materials.

Interviews

Interviews took place via Zoom or Google Meet outside of the normal school day, and most school days within the district were from 7:30 am to 3:45 pm. This type of research generally calls for a naturalistic setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which would normally imply in-person and within the context of the participants' meaning-making process, such as their classrooms. The district guidelines limited this option as the district emphasized that data collection could not interfere with the services provided to students and that school resources and space were allocated for direct services to students. Though this presented a potential limitation to data collection, in a post-Covid world, online meetings were more normalized than in prior years, and through careful consideration of the interview process, a more naturalistic interview was possible through online meetings (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). Digital interviews potentially allowed increased access as teachers could participate with little disruption to their daily routines and had the option of selecting times that were more convenient for them, and interviews did occur at a variety of times including as late at 8:30 pm on a weekday and as early as 8:00 am on a Saturday morning. While phone interviews would have limited visual cues, the medium of Zoom or Google Meet allowed for some visual cues to still be present, which informed my

impressions of participants' emotional connections to the students and needs they discussed. There were some technical issues, as with one interview when Zoom's audio stopped working, so we switched to Facetime via our phones. Though this did result in an interruption of the flow, that participant and I worked together to address the technical issue and to continue the interview.

Audio of the interviews was recorded using Otter.ai, which was also used to transcribe the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for unexpected areas to be explored and to provide opportunities for more depth, and this depth was important as the focus was on thicker data to accommodate the small sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The depth of the interviews created increased opportunities to explore how giftedness was constructed and the related classroom practices based on those constructions.

In addition, the semi-structured and reflective process required for the interviews had the potential to result in further reflection by the participants, so the initial questions and follow-up questions were written with the awareness that participation in the study did not end at the conclusion of the interview but may actually have impacted their own engagement with the topic afterwards (Husband, 2020). Participants were asked questions about gifted students, gifted education, their experiences with both, and how those experiences related to choices in their classroom practices. The questions focused on moments that reinforced or challenged their perceptions of giftedness and gifted students. During the interviews, the verbiage of the questions focused on reconstructing rather than remembering as references to memory could have potentially impeded rather than supported recounting events (Seidman, 2019), and this focus on reconstructing aligned with reflexive thematic analysis and transformative learning

theory as both informed the study's prioritization of participants as reflective co-creators in an ongoing process.

The interviews went through a coding process based on relationships between ideas to develop themes. The coding process helped explore the ways participants discussed gifted education, their classes, their students' needs, and their own reflective processes. Summaries of the findings were shared with participants, and they had the opportunity to provide clarification, challenge ideas, and suggest different interpretations through member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saldaño, 2021). Also, throughout the process, I kept a reflective journal to acknowledge the subjective role of the researcher and to provide a place for meaning making (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This reflective journal was used to track initial observations and assist in the co-construction of meaning between the participants' words and the researcher's perceptions. While my use of memoing focused on the analytic process of code development and making sense of the data in relation to the code development, my journaling prioritized my own experiences in the research and meaning-making process (McGrath, 2021). My journaling included contexts for the interviews, personal connections and reactions to the topics discussed, my reflexive thinking about the topic in relationship to my biases, and my experiences as a researcher that may led to refining my interview strategies and growth as a someone new to the field. One change in strategy was that I found asking participants to discuss students in terms of *Gifted and...* sometimes led to pauses and silted conversations, so I modified to ask them to identify "what beside their giftedness do you notice?" This rephrasing worked better for some participants, so I shifted to it when I felt the original phrasing was causing confusion or slowing down the flow of the interview.

Data Analysis

Though this process has outlined phases, it was not linear (Nowell et al., 2017), and I had to revisit and add to memos and journal entries. In addition, sometimes returning to prior interviews led to insights about or connections with interviews that occurred later. As the analysis was driven by researcher reflexivity, the issue of objectivity was present. As previously stated, objectivity is a construct based on assumptions about power and truth within a positivist paradigm (Byrne, 2022; Noy, 2006), and these assumptions contrasted with the theoretical framework that guided this study. Instead, this study focused on developing an understanding (Miles et al., 2014), and this understanding was supported through thick descriptions that provided context and established the relationships between ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To increase credibility, member checking was used as participants were asked to view and provide feedback on the interviews and the summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saldaño, 2021), both establishing them as co-creators in the process and providing a check to researcher bias. Using reflexive thematic analysis did not require a consensus between the participants and the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). Instead, areas of consensus and disagreement provided additional areas to explore, including providing opportunities for the researcher to reflect on personal biases and assumptions during analysis. While I found myself mostly in alignment with participants, I found moments of disagreement that required additional reflection to think through. For example, my own views on grades as problematic contrasted with the value some placed on linking grades with rigor, but through reflection, I came to the understanding that while they spoke of grades, their underlying concerns were about students' ability to face challenging situations in the future and be prepared for those challenges. Though my perceptions regarding the role of grades in preparing students for future challenges differed from theirs, I

found shared understanding in their concerns for students' futures and their desire to prepare their students for the future.

Once the interviews were transcribed, they were coded using an organic approach that allowed themes to emerge rather than be predetermined (Braun and Clarke, 2022), so the researcher did not start with a fixed or predetermined set of code labels or expectations. Though coding programs may have provided a convenient way to code large amounts of text, these programs may have limited my ability to incorporate the subjective experience of meaning-making (Chowdhury, 2014), so the transcriptions were initially hand coded. Initial codes were developed as the transcriptions were read multiple times to increase familiarity, and during each reading, reflection was used to refine the code labels and identify potential relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A codebook was not developed as a codebook may have limited or restricted emerging themes or new ideas, which as a process would have contrasted with the organic nature of this approach. Instead, as I shifted from hand coding to digital coding, I placed excerpts that had become meaningful to me into Excel. I labeled each excerpt with a code. The codes shifted from summaries to analytical meanings, merging both the participants ideas with the researcher's perspective. I used Excel's filter option to bring all texts with the same codes together. I then looked for shared meaning in the excerpts that were sorted together, and I repeated this process until I reduced the number of codes and felt confident that the excerpts grouped together had a shared meaning expressed by the code and would support answering my research questions.

Underlying the creation of these codes was a reparative reading rather than critical reading (Sedgwick, 2003). Though reparative reading was intended for the analysis of cultural artifacts (e.g., literature, film, art, etc.), the approach underlined the importance of reparative practices that emphasized finding value and empowerment in the present without assuming an

underlying flaw. Aligned with this research project's goals was the need to empower and recognize teachers as co-creators (and constant re-creators) of giftedness, and this focus did not align well with a focus on the flaws or shortcomings of teachers. Instead, coding focused on the needs and choices made rather than the absence of awareness or choices, which allowed for transformative rather than accusatory language. Codes reflected the researcher's understanding of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Research journal entries provided additional context to the codes as they developed as well as explored potential biases and reflection on their role in the meaning-making process. Ideally, a second researcher who was an outsider to the study would have served as a way to increase reflection in code development (McKenzie & Bartunek, 2023); however, that was not possible for this study. Instead, discussions with a mentor figure (i.e., the dissertation committee) served as an additional area for critical reflection in the development of these codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes were clustered together to identify potential themes and subthemes, which were each structured around an organizing concept. Candidate themes were considered throughout the process, and they were refined or removed based on how they helped to make sense of the data. Theme development was not limited to my research questions, as this limitation could have restricted the understanding of what participants shared. Instead, the themes developed through the reflective process, and then the themes were explored in terms of how they relate to the research questions.

Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

To better illustrate the process, I have included brief descriptions of the phases along with figures to illustrate those stages. In addition to illustrating the process, the below is intended to increase transparency in how I developed my codes and themes.

Phase 1: Familiarization

Familiarization started with data immersion, engaging with the transcripts, audio recordings, and notes until a broad understanding of the data's content was internalized (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Green et al., 2007). To accomplish this goal, I went through the following process for each transcript. I read through it on Otter.ai and used the saved audio to make initial corrections and gain a better understanding of tone. Then I downloaded the transcript data into Microsoft word, and I revisited the interview as I removed identifying information. I then imported the transcript into an Excel file. At this point, the interview was separated into cells, and I summarized each chunk. My summaries included my understanding and my initial responses. I used memoing for this part of the process, as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Sample Memo
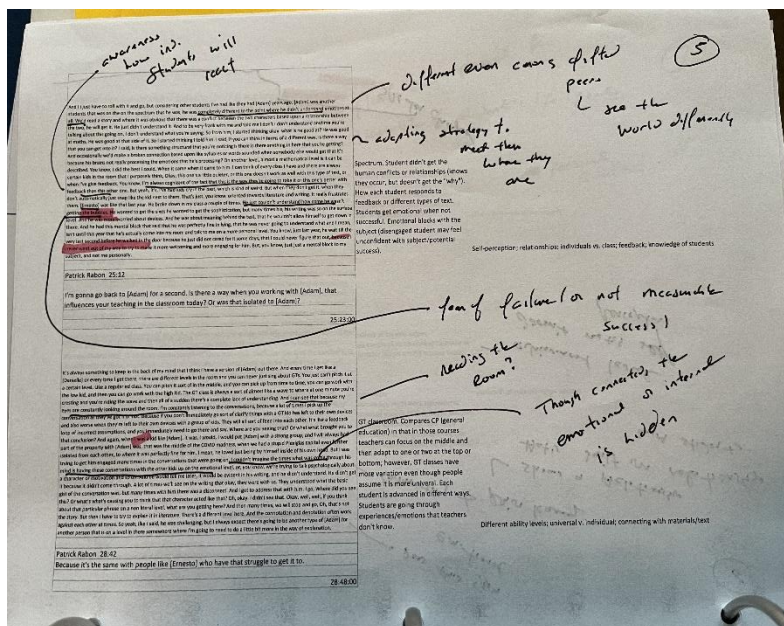
Phase 2: Coding

This process was built on the familiarization phase by identifying pieces of data from the interviews and creating potential codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). For this process, I

used an inductive approach, starting with the data itself and identifying the assumptions, experiences, and perceptions of the participants. The coding started at the semantic level, taking what participants said as the guide for code development, and as patterns emerged, the coding process transitioned to latent coding, shifting from explicit to implicit meanings. As interviews occurred over a period, I coded each interview after the familiarization process. Then, once I finished with all interviews, I went through interviews again to align the codes and create consistency between them. I used Excel to track and refine my codes. The first iteration of code develop was during the memoing process (see Figure 3.1), at which point I used key words to reduce codes to common ideas, such as technology, home life, and choices. In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2022) and Byrne (2022), I developed these codes into statements that made sense of data. During iteration two of the process, I realized that my codes did not consistently make my analytic takes clear. They described what the teachers did, but they did not connect to making sense of those actions in relationship to the research questions. For iteration three, I focused on including analytic takes. This was illustrated in Figure 3.2 in the change from "Teacher makes connections to her own lived experiences" to "Teachers make modifications based on knowledge of students." While the third iteration aligned more with the meaning-making process, I ended up with 56 unique codes, which did not simply the data enough. I then decided that I would simplify the codes by thinking in terms of awareness, knowledge, and practice. This idea occurred during my journaling on theme ideas (see Figure 3.3), which allowed me to return to my code development and reduce codes to statements that fit those areas. This helped reduce the 56 codes to 21.

Figure 3.2

Code Development in Excel

#	Part.	Site	Data Item	Iteration 2	Iteration 3	Iteration 4
156	Karen	8	Again, I'm really more probably cognizant of that and quicker to pull them aside and say, Hey, is there anything you want to talk to me about? You know, what's going on? Why don't you turn this in?	Teacher uses past experiences with students to make current choices	Teachers seek input from students to inform their choices related to those students or the classroom	Reflecting on personal practices & choices
96	Rebecca	8	[Alice] So kind of looking at that in a way that she needed something that to offset you know, kind of like how you give a handicap in bowling.	Teacher makes a connection to her own lived experiences	Teachers make modifications based on knowledge of student	Reflecting on personal practices & choices
242	Tina	8	And I feel like sometimes we lowered the bar for some of the students to the point where we're not getting the most that we possibly could out of them.	Teacher wants to balance meeting needs with maintaining rigor	Teachers addresses individual needs while also serving the whole class	Reflecting on personal practices & choices

Figure 3.3

Journal Entry Showing Code Development Map
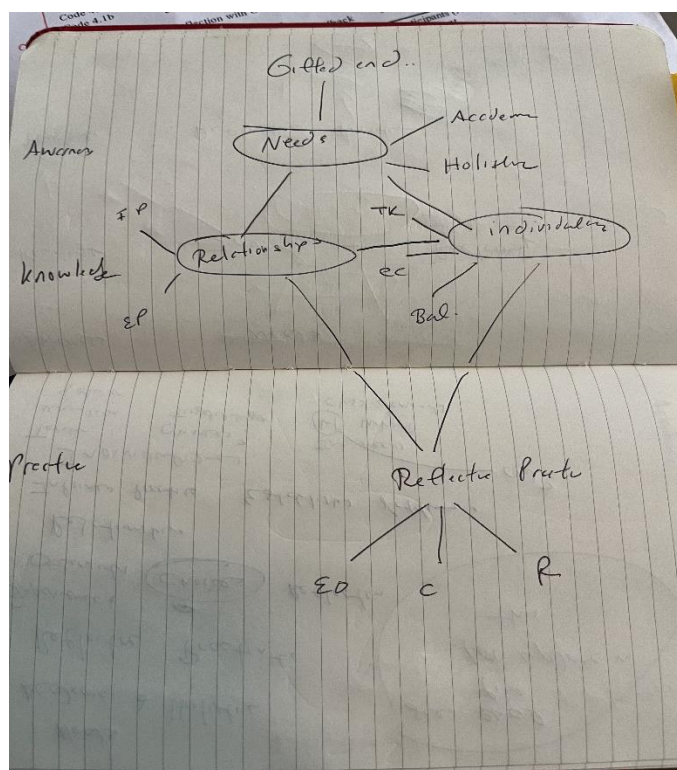
Phase 3: Initial Themes

During this phase, relationships between codes were identified to develop themes and potential sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). The relationships between codes led

to the development of themes united by an organizing concept. I then identified potential

subthemes that helped make sense of different aspects of the themes. My initial theme

development ideas are illustrated in Figure 3.4, an entry from my journal.

Figure 3.4

Journal Entry Showing Initial Theme Ideas
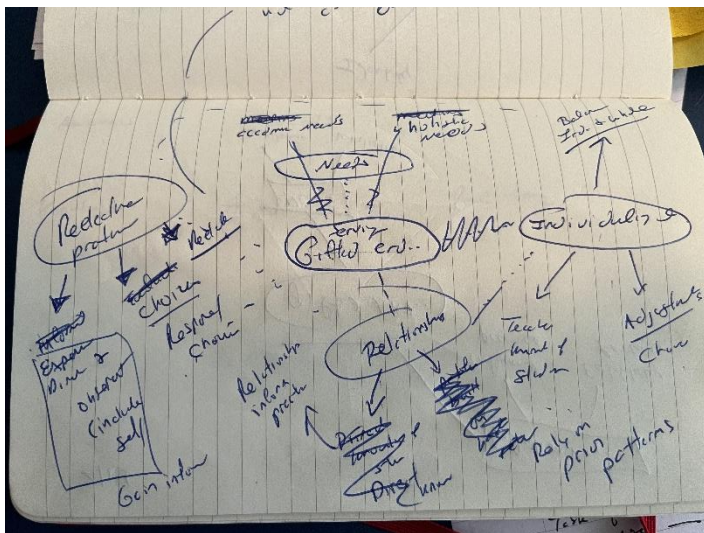
Phase 4: Review and Develop Themes

At this phase, themes were refined to make sure there were clear distinctions between

themes and that data could be clearly connected to the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne,

2022). Within each theme, each piece of data must be connected to the other pieces of data to

allow the meaning-making process to occur. At this point, I returned to my Excel file (see Figure

3.2) and sorted by iteration four of my codes. I then pulled all codes I identified as related to a

theme together, and I reviewed the data and codes to verify I felt internal consistency was

achieved.

Phase 5: Refining and Defining Themes

This phase was built on the work from phases four and five, as now that clear themes and

sub-themes were identified, I needed to verify that I could answer my research questions and

adjust themes as needed to better align with my questions and support my analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). I structured codes by subtheme and theme, and I did counts of data excerpts, participants, and sites represented to make sure I had the data to support my findings and discussion (see Figure 3.5). While the counts changed some as I revisited and reflected on some data excerpts, this initial count helped me decide that my themes and subthemes worked together and that I had enough data to move on to building my narrative.

Figure 3.5

Except from Chart Showing Data in Relationship to Codes and Themes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	# of Data	Participants	Sites
Needs	Giftedness	Prioritize Self & Peer-Directed Learning	17	10	4
		Provide accelerated learning opportunities	44	12	5
		Align with gifts and talents	24	7	5
		Match work to level of giftedness	10	6	3
		Prioritize quality work over the amount of work	19	6	5
		Provide opportunities for socialization and life skills	18	7	5
		Consider the effects of acceleration	8	3	2
	Co-Existing Needs	Demographics	2	1	1
		Mental Health	4	2	2
		On the spectrum	10	6	4
		Socioeconomic status	27	12	5
		Learning Disabilities	8	4	2
		Unique Contexts	24	11	5

Phase 6: Crafting a Narrative

During this final phase, the other phases were revisited as they helped bring new insights to my understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). Themes were organized in a logical way to allow the research questions to be answered, and the analysis of themes were discussed in relationship to the current literature (see Chapter 5).

Memoing

Throughout the phases, memoing was used to help support code and theme development as well as the analysis. Memoing is the process of writing and organizing the researcher's thoughts throughout the collection and analysis of the data (Miles et al., 2014). Memoing was part of my meaning-making process, and it informed the development of codes and themes. This process was incorporated in the reflexive journal practices of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I used Microsoft Excel for the initial memoing process, and then I handwrote additional memos on the transcripts as I revisited them (see Figure 3.1).

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness

</div>

To meet trustworthiness criteria, this study followed the process outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2016) and expanded on by Nowell et al. (2017). The key areas for trustworthiness included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility required enough exposure to the context and participants to gain a deeper understanding, and my prior work in the district contributed towards this goal. However, as potential biases were in place, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended a party not directly involved in the study have opportunities to challenge my analysis. For this study, this area was addressed through my conferences and feedback with my dissertation committee. In addition, as my husband had experience in gifted education and research, I had him read my analysis of data and raise questions to challenge my understanding. Member checking was applied. For transferability, my data was not intended to be generalizable enough to fit another context; however, I provided enough thick data to allow readers to see potential alignments between their own contexts and the study's context to make choices about the transferability to their specific situations. Dependability was established through an audit trail by providing details from the whole process, including choices made by me as the researcher. This process may potentially help researchers

and audiences to apply their understanding to my choices and evaluate them. Building on dependability, confirmability occurred through the justification of my choices through the theoretical frameworks and the methodology used.

Member Checking

Member checking is the practice of asking participants to confirm, challenge, or clarify transcriptions and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and this process assisted in increasing validity as well as including participants in the meaning-making process (Lincon & Guba, 1985), which was important as this study explored their assumptions and perceptions. Placing the meaning-making process solely in the researcher's domain would have increased the chances for misrepresentation and decreased participant agency. Member checking occurred twice during the study. At the end of the interview, I summarized my understanding of what the participant shared with me, and I asked the participant to clarify, add, or correct my understanding and asked the participant what additional information should be added. While some participants confirmed my summaries, others added additional information or clarified my understanding. Once each interview was transcribed and edited to remove all identifying information, I invited the participant (Appendix N) to review the transcription of his/her interview and a summary of the interview with my initial takeaways (See Appendix O for sample of a summary). I invited participants to review and provide feedback. McKim (2023) suggested that transcriptions have limited effectiveness in member checking, so I felt the summaries, which were brief, provided a better chance for participant response. One participant did send an email to expand on one of her responses, but this occurred before the member checking email was sent. No participants responded to the member checking email to clarify, modify, or add to the transcripts or summaries. They may have felt it was unnecessary as we completed member checking during the

interview process already, or even the brief summaries may have required more time than they could have invested or felt the need to invest. However, my best efforts were made for member verification, and based on my verification process during the interviews, I felt confident that I represented their ideas well even if those ideas were mediated through my understanding.

Ethical Considerations

As I was employed by the Southeastern School District, this study was done as insider research, a position that raised ethical issues and issues with researcher credibility (Berger, 2015). While there is an assumption that preexisting relationships violate researcher objectivity (Seidman, 2019), this assumption ignores the value of exploring social networks and the meaning making process that occurs within these organic social networks (Noy, 2006). Though these issues were present, the reflective nature of this study was benefited by the insider status and provided means to reduce bias and increase the validity of the analysis. Familiarity led to increased comfort and rapport, and there were shared experiences through district expectations and training (and the related language) that provided additional insight and understanding that an outsider researcher may not have (Berger, 2015); however, I remained aware that this familiarity could result in increased bias as I viewed the responses of participants through my own perceptions of the issue (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). Both insider and outsider researchers have varying degrees of access and subjectivity, and my goal as a researcher was to contribute through my insider status in a way that gave voice to educators in the field while also using reflexivity to acknowledge and address my own biases. In my discussion and results chapters, I acknowledged when I felt my own biases potentially affected my understanding, and I worked to expand on my understanding in ways that challenged by biases.

My potential privileged status as a researcher in this context had to be considered. The use of reflexive thematic analysis supported exploring constructed understandings (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and as mine and participants' understandings of giftedness were constructed via social networks, the overlap between my networks and the participants supported my ability to explore the understandings of giftedness in the district and make use of shared experiences that we had in common. The insider status gave me greater access to these social networks (Berger, 2015; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017), which resulted in teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches supporting me throughout this process, including recruitment and encouragement. The privilege of insider status had limitations though. I ran the risk of unintentionally taking on the role of expert due to my familiarity with the contexts (Berger, 2015), so I brought increased awareness to this and relied on asking questions, holding off on restatement until the member checking summary at the end of the interview. If I needed to clarify a point, I relied on asking a question rather than restating. This helped the conversations be more participant focused rather than research focused. Also, due to the insider status, I noticed that some participants assumed shared knowledge, not expanding on a reference to an initiative or to a student we both knew. To address these areas, I worked to establish the participants as experts (Richard, 2020), which I accomplished by asking for their advice and stressing that their contributions were helping me make sense. I also shared my own experiences and doubts during the process to help establish my role as co-creator rather than expert (Berger, 2015; Tshuman, 2021), exposing myself in the same way that I asked my participants to do. I shared my own doubts about some choices I made as a teacher, and I discussed my own uncertainties in making choices for my students.

Potential Risk and Beneficence

Participants

There were no clear risks for participants. Participants could refuse to participate and could withdraw from the study without consequence. All participants who were asked to be interviewed completed the interview process. As the study used a reparative approach, the purpose of this study was not aligned with finding fault or critiquing teacher choices. Instead, the purpose was the exploration of teacher assumptions, perceptions, and choices and how they view them. In addition, though the findings will be shared with the district, schools are referred to as sites and teacher names were not included. In terms of benefit, reflection was a common and encouraged practice, and this study fed into and supported that practice.

Southeastern School District

There was no potential harm to the district. The purpose of this study was not related to critiquing district guidelines and policies, and it was not related to critiquing schools or teachers within the district. The district's name was changed for the purpose of this study, and the findings of this study focused on teacher reflection and adaptation to meet the needs of their students, a message aligned with the district's goals and values. In terms of benefit, reflection has been identified as a positive practice that can lead to teacher growth. The findings will be shared with the district, providing potential information that can inform professional development and provide the district with greater insight into the diverse ways teachers reflect and adapt their classrooms to meet students' needs.

Data Storage

As the interviews were completed, they were transcribed using Otter.ai (2023), and then the audio was used to verify and correct the transcriptions. For data privacy, the transcriptions

were downloaded to Microsoft Word on my password protected desktop computer where identifying information was removed as the text was corrected using the audio file on Otter.ai. Once all identifying information was removed, the transcript was uploaded to the researcher's One Drive to a folder set to restricted, the downloaded Microsoft Word file was deleted, and the recycle bin was emptied. This process was used to prevent a revision history being available in documents that included identifying information. Once transcriptions were completed and verified, the files on Otter.ai were deleted (both audio and transcription files).

AI

This study used Otter.ai transcription service to assist in processing the interviews. The use of AI in research presented unique challenges to data protection and privacy. Using AI ran the risk that the programs might process and use data in ways unintended by the study, and the potential existed for AI systems to turn anonymous data into identifiable data depending on other publicly available information (Tripathi & Mubarik, 2020). While the AI processed the intended information, my use of AI ran the risk that additional information may have been collected that was not intended to be part of the data collection (Jacobson et al., 2020), which meant that participants and researchers might not fully understand AI systems and what their consent included (Bouhouita-Guermech et al., 2023). I addressed my concerns for participant privacy and data security by verifying Otter.ai's policies and data privacy procedures.

For this study, the intended data was the transcription of the interviews. Otter.ai transcribed the interview and identified speakers' voices to assist the transcription process (Otter.ai, 2023b); however, Otter.ai did not know participants' names as they were not asked to create an account, so they were tagged by the system as Speaker 1. Though the potential existed for unintended information to be collected, the use of AI for transcription followed the guidelines

of principlism, focusing on consent, beneficence, non-harm, justice, confidentiality, and privacy (Jacobson et al., 2020; Bouhouita-Guermech et al., 2023). According to Otter.ai (2023c), transcriptions from this study were protected with a high level of data security and privacy. The service followed the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' Service Organization Type 2 guidelines for data storage, met the Europe's General Data Protection Regulation guidelines for data privacy, and complied with California Consumer Privacy Act's requirement that information collected would not be sold to other parties.

In addition, the AI produced a summary of the transcription and provided insights (Otter.ai, 2023b). That the AI included summary and insights did suggest that the AI was making meaning, which also presented an additional ethical challenge with the role of AI in this study. The AI's meaning-making process may have incorporated potential biases that affected the program's output (Le Quy et al., 2022); however, the summary and insights were not used as data themselves. Using AI to craft meaning has been identified as problematic as AI may incorporate inequitable assumptions and was not embedded within the same culture and context as the researcher (Anis & French, 2023), and Braun and Clarke (2022) expressed skepticism to the degree that AI can make meaningful connections as the program was not in relationship with the participants and the researcher. The use of AI in this process though was not to explicitly generate meaning. Instead, I used them as a starting point to write summaries for member checking, but I only did so after I finished the familiarization stage for each interview so that the AI's takes did not influence my own. This followed Anis and French's (2023) guidelines for AI that the focus should be on using tools for efficiency rather than meaning making.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was that the data could not be generalizable in the ability to predict the outcome in other contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of this study was not to produce a predictive model to explain outcomes in other contexts. Instead, the goal of this was to explore teacher assumptions and perceptions within this specific context. This limitation places future choices about transferability into the hands of readers who have the agency and context-specific awareness to decide if and in what ways the findings in this study relate to their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2020).

Another potential limitation of this study was potential prior relationships with participants, including that Site 11 was where I worked. Though these prior relationships presented potential issues with biases, I addressed this area through my increased awareness of this issue and through the trustworthiness checks. My connections to the district provided greater access with pre-established rapport with some participants and understanding of the context. As some participants had no prior relationship with me but they had shared understandings with the participants who did, I feel confident that the data collected presented their understandings rather than reflected my biases or perceptions.

Summary of Methods

This qualitative study used constructivism as the primary focus in the meaning-making process of the participants, and this study's method could also inform future constructionist approaches that seek to understand the social outcomes or products of teachers' work within their schools and districts to serve gifted students. The use of transformative learning theory provided a means to understand and explore how teachers made sense of the needs of their students in terms of being *gifted and...*, while reflexive thematic analysis provided a means for the

researcher to make sense of this process. The focus on trustworthiness and the inclusion of thick

data along with detailed information about my choices as a researcher during the collection and

analysis of the data increased transparency and trustworthiness while potentially providing future

audiences with enough information to decide how well this study could apply to and inform their

own contexts.

Table 3.1

Potential Site Data

Potential Sites	Poverty Index	Student Population	Percentage of Students in Graduation Cohort Who Meet College Readiness through AP	Percentage of All Test Takers Scoring 3 to 5 on the AP Exam
	%	N	%	%
SITE 1	54.3	882	18.2	62
SITE 2	54.6	1643	15.3	74
SITE 3	68	1713	11.2	68
SITE 4	73.2	679	22.6	61
SITE 5	72.3	875	8.7	45
SITE 6	61.3	1633	18.9	80
SITE 7	51	1719	21.9	76
SITE 8	49.2	3059	23.4	76
SITE 9	46.6	1837	25.5	84
SITE 10	75.7	313	0	*
SITE 11	21.1	131*	*	96
SITE 12	62.3	162	2.1	*

Note: Data collected from the Southeastern State Department of Education (2023a) and SES

Report Card (2022, 2023b).

Table 3.2

Participant Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Exp.	Site	Years at Site	Content Area	GT	AP	IB
Amanda	F	White/ non-Hispanic	15	2	15	Social Studies	Yes	Yes	No
Rachel	F	White	7	3	2	Social Studies	Yes	Yes	No
Jimmy	M	Caucasian	24	3	8	Math	Yes	Yes	No
Sean	M	White	18	3	15	Social Studies	Yes	Yes	No
Jesse	F	European Caucasian	34	7	6.5	English	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elle	F	Caucasian	18.5	7	15	English	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rebecca	F	Caucasian	16	8	5	English	Yes	No	No
Karen	F	Caucasian	29	8	6	English	Yes	No	No
Tina	F	White	24	8	19	Social Studies	Yes	Yes	No
Chris	M	N/A	18	11	4	English	Yes	Yes	No
Reese	M	Caucasian	27	11	15	Social Studies	Yes	Yes	No
Laura	F	White/ non-Hispanic	20	11	6	Science	Yes	Yes	No

Note. Exp. is self-reported years of experience teaching. Gender and race were self-reported. GT indicates that they hold the state's required endorsement for teaching gifted students. AP and IB indicate if they hold the state's required endorsements for Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents my findings in relationship to my research questions and the purpose of this study, which was to explore how teachers of gifted students transform and negotiate their understanding of gifted education in response to their experiences with gifted students. As this study was guided by the principles of reflexive thematic analysis, it followed the recommendations of Braun and Clark (2022) and Byrne (2021) by presenting the findings under an overarching theme that brings the themes together towards a common understanding. The themes clustered the data sets to mark boundaries between different concepts with subthemes narrow the focus. The analytic take was indicated with a verb with most codes, such as "Align with gifts and talents." The original codes related to needs used the verb recognize, such as "Recognize mental health issues" and "Recognize the needs of autistic students." These codes felt repetitive, and the subtheme *co-existing needs* made my analytic take clear. Also, the word "recognize" felt limited. No verb clearly conveyed the complex interactions with these needs, so I shorted the codes to word or phrased that captured the need and then expanded on the complexities of that need as each code was discussed.

This reflexive thematic analysis produced four themes under the overarching theme: "Gifted and...." The themes and their related subthemes (see Table 4.1) were initially developed without the restraint of the research questions, as outlined by Braun and Clark (2022), in order to allow themes to organically develop. As patterns emerged into themes, I returned to the research questions to support refining the themes and codes so that they could be used to address the research questions. This process, as illustrated by Figure 4.1, means that though each theme relates to the research questions, crossover between themes was necessary to answer the questions and provide context.

Figure 4.1

Thematic Map
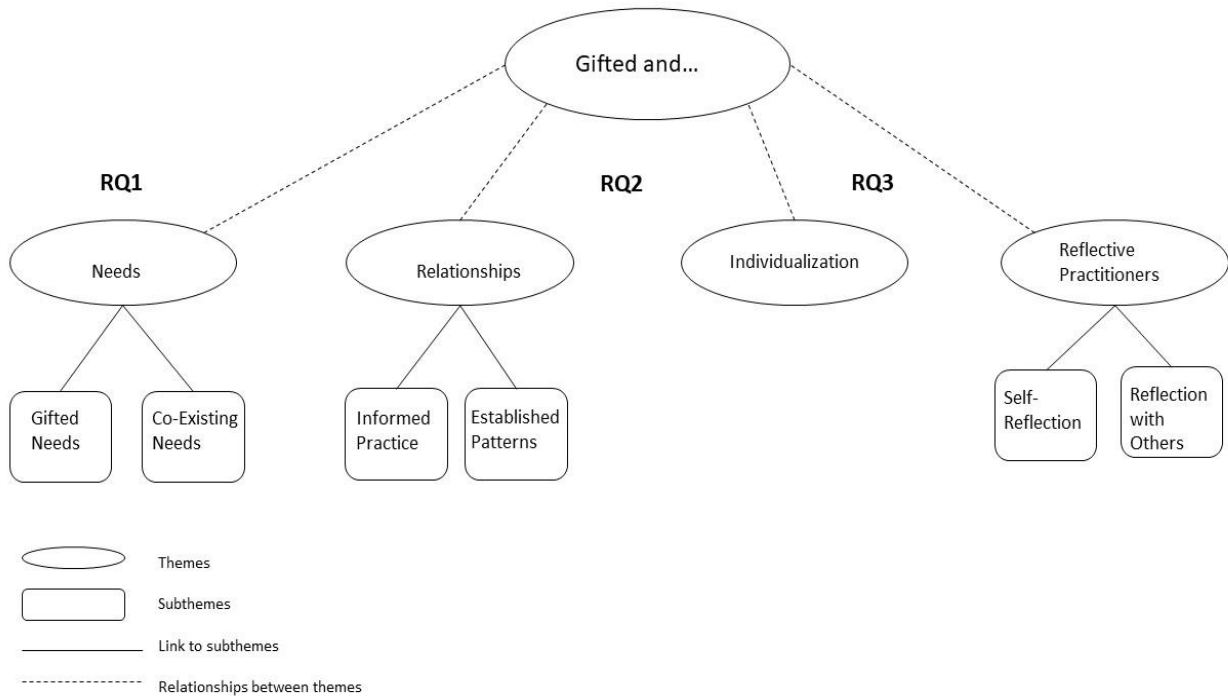
Note. Thematic map demonstrating the overarching theme and four related themes with corresponding research questions.

The first theme, "needs," addressed the first research question: what are the individual, cultural, or societal needs that educators identify as relevant to effective gifted education? This theme outlined the factors and needs participants raised when asked to discuss their students. The subtheme "gifted needs" included those related to meeting the needs associated with their giftedness, namely accelerated academic ability. The subtheme "co-existing needs" outlined areas not directly associated with their giftedness that participants considered when serving students.

The second theme, "relationships," and the third theme, "individualization," addressed the second question: what role or roles do gifted students play in educators' awareness of these needs? The participants identified experiences with students and their knowledge of students as directly affecting their choices in their classrooms. The theme "relationships" revealed that while participants often referenced advanced academic abilities when discussing gifted students in general, as individuals, they were more likely to identify both academic and co-existing needs. For example, when discussing the faster pace of honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses, participants tended to be more comfortable generalizing; however, when discussing issues of poverty and academic struggles, they focused more on relationships with individual students as informing their choices. This pattern led to the third theme, "individualization." In this theme, participants addressed how they transferred the knowledge from their relationships with students into choices for those students, including students' roles in the choice-making process and participants' feelings when these relationships and individualization do not lead to the desired outcomes.

Theme three, "individualization," and theme four, "reflective practitioners," answered the third research question: how does critical reflection on these needs relate to pedagogical choices in the gifted serving classroom? The theme "individualization" showed the choices that teachers make in serving students. While discussing these choices, participants often shared successes, implying their reflection regarding their choices occurs in terms of their perceptions of the success of those choices. In the theme "reflective practitioners," participants used parent/guardian and student responses to evaluate their choices. In some cases, the responses were directly linked to a choice; however, in most examples, the responses were in terms of the students' views of them in general as teachers, such as students staying in contact with them after

graduation or still visiting even though they no longer teach them. In terms of peer reflection, participants tended to discuss peers who do not teach in gifted serving classes as critical of the participants due to a common perception that teaching gifted students was an easier task than teaching the general population. Though not directly stated, this area suggested a feeling of isolation among some teachers who had predominately gifted serving classes, and some participants expressed uncertainty when reflecting on their choices, potentially due to this isolation; one participant concluded the interview stating that he wished conversations like ours were part of district and school professional development, suggesting an increased need for peer feedback and both the reflection and affirmation to which it can lead.

The findings presented in this chapter start with the organizing concept that unites the themes: "gifted and...." Then the four themes are explored, with themes one, two, and three having subthemes that are identified. Under the subthemes for themes one, two, and three and under theme four, findings are structured by the codes. Though the findings were mediated through my own reflective process (Braun & Clark, 2022), my own understanding was informed through conversations with peers and their own experiences with gifted serving classes. Participants and their students were given pseudonyms (see Table 4.2). In support of my understanding, this chapter includes excerpts from these conversations and places them within the context of my own meaning-making process.

Gifted and...

As the overarching theme, *gifted and...* captures the intent of this study, which is to expand conversations on giftedness by including a fuller understanding of which factors and needs teachers working in gifted serving classrooms are aware and address. The conjunction "and*"* set up that the conversations and the resulting data from them started with the concept of

giftedness and then built onto that concept. In addition, the use of the ellipsis was intended to indicate that participants had the freedom to build onto our conversations with the factors and needs that came to their minds instead of being directed to consider specific needs, such as those associated with economic status or learning disabilities.

<div align="center">**Theme One: Needs**</div>

This theme structured data from the interviews that identified the needs of those in gifted serving classes. The first subtheme, "gifted needs," explored needs participants linked to gifted students. With the second subtheme, I selected "co-existing needs" to organize the additional needs or factors participants identified. Initially, I labeled this theme "issues," but reflecting on the potential negative connotations of this word, I decided that co-existing better conveyed my own take on the data and avoided deficit narratives.

Subtheme 1.1: Gifted Needs

Code 1.1a: Prioritize Self & Peer-Directed Learning

11 of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, discussed how their classrooms were structured around students directing their own learning and the learning of peers. Participants connected this self and peer-directed learning with shifting control from themselves to their students, putting the "onus" (Elle) on the students. Karen emphasized, "Predominately, I'm not the one in front of the class," and Elle asserted that she is not the "sage on the stage."

Participants identified that gifted students still required modeling and additional teacher support, such as feedback, so this release of control was not immediate. Karen outlined the process in how her students worked in groups to explore the poets Plath, Piercy, and Sexton:

They had to go through the portion, analyze it, explain the annotations, connections,

explain how they would approach it on the essay, what they would write about. So while

I had modelled that before them early in the year, a couple of times and kind of helped

them through the process to scaffold them, at this point, they should be able to do that on

their own.

Karen's approach shifted from modeling the process to expecting students to work together to

make sense of the poems, with the use of the word "they" implying a collaborative, peer-directed

effort. Karen went on to explain the next step as individual as students write their essays

independently with their thinking informed by their prior collaborative efforts. This shift to

increased independence was also evident when Jesse discussed her approach to feedback. She

conferenced with students to provide support as they "find their own mistakes and stop making

them." Tina, Karen, and Jesse all discussed that less "repetition" (Tina) was needed in supporting

the students, so this shift to collaborative efforts occurred early in the process.

Reinforcing the predominance of collaborative learning, peer-directed learning was

identified as a routine part of gifted serving classes. Chris stated that his students "work together

all of the time" and were "constantly in collaboration mode," while Karen said that collaboration

was "typically" how her students learned. Laura shared that her students not only discussed and

reflected in groups to make sense, but that they "may look at the group next to them" and

consider if that group's thinking makes "sense [in] how they reasoned through it." From Elle's

perspective, gifted students embodied a "collaborative spirit," almost suggesting that gifted

students gravitate towards this approach to learning, and this understanding was reinforced by

Chris who stated that "they try to help each other out." Jimmy discussed that this collaborative

nature extends beyond the classroom as his AP Calculus students helped students from his other

courses during lunch and that at home, his students' "resources [were] each other." Though not explicitly stated, there was a trust between participants and their students in that the participants felt comfortable with students making sense with each other rather than being teacher directed, and that what students contributed to each other was worthwhile. As Chris stated, "one will pick up on something on a different level than the other," suggesting that their contributions were unique and increased their peers' understanding beyond what teacher directed learning had already occurred.

This process does not mean that participants' responsibilities ended once students shifted to collaborative learning. Elle discussed that her primary role was to "monitor" and at appropriate times, "throw out or pose another question." Karen too discussed her monitoring of the collaborative process, sharing her choices about when to interject. She recounted a discussion of a poem that resulted in a verbal back and forth between two students, and her initial response was "Oh crap, here we go" as she anticipated a verbal altercation. Instead, she chose to hold back a bit before intervening, and this potential conflict between students turned into a rich conversation where the students understood how their experiences with their own fathers had shaped their contrasting responses to the poem.

Chris also discussed monitoring, and he shared examples of times he decided to intervene. In one case, the group's understanding incorporated a misunderstanding that resulted in a "feedback loop of incorrect assumptions," so he chose to interject and address the misunderstanding. When monitoring group conversations during one school year, he had Adam, a student with autism spectrum disorder, in this English class. Adam struggled to make sense of the characters' emotions, so Chris interjected with questions to help Adam and the rest of the group make sense of the readings in a way that included Adam in the meaning-making process.

This peer-directed learning co-existed with and fed into self-directed learning. Karen discussed how students in her science class direct their own learning outside of her class:

> I teach science, and some of my students who are really interested in science are doing their own experiments and, you know, building things at home that are helping them to understand more about environmental issues and things, understand how tidal systems work.

The extending of their own understanding was also in the response to challenging content. Jimmy discussed his student Jackie, whom he described as a student "pegged for greatness." When she came across concepts that she did not understand, she would make her own corrections and notes in order to make sense of and learn from her mistakes. Jimmy noted that he kept examples of self-directed learning from former students who engaged, like Jackie, with their own mistakes and made sense of them, and that his current students used these examples to guide their own self-directed learning.

Rachel noted when in her teaching career she realized that gifted students were more invested in self-directed learning. She shared that when she assigned work, she was restrictive in how students demonstrated and guided their own learning. Rachel said, "I guess I just assumed that everyone would follow along with what I assigned." Instead, Rachel's interactions with her students informed her practice and led to new choices regarding self-directed learning. She shifted to "options" and "choice" for her students, resulting in students producing videos and podcasts. In a potential explanation for why this self-directed learning was routine in gifted serving classes, Reese's comment on what makes learning "high level" was helpful. Resse said that higher level thinking was when "you're taking concepts and you're applying them to something that makes sense to yourself," which suggested that part of advanced or gifted

learning was making connections between the content and their own lived experiences and interests.

Code 1.1b: Provide Accelerated Learning

12 out of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, identified accelerated learning as a need for gifted students. Gifted students were identified by Jesse as "more academic, in nature, more intellectual, more analytical. I feel like they have a better ability to analyze sooner than a lot of the other students." Karen identified them as "[picking] up concepts a little easier." Gifted students were associated by participants with "an ability to achieve academically" (Reese), to "apply [concepts] at a higher level" (Sean), to be "interested in something deeper" (Amanda), and to go "beyond the text" (Chris). Uniting these ideas was that gifted students were successful in skill sets associated with intellect.

To clarify this idea, participants tended to speak of gifted students in comparison to general education classes, making broad statements about general education or comparing their own general education classes to their gifted serving classes. Jesse contrasted gifted students from their age-level peers as being "just different." Karen discussed her general education, referenced as CP for College Prep, students as needing "more scaffolding, more modeling" in contrast to gifted students:

> It's easier for them to make that transfer whereas my CP class, I would have to start at the bottom and scaffold over again, and model all the way from the beginning because it's a new genre, or we're looking at it a different way.

Rachel and Sean both distinguished general education students and honors students in that honors students tended to acquire basic knowledge independently and quickly, allowing them extended opportunities to engage with complex connections. Tina shared the same understanding

of this difference, and she explained the difference in the pacing of her general education versus honors sections of a similar course:

> You'll also see, for example, in AP Human Geography, I would teach the five themes of geography to that class maybe in 10 or 15 minutes, whereas in the College Prep level course, I was teaching the five themes of geography a theme per day.

> Chris discussed general education students and gifted students in terms of pacing, and he associated the faster pacing in gifted serving classes with increased complex thinking, stating, "I can take them to places you really can't go with a regular ed class where their eyes glaze over." Chris' statement also implied that there may be a limit to the level of complexity in which general education students could engage, potentially due to academic ability or maybe due to the amount of class time devoted to repetition and scaffolding. The level of complexity that gifted students could practice in class was connected by participants to students "questioning" ideas (Amanda), using "figurative thinking" (Elle), making connections to society and human nature, looking for "patterns" and making sense of the ideas for themselves (Laura), and "finding meaning" (Rebecca).

To meet this need, some participants shared that additional expectations were placed on them. Chris discussed that teachers of gifted students must be "confident in [their] subject matter" and "content savvy" as gifted students pushed teachers "to the edge your own understanding." Karen also noted this expectation, stating that the more advanced gifted students "are the most difficult for me because I have to figure out where can I possibly take them after this? I mean, they are so far advanced, cognitively and emotionally." Overall, participants identified that gifted students require more time with deeper engagement that focuses on complexity and making meaning and less time spent on acquiring information or repetition,

which suggested that teachers needed appropriate content knowledge and critical thinking skills to meet this need.

Code 1.1c: Align with Gifts and Talents

Eight of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, discussed the value of recognizing and aligning work with students' unique gifts and talents. Part of this recognition was participants commenting that people tended to expand giftedness to include all areas of a student's life. Tina noted, "I think sometimes there's an overgeneralization that if you're gifted and talented in one area that you need to be gifted and talented in all areas, and it's like a, it's a misconception." Chris raised this same concern, stating that a student "may not be bright necessarily within your particular subject." This statement did not come across as a criticism of a student's failings. Rather, his statement addressed people perceiving a student to not be gifted based on performance in one area, such as English, rather than recognizing that the student's giftedness may be in another area, such as math. Chris provided an example of his awareness regarding a previous student, Ernesto, who struggled to meet his own expectations in his writing, and Chris guided him "to play to his strengths" by helping him think in terms of logic rather than language, as Chris identified Ernesto's mind as a "very math-oriented brain." Tina defined giftedness as "having enhanced abilities in a specified area" and as having "a special talent in an area." However, others suggested that gifted students were gifted in multiple areas. Reese said that gifted students tend to be "gifted in multiple ways," and Rachel shared that there was an overlap in her gifted serving classes with the performing arts programs at her school. Though participants' perceptions differed on if talent was area specific or more inclusive, their perceptions were more consistent in that giftedness was not restricted to academic abilities.

Participants spoke of their students' gifts and talents. Jesse said of her students that some "are artists and some are musicians and some are readers and some are writers and some are athletes." Karen described some as being "artistically, musically" gifted. Reese stated that "they're gifted musically, they're gifted athletically, you know, they're gifted in the theater." Tina included athletes and artists. Rachel mentioned "art, music, band." Amanda said in her gifted serving classes that she teaches "the vast majority of the kids in drama and the vast majority of the kids in bands," which indicated to her that giftedness and creativity overlapped.

An awareness of the different ways students were gifted and expressed their giftedness informed participants' choices. Rachel stated that her assignments were designed to "pull in, on their own, their own gifts," and Amanda stated that she values "incorporating into projects, into things, those other talents that those kids often come with." Jesse shared "I try to give my students an opportunity to use whatever it is that they're really good at to reach the same goal as everybody else," which added to this understanding that aligning with their gifts and talents was a choice that helped meet their academic needs. Rebecca, discussing her student Lori, said, "She really excelled in that area [art]. That made her very excited to be part of what we were doing that day because she felt that it was, you know, something that she took value in," and Rebecca's impression was that making this choice increased Lori's classroom engagement.

In valuing students' gifts and talents, some participants extended their choices to supporting students' contributions to society. Karen criticized test-oriented learning as disconnected from their gifts and talents, and instead advocated for aligning with them because these students "could potentially be your future world leaders, your, your scientists who discover important things" or "the person who writes the next novel that will be around in 100 years." Tina too thought in terms of their future contributions to society as she identified gifted students

with being the "ones that bring about amazing changes." Overall, though there was some disagreement on if students were talented in one or in multiple areas, participants valued students' gifts and talents, and they suggested that aligning with students' gifts and talents could support their current efforts and future endeavors. In my own meaning making process with this theme, I wrote in my notes the following: "Teachers work with students today while dreaming of the future." My impression in that moment was that aligning work with their gifts and talents not only meets a need for these students, but on some level, it meets a need for myself and the participants in that being part of their talents reaffirms our choice to teach in gifted education.

Code 1.1d: Match Work to Level of Giftedness

Three of the 12 participants, representing two of the five sites, shared that while gifted students perform academically above the general population, there were tiers within the gifted population that should be considered. Sean mentioned students who were "not quite as gifted" or "barely qualified" for the gifted label, and he identified them as ones who "seem to struggle a little bit more." Sean's comments did not clarify if he identified these differences as being inherent differences in giftedness or prior academic experiences. Karen also made a distinction among gifted students, between "the ones who have the skills developed versus the ones who don't," suggesting that prior skill exposure rather than levels of giftedness accounted for these tiers. Karen suggested that to meet these students' needs, teachers must "meet them where they are," implying that teachers must identify the skills needed and target those areas.

Though these findings cannot address if participants perceived these tiers as inherent or based on past experiences, one participant's experience with a student indicates that a student's past performance or skill level did not dictate potential. Jimmy, discussing an unnamed student, described him as follows:

Gifted and a late bloomer, and those are some of the best gifted kids I've ever had are the

ones that when it clicked, it was a little later than everybody else, but when it clicked,

boy, they took off, and that kid had better basic skills than any honors kid, honors kid I've

ever had.

Jimmy discussed this student's academic history, and the student's abilities were not the same as

other gifted students in the past. He described the transformation that came "a little later than

everybody else" as "glorious." Jimmy's example suggested that gifted potential may evolve

differently based on a student's unique context. In this case, he associated the student's

transformation with how much time the student had spent working with basic concepts till he had

mastered them on a different level than his peers who had spent more time on the advanced

concepts in previous years, leaning into the idea that tiers may be more about a student's unique

context and prior experiences than inherent gifted traits.

Code 1.1e: Prioritize Quality Work over the Amount of Work

Six of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, identified as a need quality work that

complemented the students' accelerated learning. In addition, participants expanded on this need

by discussing how their choices were informed by students needing a school-life balance and that

the amount of work did not correlate to the quality of the work given. Amanda and Tina both

mentioned that gifted students required challenges, noting that gifted students easily become

"bored" because "they don't care about mundane work" (Amanda), and they seek to "stretch

themselves" (Tina), suggesting that quality may be defined by participants in terms of

appropriately challenging.

Amanda, in a tone that expressed frustration, stated that teachers tend to meet this

challenge by assigning "more work," when instead, "it's not about how much work you're giving.

It is the type of work that you're giving him that makes it AP and honors." Jimmy expressed a similar sentiment in that people conflate honors with going "faster." While participants associated gifted students with the ability to move at an advanced pace, Jimmy's concern was that the pace was not aligned with meeting their accelerated needs and was instead driven by the idea that the students should struggle due to the pace rather than the content. Such an approach, according to Jimmy, would "kill a gifted kid's drive." Reese too critiqued conflating an excessive workload or pacing with giftedness as "just bad teaching." A perception of giftedness as excessive work ignored that gifted students sought challenges outside of the classroom and that time must be allocated for students to meet their gifted needs in multiple ways, such as athletics, performing arts, community service, and student government.

Participants shared that these outside of the classroom activities potentially fed into the perception that giftedness was more work rather than quality work. Elle stated that her students were "so busy pushing their extracurricular and sporting engagements to build their resume to get to the college they want," suggesting that this perception of giftedness was not isolated to the classroom. Tina linked this concern to parent/guardian expectations because parents/guardians had "seen them be able to do so much even at a young age, that they kind of have those expectations for them as they mature." There was an awareness here that these expectations of amount over quality could be rooted in the ease gifted students had in previous years, such as mastering content quickly, and that gifted students strived to meet these expectations even if they "over stretch their abilities to the point where a lot of times it does cause emotional stress" (Tina).

In terms of participants making choices, they called for teachers to reflect on their practices regarding the work assigned, including thinking of their courses not from just their own

perspective as teachers but also from the students'. As Reese stated, "my course is not everything to every student, and in fact, my course is not everything or hardly any significance to most students." Reese did not make this statement in frustration or disappointment; instead, he presented this as a greater understanding that has come from "the 25 years I've been teaching." Reese presented his advice to his fellow teachers as follows:

> I would say more is not better. You know, I know that's so cliche, but I believe it's true. I don't think that the gifted students are seeking to do more work. They are seeking to do better work. They are seeking to do more valuable work. And so I hate to give that answer. But I do believe that.

> Rachel's choice-making process in regards to this area was that "when I'm deciding about assignments for kids, me personally, I try to make sure that we have enough class time to get stuff done." Amanda conveyed a similar sentiment: "I'm a firm believer to start out with that if you're utilizing your time in class, then homework should just be studying." Taking participants' comments together, the trend was that quality work was challenging work that met their accelerated needs while recognizing that gifted students sought challenges outside of the classroom, so participants advised using class time wisely and keeping in perspective that their classes were not the whole of the gifted students' lives nor the only way gifted students met the need for challenging work/engagement.

Code 1.1f: Provide Opportunities for Social and Life Skills

Seven out of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, identified social and life skills as a need. Jimmy stated, "I'm a math teacher but also life skills," and later in the interview repeated this idea with "the math comes second. Being a good student comes first." Though initially the second comment suggested academic skills, Jimmy often phrased being a "good

student" as life skills that transferred outside of the classroom, such as taking "responsibility" for one's choices, "prioritizing" tasks and responsibilities, and "compartmentalizing" as needed to avoid "fixating" on an issue that cannot be addressed in the moment. He connected these skills "maturity" and adult-like expectations that the students will face with adulthood. Amanda too connected these life skills with students' future lives, stating, "That part of life is the skill of understanding that for the rest of our life, we're going to have to do things that we don't want to do," and Karen equated these skills with the ability to handle "difficult moments." These participants identified their classrooms as places to practice and reinforce these skills, benefiting students in the present and in the future. In terms of meeting this need, Rebecca added that the approach should be "from a place that's going to teach them instead of a place that's going to punish them all the time," sitting up the idea that teachers must make choices regarding their approaches to reinforcing these skills.

In addition to life skills, participants also identified students' awareness of future social interactions as needed. These social interactions were separate from collaborative learning, leaning more towards choices about how they present themselves and how others may respond to them. Jesse, discussing her student Sally, mentioned working with Sally on how she presented herself to others, such as being "immature" and having "loose language." She recalled advising Sally, "If you're gonna get attention, make it for something good." Chris too raised a concern about how they see and present themselves, but he focused on them being overly confident in their abilities, and he warned his students that "somebody's gonna pull the rug out from under you." Both participants showed concern that how students present themselves will be problematic in their futures and attempted to address this with their students.

Code 1.1g: Consider the Effects of Acceleration

Three of the 12 participants, representing two of the five sites, discussed gifted students' uniqueness from their peers in ways that were outside of their academic acceleration. Chris spoke of gifted students in terms of giftedness "being a challenge for them." He expanded on this idea, stating, "I'm sure it would be easier for them if they just got it like everybody else did instead of constantly questioning, you know." The statement conveyed a perception that their differences may place them as outsiders or present unique challenges for them, suggesting Chris identified that gifted students had unique needs in terms of self-perception or identity. Laura made a similar comment: "They sometimes don't know how to deal with the fact that maybe they're out of sync sometimes with people that they see around them." Being "out of sync" also suggested that gifted students must process their identities in terms of their giftedness and the academic acceleration that comes with it. Karen identified some gifted students as "old souls," who "stick out among their peers" and "seem like they came from another century." The understanding produced here was limited as only three participants spoke on this idea; however, participants were not directly asked about this area, and additional understanding may have been gained by directly asking about the effects of acceleration. Though based on limited data, the pattern suggested that acceleration may present a need in terms of fitting in with peers and forming an identity or self-perception in relationship to feeling different than peers.

Subtheme 1.2: Co-existing Needs

In addition to gifted needs, which were those needs connected directly with their advanced academic abilities, participants identified co-existing needs. The needs identified were titled "co-existing" so as not to assume the degree to which they affected or interacted with giftedness. Though participants raised these needs in connection with their gifted students, the

data did not allow for conclusions to be drawn about the interaction between these needs and giftedness. In addition, each of these codes in isolation had few corresponding pieces of data. I originally placed "co-existing needs" as a code; however, upon reflection, doing so lost nuance in that under a single code label, awareness of these needs appeared consistent among all sites and participants. I chose to change the code label into a subtheme, and then I distinguished the needs into code labels. This allowed for a clear understanding of participants' awareness of specific needs, including the increased awareness of low-socioeconomic status in comparison to other needs.

In terms of participants' awareness of needs, the low numbers and low representation among sites would invite a critical approach, one that reinforced the narrative that teachers were not addressing and were not aware of the diverse needs of their students. However, the below findings should be viewed with an understanding informed by the design of this study and the findings presented under the subtheme "relationships." This study's design included asking teachers about needs that immediately came to mind as they reflected with me on their students, and I did not prompt teachers to think of any specific needs. Interview questions targeted towards specific needs, such as learning disabilities or inequitable access, may have produced a deeper exploration of participants' understanding in this area, but this approach would have prevented my ability to explore what needs naturally came to their minds. Every aspect of the one-on-one conversations with participants was not represented in the data, and I left each interview with a strong feeling that each participant deeply cared for the needs and success of their students, and this feeling was only reinforced in teachers discussing individual students and their relationships with these students. It is with this understanding of the study's design and the relationships that teachers build with their students that the below findings should be viewed.

Code 1.2a: Demographics

Three of the 12 participants, representing two of the five sites, discussed students in terms of racial demographics and multilingual status. Near the start of the interview, Rebecca was asked what outside of giftedness she considered when serving gifted students, and she replied as follows:

And that's it, just came to me as soon as I read [the study's purpose], I was like, it's gifted and Black. It's gifted, gifted in, you know, speaking English as a second language. But it is it's all of them. It's dealing with all of those things at one time.

As Rebecca continued to speak, she added, "I would, I also consider like LGBTQIA." Near the end of the year when I provided a summary of our talk, she reiterated and expanded on her original statement: "the first thing that I thought was like gifted and race, gifted and Black, gifted an Asian, so definitely considering their cultural backgrounds."

Resse raised concerns regarding the additional responsibilities placed on some multilingual students:

I think about our kids whose parents can't even speak English. Yeah, they're way more than I think we realize the number of students who are acting at their own advocacy, you know, in our school. Those are the sorts, the sorts of students that I think I'd give a little bit more.

Resse specifically addressed gifted students who were fluent in English but whose parents may not be. These students potentially navigated class selection, college applications, and advocating for their own needs while also serving in a support role for their families and communities in terms of translating.

When discussing a struggling Latino student, Tina mentioned "language barrier" as a potential area to address, and she connected this area to the degree of academic support the student could receive at home. She stressed that she did not intend to imply that parents were not supportive but rather that language may complicate the support process.

Tina, speaking of the same student, also indicated that the student's disorganization may be gender related, connecting the student's disorganized bookbag to observations of her youngest son: "I can tell you, my son's bookbag, and it's the same." No other participants made specific references to gender in terms of students' needs.

Elle mentioned district requirements regarding the service of multilingual students, but she mentioned this within the context of the many elements that a teacher must be aware of and adjust to daily, but she did not explicitly state this within the context of serving gifted students:

> Like, I don't know about your school, but we're getting all new Promethean boards, but nobody asked the teachers do you actually want to replace your projector and what's gonna happen to the projectors all the way up to? Now don't forget the WIDA scale has like five different versions of what ESL is and you only have like, you know, for different reasons, different levels in your class plus the exchange students plus, plus, yeah, everything's a million different things coming from a million different people who aren't in the classroom. They're making the decisions on what we have to do.

Though she referenced multilingual students, I did not include this data in my count for participants and sites who contributed to my understanding here as the above was not in response to discussing gifted students but rather part of us chatting near the end of the interview about how teachers were adapting and making choices to directives from those outside of the classroom.

Code 1.2b: Mental Health

Two of 12 participants, representing two of the five sites, raised the issue of mental health. Other participants briefly raised concerns about stress related to grade expectations and anxiety over making mistakes; however, I did not include them with mental health. I took as my guide what the participant Karen said: "Not that I exactly know how to handle that. I'm not a psychiatrist, so I can't, you know, kind of make those diagnoses about students." With Karen's words as my guide, identifying something as a mental health issue erased the uncertainty that teachers potentially felt as non-experts expected to make informed choices, so I only included direct references to mental health.

Elle stressed the importance of awareness: "We also have to think of mental health, especially in this day and age. And that's important." The "especially in this day and age" pointed to an increased societal awareness of mental health as a need. Karen too indicated a change in her understanding of mental health when she said, "My cognizance of the emotional well-being of the students has increased, probably threefold, since I began teaching 29 years ago." Such awareness did not erase Karen's concern of "I'm not a psychiatrist." Like many of these co-existing needs, teachers were expected to identify, be informed on, and make choices regarding them without in-depth training.

Code 1.2c: Autism

The code "autism" was separate from learning disabilities because though students with autism may have learning disabilities, the two are separate with autism having unique social needs (Potter, 2015). The data selected for this section included direct references to students with autism or references connecting students to being on spectrum. Six of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, discussed autism.

Chris shared about Danielle, a student diagnosed with autism, and he associated her drawing instead of interacting with peers as a form of withdrawal:

She, sweet kid, but there are certain days where she just will completely go into a shell of where she just sort of locks down and really doesn't want to share, doesn't want to do much of anything except draw.

Chris also discussed Adam, who "was completely different to the point where he didn't understand emotions at all." In both cases, he identified them as students who did not engage with peers, which required choices to meet their academic needs while at the same time incorporating peer-directed learning through group collaborations.

While Danielle and Adam isolated, Rebecca discussed Lori, who tended to share her interests:

I have a student named Lori, who is autistic, and she used to like, I don't know, have conversations about things that I maybe didn't really understand, animes and things like that. And I was just kind of talked to her the way you know, I talked to any student like....I'm not really sure what that is, but maybe you could show me an example or something.

Rebecca's tone conveyed that she had no interest in anime, but she was interested in validating Lori's interests and her desire to share them.

Reese discussed Isaac, a current student who was autistic and had an aide with him. Describing Isaac, Reese said that "he is brilliant. I mean, he is a very, very intellectually capable student." Juxtaposed with this statement, Reese shared that Isaac recently had a "meltdown" in class, which prompted Reese to reflect on serving a student with high intellectual abilities who

may not learn the social skills needed for college or a career. Reese reflected about changes to gifted education in connection to students with autism:

> 30 years ago, when I was in high school, I don't, I don't believe he would have been in advanced classes. I don't, I don't know. He might have been, but I don't believe he would have been, and it sort of struck me that simultaneously I was thinking this is a kid who I don't believe can handle upper-level mature classes like taking classes at [local university's name] as an example. Like he can't do it. He literally can't. He was having a massive meltdown in my class.

Reese's tone and facial expresses clearly related concern about the disconnect between Isaac's academic abilities and how those abilities will be served after high school. Even though he has seen advancements in high school services being offered to Isaac, he showed worry over if those services considered Isaac's future needs.

Amanda and Rachel both discussed the additional needs of autistic students, such as the need for aides for some students and modifications while simultaneously being "very gifted" (Rachel). Both demonstrated an awareness that high academic abilities did not exclude the need for support systems and that the need for support systems did not negate high academic ability. Tina raised another way that teachers may consider the needs of autistic students, and this being that not all students may be diagnosed, and that teachers may make choices based on patterns they identify that may indicate autism without the formal supports that come with a diagnosis: "I'm not a professional in this area, but [some students] have all the symptoms of being on the spectrum for autism or along those lines and undiagnosed. There's no accommodation for that type of learning." Due to the lack of accommodation, Tina raised the concern that teachers must

act as experts to diagnose and make choices based on their non-professional understanding of autism.

Code 1.2d: Learning Disabilities

Three of the 12 participants, representing two of the five sites, discussed learning disabilities. Jesse and Rebecca both shared experiences with students with learning disabilities. Jesse discussed Martha, and Rebecca discussed Alice. For Martha, Jesse said that it took "forever to do anything" in reference to Martha's work. Jesse identified Martha as an "incredibly, incredibly intelligent girl" and stressed that her disabilities were "not her fault." In terms of her work, Jesse discussed that the pace of a gifted class could be problematic for students like Martha with extended time as an accommodation because the pacing meant Martha may always be several assignments behind her peers:

> The problem with some of the accommodations, you know, when you're really pushing a group of kids to create a product that takes a long time, a lot of detail, and a lot of, you know, rules and regs or whatever, to give a kid extra time to work on things like that is fair. But by the time they finish one thing, they're two things behind. So that's kind of a struggle. You know, to find that balance between really pushing a kid, challenging a kid but then also trying to remain within the parameters of their rights. So that can be, that can be a challenge.

For Rebecca's student Alice, she expressed concern that the contrast between gifted intelligence and academic needs due to learning disabilities could result in a student disconnecting from class: "she was very detached from school, not really into anything, kind of sat in the back head down, didn't really care about anything. And she is in my honors classroom, but she had a 504 plan." Rebecca associated the "head down" with the student's perception of not belong,

potentially due to her 504 plan, so Rebecca focused on choices to increase Alice's sense of belong.

Jesse noted that students with learning disabilities were not common in gifted programs, which may explain why few participants noted this as a need. However, Tina raised the concern that "I've also had students that have kind of undiagnosed learning disabilities. And that kind of is prevalent, more so I think, in the gifted and talented classroom than you find in the regular classroom." The contrast between the "regular classroom" and the gifted serving one was that Tina perceived a disconnect between needs and identification occurred more often with gifted students. Though Tina did not suggest a reason for this disconnect, viewing this pattern with the understanding of giftedness as advanced academic ability, a potential explanation may be that the advanced academic abilities of gifted students make academic needs be less obvious.

Code 1.2e: Socioeconomic Status

12 out of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, made connections to economic status in terms of students' needs. However, not all references directly stated economic status. In response to an interview question about what resources students could access outside of school, the ability to access the Internet and reliance on community resources, such as public libraries, was consistently represented. While some participants directly used economic status to make sense of the quality of this access, others referenced Internet access as being the main resource outside of school but questioned the educational effectiveness of this resource. If Internet access was perceived as a universal for gifted students while also being questioned as a useful resource, the ability or inability of students to gain access to better quality resources outside of school was relevant in understanding participants' perceptions of socioeconomic status and needs.

Seven of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, directly stated that socioeconomic status affects access to resources outside of school. Tina and Laura both associated gifted students with being more likely to have the financial resources needed to access enrichment and engagement outside of school. Tina stated that gifted students were more likely to be "middle class socioeconomic status," and Laura stated the following about her current teaching context:

> I think I'm pretty lucky that the students I'm teaching have a lot of support at home from parents. So, I think that when they have an interest in something, their parents will, you know, allow them to travel, they will take them on trips to explore different things.

This should not suggest that the participants did not acknowledge that those needs still existed; rather, it was that they see these needs as less common among gifted students while understanding that giftedness did not isolate students from poverty. For example, Tina referenced one student who "works a lot of hours...outside of school to support herself." Also, Laura's use of the word "lucky" to describe her current teaching context implied an awareness that in other schools, this same economic privilege was not always present.

For example, Amanda stated that in her experience, access to resources outside of school was "really varying degrees" of access. Amanda expanded on these varying degrees of access by describing freshmen orientation:

> So you have from the very beginning, you have, you know, I teach freshmen, so we have a freshman orientation and from the very day one, the parents come in, and you have those ones that are okay, can you tell me exactly what the best study guide is? And they have purchased it on day one, and [students] have it from the very beginning and at home and as a resource. But you know, that they are the students that those resources aren't

there. So, they're gifted and you know, working a lot, supporting a lot of other parts of

their lives or have other things happening.

A clear awareness was present that students did not all have access to the same resources outside

of school, and there was an awareness that those degrees of access varied between schools. Elle

raised the point that there could even be "a correlation between the number of gifted students

from higher socio-economic statuses than lower," which suggested a perception that access to

resources and enrichment outside of school affected gifted performance and identification.

Participants also engaged with the idea of this need through how schools, districts, and

other institutions assisted with access. Amanda discussed her district supplementing resources

for Advanced Placement courses as the district,

Usually [has] money set aside, since I'm an AP teacher, money set aside just for teaching

AP courses. So, my ability to get study resources that students are welcome to take home

and utilize. They have that, so, but it comes from the school, but they are welcome to take

those things outside of school.

Chris too acknowledged the school district's role and his school's role in providing resources for

students: "I believe that the school district does a good job, that our school especially, in trying

to sort of meet them and to give them the additional things outside of school." Elle mentioned

academic resources, including access to PSAT preparation tutoring, and expanded to include

resources to support artistic giftedness, such as funding for state and regional competitions for

those in the performing arts.

One outside resource to which students were assumed to have access was the Internet. As

Reese said in this interview, "The reality is that the Internet is the biggest library on Earth."

Rebecca and Rachel both raised the access to the online learning available through social media,

such as TikTok (Rachel), podcasts (Rebecca), and Reddit. Sean and Tina pointed to digital

resources, such as AP Classroom provided by the College Board. Considering the resources and

access provided by the district in this study, participants viewed technology's role in meeting

students' academic needs outside of school as a means of providing more equitable access.

Chris and Karen raised concerns about the reliance of technology to fully address issues

of access outside of school. Chris acknowledged that Internet access might not be universal,

speaking of "a household that doesn't even have your Internet access, or is food insecure."

Karen's concern was not presented as a lack of access, but rather that the reliance on access had

removed the demand for schools to provide enrichment outside of the typical school day. She

expressed concern about technology and enrichment stating, "Because you can do a virtual tour

or something, but it's just not the same as being there in person." She connected this to income

by stating that families that were "wealthy" could still have "cultural enriching experiences" that

were no longer provided to all students through schools.

Though not explicitly connected to income, those that need to rely on technology for

academic support were presented at a disadvantage by some participants and taken within

conjunction with technology being presented as a means for greater access for all students, the

issue was economic if lower-income students were relying on less effective resources. Jesse

called the Internet "dicey," Jimmy raised the concern that there was a "technology overload" that

made it harder for students to distinguish between "what they have at their disposal and what's

useful," and Rachel discussed that students needed to "vet sources" when using online materials

to support learning. While the ability to evaluate Internet sources and make choices about using

them is a useful skill in our tech-rich society, it does mean that those students who rely on the

Internet for academic needs have additional responsibilities placed on them outside of other socio-economic related needs.

Code 1.2f: Personal Lives

The findings under this code label were related to the unique context of students' personal lives that participants recognized as affecting their school lives. This code label was not intended to imply that demographics, mental health, or other co-existing needs were separate from their personal lives. Instead, these were factors and needs associated with their connections with others, such as family or friends.

10 of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, directly addressed students' personal lives as an area they considered. Elle brought attention to each student having unique lived experiences and that people should be careful not to universalize the experiences of gifted students: "They're all individuals, not just lumped in as one being just because they've got some sort of label, gifted label." Elle's thoughts suggested that people begin to construct a student's lived experiences in relation to the label gifted, and that this construction erased struggles in their personal lives. Jesse asserted that gifted students "like a lot of kids,...still have baggage," and Karen stated a similar sentiment when discussing gifted students: "You bring all your baggage with you. And that, to me stands out." Jesse and Karen's statements about "baggage" taken with Elle's concerns about gifted students being "lumped in as one being," suggested that participants may see themselves as uniquely situated to recognize that giftedness does not isolate or protect students from having needs related to struggles in their personal lives.

Chris too raised needs associated with their personal lives, stating, "These kids were very smart, very academically motivated, but many times there were other things outside that were more of a challenge to them." The implication here was that these outside factors potentially

affected meeting students' academic needs. Karen lamented how the outside situations limited one of her students:

> But that one, I still keep in touch with this kid too, and he's doing okay, but, I mean, if he would have been in a more in a different kind of environment, he could have grown to so many different levels, I think. So, it's kind of sad to me, but he's, he's doing okay now, but he could have been [speaker paused]. He was massively talented.

Chris and Karen's comments suggested a concern that some factors were outside of a teacher's control, and that these personal factors potentially limited a student's short-term and long-term achievement.

This concern that these personal factors were outside of teachers' control did not appear to limit their awareness of these needs nor stop them from making choices in response. Personal issues that participants provided ranged in degrees of severity including, "issues with their coach" (Jesse), a student who "lived with his mother who did not have a good relationship with his father" after the divorce (Karen), a student who "lost his mom last semester" (Laura), a student whose brother "had overdosed and died" (Rebecca), and a student "who had a parent who was killed by his other parent" (Resse). Laura discussed taking time to monitor the student whose mother had died to make sure he was "doing okay." Karen shared a specific event where a highly gifted student she saw as an "old soul" and "Zen master" suddenly punched another student during her class:

> I just pulled him aside and I said, "Hey, what in the world is going on?" I said, "This is so not like you," and he just broke down and started crying and told me like, you know, all the stuff that his mom and his dad wasn't helping, and his girlfriend was cheating on him. His girlfriend happened to be cheating on him with a friend of the guy that he

punched. And so it was like all this stuff that was like overwhelming to him. And that was hard for me to witness because that was you know, a student who just had this total aura of peace and calm about him all the time. And he just completely broke down because of, not because of stuff that was happening in school. There was all this stuff that was happening outside, his personal life, that he couldn't shake because you can't drop that stuff when you can't' just come to school like everything's okay. No human can do that.

Whether it was monitoring a student based on what the teachers knew about the student or seeking a deeper understanding for unexpected behavior, such as a violent outburst, participants' responses suggested teachers recognize that students' personal lives and lived experiences did not cease to exist at their classroom doors and that as teachers, they should consider students' needs related to their lives outside of the classroom.

Theme Two: Relationships

In this theme, relationships took on two different meanings. The first was the relationships between participants and their students. The subtheme "informed practice" brought together data that gave insight into the value participants placed on these relationships, to how the value of these relationships informed participants' classroom environments, and to the how these relationships were linked with making informed choices for their students. The second meaning of relationship was in terms of connections, which was conveyed through the subtheme "established patterns." The patterns were connections participants made between their past experiences and the present, both in their professional and personal lives.

Subtheme 2.1: Informed Practice

Code 2.1a: Create Academic Safe Spaces

Seven of the 12 participants, representing all five sites, discussed their relationships with students and how these relationships interconnected with supportive academic environments. Though I initially placed this code label under Subtheme 1.1 "gifted needs," I moved this code label to the theme "relationships" because the participants' comments moved past meeting a need. Instead, the knowledge needed to craft these safe spaces was informed by relationships with the students or the awareness that relationships were needed to create these academic safe spaces.

Laura used the phrase "safe place" to describe her classroom environment, and this phrase reshaped my understanding of classroom environment to include relationships as the word "safe" implied to me trust that was built through interactions rather than a given.

> Yeah, I think environment is really important. I think you have to have that safe place where they know that they are respected, that you realize how very, very intelligent they are, but that you're willing to stretch them, that you're wanting to help them to continue to grow in, in their areas of abilities.

Laura explicitly linked safe spaces to the interconnection between her relationships with the students ("they are respected") and their academic abilities ("continue to grow").

In forming these relationships in connection with their academic needs, Jesse stressed, "Gifted kids are just like all other kids. They really are. They're just like all other kids." Laura made as similar statement:

I'm like, but they're 14. I think we forget that they are kids too. And we want to, you

know, treat them incredibly different than we would any other student, but they are kids.

They're 14-year-old kids.

Connecting this understanding to making academic adjustments, Laura added, "having a little bit of grace for them just as you would any other student in the school is important." Jesse and Laura's shared concern was that the increased academic expectations for gifted students was not always balanced by an awareness that they had the same needs as students in the general population, potentially needing additional or targeted supports to reach their potential. Laura's call for "grace" implied the necessity of building relationships, as relationships informed when grace was needed and how that grace looked. Also, relationships with students were what informed these teachers' awareness that gifted students had academic needs.

According to participants, these increased expectations were internalized by students, and the participants shared the effects of this and how they developed relationships with students to address. Chris, discussing his student Ernesto's struggles with writing, said, "He broke down in my class a couple of times. He just couldn't understand how come he wasn't getting the sophistication point. He wanted to get the sixes. He wanted to get the sophistication." The "six" and "sophistication point" mentioned here were references to earning all points on the rubric College Board used to score AP Literature and Composition essays, and Chris used the same rubric when scoring his students' essays. Implied by Chris' discussions of the pressures gifted students faced, Ernesto's expectations for himself were based on an internalized perception that less than perfect was unacceptable for gifted students, a perception that ignores that, like all students, they had academic needs to be served. Karen connected this internalized perception to students being "conditioned by the school system for so many years that wrong is bad." In some

cases, Karen noted that students "will take the zero" for an assignment rather than invest their efforts in completing an assignment in which they lack confidence in their abilities. This reaction implied that for many students, zero was not attempting a task while a grade less than 100 was a confirmation of one's unworthiness. Chris and Karen's relationships with students informed their insight into why gifted students may become frustrated or give up on challenging tasks.

Jimmy and Laura both shared that they made choices in how they framed mistakes in their classrooms to build supportive relationships with students. Jimmy reframed failure and mistakes as a requirement for success: "I stress that every day if you, if you do 100% of today right, you have wasted today. You gotta get something wrong." Laura shared that in response to her relationships with students and past experiences, she had rethought her classroom environment:

> I learned how to make a safe environment for gifted students, like really being intentional about an environment that's welcoming, that is friendly, where everybody feels like it's okay to make a mistake, because nobody's going to judge. And that's one of the things that I say a lot in my classroom is there's no judgement here.

In both cases, mistakes were reframed as normal parts of the learning process. Potentially, creating this type of environment encouraged students to share their needs. Chris, who also shared that he focused on being "welcoming" rather than judgmental, shared that his student Adam would "be very frank with me and told me, 'I don't, I don't understand anytime you're talking about this going on. I don't understand what you're saying'." That Adam felt comfortable being this direct suggested that an academically supportive environment could better inform teachers' choices as student response could inform their choices.

The building of relationships to create academic safe spaces informed not only choices regarding their whole class but also individual choices with students. Rebecca, discussing her student Alice, stated that she had to work to convince Alice that "I was going to help her and teach her and try to get her to grow as much as I could." Jimmy, discussing students struggling academically because of issues in their personal lives that were affecting their ability to focus, shared that he approached these students with an awareness of what was causing their academic issues and used class time to meet their academic needs. He said his goal for these students was that, "When you leave, I want you to leave here and not have my class be a stress, be one of the things that's on your mind." By identifying class time as the only time that the student should prioritize academics, Jimmy built relationships that helped students compartmentalize and address each problem at a time rather than becoming overwhelmed. Overall, participants' contributions to my understanding led to the perception that relationships informed and were part of meeting students' academic needs as they led to choices that targeted individual needs and addressed unhealthy academic pressures placed on gifted students.

Code 2.1b: Create Emotional Safe Spaces

Five of the 12 participants, representing three of the five sites, addressed emotional safe spaces with a focus on classrooms being places for vulnerability. Elle described her class as a place that "sometimes devolves into group therapy," Rebecca shared that sometimes conversations could become "uncomfortable" as students linked the readings in her English class to their lived experiences, and Chris stated that in his classroom "we deal with emotions." Karen shared the value of allowing classes to be emotional safe spaces:

> So that's kind of what I learned from that kid a long time ago is sometimes you need to
>
> get things out and in a safe place, maybe, and kind of let your emotions out because you

might not get them out at home or any you know, because maybe you're being the wall of support for somebody else, and you can't show a chink in your armor. But when you're, when you feel safe in a classroom at school, you feel like you can show that vulnerability.

Even if the students did not share their vulnerability, these participants strived to make their classrooms safe places, as Laura shared that she continued to support her student Colin, who lost his mother recently, so that "he feels like he has a safe space," even though as of the interview, he had not shared his feelings.

Code 2.1c: Link Effective Service with Knowledge of Students

Nine out of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, associated effective service with knowledge of their students. Participants indicated that developing relationships with their students was an essential part of teaching them. Amanda shared that she valued "getting to individually create relationships and know the students," and Jesse shared that getting to "know them as individuals" helped her know "how to challenge them and push them to the best of their abilities." Rachel and Rebecca both expressed that getting to know students informed their teaching styles, with Rachel encouraging teachers to "really get to know them [students]" and Rebecca encouraging a "students first" approach where teachers prioritized getting to know their students.

Jesse commented that relationships led to better student performance because "they feel like not indebted, but they feel like safe, they can trust you." Though expressed differently, Jimmy stated, "I'm not exactly the warmest and fuzziest, but my kids know I do love them," which also suggested a link between relationships and student performance. Chris made the same link when he stated that relationships were the "key to getting them to, to move the needle themselves."

Tina commented that without these relationships, students might not inform teachers of their needs:

> If you don't have that personal relationship with the student, they may not feel comfortable letting you know, hey, you know, I had to work last night until 1 am, and I just did not get to my homework.

Tina developed this idea further stating, "You accommodate each student based on what they're going through." Jesse developed a similar idea to Tina's:

> But then I think that's just being a good teacher. Right. Again, if you know your students well, and you know what they're capable of or what they're not capable of, you should be making accommodations for every kid all day every day.

With both Tina and Jesse, their relationships with students informed their choices in terms of increasing awareness of their needs. These comments suggested that participants perceived those relationships produced better outcomes both in terms of student engagement and in informing teachers' choices.

Subtheme 2.2: Established Patterns

Code 2.2a: Use Prior Experiences with Gifted Students to Inform Practice

All 12 of the participants, representing all five sites, identified that their prior experiences with gifted students informed their choices and practices. Some teachers referenced professional development, but they tended to acknowledge it by stating they participated or instead questioned its value, as when Karen stated that she had attended "countless hours of useless PD." Participants' responses tended to value direct experience with students. Elle shared that though she has participated in district led professional development, "I think it's more to do with the experience in the classroom, with working with the students themselves." Karen stated, "What

ultimately taught me to work well with gifted students is working with gifted students and

learning through trial and error," and Jesse also referred to the process as "trial and error." Laura

shared the following in response to how she learned to work with gifted students:

> Well, mostly from experience. I mean, I took the class, and I'm certified to teach gifted
>
> and talented students. So, you know, I recall writing the papers and having the
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> discussions and things about what makes students gifted and what we should do to to
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> help them receive, you know, more than, than what they might normally, but I really
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> think it's more just years experience of working with gifted students and observing them,
>
> learning from them, that kind of thing.

This pattern of responses suggested that participants perceived experience to be the best teacher,

based on participants' perceptions of their own learning.

Connecting past experiences to present choices, Amanda connected working with

students with IEPs and 504 Plans in place as influencing her work with gifted students. She made

connections between her gifted students who were not identified with learning disabilities but in

whom she perceived similarities that suggested unmet needs: "They may need similar things just

for who they are as a person and their personalities." From her perspective, her students might

not come with an IEP or 504 Plan, but she was still able to recognize needs and informally put in

place accommodations to meet those needs. Sean also identified needs based on prior patterns, in

this case working with autistic students. Though he had students that "aren't necessarily

identified as being on the spectrum," he had recognized similar patterns to past students that

informed how he met their needs.

Chris stated that his classes over the years had given him the ability to identify specific

students and to prepare in advance for meeting their needs:

I can think of every class I have, and there are always certain kids in the room that I

purposely think, okay, this one's a little quieter, or this one doesn't work as well with this

type of text, or when I've give feedback. You know, I'm always cognizant of the fact that

this is the way they're going to take it or this one's better with feedback than this other

one.

The "always" in "every class" suggested that his understanding of these patterns informed his

approach to his students.

Code 2.2b: Use Personal Connections & Experiences to Inform Practice

Eight of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, made connections between

their personal lives and their students, which potentially informed how they viewed or connected

with their students. Several participants shared that they felt connected with their students as they

too were formally identified or self-identified as gifted. Chris stated that he sees "lot of myself"

in them, and he reflected on his own children of not being served in gifted classes: "Oh, there I

was, the little Chris in the back of the room, underserved. So yeah, I understand them." Amanda

discussed her own experiences in gifted serving classes, and that her choices were informed by

"knowing kind of how I was as a kid, and, and then using those types of ideas in my classroom."

Jesse too connected her relationships with students to her own giftedness: "Probably mostly

because I'm, I am gifted myself, so there's kind of an automatic connection."

Some participants discussed their own children. Elle mentioned her daughters'

identification in elementary, and though she did not directly link that to her classroom, she

discussed that they would have received services earlier in a different school than they attended,

which potentially informed on some level her awareness of students' needs being unique to their

own experiences and backgrounds. Tina referenced her sons being gifted in terms of normalizing

disorganization for some gifted students, which led to discussing how some gifted students may need additional support to prevent disorganization from limiting their success. Rebecca referenced her daughter's ADHD to explain potential ways to serve a student who was not diagnosed but in whom she saw similar patterns. Reese referenced his two sons, discussing his youngest son's impression that he was being "punished" as a gifted student with extra work and his eldest son's experiences in a gifted program "gave me a lot of perspective, no doubt," which informed revisions to the work he assigned his students. In each of these, participants used their own experiences to make sense of or to inform their understanding of serving gifted students.

For Reese, his reflection on student needs extended to his own childhood needs. Discussing Joey, a former student, he said,

> Joey is a kid that I just think that I maybe had a softer place for who didn't have a lot of money, had a lot of things going on, I think with his family, young siblings lived in a rural area, that sort of thing.

In explaining his attention to Joey's needs as a student, he linked it to his experiences:

> I would make the very, maybe a very Freudian assumption, that maybe that's because of my own experiences, in that we did not have money when I grew up. And I tend to think about the difficulties that the, the lack of economic stability and economic thriving can create. So, I do think, tend to consider those sorts of things.

In the same way that Chris, Amanda, and Jesse connected their experiences as gifted students with the needs of their students, Reese linked his experiences in a rural, low-income area to the needs of his students.

Theme Three: Individualization

While theme two focused on relationships, theme three explored students as individuals. Part of individuality was that students have agency, which could work against teachers' expectations but may also be utilized to co-create the classroom and increase student investment. In addition to student and teacher agency in the classroom, individualization was also explored through the choices that targeted individual needs, which potentially provided insight into the ways participants met the unique needs of students in their gifted serving classes.

Code 3a: Acknowledge that Students' Priorities may not Align with Teachers' Priorities

Four of the 12 participants, representing three of the five sites, revealed a potential disconnect between teachers' priorities and student's priorities. In terms of individualization, awareness of differing priorities potentially informed teacher choices. Jimmy discussed students lacking work ethic: "But it's more about the work ethic. The right attitude. The right work ethic is what makes us successful honors kids/AP kids nowadays and after if they have that kind of attitude, that kind of work ethic." Though Jimmy did not explicitly discuss a difference in priorities, his concern was students not prioritizing time to complete work and invest in making corrections to their tests and assignments, and a reasonable assumption was that in cases where co-existing factors, such as working a job or family conflict, was not the cause, the lack of "effort" may be due to differing priorities in how to use their time. Elle too raised the concern of "work ethic" several times in her interview, and Jesse discussed a student's underperformance as him being a "classic underachiever." Speaking of students who did not strive for more, Chris mentioned Danielle who did not complete extra credit assignments even though the rest of her peers did because "she was like, ah, well, you know, it's an 89. I'm good with that." At a different point in the interview, Chris said, "They have great potential, but that doesn't necessarily mean

that they always use it." Though none of these participants spoke in terms of differing priorities and I lacked the input of student voice to fully inform this code label, my own experiences as a teacher and talking with my students led me to conclude that teachers and students may see the work assigned in class differently in terms of their priorities and their unique contexts.

Code 3b: Allow Students to Serve as Co-creators of the Classroom

Nine of the 12 participants, representing all five sites informed my understanding of students' role as co-creators of their classrooms. Elle shared an activity prompted by Isaiah, one of her students:

> He's one of those who would make those suggestions like, hey, there's something going on in this dystopian novel. Let's see if we could live that for a moment. And I, and that prompted me to create an activity that forced students to live that dystopian moment. And that was just, I don't know, it was kind of brilliant on his part.

Elle also shared that when she used the activity Isaiah inspired, she acknowledged his role in the creation of it, which "gives students confidence to give me other suggestions as well. It just propagates more student initiative and ownership." Rebecca also noted that students assisted in the co-creation of her assignments, stating, "They come up with really great ideas that that even I wouldn't even think of."

For Sean, the co-creation was not an activity but rather his efforts to balance high expectations with grading practices that did not punish students for being learners rather than experts. He started with curving grades, but he felt unhappy with the results in terms of high expectations. Sean recalled the input from one of his students: "And he literally said to me, 'You've got to find a way to make us work for it'." This input led to connecting scaled scores to activities linked to missed content, so completing readings associated with an assessment became

an expectation and scaled scores were earned based on showing interaction with the content outside of the formal assessment. He stated that he was happier with this choice, and he perceived students and parents to approve of the choice due to the rarity of student or parent complaints.

The co-creation was also in the way participants discussed their classes. Jesse referred to her class design as "everything we do, we do as a community of learners." While the "community of learners" connected with a focus on peer and self-directed learning, the use of the pronoun "we" to include herself suggested that she perceived herself as part of that learning community. Karen referred to some of her students as "my colleague and my peer, as my equal." Laura also discussed this co-creation with students, stating that students' input and questions "turns the whole thing on its head," and that the process to make her lesson work with their input was "creating" her lesson.

Code 3c: Link Choices to Knowledge of Students

Nine of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, discussed their choices in terms of how knowledge of a student informed their choices or in terms of what they needed to know to inform their choices. Karen made sense of a student who had struggled in previous classes but requested to take on more advanced coursework using what she knew about the student: "Probably since he was a sports guy, he probably liked that challenge because the ones who were like hardcore athletes, they like the the challenge." She saw the student as seeking challenges, which could inform how to meet his needs. Rachel too made sense of a student's requests in terms of her knowledge of him. Rachel's student disliked working with groups and presenting in front of peers, which Rachel linked with his autism. She identified groups with

supportive peers whom she felt would work well with the student, and she modified with the student his presentation assignments to be video projects.

Some participants mentioned making choices regarding modifying assignments based on students' needs. Jimmy suggested that sometimes he must choose to "prioritize and trim down" by asking himself, "What do I need to see from this kid for him to show me success, for him to show me that he's learning?" Elle also suggested prioritizing what was important in relation to a student's context: "And if there's anything I can pull back on to help alleviate the kid's schedule. Just I don't know, I mean, schools are work, but that living situation is a bit extreme." Chris suggested targeting specific skills to support a struggling student, and he suggested alternative readings to increase engagement, discussing how he had, in some situations, shifted from teaching the poetry of Sexton to instead teaching Malcolm X versus Martin Luther King while acknowledging that he was the "white guy trying to get into their world," a suggestion that implied the demographics of a class may affect how texts were taught and received.

These choices were not just in terms of academics. Rebecca and Chris both mentioned monitoring the topics in their classes and their own choices in response to students in their classes who had experienced tragedies. Rebecca's student Wyatt had lost his brother to a drug overdose, and Chris' student Danielle lost her mother. Rebecca recalled "just keeping those things in mind when you're having conversations and then in other aspects of the classroom, like if he needs an extra break or something to allow that kind of thing." For Danielle, Chris also recalled thinking of classroom conversations in terms of the whole class's reaction and in terms of how the topic may relate to or trigger different responses in Danielle.

Theme Four: Reflective Practitioners

The fourth theme, "reflective practitioners," explored participants' reflective process. In this section, the subtheme "self-reflection," which focused on participants' individual reflections in response to their choices, was explored. The second subtheme, "reflection with others," included reflection that occurred in response to the reactions or actions of others, including colleagues, students, and parents/guardians.

Subtheme 4.1: Self-Reflection

Code 4.1a: Facing Uncertainty

Three of the 12 participants, representing three of the five sites, used language that suggested they face uncertainty in their reflective practices. Jesse, discussing trying to meet the needs of her student Joe, said, "I don't know if he doesn't have, you know, the home life that's, you know, kosher. Or what, I'm not sure." Jesse was reflecting on how she met Joe's needs, but she expressed doubt if she fully understood his needs because he did not share with her in the way other students did. She based her choice on assumptions regarding his behavior, but she could not fully evaluate if she was aligning her choices to his needs.

Chris and Karen both expressed uncertainty in their choices and the related effects. Chris stated, "You know, I did the best I could" and "That seemed to help." Karen stated, "I don't know that they listen, but I try." With both participants, there were doubts. Chris' reflecting that his actions were "the best I could" and "seemed" beneficial suggested a feeling of dissatisfaction or doubt with his choices. Karen's statement suggested that the benefit is uncertain in terms of students taking her advice.

A limited number of participants and sites were represented in this theme, but no interview questions directly raised this issue. These were comments that occurred organically in

the conversation, and they potentially suggested that teachers potentially had to make choices

and reflect on them with limited knowledge to inform their choices and without knowledge of

the long-term outcomes to inform their self-evaluation.

Code 4.1b: Reflecting on Personal Choices

Nine of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, addressed ways they

reflected on and informed their choices. Participants did not explicitly reference reflection.

Instead, this code label organized moments where participants recognized personal change,

stated an idea that guided their choices, or justified a choice. Each of these required some degree

of reflection in terms of evaluating choices or recognizing that choices had been made, whether

intentional or not.

One area was reflection indicated by participants discussing changes they made. Jimmy

did not identify a specific change, but as he discussed his student Jackie, he said the following:

I think she has been one of the most influential students. I've had a lot of great wins over

the years, but she is the complete package, has been more influential in positively

affecting me as a teacher than just about any other student.

That Jackie, and to some degree other students, had influenced him indicated that he recognized

through their influence potential choices that had resulted in change. Sean discussed his National

Board certification process and his exposure to universal design, directly linking his exposure to

universal design to "making sure that that I can find ways to apply it to that gifted learner so that

it's hitting their unique needs." Though not explicitly stating reflection, his exposure to the

National Board process, which required reflection (National Board for Professional Teaching

Standards, 2024) and his linking of universal design to meeting students' needs sets up that his

mental process included a moment of reflection on current practices, and he had made choices in response to that reflection.

Chris linked the failure to reflect and change with a failure to serve students effectively: "I mean, if and if you don't adapt, if you stick in a rut, then you're underserving this particular type of student." His comment suggested that interactions with students led to reflection and resulting choices, and that these were necessary to provide effective service. Karen associated her increased awareness of gifted students' emotional needs and their home lives with being more "probably cognizant of that and quicker to pull them aside and say, Hey, is there anything you want to talk to me about? You know, what's going on?" Expressing a similar idea of change over time in response to learning about his students, Reese said that he had "become a little bit more cognizant of what's in my mind a little bit more important." In terms of importance, his priorities shifted over the years to recognize that students' needs must be considered and that a focus on his content should not override his desire to address their needs.

Tina expressed a similar change in her approach to teaching:

Um, I think I'm going to call myself seasoned, old. Okay, coming from a seasoned teacher. I think when I was younger, and I started teaching gifted and talented students, I didn't take into consideration what they were going through or their, their situations outside of the classroom. I just expected they can do it. They're gifted and talented. And I think as I've aged or become seasoned, I've definitely increased my level of awareness of what may or may not be going on outside of the classroom.

However, Tina also raised a concern. She expressed that in reflecting and making choices regarding student needs, teachers may "lower the bar," which she perceived as a failure to meet their academic needs and help them achieve their potential. Though she did not explicitly state

how to reconcile these two perspectives, the implication is that teachers should meet those co-existing needs while still meeting students' gifted needs.

Lastly, their own reflection was reflected in the beliefs that they held about teaching gifted students. Though a belief may not be informed by reflection, taken within the context of the interviews, their beliefs felt linked to their experiences as teachers to which they had come to through their interactions and relationships with students. Jesse stated, "It's one, it's one of my firm beliefs that everybody has a gift, and so I try to identify those in kids and work towards them." Karen stressed that giftedness did not equal success: "Some of the best and the brightest ...get left behind once they get out into the real world." She associated this with students not being taught life skills, such as perseverance, which results in lost potential once they no longer had teachers in a support role. Elle also expressed that choices were not always fair to all students, but they might be appropriate for a student in a specific context: "That's not incredibly fair to everybody else, but his life situation isn't fair to everybody else."

Lastly, personal reflection could be in the moment. Karen described her classroom as "a living, breathing thing. And every day it changes. Every hour it changes." She later shared that "as a teacher over, over time, that you, you're able to read the room. You become very good at sensing tension and emotion. You might not be able to see it, but you can feel it." There was a reflection in the moment that was informed by years of experience, indicated by "as a teacher over time." Chris also discussed that moment to moment act of reflection and response:

> The GT class is always a sort of almost like a wave to where at one minute you're cresting and you're riding the wave, and then all of a sudden, there's a complete lack of understanding, and I can see that because my eyes are constantly looking around the room.

Subtheme 4.2: Reflection with Others

Code 4.2a: Reflecting with Peers

Four of the 12 participants, representing three of the five sites, discussed their reflection

in terms of their peers. Reese spoke in general about the value of receiving feedback from peers:

I think to some extent, you have to consider the opinions of other teachers who are

experienced. I don't think that clearly it's not necessary that you take every word for

word, but I do think that oftentimes teachers can be the bastions of good information. So,

I would not take it without consideration.

He also discussed how technology provided opportunities for teachers to share with each

other in that "communication among teachers and among people who teach students of all

abilities, because our communications are so much more accessible.... we have the ability to

share that information. So those are things that are readily available to us." Though these were

not explicitly reflective statements, they showed an openness to input and the value of

exchanging ideas with peers.

However, three of the participants shared that some input from or interactions with peers

had felt dismissive of their work in gifted serving classes. Amanda discussed peer reactions to

her leniency with deadlines, a practice she attributed to recognizing that students' lives are not

always conducive to strict deadlines. Amanda said, "I'll get yelled at by colleagues because

they're like you're not teaching them anything about college." Her tone conveyed frustration at

their judgement of her choices and the divide between her perspective on meeting the needs of

gifted students and theirs. Elle discussed that "some of my colleagues...think that just because

you teach the best students in the school that I have no discipline problems, and that's certainly

not the case." The impression here was that gifted teachers did not face the same challenges as

general education teachers, such as discipline, and that this difference undermined her status as a

teacher. Sean recounted hallway chatter with peers: "I don't hear it as much anymore, but I used

to hear all the time in the hallway. Oh, you teach, you teach smart kids? Oh, you teach AP kids?"

Sean expressed frustration when following up this comment with his reaction to his peers'

perceptions of him:

> I have different pressures and different stresses, but it is every bit the challenge, it's every
>
> bit. It's unique. For sure. And for sure, they might be better behaved. It is. Don't. Don't.
>
> Don't act like there's not challenges.

Peers' perceptions about teaching gifted serving classes as a privilege and as an easier teaching

position led to a defensive stance in response to participants' challenges and efforts being

dismissed. Reese's comments suggested an openness to peer feedback, but the other participants'

responses suggested that that openness comes with a reasonable expectation of mutual respect.

Code 4.2b: Using Students & Parent Feedback

Five of the 12 participants, representing four of the five sites, discussed feedback from

students and parents/guardians. Jimmy mentioned including student feedback in his own

reflective process:

> I talk a lot with the kids, and especially when I've got these kids for a year straight and
>
> we actually go back when I, when I get done with BC kids. Some of them I've had for
>
> three or four years. And the AP exam was done, and we're talking afterwards. That's
>
> okay, let's let's go back and look at the journey and how did you grow? What can we
>
> change for the next generation? I get a lot of feedback from those kids every year.

In this case, students informed his practice and provided a chance for reflection on his choices.

The focus on the "next generation" also extends the idea of peer-directed learning as his current

students help guide future students. The other participants did not share examples of direct student feedback informing their choices, but no interview questions explicitly asked them about this area, so the limited data under this code label should not lead to the assumption that student-directed feedback was not requested or used. This data only indicated that in the natural flow of the conversation, Jimmy reflected on his classroom choices in this way while others did not.

Jimmy and other participants reflected on student and parent actions as feedback linked to their evaluation of their efforts. Jimmy, who expressed in the interview that he met resistance in the past to some of his grading practices, shared the following about how they are viewed now:

> I actually have a lot of a lot of parents and a lot of kids that are requesting my class knowing they're not going to get an A, but they're going to be more prepared for college than any other student in that school. They have to turn kids away from my class. I got 31 kids now in Algebra II, and that's already more than what I can handle, but they have to turn kids away because I don't have anywhere else to put them.

He found validation that his choices, though initially met with resistance, were effective, and this validation came from requests for his class.

Sean also discussed evaluating his choices based on parent and student actions. He outlined for me how he shifted his grading to include a balance between accountability and grace, and he made this process clear to students and parents with a data chart he kept that tracks students' review of content, with reading/review assignments increasing grades on assessments. He said that with this approach, he had seen a difference:

> And that I've seen from the students, especially in AP course, in the amount of stress that
>
> it has taken off of them. And the amount of stress that it's taken off of me, I don't deal
>
> with upset parents anymore. I rarely do.

He perceived that his students were experiencing less stress, and the rare parent complaints

affirmed his choices regarding grading. He explained that his changes to grading did not lower

his expectations; instead, he sought a way to hold students accountable while providing a way to

reduce grade-related stress.

Participants also shared individual moments with students. Jesse mentioned her student

Sally, whom she had worked with on social skills, and how Sally "comes back to see me. She

sends me, you know, emails." Rebecca shared her experience with Alice, whom was disengaged

from class. Rebecca recounted that Alice was intelligent but struggled with writing, particularly

sentence structures and grammar. Rebecca modified her rubrics to focus on the content to

acknowledge Alice's giftedness. Rebecca evaluated this choice based on Alice transitioning

"from sitting in the back row with her head down to sitting right up at my desk every single day."

These examples should not suggest that all reflection was in terms of success. Chris recounted

his work with Ernesto:

> You know, just last year, he waited till the very last second before he walked in the door
>
> because he just did not care for it some days, that I could never figure that out, because I
>
> went out of my way to try to make it more welcoming and more engaging for him. But,
>
> you know, just just a mental block to my subject and not me personally.

Here Chris identified that his choices did not change Ernesto's relationship with him or his

subject area. As Chris perceived that he had made effective choices in serving Ernesto, he

decided in his reflection that he could not overcome Ernesto's feelings about his subject, English,

as Ernesto, who preferred math courses, felt frustrated that his performance in English courses

did not match his performance in math courses. This final reflection did not come across in the

interview as dismissing the student's response; instead, Chris outlined multiple ways he worked

to make English more approachable for Ernesto, including comparing math and writing,

discussing logic rather than feelings as a way to approach analysis, and giving Ernesto small

goals to achieve with each draft in order to make the writing more manageable. In the end, Chris'

reflection based on the student's response took in his whole experience with Ernesto.

Conclusion

These findings have explored how teachers in gifted serving classes transform and

negotiate their understanding of gifted education in response to their experiences with gifted

students. Participants' contributions to this study highlighted that teachers consider a variety of

factors and needs when making choices regarding the services they provide, and their choices

were informed through their experiences and relationships with students. While reflection was

not explicit in the data, participants clearly engaged in moments of reflection, though they might

not have had the context necessary or the opportunities necessary for critical, in-depth reflection

supported by peers.

At the end of the interview with Chris, he said the following:

This is good. Actually, this should be something that should be done, like an end of the

year thing on a campus…. Just sort of a touching base thing. And that might be good,

across, the across the board for GT teachers, or even a collaborative thing where teachers

get together and just sort of shoot the breeze about what we're doing. You know, again,

take that whole idea of, there's some sort of evaluating evaluation going on in the

background that needs to be taken completely off the table. It needs to be a true

collaboration.

Reflecting on Chris' thoughts at the end of our conversation, I think back to the 12

interviews I conducted and were represented in this chapter through data excerpts. Each

interview enriched me and challenged me while also providing affirmation. In that process, I

reflected, not just through the reflexive practice of code and theme development, but I also

reflected as a teacher of gifted students. Like Chris, I feel conversations like those in this study

have the potential to better inform and support our reflective practices. In addition, the voices of

these teachers and the insights they shared with me reinforced my perspective that the academic

conversations regarding gifted education will be enriched and fuller through the increased

inclusivity of adding more teachers' voices.

Table 4.1

Participant Data Supporting Subthemes

	Subtheme with Codes	Number of Participants	Number of Sites
Theme One: Needs			
Subtheme 1.1	Gifted Needs		
Code 1.1a	Prioritize self & peer-directed Learning	11	4
Code 1.1b	Provide accelerated learning opportunities	12	6
Code 1.1c	Align with gifts and talents	8	5
Code 1.1d	Match work to level of giftedness	3	2
Code 1.1e	Prioritize quality work over the amount of work	6	5
Code 1.1f	Provide opportunities for social and life skills	7	5
Code 1.1g	Consider the effects of acceleration	3	2
Subtheme 1.2	Co-Existing Needs		
Code 1.2a	Demographics	3	2
Code 1.2b	Mental health	2	2
Code 1.2c	Autism	6	4
Code 1.2d	Learning disabilities	12	6
Code 1.2e	Socioeconomic status	4	2
Code 1.2f	Personal lives	10	4
Theme Two: Relationships			
Subtheme 2.1	Informed Practice		
Code 2.1a	Create academic safe spaces	7	5
Code 2.1b	Create emotional safe spaces	5	3
Code 2.1c	Link effective service with knowledge of students	9	4
Subtheme 2.2	Established Patterns		
Code 2.2a	Use prior experiences with gifted students to inform practice	12	6
Code 2.2b	Use personal connections & experiences to inform practice	8	4

	Subtheme with Codes	Number of Participants	Number of Sites
Theme Three: Individualization			
Code 3a	Acknowledge that students' priorities may not align with teachers' priorities	4	3
Code 3b	Allow students to serve as co-creators of the classroom	9	5
Code 3c	Link choices to knowledge of students	9	4
Theme Four: Reflective Practitioners			
Subtheme 4.1	Self-Reflection		
Code 4.1a	Facing uncertainty	3	3
Code 4.1b	Reflecting on personal practices & choices	9	4
Subtheme 4.2	Reflection with Others		
Code 4.2a	Reflecting with Peers	4	3
Code 4.2b	Using student and parent feedback	5	4

Note. The codes for each subtheme are listed with the number of participants (N=12) and the number of

sites (N=5) whose understanding contributed to each code's development.

Table 4.2

Participant and Student Pseudonyms

Participant Pseudonym	Site	Student Pseudonym
Amanda	2	*
Rachel	3	*
Jimmy	3	Jackie
Sean	3	*
Jesse	7	*
Elle	7	Isaiah
Rebecca	8	Wyatt
		Lori
		Alice
Karen	8	*
Tina	8	*
Chris	11	Danielle
		Adam
		Ernesto
Reese	11	Joey
		Isaac
Laura	11	Colin

Note. Pseudonyms were only given if a student's name was stated and data including that name was used in Chapter 4 or Chapter 5. * indicates that no students were named in the data used or that the participants choose not to use names to reference students.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discussed my findings through consideration of how the themes and subthemes answered this study's research questions and addressed the purpose, which was to explore how teachers of gifted students transform and negotiate their understanding of gifted education in response to their experiences with gifted students. I used individual and shared experiences to support my responses. Participants and their students were given pseudonyms (see Table 4.1). I connected the data to the literature on gifted education and, in terms of reflection, transformative learning theory. Finally, I addressed the limitations and implications of this study along with areas of future research suggested by this study.

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

- RQ1: What are the individual, cultural, or societal needs that educators identify as relevant to effective gifted education?

- RQ2: What role or roles do gifted students play in educators' awareness of these needs?

- RQ3: How does critical reflection on these needs relate to pedagogical choices in the gifted serving classroom?

Participants' responses and narratives informed the responses to these questions. Within the reflexive thematic analysis framework, these responses were also informed by my own meaning-making process, which required acknowledging that my lived experiences shaped the lens through which I viewed participants' experiences.

Gifted Students' Individual, Cultural, and Societal Needs

The first research question, which addressed the identification of gifted students' needs, was relevant in that being aware of needs was an essential step in working towards addressing these needs. This study was situated in response to the literature on gifted education and critiques

of gifted education's ability to meet the needs of all students, and this response was intended as additive in that I am including teachers' voices. This inclusion was not at the expense or loss of academic perspectives and priorities shared in the literature; instead, this inclusion was to add depth and complexity to the current conversations. To support this process, the discussion of the findings in relationship to this question was guided by Sedgwick's (2003) reparative reading approach, which she described as "additive and accretive" (p. 154). While the literature that inspired this study, as discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, was dominated by a critical lens, which cannot help but to be "tied to a notion of the inevitable" in terms of issues (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 147), this discussion sought to acknowledge efforts and potential while not ignoring concerns. Also, this discussion suggested that meeting the needs of students in gifted serving classes may be more complex than the prior literature explored.

Giftedness

The identification of gifted needs required a construction of giftedness in that needs were identified in relationship to the constructions in place. To better understand participants' constructions and to provide this context, they were asked to define giftedness, and their responses aligned with various understandings of giftedness. Reese's response illustrated the challenge of defining giftedness:

> I think it means a lot of different things. I do think that it means an ability to, to achieve academically. I do believe that it also means you know a measurable, a measurable and obvious intellect as well. Obviously, it's not just simply a matter of being able to perform academically, but it can also be things that are, that are able to be seen from an intellectual standpoint, the ability to understand and apply outside of ways that we typically measure students with grades as an example.

Reese's response initially defined giftedness in terms of academics and a "measurable and obvious intellect," a definition that echoed historical constructions of giftedness linked to intelligence quotient (IQ) (Gentry et al., 2021). Yet, this version of giftedness was "not just simply" academics; rather, it was something "outside of the ways that we typically measure students." This apparent contradiction of measurable and "outside" of measurable aligned with Plucker and Callahan's (2014) observation that giftedness was not uniformly defined.

Some participants identified giftedness in comparison to age-level peers. Karen defined giftedness by contrasting gifted serving classes to general education courses, in that general education classes needed "more scaffolding, more modeling." Jesse's contrast of the two identified gifted students as acquiring skills "sooner," a sentiment shared by Rachel and Sean who both discussed gifted serving classes moving at a faster pace. Tina contrasted the two with the stark comparison of a concept taking "10 to 15 minutes" in a gifted serving class but taking five class periods in a general education class. Defining through contrast aligned with federal guidelines for giftedness as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its reauthorization through The Every Student Succeeds Act established a focus on higher achievement in comparison to peers (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018; Rinn et all, 2022). As Laura, who directly mentioned the state's guidelines for giftedness, said, "it's just like the advanced ability or potential that students have to work academically or creatively beyond what their peers can do at their age." Sean extended this comparison to within gifted serving classes, identifying some students as "barely qualified" in terms of giftedness, which reinforced the idea of giftedness as measurable in the concept has boundaries where students were on the edge of being not labeled.

Participants also defined giftedness in terms of future rather than present achievement, with Chris emphasizing the word "potential" several times. The emphasis on potential connected with talent development aligned with domain-specific giftedness. Tina challenged the "overgeneralization" that giftedness applied to all aspects of a student's life, and Chris discussed giftedness in terms of a "particular subject." Other participants extended giftedness to athletics, performing arts, and visual arts. Jesse extended this concept to all students being gifted when the tasks were aligned to students' talents, and Karen questioned a limited understanding of giftedness that reduced it to something measurable and unchangeable, critiquing the use of test scores to assess a student's giftedness in elementary school and assume it remains a constant throughout the student's life. These perspectives on giftedness aligned with recent understandings of giftedness in terms of talent development and giftedness outside of academic abilities (Dai, 2020; Kuo, 2022; Lakin & Wai, 2022), with Karen's concern that the gifted label ignored biological changes aligning with debates about the relationship between genetics and opportunities (Dai, 2018, 2020).

The differing constructions of giftedness among the participants reinforced that though participants shared some commonalities, such as participating in district professional developments and meeting the criteria for the state's Gifted and Talented endorsement, students' needs must be met without a consistent point of reference. The lack of a consistent construction of giftedness meant that teachers were making choices with different reference points for giftedness yet serving potentially the same or similar populations, as, at the time of the study, these participants were in the same district and, in some instances, the same school. The inconsistent understanding presented an additional challenge for teachers attempting to meet these gifted needs, an issue raised by Plucker and Callahan (2014) in their discussion of the

challenges faced by attempts to evaluate and reform gifted education. As there has been no fixed concept of giftedness to identify the needs of gifted students, teachers used their constructions and experiences to identify the needs of gifted students. This necessity placed greater importance on what needs teachers identified.

Gifted Needs

Academic

Unsurprisingly, considering the association of giftedness with academic intelligence (Gentry et al., 2021; Sternberg et al., 2021), participants commonly expressed gifted needs in terms of academic services. Jesse linked giftedness with being "more academic, in nature, more intellectual," Reese with "an ability to achieve academically," and Sean with "at a higher level." This shared understanding regarding their academic abilities was also a shared understanding of a need. Gifted students required less "scaffolding" and "modeling" (Karen), and participants shared that they engaged with complex concepts and made multiple connections as they made sense of the content. Though these descriptions could be seen more as traits and about how teachers should approach serving gifted students, the connection to gifted needs was that serving students at an appropriately challenging level decreased boredom. Gomez-Arizaga (2020), Miedijensky (2018), and Szymanski (2021) identified that gifted students experienced boredom and disengagement when their instruction was not appropriately challenging in relationship to their gifted abilities, thus having appropriate level instruction was a need.

Participants expressed the awareness of this need in how they described gifted students and in how they described the characteristics of a gifted serving classroom. Participants placed gifted students at the center of the classroom, such as Karen's statement that "Predominately, I'm not the one in front of the class" and Elle stating that she avoided being the "sage on the stage."

Instead, students were described as participating in peer and self-directed learning. In describing this learning environment, participants used phrases emphasizing a "collaborative spirit" (Elle), in that students "try to help each other out" (Chris), in that their "resources [were] each other" (Jimmy), and in that students "may look at the group next to them" to compare and evaluate their own group thinking (Laura). While Miedijensky's (2018) study on teacher perceptions regarding gifted learning environments showed a shared understanding that gifted students were individualistic, participants in this study perceived this differently. They identified self-directed learning in that students pursued their own interesting projects outside of school, such as Laura's students who conducted independent science experiments outside of school and Jimmy's student Jackie who kept a notebook of her mistakes and thinking so that she could correct and reflect on them. Also, they described student learning inside of their classrooms as being more collaborative than independent.

The difference on this point between this study and Miedijensky's (2018) study may be context specific as both used small sample sizes to focus on depth of understanding, twelve and thirty respectively. This difference should not suggest a lack of validity to either study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Braun and Clarke (2022) discouraged attempts at generalizations in qualitative research as findings were always context specific, and the meaning-making process and value in the study was in sparking reflection about the results in this context and then informing one's own reflection regarding one's unique context.

Within this study's context, a potential understanding arose based on participants' responses. Chris' comment that the "one [student] will pick up on something on a different level" and Laura's discussion of how a group of students may support their own learning by examining how another group "reasoned through it" suggested the benefit was a gifted mind informing a

gifted mind. Teachers identified that gifted students must be academically challenged, but that presents an issue as in Karen's interview when she raised the concern that she must "figure out where can I possibly take them after this? I mean, they are so far advanced." While the focus on collaborative learning in this study may be context specific, potentially in alignment with district professional development or expectations, participants' comments suggested that it may also be a recognition of academic needs. In this case, gifted students had the need to be challenged at an appropriate level, and their gifted peers provided a means to meet that need through collaborative learning. Embracing collaborative learning and seeing value in it recognized that academic need.

Social

Another need identified by participants was socialization and social skills. Though socialization and collaboratively learning were not specifically connected by the participants, references to collaborative learning when discussing how learning in their classes was peer directed recognizes that gifted students process their understanding through social interactions. Some participants recognized that gifted students potentially experienced their own challenges due to their giftedness. Chris identified giftedness as "being a challenge for them" in that they processed differently than peers in the general population. Laura associated gifted students with being "out of sync" with their peers, which may be due to the prioritization of academics over socialization at early ages (Cross & Cross, 2015). Karen described highly gifted students as "old souls" who "stick out among their [gifted] peers" and the general population. Participants identified peer directed learning as part of a gifted serving classroom in terms of meeting an academic need, but potentially there was a social need being met for students who felt different or other in comparison to the general population. Maria Casino-Garcia et al. (2021) identified that gifted students surrounded by gifted peers have an increased social self-concept as opposed

to gifted students being served with few to no gifted peers, which aligned with participants' perceptions that gifted students need opportunities with like-minded peers to address being "out of sync."

Co-existing Needs

Autism and Learning Disabilities

Some participants directly referenced meeting the needs of students with autism. Autism and learning disabilities are separate concepts (Potter, 2015), though an overlap exists between the two. Chris discussed Danielle, who was withdrawn from her peers, and Adam, who struggled with texts and group/class discussions that required processing the emotions of characters. Rebecca discussed Lori, who fixated on and frequently shared her interests. Reese discussed Isaac, who had emotional outbursts related to frustration. Amanda and Rachel discussed prior autistic students requiring aides and modifications to assignments in their classrooms. A shared understanding of this need was that formal identification and support were necessary to meet autistic students' needs. The patterns and behaviors identified by participants linked with those associated with autism (Losh & Blacher, 2023). Though participants recognized behaviors and used formal diagnoses to identify and meet students' needs, there were doubts about their ability to meet them all. Reese's discussion of Isaac revealed concerns about Isaac's ability to function in academic and professional settings, with Reese worried that Isaac "can't do it." Participants discussed the value of relationships in meeting the needs of students in general, and this understanding applied to meeting the needs of autistic students too as Losh and Blacher (2023) related positive student-teacher relationships with the success of autistic students to adapt to the challenges of the classroom environment. Though this strategy applied to autistic students, participants did not discuss it directly in terms of autism and their responses in interviews

conveyed uncertainty in how to best meet the needs they identified. Rebecca described her approach as "I...just kind of talked to her the way, you know, like I talked to any student," and Chris discussed using questioning to reframe ideas in ways that his student Adam might understand outside of the emotional context the other students used to make sense of the texts. In both cases, participants relied on modifying strategies they used with their non-autistic students.

In terms of learning disabilities, whether linked with or separate from identification of autism, a conflicting understanding was present. Jesse noted that learning disabilities were uncommon in gifted programs while Tina expressed the concern that they were simply less diagnosed, which may be due to giftedness masking learning disabilities (Hulsey et al., 2023). Due to this uncertainty, how large scale the need was perceived to be was unclear as participant awareness ranged from few students had this need to more than known had this need. Though this pattern should not be assumed as representative of teachers in gifted serving classrooms as the data was context specific (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and as participants were not asked about the presence of undiagnosed learning disabilities, the comments from participants within this context suggested the potential of uncertainty regarding learning disabilities as a need in this area, which potentially related to the challenges for both teachers and clinicians to recognize (Hulsey et al., 2023).

The recognition of these patterns informed participants' understanding of other students as they raised the issue of undiagnosed autism and undiagnosed learning disabilities. Participants used the patterns associated with diagnosed students to make informal diagnoses of other students and meet their needs. However, as Tina stated in her interview, "I'm not a professional in this area." The informal diagnoses and the needs met for students who were undiagnosed were based on personal experiences rather than expertise, which may be problematic as Clark et al.

(2023) found discrepancies between teacher identification of giftedness in autism students and clinicians. While their study was about the identification of gifted traits, it was suggestive as inconsistent identification of gifted traits limits the ability to directly target gifted needs. Overall, this suggested that participants were aware that students with autism and learning disabilities had unique needs, whether formally diagnosed or not, but perceived themselves to lack the expertise needed to address these needs.

Social Categories

Social categories, such as race and economic status, have been a primary concern in research on gifted education due to inequitable access and benefits associated with them individually and with the intersection of the two (Goings & Ford, 2018; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Peters, Gentry, et al., 2019; Plucker & Peters, 2018; Shores et al., 2020). In relation to the role of educators, the existing literature raised issues of teachers being more likely to recognize giftedness in students who identified as the same race as the teachers and teachers holding deficit thinking regarding underrepresented groups (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hurt, 2018). The current literature framed social categories in terms of teachers' failure to identify needs related to minority groups and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants responses did not focus on needs related to race. Rebecca mentioned "gifted and Black" when thinking of factors outside of giftedness that may be relevant to serving gifted students; however, in discussing her students, she did not address needs related to the race of students. No other participant directly referenced race. The lack of direct discussion of race may seem to affirm prior studies that connected teacher bias to how gifted services were provided (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hurt, 2018). However, that reading of the data would conflate issues with identification with the services provided, in that if biases existed in identification than these

same biases existed with those providing services, though the teachers in these two groups may not overlap. The design of this study did not explore perceptions of giftedness in relation to student race, so the lack of references to race may be due to the study's design. Also, all participants self-identified as White or European-White, which could suggest that the race of participants was related to the lack of attention to this area, affirming Hurt's (2018) concerns regarding potential biases that negatively affect minority students. Alternatively, if I keep Sedgwick's (2003) reparative reading approach in mind, there is another possibility worth exploring in future studies: do teachers associate the needs they identify with race as a category or with the students as individuals? Participants shared the value of knowing each student's individual contexts and aligning services to those needs (see Relationships in this chapter).

Potentially, the needs were identified as unrelated to societal and historical issues related to race as the participants' identification as White limited experiences they could connect to these needs. This does not mean the needs were not addressed, only that the needs may have been associated with aspects of the students outside of race, such as economics. Further exploration that includes teachers' voices on this area in gifted education can lead to greater understanding in this area.

While participants did not identify needs related to race, they identified needs in terms of economic status. This pattern could suggest that participants felt they were addressing the needs of minority students through addressing economic needs, potentially recognizing that race and poverty are not interchangeable concepts. Participants identified that gifted students had "varying degrees" of access (Amanda), and they associated this access with income levels. Laura spoke of access to enrichment, including "trips to explore different things," and Tina associated most of her students with "middle class socioeconomic status" while Elle associated most gifted students

with "higher socio-economic statuses." While participants acknowledged the variance in access, they felt the district and schools represented in this study invested in resources for students that allowed more equitable access: "I believe that the school district does a good job, that our school especially" in providing access to resources (Chris).

In addition, Internet access was given as a resource for students outside of the classroom, suggesting that this access was available for all economic levels, with the exception of Chris who worried about households that lacked Internet access. Though participants did not directly connect this to being an issue of access related to income, they did question the value of the Internet as a resource, labeling some of what students accessed there as "dicey" (Jesse) and requiring a need to "vet sources" (Rachel). If low-income students had limited access outside of school to resources and enrichment (Bassock et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2020; Lombardi et al., 2021) and must rely on the Internet, potential opportunity gaps along with the additional responsibility to sort what was "at their disposal and what's useful" (Jimmy) could lessen the effectiveness of the Internet as an equal access resource.

While participants were less likely to discuss students in terms of race, they were more likely to discuss them in terms of economics. This aligned with Peters' (2022b) perceptions that in the current landscape, thinking of students' needs in terms of economics may be an approach that reaches a broader audience. Tina identified a student who "works lots of hours" in order to "support herself," and Reese discussed his student Joey, with whom he identified because Joey's rural, low-income background reflected his own: "I would make the very, maybe a very Freudian assumption, that maybe that's because of my own experiences, in that we did not have money when I grew up." Though Grissom and Redding (2016) discussed the connection between a student and teacher based on identifying as the same race, a similar effect was present in that the

participant identifies with the student due to common lived experiences in a rural area. This pattern suggested that while connections based on race may not link a student and teacher, other common experiences could lead to identification between them. Though they identified economic access and needs associated with low-economic backgrounds, the addressment of needs was still in terms of individual students rather than a group. In other words, the unique context of a student was how participants identified the needs rather than linking the needs directly to social categories of race and economics.

Mental Health

In identifying mental health needs, participants expressed that they were aware but lacked the expertise to address. Elle and Karen both discussed their increased awareness of mental health as a need, and Karen stressed that "I'm not a psychiatrist," acknowledging that awareness was not expertise. Though participants only directly discussed mental health as a need in general terms, they did discuss areas related to mental health and gifted students. In mentioning students' different areas of giftedness, participants shared that their students were often involved outside of the classroom, including athletics, student government, performing arts, community service, and employment. Participants associated gifted students with being involved in multiple activities and extracurriculars outside of the classroom. Elle connected this to preparing "their resume to get into the college they want," and Tina connected this with expectations built on prior achievements, as parents/guardians and teacher saw them do "so much even at a young age, that they kind of have those expectations for them as they mature." Cross and Cross' (2015) survey of research relevant to counseling gifted students identified this pattern also where prior achievements led to increased expectations in the present, which students internalized and attempted to meet despite potential harm to their mental health.

Participants did not discuss depression or suicide risks for gifted students. Participants did discuss factors associated with increased risk, such as feeling different in comparison to peers and the pressure to perform (Cross and Cross, 2015; Winsor & Mueller, 2020). Winsor and Mueller (2020) raised the concern that gifted students may mask their depression and suicidal ideation. In addition, Bishop and Rinn's (2020) study found that clinicians may misidentify a mental health need because increased intelligence can change how needs are presented, which suggested increased challenges for teachers seeking to identify the mental health needs of gifted students. These challenges required a return to Karen's concern that she was "not a psychiatrist." While participants recognized a need, the recognition of a need was not the same as the expertise required to address that need. Instead, as will be addressed next, participants created supportive environments that potentially addressed this need, but participants discussed supportive environments in terms other than mental health. Though speculative, my own reflection on this distinction returned to Karen's concern. There was a potential distinction between mental health as a need and safe environment as a need in that mental health was the expertise of trained therapists while the classroom space was the expertise of the participants.

Effective Service

Bridging gifted needs with co-existing needs was demonstrated in how participants linked individual knowledge of students with meeting their needs, which potentially allowed for more effective service. Amanda, Jesse, Rachel, and Rebecca all discussed the value of getting to "know them as individuals" (Jesse). The connections built through this process were "key to getting them to, to move the needle themselves" (Chris). Jimmy identified this link in discussing that "my kids know I do love them" when discussing their investment in his course and their willingness to be open with him. Tina discussed that in the absence of this openness between the

teacher and the students, "they may not feel comfortable letting you know." The openness

informed participants' choices in that they are "making accommodations for every kid, all day,

every day" (Jesse). Their understanding suggested that teachers may think of students as

individuals, merging multiple factors into the *gifted and...* concept rather than thinking of

individual factors. A student may be autistic, reserved, into anime, have a "math brain" (Chris),

etc., and these factors vary in terms of which one or ones were considered during each

interaction with a student. The participants tended to think of their students in terms of multiple

factors and targeting a need in the moment, which aligns with the trend found in the research

synthesis by Parsons et al. (2018) in that teachers tended to adapt in the moment based on their

perceptions of students and their beliefs.

Social Categories vs. Individualism

Potentially, this focus on each student being unique may mean that participants identified

the unique characteristics that aligned with their own experiences or values. This may negate

some connections when the teacher's social category did not align with the students, such as

Redding (2019) linking increased student performance with an alignment between the teacher's

and the student's racial identity. Some participants recognized the lack of access to resources in

terms of economics rather than the intersection of economics and race, though the literature

showed a connection between the two (Goings & Ford, 2018; Peters, Gentry, et al., 2019),

because economics rather than race was more relatable to the participants' lived experiences.

While this focus on the individual over the social category did not negate systemic issues that

need to be addressed and may suggest the need for professional development to increase

awareness of potentially unidentified needs, it did suggest that needs were identified when

teachers and students share common experiences. My takeaway from this understanding was that

when that common experience cannot be a shared identity, such as racial identification or similar lived experiences, the ability of students to share and be vulnerable with their teachers may present an opportunity to build relationships that serve in the place of or along with a shared identity. The next section addresses these relationships by exploring how students' sharing and vulnerability informed the participants' students-as-individuals approach to identifying and meeting students' needs.

Gifted Students' Roles in Educator Awareness of Needs

The second research question addressed students' role in informing teachers' awareness of their needs. That students played a role in the identification of their needs related to the students-as-individuals approach in that participants tended to link needs with students in terms of students' uniqueness rather than in terms of the social categories or areas identified in the literature. Within the context of *gifted and...*, the "and" links students' giftedness to multiple aspects of students' lived experiences rather than a characteristic in isolation. Teachers' knowledge of students' content-specific academic abilities and how it related to pedagogical choices was explored outside of the specific context of gifted serving classes with Seah and Chan (2021) and Hill and Chin (2018) linking knowledge of students with academic outcomes. Using participants' perspectives, this section extends that understanding into the gifted serving classroom. Also, participants linked knowledge of students outside of their content-specific abilities to academic and social growth.

Safe Spaces

Participants discussed their classroom environments in terms of being a "safe space" (Laura), and they identified the characteristics of a safe space based on their perceptions about students' academic and emotional needs. Their safe spaces identified needs in terms of validating

students' experiences rather than linking them to specific categories. Laura linked the safe space to students knowing that they were "respected" as "very intelligent" people. Their students had the space to be gifted while still being "14-year-old kids" (Laura), "just like all other kids" (Jesse). Though this required a level of generalization, the students-as-individuals played a role as participants linked the safety of their classroom to individual students and their unique needs. Classroom environments that were shaped as safe spaces were places that supported students and teachers identifying individual needs.

In terms of academic safe spaces, participants identified the fear of failure and mistakes as a general pattern, which they linked to individual students' needs. Jimmy and Laura both identified a fear of mistakes, which Jimmy reframed as a form of success: "I stress that every day if you, if you do 100% of today right, you have wasted today." Jimmy recognized that some students had anxiety over making mistakes, which led to him reframing mistakes as part of the learning process and incorporating reflective notes where students identify and learn from the mistakes they made. Chris recognized this anxiety in his student Ernesto who "broke down" in class over not scoring full points on a writing assignment, and he linked this reaction to internalized expectations equating giftedness with perfection rather than growth, a trend in gifted students supported by Grugan et al.'s (2021) systematic review linking a fixation on perfection and the related anxiety with gifted students and concerns raised by Wiley (2020) about the role of the gifted label on this perfectionism. Chris focused on the "welcoming" classroom to relieve such anxieties, though as he acknowledged with Ernesto, that was not always enough to overcome that anxiety. Instead, he added to his support for Ernesto by framing writing in terms of logic and math, subjects Ernesto identified as his strong areas, and by identifying manageable next steps for the student to work towards a goal, an approach that aligned with Mofield and

Parker Peters (2019) recommendations for addressing perfectionism in gifted students. While

spaces addressed some needs, it was not a panacea and may not be perceived as a safe space for

all students due to anxieties related to academic performance. This recognition reinforced how

the general pattern, which in this case was that gifted students have anxiety about making

mistakes, was used while overlapping with the individualistic approach, targeting adjustments to

an individual students' needs.

Safe spaces extended beyond students' academic needs to include their emotional needs.

Though some participants expressed discomfort regarding mental health due to a lack of

expertise in this area (see Mental Health), they valued the inclusion of emotions in their classes.

Elle labeled her classes as "group therapy," and Chris discussed that "we deal with emotions."

Karen, citing prior experience with students, stated, "Sometimes you need to get things out and

in a safe place, maybe, and kind of let your emotions out." The identification of emotional needs

and having a space to explore those needs aligned with Ribeiro Piske and Stoltz's (2021)

findings, which linked exploring emotions in the safety of the classroom with academic

development in gifted students. This study focused on elementary school children, though, so a

more in-depth exploration targeted towards secondary gifted students could potentially explore

the role of emotional safety and exploration at this age. The need to explore emotions in gifted

classrooms also aligned with research in overexcitability (Silverman, 2020; Szymanski &

Wrenn, 2019), in that gifted students experienced and processed emotions and stimuli differently

than the general population and a shared space to process with likeminded peers was beneficial.

Though participants spent less time discussing emotional safety than they did academic

safety, which potentially reflected their identification as experts as teachers but not in mental

health, they did identify the role of emotional vulnerability in their classes. As with academic

safe spaces, participants shifted from the general pattern of gifted students needing an emotional safe space to individual needs, including Karen addressing the needs of the student she referred to as the "Old Soul" who struggled with his parents' divorce and his romantic relationship and Laura who identified the need to monitor Colin after the death of his mother.

Individual Contexts

What united academic and emotional safe spaces with the student-as-individual approach was resistance to labels erasing uniqueness. Elle stated, "They're all individuals, not just lumped in as one being just because they've got some sort of label." Though Elle was directly addressing the label of gifted, the implication of her stance was that labels are restrictive and erase unique needs. Participants again shifted from the general to the specific. Jesse asserted that "like a lot of kids, [gifted kids] still have baggage," and Karen stated, "You bring all of your baggage with you." Chris referenced that there were "other things outside that [are] more of a challenge to them." Participants identified unique issues that informed their awareness of students' needs. Jesse identified issues with a coach, Karen mentioned the specific conflict between parents after their divorce and how it affected her student, Laura and Reese both shared about students who lost a parent, one to violence, and Rebecca shared the unique situation of a student losing his brother to an overdose. Prior studies identified that gifted students' emotions and giftedness may interact in ways that caused them to process their emotions differently than the general population (Silverman, 2020; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019), which also affected how they processed more traumatic and life-changing experiences (Peterson, 2012, 2014). Participants did not link these unique situations to labels, and the awareness of these needs through their interactions with these students informed their prioritizing students as individuals rather than a

collective, so that teachers "accommodate each student based on what they're going through" (Tina).

Connecting to Experiences

Current and past students informed participants' understanding of students' needs. When I asked participants how they learned to work with gifted students, they discussed professional development, but participants tended to not value it as much as experience. Karen described the professional development she experienced related to serving gifted students as "useless." This statement did not seem to imply that all professional development in this area was without merit; rather, it was that the professional development offered was not targeted towards meeting the needs of her students. This concern aligned with other studies that noted the failure to structure professional development in ways that adapt to teachers' unique situations were unlikely to be effective (Peters & Jolly, 2018; McKeown et al., 2019). Karen discussed her own self-directed professional development through nonfiction readings, and Elle discussed seeking out professional developed targeted more to the needs she identified in the classroom. Their valuing of self-directed professional development may be related to their ability to adapt it to their unique needs and contexts (Lan, 2022; Porter & Freeman, 2020). Participants indicated that their training as gifted serving teachers came from the students.

Elle, Chris, and Laura all discussed direct experience as their training, with Karen and Jesse both using the phase "trial and error." While their knowledge of students informed their pedagogical choices, their experiences with students in the classroom did as well. As Laura stated in her interview, she learned by "observing them, learning from them." Their perceptions of experiences with students as the primary means of learning to work with gifted students

aligned with their focus on the unique contexts while the professional development sessions offered did not allow for their unique needs.

Participants discussed pattern recognition in how prior students informed current choices. Amanda linked prior experiences with students to her current students stating, "They may need similar things for who they are as a person and their personalities." The focus on "a person" reinforced the student-as-individual approach. Sean linked prior students diagnosed with autism to current students with similar patterns who "aren't' necessarily identified as being on the spectrum." Sean used the general category of "being on the spectrum" to make sense of an individual student, and Chris stated that "there are always certain kids in the room," connecting to general patterns. These general patterns served as a starting point in identifying needs, and then knowledge of the students as individuals informed their responses, which aligns with Peters' (2022b) caution that general labels may group gifted students in ways that poorly represent their lived experiences and needs.

Relationships

Participants' shifting from the general to the individual occurred through relationships, which moved *gifted and...* from a single characteristic, such as gifted and autistic, to a more individualized understanding, such as gifted and autistic and creative and into anime. Rachel made sense of a student's request not to present in front of the class with his autism and his dislike of group work. She understood him as struggling to share with others, so she modified his assignment to be a video that could share his voice with the class in a way that felt safe for him. Jimmy and Elle both discussed their knowledge of students' non-academic struggles, such as factors affecting their home lives. Their relationships with their students provided knowledge of their academic abilities in connection with the outside events, so they were able to "prioritize and

trim down" (Jimmy) or "pull back on" to address to a "living situation [that] is a bit extreme" (Elle). Relationships with students informed this approach, which was linked with improved academic performance (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Martin & Collie, 2019) and increased teacher job statistician (Lavy & Bocker, 2018; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). In the context of these studies, the relationships that informed these choices increased student investment in learning and increased teachers' emotional investment in their students and their success.

These modifications may be perceived as reinforcing deficit narratives. Flynn and Shelton (2022) raised this concern when discussing reduced or alternative identification criteria for more inclusive gifted education. Though identification and classroom expectations are different, the possibility exists that reduced classroom expectations assume some students are incapable of the same level of work as their peers. Also, participants shared that they may "trim down" (Jimmy) expectations in response to outside factors. As low-income and minority students have an increased likelihood of negative external factors (Plucker & Peters, 2018), and thus may have more paired down assignments, these participants' approach potentially reinforced opportunity gaps if students were repeatedly given reduced expectations. Reduced expectations would go against the literature, which stressed the need among low-income and minority students for increased opportunities for advanced coursework (Crabtree et al., 2019; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hines et al., 2022; Wai & Allen, 2019). However, while the participants' approach may lessen an opportunity, their focus was on supporting the students so that they can address present needs and still be ready for future opportunities. The participants discussed these adaptations in temporary terms, meeting a need in the moment, instead of student deficits and in terms of their own values, such as Reese who described these types of choices as "not about being a teacher as much as that is maybe about being a decent human being." While a

reduced expectation may limit growth, for participants, it was about, as Tina stated, "to put necessity first, livability, survivability" when students were facing moments where participants perceive that academics should not be a student's priority.

Reinforcing these relationships were links with teachers' own lived experiences. Chris related to the students in terms of seeing "a lot of myself" in them, Amanda connected "knowing kind of how I was as a kid" to her ability to identify with gifted students, and Jesse described the connection as "automatic" because "I am gifted myself." Participants also made sense of gifted education through the experiences of their children, with Elle, Tina, Jimmy, and Reese referencing their children's experiences in gifted education. For Reese, the experiences of his eldest son resulted in him reevaluating the type and amount of work he assigned to his students, and the experiences of his youngest son feeling "punished" with extra assignments because of being labeled gifted reinforced this reevaluation. Tina normalized a student's disorganized bookbag as being similar to her sons' bookbags, implying the need for patience with the student who loses assignments. Elle and Jimmy both used their children's experiences in elementary school to make sense of trends in gifted education, including access to services and the assumption that gifted education was simply moving quickly through the content.

The connections made here that reinforce the relationships suggested that shared identities may be built on a variety of connections, presenting the opportunity to explore how teachers may connect to the experiences of students of different races and backgrounds. Of course, this way of viewing participants' choices should not erase concerns about the absence of a shared culture or racial identity (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Morgan, 2019); instead, this pattern presents an additional area to explore in terms of how connections can be made and

reinforced that might potentially increase student investment and increase identification of unique needs.

<div align="center">**Teacher Reflection and Related Choices**</div>

The third research question addressed the role of critical reflection on teachers' pedagogical choices in the gifted serving classroom. Critical reflection requires that individuals develop new understandings, transforming rather than adapting (Mezirow 1981; Walker, 2018). While transformation may be an individual act, it is supported through interactions with others through experiences that spark reflection, feedback, and opportunities to test one's new understandings (Mezirow 1997, 1998). Using participants' perspectives, this section explored teacher reflection and was organized by with whom teachers are reflecting.

Peers

Some participants discussed the role of peer feedback. Reese discussed the need to "consider the opinions of other teachers who are experienced" in addition to student feedback. He also referenced online communities where others who instruct gifted students can "share that information." Reese's discussion of peer feedback and input differed from his peers who felt that peers were dismissive towards them. Amanda discussed being "yelled at by colleagues" who disagreed with her classroom choices, ones she made based on her knowledge of her students and their needs. In this case, peers felt she was too lenient in terms of deadlines, to which Amanda countered that her students perform well on AP exams. In this case, her peers associated the gifted label with increased rigidity in terms of expectations rather than how students in general education may be treated. Elle stated that colleagues perceived her to have "no discipline issues" because she teaches gifted serving classes, which she stated, "That's certainly not the case." Sean recounted a similar pattern: "Oh, you teach, you teach smart kids? Oh, you teach AP

kids?" Sean expressed frustration at these questions as dismissive of his work, stating, "I have different pressures and different stresses, but it is every bit the challenge....Don't act like there's not challenges." For these participants who perceived their own work as devalued, they were limited in using discourse with peers to reflect, validate, and transform. As Mezirow (1991) stated, to validate choices and understandings, adult learners need opportunities to communicate that allows for "consensus reached through rational discourse" (p. 76). The potential isolation of educators in gifted courses may suggest the need for increased collaborative opportunities with peers in gifted education, as these discussions paired with effective professional development can lead to transformative understandings of giftedness (Hertzog, 2022; Peters, 2022). In addition, access to other discourse communities, such as online discussion groups, may present an option; however, the reliance on online communities may requires teachers place increased expectations on their professional growth outside of the school setting and workday (Zhang & Liu, 2019).

These participants felt that peers were dismissive of their struggles and efforts as their peers' comments associated gifted serving classes with not requiring the same level of effort as general education classes. Though these perspectives represented only four participants, they were suggestive. Reese's context at the time of the study was teaching in a high school for gifted students (Site 11), so the teachers had a shared identity. The other three participants taught at traditional high schools (Site 2, Site 3, and Site 7), where they may be the only persons who taught the honors/AP/IB equivalents of their courses or may be among a small group of honors teachers in comparison to the larger population of teachers serving in general education. In terms of transformative learning theory, this context potentially limited transformation. Mezirow (1981) included feedback with reflection as part of transformative process, but feedback from

peers was limited for the participants. Interactions with others shape and reshape the constructions of people (Mezirow, 1998), and the potential lack of supportive peer feedback may have limited opportunities for reflection and the potential related transformation. Feedback from dismissive peers may have resulted in limited opportunities for transformative learning through critical reflection. Participants' comments indicated an openness to feedback; however, there was a reasonable expectation of mutual respect that was not met.

Students and Parents

Another source of feedback, which potentially informed participants' reflection, was interactions with students and parents. Jimmy shared his end-of-the-school-year feedback process where students share with him their "journey" in his course and make suggestions "for the next generation" in his class. He said, "I talk a lot with the kids," which informed his thinking about the next school year. Jimmy shared that some of his initial approaches in his gifted serving classes met resistance from administration and parents, but he stressed, not from his students as they valued his high expectations. At the time of our interview, he said that parents' views had shifted as his scores and students' growth were evidence supporting his choices, and that now "they have to turn kids away from class" because so many students and parents request his course. Sean noted his own reflection in terms of accountability and learning. He felt dissatisfied with his initial grading practices as they valued deadlines over learning, and through student feedback and reflection on his goals for students, he devised a way to focus on learning. He noted student satisfaction with "the amount of stress that it has taken off of them" and parent satisfaction in that "I don't deal with upset parents anymore." While some discourse occurred, the discourse did not explicitly require validity testing through consensus, a requirement of critical reflection (Mezirow, 1981; Walker, 2018). The participants associated the

actions of students and parents with validation of their choices, but this validation was through an intuitive response rather than a critical exploration of their choices. Also, while student feedback provided a form of discourse, the potential imbalance of power between teachers and their students must be considered in how it may have limited that discourse. Students might have validated choices based on personal connections with their teachers and based on interest in the content area rather than critically evaluating their teachers' choices, a pattern identified by Röhl & Rollett's (2021) examination of student feedback to teachers.

Participants also used students' interactions with them as a means of feedback that informed their self-evaluation and reflection. Participants mentioned students who still visited them or stayed in contact after the course was over, such as Jesse's student Sally who "comes back to see me. She sends me, you know, emails." These served as a general confirmation of teaching practices. The absence of narratives of students' actions not confirming teacher practices could be due to the study's questions not targeting that area or that participants did not perceive these actions as a form of feedback. Additionally, they spoke of individual actions more directly tied to specific choices. Rebecca used a modified rubric for Alice to focus on Alice's content knowledge rather than writing conventions, and she identified this process as successful as Alice went "from sitting at the back row with her head down to sitting right up at my desk every single day." Noticeably, the evaluation here was not in terms of Alice's grades. Rebecca identified that Alice, whose 504 did not allow accommodations for her struggles with writing conventions, was disengaged due to the focus on her weak areas in prior courses. Rebecca's choice was based on identifying that Alice needed validation as a gifted student, and Alice's moving to the front of the class affirmed her choice. In these cases, participants did link their actions to their knowledge of their students, indicating reflection had occurred (Dirkx et al.,

2006; Lundgren & Poell, 2016). However, if critical reflection had been achieved was unclear as participants might have associated a student's action with validation of a choice, and this association was more intuitive than critically examined, which did not meet Mezirow's (1981) requirement that critical reflection requires the ability to validate through consensus.

Based on what participants shared, students served as the primary source of input for their reflections and self-evaluation. This focus on students was unsurprising considering the value placed on relationships and that they identified experiences with students as guiding their choices. Also, the participants who discussed peer feedback mostly had negative associations with that feedback and mostly positive associations with student feedback. This pattern could be due to confirmation bias if critical feedback was not valued. As this study did not compare responses to feedback from teachers in gifted education to feedback from teachers in general education, future research could explore this area.

Self-Reflection

In terms of self-reflection, participants did not use the term reflection; instead, they discussed and evaluated choices in terms of their own perceptions, expectations, and values. Jimmy discussed his student Jackie, whom he identified as "one of the most influential students" of his career. While this reference was to a student, it was not student feedback or response that Jimmy discussed here. Instead, he discussed her as "influential in positively affecting me as a teacher." He perceived her as a model of what students could do through self-directed learning and reflection, which he linked to the notebook where she identified her mistakes and worked through her own misunderstandings. His exposure to her process helped him rethink an aspect of his own approach, leading him to encourage the same process in his other students. She presented new information to him, which resulted in self-evaluation and new choices in his

classroom. Sean, though not referencing a specific student, referenced the National Board process and his training in universal design when he discussed how he reflected on his current approach to teaching and identified ways to "apply it to that gifted learner so that it's hitting their unique needs."

Participants also recognized that change had occurred through their experiences, though linking these changes to specific moments or experiences that sparked these changes was not provided by all participants. Chris discussed the value of making changes based on his experiences, as the failure to do so will lead to "underserving" some students. Karen discussed that she had become more "cognizant" of non-academic needs, which resulted in allowing the classroom to be space to explore their emotions. Reese, who linked his refection and resulting choices to his sons' experiences in gifted classes, said that he developed an understanding of what is "a little bit more important," which he identified as balancing academic needs with the students' additional needs. Tina also marked an increased awareness of "their situations outside of class," linking this to being a "seasoned teacher" with more experiences to inform her choices. In these examples, participants clearly had experiences that led to rethinking past understandings, suggesting that critical reflection had occurred in that new information resulted in rethinking their approaches (Mezirow 1981, 1991). However, the lack of collaborative discussion to challenge and validate these new understandings limited reflection from becoming fully transformative, though it is important to note that this statement is based on what participants shared, so discussions may have occurred that were not mentioned.

Not all choices provided opportunities for reflection. Participants discussed the need to make choices in the moment. These choices were informed by their experiences and potentially by reflection in the past, but the choices occurred in the moment. Karen described the classroom

as "a living, breathing thing. And every day is changes. Every hour it changes." She stated that a teacher must "read the room" and react in the moment. Chris expressed a similar idea, stating that "you're cresting and you're riding the wave," but he may suddenly perceive a need to make new choices in the moment based on "constantly looking around the room." Additionally, not only must choices be made in the moment, but their immediacy required an intuitive judgement. Jesse talked about making choices without needed information, with Chris and Karen expressing uncertainty about the outcomes of their choices: "I did the best I could" (Chris) and "I don't know" (Karen). These in-the-moment choices may not provide opportunities for critical reflection as they were adaptations in the moment rather than allowing time to consider the causes and underlying assumptions (Mezirow 1981; Walker, 2018); however, this should not imply that these in-the-moment choices were not informed by prior moments of critical reflection or did not result in reflection later. The data collected cannot address that.

The potential for transformative learning was evidenced in the many ways that reflection takes place with the participants; however, though reflection led to choices and questioning prior assumptions, the lack of consistent access to a collaborative, supportive discourse community limited opportunities for reflection to become transformative. Also, the lack of community limited the potential for individual change to affect the broader community (Mezirow, 1981), increasing the need for collaborative opportunities and professional development that teachers will value, and, within the context of gifted education, that challenges the broad generalizations about gifted education and the potential biases underlying them (Hertzog, 2022; Peters, 2022).

Limitations

This study used a sample size of 12 to address my research questions, and though saturation was achieved, recruiting a diverse range of perspectives met with challenges. Of the

10 sites that met the selection criteria, only five were represented in this study. Administration at Site 1, Site 4 and Site 5 gave permission to recruit among their teachers via their schools' instructional coaches, but no teachers from those schools signed up to participate. Efforts were made via the instructional coaches at these schools to reshare recruitment information, but this did not result in additional participants. Administration at Site 6 and at Site 9 did not respond to requests for approval to seek participants. Additional efforts were made including sending the requests again and the administrator at Site 11 asking on my behalf; however, the administration from those two sites did not respond. Representation from additional sites and the different combination of participants this could have yielded could have revealed additional insights and perspectives. As three of the unrepresented sites have higher levels of poverty than those represented in the study, additional insights, including into the role of economics, may have been gained. However, as the issue of socioeconomic status did arise and multiple sites were represented along with including a range of poverty levels, I feel that the study still provided insight.

The diversity of the participants also presented a limitation to this study. Most of the participants were from the humanities, with five teaching English courses and five teaching social studies courses. One participant taught math, and one taught science. Focusing on a single content area, such as humanities or STEM, might have provided additional insight into content specific needs in gifted education or content specific understandings of giftedness. In terms of gender, the self-reported gender of participants included four males and eight females. Also, all participants identified as White or White-European. The demographics of the participants were unsurprising as prior national data reported teachers as predominately White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a, 2023b), so the sample population was not representative. The

representation of different gender identities, races, and ethnicities may have provided additional understandings, particularly considering the role of shared identity in relationship building (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hurt, 2018; Redding, 2019) and social factors not raised by the participants.

Interviews ranged from 19 minutes to 73 minutes, with the average interview length of 39.5 minutes. During each interview, I asked follow-up questions and attempted to get participants to expand on their responses or provide additional information. In some cases, participants expressed exhaustion as interviews occurred after school hours. The timing of the interviews was restricted by district research guidelines as these guidelines stated that data collection could not interfere with my role at my school or the role of any participant, so data collection had to occur outside of contract time. Also, as interviews took place outside of the school day, participants were often at home and having to balance my needs as the researcher with the needs of children, pets, and spouses while also considering their own needs. On that point, I want to express my gratitude that participants did find time to include me in their days and work to meet my needs.

Though these limitations were present in this study, the study provided insight into the experiences of teachers in gifted serving classrooms. Though the insight may be context dependent, in accordance with the principles of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), variables are never fully in the control of the researcher and no study can claim a full or complete understanding. Instead, the insights provided are meant to add to and inform future conversations, each of which will occur in their own contexts.

Implications of Findings

To date, this study is the first reflexive thematic analysis exploring how teachers in gifted education make and reflect on choices informed by their experiences with gifted students. The findings of this study addressed a gap in the literature and attempted to address the absence of teachers' voices in that literature. The small sample size was appropriate for this type of study as it allowed for thick data and a deeper understanding of this topic within a specific context (Braun & Clark, 2022). The findings should not be taken as generalizable. Instead, the significance of this study is in the invitation to discuss the implications below and make sense of them within the reader's unique context.

Implications for Researchers

This study started partially in response to my own struggle to reconcile how I as a teacher in gifted education saw myself and my peers with how I felt we were represented or ignored in the literature. Participants' comments within the context of this study could easily fit in the dominate narrative that needs associated with minority groups are ignored as participants did not discuss students' needs in terms of race, though they did discuss needs in terms of economics and access. Instead, participants discussed students in terms of their uniqueness or individuality. Researchers should consider additional ways teachers identify students' needs and how those relate to other aspects of students' lives and identities.

Researchers should consider ways to provide context for their claims about gifted education. Giftedness and gifted education are not consistently constructed, yet broad claims about gifted education assume a sameness that does not reflect reality. Card and Giuliano (2014), Horn (2015), and Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2017) suggested the potential for small-scale studies to identify gifted programs that meet academic needs, so increasing these small-scale studies and

including the voices of stakeholders, including parents/guardians, students, teachers, staff, administrations can potentially provide a greater insight into effective gifted services. In addition, there was a contradiction in the literature in that standardized assessments were linked with a failure to identify giftedness in some subgroups and that they measure access more than potential (Gentry et al., 2021; Giessman et al., 2013; Peters, 2022b), yet these tests were the measures of gifted programs effectiveness in studies that question their value (Bui et al., 2014; Redding & Grissom, 2021). Using measurements that are potentially biased to support that gifted programs are biased is problematic. Just as the participants measured effectiveness in more wholistic ways, researchers may need to explore ways to include measurements beyond test scores to fully understand the effectiveness of gifted education.

Implications for Teachers

This section was difficult to write as I was aware that my own biases affected my understanding here. Though I was at the moment of writing a teacher and dissertating student, and thus a fledgling researcher, in moments of reflection and thinking about the findings, my sense-making process continued to start with identity as a teacher. I found myself hesitant of phrasing that might seem critical of teachers even though I kept reminding myself that a reparative approach acknowledges issues and potential together rather than focusing on issues (Sedgwick, 2003).

With that intention in mind, I identified the following implications. Teachers of gifted serving classes have many experiences informed by their own identities and relationships with students. The potential of these relationships in meeting the needs of gifted students, whether formally identified or not, reveals the potential to meet the needs of students when the teachers and students do not have shared identities to inform choices and build kinship. However, we

cannot rely on this approach as a panacea to systemic issues. Only one teacher directly mentioned race and LGBTQIA gifted students. This statement should not be read to imply a bias or an internalized prejudice.

However, as our identities inform what we notice, as a White, gay male, the single reference to LGBTQIA students made me uncomfortable. Possibly because of my identification as White, I was not surprised when my White participants did not discuss gifted needs in terms of race. My own awareness of race in terms of social and historical inequities has increased through self-directed learning and courses I have taken as part of this program, but it has not been part of my teacher training or district-led professional development. As a gay male, I am very aware of how my own giftedness in high school related to my resistance and eventual acceptance of my sexual orientation, and I am possibly hyperaware of the LGBTIA students I have taught who engaged with understanding and processing their identifies and having unique situations, such as how they were treated by peers and their relationships with supportive and unsupportive family members. The absence of this awareness I cannot help but to link with my participants' lack of a shared identity with me in terms of sexual orientation. Though I did not ask about their sexual orientations, and I may be making heteronormative assumptions, my closeness outside of the study to several of the participants and the details about their personal lives that some participants shared make my assumption likely. During each interview, I shared a story about one of my former students and asked for advice to help me support that student. I tried to share stories that did not directly guide the participants but that did raise possible aspects that they had not raised, such as mentioning a student who identified as Black and Latino, discussing a student who had a 504, and talking about a student who worked to support his family. I had in mind a transgender student that I taught a few years ago, and though I intended

to mention him and seek feedback, as the interviews progressed, I felt anxious and uncomfortable, and in the end, I never told his story. So, while I do not think that a shared identity based on race or common identities is a necessity to build strong relationships between teachers and students, I do acknowledge that shared identities increase comfort, feelings of belonging, and a sense of worth. I am not implying or assuming a bias in the participants; instead, my intent is to acknowledge that their lived experiences and mine inform how we make sense of and connect with the needs of others. We, as teachers, have more work in this area to build those bridges and be aware of when extra awareness is needed regarding issues and needs outside of our own lived experiences and identities. District and school leadership may need to consider how to recruit diverse faculty and what role diversity should play in selecting teachers for gifted and talent training.

Implications for Professional Development

One area of note for school and district leadership is participants' perceptions of current professional development. They identified that they had participated in professional development sessions to meet requirements; however, they generally did not find value in those sessions. They valued experiences with students and feedback from students, and they valued self-directed learning and processes, such as independent reading and working towards National Board certification. From my own experiences as a teacher, professional development tends to focus on reviewing the content and standards for the courses and modeling digital tools to support that content. Some participants shared that to meet gifted students' advanced academic needs they must have advanced content knowledge, so professional development geared towards reviewing the content may not be at the level needed to support that or may not align with teachers' focus

on self and peer-directed learning. Professional development that is not content specific but rather gifted specific may better meet the needs of educators in gifted education.

Some participants noted the lack of supportive peer feedback as peers outside of gifted education perceived teaching in gifted serving classes as significantly easier than teaching in general education classes. In addition, in cases of a limited number of gifted courses, a teacher may be the only one at a school to teach the honors/AP version of the course or may be one of the few to teach honors courses in that department. Collaboration is an important part of a teacher's development (Hertzog, 2022; Peters, 2022), and peer feedback from collaboration supports reflection (Mezirow, 1981, 1991). Providing school and district level opportunities for those in gifted education to share their experiences and seek peer feedback may present opportunities for reflection and transformation.

Implications for Gifted Education

This study did not address issues of access and identification, though these concerns were already well explored in the literature. This study focused on services for gifted students post-identification, and the implications of my findings are that while the construction of gifted centers on advanced academic ability, we cannot forget that gifted students are *gifted and....* Their giftedness is not isolated from other aspects of their lives, whether that be opportunity gaps that affect current performance or how through their giftedness they make sense of their emotions, identities, and experiences. While gifted education must continue to meet the advanced academic needs of gifted students, those needs and co-existing needs are community specific and specific to each individual student. As illustrated by successful gifted programs (see Horn, 2015 and Olszewski-Kubilus, 2017), choices must be informed by discussions at the district and school level that include the voices of all stakeholders. Also, though the label of

gifted is useful in terms of forming a shared identity, common goals, and common expectations, services must be guided by focus on the student-as-individual so that the unique needs of the students are addressed.

Future Research

This section outlines suggestions for future research based on the discussion, limitations, and implications presented in this chapter. While the district in this study included some rural areas, the district was identified as mostly urban by state in this study. Exploring gifted needs identified by teachers in rural and metropolitan areas may present new or differing insights as some needs more than others may be specific to location.

This study's design allowed participants to decide the needs to be discussed, which may mean that participants had additional needs that they choose not to share or that did not arise in their minds in the moment. Studies that focus on the gifted needs of specific social categories, such as race, or co-existing labels, such as autistic, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers make sense of these areas in relation to giftedness. However, as previously noted, these categories in isolation may not allow for a full understanding of students' needs, and research will need to build on the intersections between these identities and needs. Additionally, while limiting this study to a single district helped in exploring shared understandings, seeking participants based on a shared identity, such as a race, economic background, or sexual orientation may provide additional insights into how teachers' lived experiences relate to the needs they identify.

While the literature focuses on the value of teachers and students having a shared identify in terms of race (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hurt, 2018; Redding, 2019), participants identified connections with their students that may present other shared identities, such as mutual lived

experiences, being identified as gifted, and similar personality traits. There is potential to explore other ways that shared identities may be formed in the classroom and how they influence student investment and teachers' choices.

This study focused on participants' perceptions, and participants evaluated their choices based on their perceptions of students' needs and the effectiveness of their choices. Participants are speaking for students in this study, so a study that asks students in gifted serving classes to identify their needs and discuss how teacher choices address or do not address these needs can provide additional insight while also informing teacher reflection. However, such a study will need to address how students' relationships with teachers and with the content may affect their evaluations (Röhl & Rollett, 2021).

Another area to explore is the effects of acceleration. While participants held a shared understanding of gifted students being different academically from their age-level peers, only a few participants noted this in terms of emotional development and identity formation. Also, limited research has explored acceleration in relationship to emotional development (see Ribeiro Piske and Stoltz, 2021) and identity formation (see Maria Casino-Garcia et al., 2021). This study may not have been well designed to explore this area as participants were not asked to discuss the effects of acceleration. A future study targeted to this area may provide greater insight and expand on the limited literature available in this area.

Conclusion

This study sought to expand conversations on gifted services to include teachers' voices. As the current literature on gifted education focuses on a critical lens to evaluate the services provided, teachers are directly and indirectly spoken about and spoken for in terms of deficiencies. While systematic issues must be acknowledged and addressed, the tendency to

generalize gifted education programs and their teachers ignores the efforts and individual agency of teachers. As shown in this study, the participants valued relationships with their students that informed their students-as-individuals approach to identifying and meeting their needs. Also, while the literature identified academic growth through assessments as the primary way to evaluate gifted education, participant responses showed that academics cannot always be the priority when students required emotional and social supports, and participants felt that students gained benefits were not measured in these national and state assessments. I started this study originally with the concept of *gifted and...* thinking in terms of a single characteristic, such as gifted and autistic or gifted and Black. Though I initially thought this phrase was more representative of how teachers, including myself, thought of their students, through conversations with my fellow teachers and the resulting reflection, I better understand that even that was too simplistic. A more accurate understanding is that one "and" is not enough to represent all the aspects of students that teachers take into account when identifying and meeting their needs. Teachers in gifted serving classrooms may recognize that each student is a multiplicity of factors, and through teachers' voices, future research can recognize this too.

Epilogue

At the end of this dissertation, it feels appropriate to return to Jay, whom in chapter one I discussed how he sparked my thinking in terms of *Gifted and...*. Though not formally identified as gifted, his teachers recognized giftedness in him. As a student from a low-economic background and who identified as Black and Latino, he may have felt out of place in his predominately White, English II Honors class. While his other teachers recognized his giftedness and encouraged him to try an honors course, his first experience with honors was with his English II Honors teacher who rigidly defined giftedness in terms of current ability instead of

potential. Looking back on my conversations with that teacher, who was a first-year teacher, I cannot help but wonder if he would have seen Jay differently in year 10 of teaching honors than he saw Jay in his first year teaching. Based on my study's findings, I also wonder if he was too isolated; would his view of Jay have been different if we had taken time as peers to discuss our experiences with gifted students rather than discuss how to meet the standards? In my AP Language & Composition class, I tried to meet Jay where he was. I worked to learn about him, and I made choices. Like some of my participants, I did not always prioritize academics. Sometimes I modified an assignment that played to his strengths, to his unique giftedness, so that his confidence increased while I also provided feedback on his areas for growth. This meant that his peers who had been identified as gifted since elementary or middle school had more interactions with complexity in my class than he did. At the end of the school year, Jay told me he appreciated my class and what he had learned, and he even consulted me on his next steps. He decided to continue with the honors track, taking English IV Honors. He did not feel comfortable taking another AP because though his confidence had increased, he worried about what support would be available to him. He felt English IV Honors was a reasonable next step. I kept in touch with him during his senior year, conferenced with his teacher about his progress, and encouraged him to think about his college and career goals. I appreciated the conversations with his teacher. She and I shared our understandings of Jay and his needs, and he told me how supported he felt in her class. Just like some of my participants, I still face uncertainty. Where is Jay now? Did he graduate from college? Did my choices serve him well? Is he happy? Until we have a better understanding of what is occurring in gifted serving classrooms and a more complete understanding of gifted students' needs, we cannot fully evaluate the choices made and their

outcomes. Until then, my peers and I live in uncertainty while dreaming of the possibilities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Text of Qualtrics XM Survey

Dear potential participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study regarding how teachers adapt their classes to meet the needs of gifted students. Completing this survey indicates that you want to participate in the study by participating in one interview. Completing this survey is not a commitment to participate; it only indicates your current interest, and you may decide not to participate at any point.

This survey will collect some information about you, have you review and sign a consent to participate and a consent to be recorded during the interview, and collect information about best times to schedule an interview.

The demographic information in this interest survey will be used to provide additional information about participants. Neither your name nor your school's name will be used. Instead, pseudonyms will be used for both. Also, the school district's name will not be used either. I am seeking 12 participants. The contact information collected will not be used in the study as it is only included to help me contact you if you are selected as one of the 12 and to inform those who win one of the six $20 Amazon gift cards.

If you have any questions, please contact me at PGRabon@coastal.edu or [Redacted]. If you have any concerns about our study, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick G. Rabon

[In Qualtrics, Consent to Participate will go here followed by Consent to be Recorded; as participants are signing digitally, at the start of the interview, I will confirm with each participant his/her consent to both].
What is your name (First Middle Last)?
What is your gender?
What is your race or ethnicity?

How long have you worked in education?
At which school in the district do you currently teach?
How long have you taught at this school?

In what content area(s) do you teach (e.g., English, Performing Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, CATE, Foreign Language, etc.)?

Outside of [Redacted], in what other states or countries have you taught? (Write "none" if you have not taught outside of [Redacted]).

In these other states or countries, did you teach honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or other advanced courses? (Leave it blank if you have not taught outside of [Redacted]).

Do you have the Gifted & Talented endorsement on your teaching license?

Do you hold an endorsement in one or more AP courses?

Do you hold an IB endorsement?

Have you taught honors, AP, and/or IB for five or more years?

Approximately, in what year did you first teach an honors/AP/IB course?

At your current school, for how many years have you taught one or more honors, IB, and/or AP courses during a school year?

Which of these options best describes the last five years of your teaching career?

- I have taught only honors, AP, and/or IB courses.
- I have taught mostly honors, AP, and/or IB courses.
- I have taught mostly College Preparatory (CP) courses.
- I have taught only College Preparatory (CP) courses.

For this study, we will meet virtually for an interview. The information below will help set up that interview, and I will use the contact information provided to schedule one. This information will not be included in the study and will not be available to anyone other than the researcher.

What email address do you want me to use to contact you?

If you are okay with sharing a phone number, please list it here:

If you have shared a phone number, should I email, text or call to set up an interview? (If you do not share a phone number, I will use the email given to contact you).

Are there specific days/times that work best in your regular schedule? (All interviews must take place after your school day. This information will help me plan a range of options for you, but we will set a specific day and time later).

Do you prefer Zoom or Google Meet for our interview?

All participants in this study who are asked to interview and complete the interview process will be entered into a drawing for a $20 Amazon gift card, with six participants winning. The Amazon gift card will be sent via email.

If you are selected for the study and complete the interview process, do you want to be entered into the drawing? Yes No

To what email address do you want the gift card sent if you win? (Leave blank if you have opted out of the drawing).

This completes the interest survey. Those selected for participation will be contacted at the email address provided or phone number to schedule an interview date and time.

Thank you for your time,
Patrick G. Rabon
PGRabon@Coastal.edu
[Redacted]

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Interview Protocols

Medium

Interviews will take place via Zoom or Google Meet after school hours. The platform will depend on which one teachers are most familiar with using.

Opening of Interview

Good [evening, morning, afternoon], and thank you for joining me in this Zoom/Google Meet and taking time from your schedule for this. The goal of this interview is to gain a deeper understanding of how educators working with gifted students have reflected and potentially adapted their classrooms to meet the needs of their students. Overall, guiding our interview will be the idea of *gifted and….* Essentially while talking about gifted students, our conversation will center around other aspects of their lives that you take into consideration when serving gifted students.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you serve gifted students through honors and/or Advanced Placement (AP) courses during at least part of your day, and you have at least five years of experience doing so. Your experience in this area is valuable because you are working with these students, and you can provide a greater understanding into how to serve gifted students. There are no right or wrong answers during this interview, and all responses will be anonymous.

I will record this session. You completed a consent form for this study and to be recorded when you volunteered as a participant; however, we will go over them again prior to starting. [Review consent forms]. The audio of the recording will be transcribed with your name and identifiable information removed. I am recording because I do not want to miss out on what you

say, and I am limited in my ability to write down all of what you share today. Once I transcribe

our meeting, I will write up a summary of my takeaways. Then I will email you a copy of the

transcript of our meeting and my summary. You will have the opportunity to provide feedback,

clarifications, or expand on your ideas if you wish to do so. Near the end of our interview, I will

also provide a summary of our interview and ask you to clarify, correct, or add to my

understanding. You may end the interview at any point.

Opening Question

My name is Patrick Rabon, and I'm a graduate student at Coastal Carolina University. In

addition, I also work for [Redacted] at the [Redacted]. I have worked with gifted students

through honors and AP courses for 13 years. Will you please introduce yourself and share any

information you want me to know about you and your connection to gifted education?

Questions

A copy of the interview questions was sent in advance to allow you time to reflect on them. I will

also screen share a copy for you to have while we talk today. Though we have these questions,

please feel free to take our conversation in different directions that will help me understand your

experiences and interactions with your students. At times, I may also ask follow up questions so

we can explore an area more. You are welcome at any point to end or pause our conversation.

The first five questions will focus on you and your understanding of gifted education.

1. How do you define giftedness or what it means to be a gifted student?

2. Please describe how you have learned to work with gifted students?

3. Outside of school, what resources, support, and access to enrichment do your students

   have?

   a. How does this affect their giftedness?

4. If I was to visit your class while you were teaching, what would I see that makes it a class for gifted students?

5. Based on what I explained about *gifted and…*, what might that mean to you? [Follow up with comments and questions to discuss].

The next seven questions will focus on gifted students you have worked with, and we will focus on three of these students. For these questions, please only use the students' first names. In my transcription, I will give the students pseudonyms.

6. Please think of a student you taught or currently teach that caused you to reflect on how you teach gifted students. Tell me about that student in terms of being *gifted and…*. What I mean by that is, what in addition to that student's giftedness led to you reflecting on how you taught that student or how you teach gifted students in general?

   a. **Potential follow-up questions**

      i. What caused you to notice this about the student?

      ii. How did you meet that student's needs?

      iii. How did X affect the student?

7. Keeping this student in mind, please share with me how the influence of your time with that student can be seen in how you teach now.

   a. If the response is that it does not, ask, why might that be?

8. Okay, please think of another student that has resulted in reflecting on how you teach gifted students. Tell me about this student in terms of being *gifted and…*.

9. Now keeping this student in mind, please share with me how the influence of your time with that student can be seen in how you teach now.

10. Okay, we are on our last student. Please think of another student that has resulted in reflecting on how you teach gifted students. Tell me about this student in terms of being *gifted and…*.

11. Now keeping this last student in mind, please share with me how the influence of your time with that student can be seen in how you teach now.

12. Outside of these three students, what are other areas you have noticed that affect gifted students about which other educators should know?

Thank you for sharing so much with me. Before we move onto our final questions, I'd like to share a bit about one of my students and get your thoughts and feelings about how I might meet this student's needs and how this student might fit the *gifted and…* concept. [Share a story that feels appropriate in response to stories they have shared already but that might start a conversation about a different aspect of being *gifted and…*].

13. When I talk about *gifted and…*, how might that apply to my student?

14. What advice based on your experiences might you give me if I was a new teacher in a gifted class and working with this student?

   b. Follow up questions as appropriate.

Thank you for that.

Ending Questions

Now we are in the final questions, and I just want to work together to help clarify my understanding and make sure I accurately represent your thoughts.

15. Of everything we have discussed today, what's one takeaway or key point you want to make sure is shared with other educators who work with gifted students?

16. During our conversation, I made note of the following: [summary of conversation]. Is my summary of our conversation adequate?

17. As we wrap up our conversion, is there something we did not talk about that you wish we had?

Conclusion

Any questions before we conclude?   [Pause].

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Your insight has been valuable and is much appreciated. Once I finish my notes on our conversation, I will send them to you so that you can make sure I have represented you correctly. You will also be welcome to add any additional thoughts or comments to mine. Again, thank you, and have a great rest of your day.

Appendix C: Results of Dissertation Proposal Form

Results of Dissertation Proposal Form

Title of Dissertation: Gifted and... Teacher Reflection and Transformation in Response to Teaching Gifted Students

Candidate Name: Patrick Gene Rabon

Time, Date, and Location of Proposal Defense: 3:00 pm, 11/3/2023, Prince 213D

Candidate Student ID: 0129224

The Dissertation Committee Chair should complete this form during and immediately following the dissertation proposal. The signatures of the committee members indicate agreement with the proposal results and the stated proposal revisions.

Proposal Results:

The above named candidate has (check one):

- [x] Satisfactorily passed proposal defense without revisions to proposal
- [ ] Satisfactorily passed proposal defense with revisions to proposal
- [ ] Proposal defense deferred and rescheduled
- [ ] Proposal defense NOT satisfactorily passed

Proposal Revisions:

The following revisions are required for completion of dissertation proposal:

The following revisions are suggested (but not required):

(1) Adapt RQ3 "change" to "pedagogical impact" and insert word: gifted "serving" classroom.

(2) Add demographic question about subject taught.

Please sign to indicate acknowledgment of the candidate's proposal results and proposal revisions.

Deborah K Conner
Signature, Dissertation Chair

Signature, Committee Member

Signature, Committee Member

Signature, Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

OFFICE OF
SPONSORED PROGRAMS
AND RESEARCH SERVICES
COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

November 27, 2023

Patrick Gene Rabon
Coastal Carolina University
Conway, SC 29528

RE: Gifted and...: Teacher Reflection and Transformation in Response to Teaching Gifted Students

Patrick,

It has been determined that your protocol #2024.77 is approved as **EXPEDITED** by the Coastal Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the Federal Policy for the Protection of **Human Research Subjects** Categories **#6 & 7,**

> #6 – Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes
> #7 – Research on individual or group characteristics, behavior, or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This approval is good for one calendar year commencing with the date of approval and concludes on **11/26/2024.** If your work continues beyond this date, it will be necessary to seek a continuation from the IRB. If your work concludes prior to this date, please inform the IRB.

Approval of this protocol does not provide permission or consent for faculty, staff or students to use university communication channels for contacting or obtaining information from research subjects or participants. Faculty, staff and students are responsible for obtaining appropriate permission to use university communications to contact research participants. For use of university email to groups such as all faculty/staff or all students, requests should be made to the Provost's Office after the research protocol has been approved by the IRB. Please allow at least one week to receive approval.

Please note, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to report immediately to the IRB any changes in procedures involving human subjects and any unexpected risks to human subjects, any detrimental effects to the rights or welfare of any human subjects participating in the project, giving names of persons, dates of occurrences, details of harmful effects, and any remedial actions. Such changes may affect the status of your approved research.

Be advised that study materials and documentation, including signed informed consent documents, must be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the research and shall be accessible for purposes of audit.
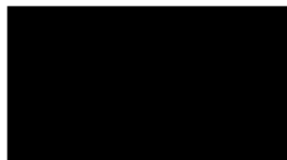
If you have any questions concerning this review, please contact Patty Carter, IRB Coordinator, at pcarter@coastal.edu or extension 2978.

Thank you,

Stephanie Cassavaugh
Director, Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services
IRB Administrator

cc: Deborah Conner

Appendix E: District Permission Letter

█████████████████████

November 28, 2023

Dear Mr. Rabon,

Your request to conduct research, *Gifted and… Teacher Reflection and Transformation in Response to Teaching Gifted Students,* is approved subject to the following conditions:

1. You must comply with the conditions set forth in the District policy, "Research Involving Students," and § 1232h, "Protection of pupil rights," of the U.S. Code;
2. You are not to release, present, or publish any personally identifiable information concerning students, their parents, or District staff members;
3. You are not to identify ██████████████████ any school in our District in any publication, presentation, or release of information associated with your research without my written permission;
4. The records and raw data associated with your study are to be destroyed when they are no longer needed for the purposes set forth in your request; and
5. You are to provide a copy of your completed research report to me at the District Office.

I hope your research goes well. If you have any questions or are in need of further assistance, please contact me at ████████

Sincerely,

████████████████

████████████
Director of Assessment
████████████████

Appendix F: Request to Principal

[Insert principal's name],

My name is Patrick Rabon, and I am a Ph.D. student in Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment in the Spadoni College of Education and Social Sciences at Coastal Carolina University and a teacher/instructional coach at [Redacted]. In my role as a Ph.D. student for my dissertation, I am exploring how teachers adapt their classroom practices to meet the needs of their gifted students.

I want to interview several teachers who teach honors, AP, or IB classes at your school to learn more about this area. All interviews are voluntary, and they will take place after school hours and will be held online so as not to interfere with the school day. No teacher, student, or school names will be used in my dissertation. School and teacher participation is completely voluntary.

I have received approval from CCU's Institutional Review Board. Also, I have received approval from [insert name] via the Office of Assessment. Though the study is not affiliated with

[Redacted], I do hope to use the study to grow in my role as a teacher and instructional coach and to create professional development sessions that are informed by experienced teachers and how they adapt to meet the needs of our gifted population.

With your permission, may I contact your school's instructional coach to request that [he/she] share my request for participants with those who teach honors, AP, or IB courses at your school?

You can see the request for participants that I will ask [him/her] to share by clicking here [insert link to recruitment letter].

If you have any questions, please contact me at PGRabon@coastal.edu or [Redacted]. If you have any concerns about our study, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix G: Request to Instructional Coach

[Insert Instructional Coach's name],

My name is Patrick Rabon, and I am a Ph.D. student in Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment in the Spadoni College of Education and Social Sciences at Coastal Carolina University and a teacher/instructional coach at [Redacted]. In my role as a Ph.D. student for my dissertation, I am exploring how teachers adapt their classroom practices to meet the needs of their gifted students.

I want to interview several teachers who teach honors, AP, or IB classes at your school to learn more about this area. All interviews are voluntary, and they will take place after school hours and will be held online so as not to interfere with the school day. No teacher, student, or school names will be used in my dissertation. School and teacher participation is completely voluntary.

I would appreciate it if you would forward my request for participants to teachers at your school who are teaching honors, AP, or IB classes.

I have asked your principal for permission to contact you, and I've included [insert name's] response below my email. There is no expectation that you must agree to forward my request. Though I have received permission from [Redacted] through the Office of Assessment to conduct my study, my study is not sponsored by [Redacted] and is not part of any expectations for your role as an instructional coach.

If you are okay with forwarding my request for participants, I have pasted my request below for you to copy and paste into an email to send them.

I cannot share with you who agrees to participate as all participants will remain anonymous, but I do hope that once I complete this dissertation journey, I can share what I've learned from experienced teachers in gifted classes with others in our district to provide additional ways to think about how we serve our gifted population.

If you have any questions, please contact me at PGRabon@coastal.edu or [Redacted]. If you have any concerns about our study, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix H: Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Teacher at [Insert School's Name],

My name is Patrick Rabon, and I am a Ph.D. student in Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment in the Spadoni College of Education and Social Sciences at Coastal Carolina University and a teacher/instructional coach at [Redacted]. In my role as a Ph.D. student for my dissertation, I am exploring how teachers adapt their classroom practices to meet the needs of their gifted students.

Your school's instructional coach, with your principal's permission, is forwarding my request for participants. I have also gained permission to conduct this study from [Redacted] in the [Redacted] Office of Assessment. However, this study is not sponsored by [Redacted], and there is no expectation that you will participate or penalty if you choose to not do so. Also, if you do choose to participate, your participation will be confidential unless you share with others that you are participating, and you may withdraw from the study at any point in time.

The study will be an interview that we conduct via Zoom or Google Meet after school hours. During the study, I will ask you questions about your experiences with gifted students and ways you have adapted your classroom to meet their needs. This study is not evaluative. Instead, my goal is to explore and learn from you. At the end of the interview, I will share with you a summary of my understanding and invite you to clarify, add to, or expand. Once I transcribe the interview, you will also have the option, if you want, to check the transcription and my updated summary to clarify, add to, or expand. Your insights and experiences will be valuable to my understanding.

I am seeking 12 participants from our district. Participants must have five or more years experience with teaching in honors, AP, and/or IB courses, and must currently hold a Gifted & Talented endorsement, as required by [Redacted].

Below is a link to a secure survey. If you are interested in participating, please complete the survey. There are two consent forms in the survey: one to participate and one to have our interview recorded by me. All recordings will be deleted once the study is over, and they are only used so that I can transcribe our interview. The survey also includes a few questions about you and your teaching experience as well as how I should contact you.

You can preview the consent forms here: Consent to Participate [hyperlink this] and Consent to be Recorded [hyperlink this].

For those selected to participate and then complete the interviews, their names will go into a drawing for a $20 Amazon gift card. Six names will be drawn as winners.

[Link to Qualtrics survey].

Please complete the interest survey by [insert date].

If you have any questions, please contact me at PGRabon@coastal.edu or [Redacted]. If you have any concerns about our study, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix I: Consent Form

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR HUMAN
SUBJECT RESEARCH PARTICIPATION**

Introduction

My name is Patrick G. Rabon, and I am a graduate student at Coastal Carolina University. I also work as a teacher and instructional coach within the [Redacted] system. I have approval from the district to conduct this study, but this study is not affiliated with the school district. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study entitled, "Gifted and...: Teacher Reflection and Transformation in Response to Teaching Gifted Students" You are free to talk with someone you trust about your participation in this research and may take time to reflect on whether you wish to participate or not. If you have any questions, I will answer them now or at any time during the study.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to explore how gifted teachers adapt their classroom practices to meet the needs of gifted students.

Procedures

During this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview via Zoom or Google Meet and respond to interview questions. At the end of the interview, I will go over what we have discussed and provide a chance for you to clarify or expand my understanding. Prior to this study, you will be asked demographic questions and questions about your teaching background. After the interview, you will be provided with the option to review a transcript of our interview and my initial summary to give feedback or clarification.

Duration

For this research study, your participation will be required for one interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. Interviews will be sometime in January through April 2024. You will be provided with the option to review a transcription of our interview and an initial summary of our interview. If you choose, you may provide additional feedback, clarification, or information to the interview transcript and summary.

Rights

You do not have to agree to participate in this research study. If you do choose to participate, you may choose not to at any time once the study begins. There is no penalty for not participating or withdrawing from the study at any time.

[Redacted] *is neither sponsoring nor conducting this research, and there is no penalty for not participating. Participants will not be identified, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.*

Risks

During this research study, *no risks or discomforts are anticipated.*

Benefits

By agreeing to participate in this research study, *you may benefit from the reflective process, and I hope to use the results of this study, if given district approval, to lead to professional development sessions for gifted teachers. Also, this research may help gain a better understanding of others within your community or society as a whole as a result of finding an answer to the research question.*

Incentives

For your participation in this research study, those who complete the interview process will be entered into a drawing for a $20 Amazon gift card. This study is seeking twelve participants, and six names will be drawn as winners.

Confidentiality

Unless you provide consent to the contrary, the confidentiality of your participation in this research study, your responses or any individual results will be maintained by the PI and all members of the research team.

Note that confidentiality will only be violated when required by law or the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. This usually includes, but may not be limited to, situations when your responses indicate that you, or another clearly identified individual, is at risk of imminent harm or situations in which faculty are mandated reporters, such as instances of child abuse or issues covered under Title IX regulations. For more information about Title IX, please see the University's webpage at: https://www.coastal.edu/titleix/.

Sharing the Results

As the Principal Investigator on this research study, I plan to share the results of this study by using it to complete my dissertation and potentially publish articles and present. In addition, I hope to develop professional development sessions that are informed by this study.

<u>Contacts</u>

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact <u>Patrick G. Rabon</u> by phone [Redacted] or PGRabon@Coastal.edu.

The faculty advisor on this study is <u>Dr. Deborah K. Conner</u>, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services is responsible for the oversight of all human subject research conducted at Coastal Carolina University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant before, during or after the research study, you may contact this office by calling (843) 349-2978 or emailing OSPRS@coastal.edu.

This research study has been approved by the IRB on November 27, 2023. This approval will expire on November 26, 2024 unless the IRB renews the approval prior to this date.

Though this study is not sponsored by [Redacted] approval to conduct this study was provided by [Redacted] [Redacted] Office of Assessment on November 28, 2023.

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Appendix J: Audio Consent Form

PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO OR AUDIO
RECORDING AUTHORIZATION

I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Coastal Carolina University, its successors, assigns, officers, employees or agents, any person(s) or corporation(s) for whom it might be acting, and any firm publishing and/or distributing any photograph, video footage or audio recording produced as part of this research, in whole or in part, as a finished product, from and against any liability as a result of any distortion, blurring, alteration, visual or auditory illusion, or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the recording, processing, reproduction, publication or distribution of any photograph, videotape, audiotape or interview, even should the same subject me or my to ridicule, scandal, reproach, scorn or indignity. I hereby agree that the photographs, video footage and audio recordings may be used under the conditions stated herein without blurring my identifying characteristics.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Patrick G. Rabon by phone [Redacted] or PGRabon@Coastal.edu.

The faculty advisor on this study is Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services is responsible for the oversight of all human subject research conducted at Coastal Carolina University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant before, during or after the research study, you may contact this office by calling (843) 349-2978 or emailing OSPRS@coastal.edu.

I have read this authorization and have been able to ask questions of the PI and/or discuss my participation with someone I trust. I understand that I can ask additional questions at any time during this research study and am free to withdraw from participation at any time.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Appendix K: Amazon Gift Card (Winner) Email

[Insert name of participant],

Thank you for your participation in the study. You are one of the six $20 Amazon gift card winners. I have used the email address you shared with me to send your electronic Amazon gift card. If you do not see it in your inbox within 48 hours, please check your spam/junk folders. If not there, please contact me.

Your time and efforts have increased my understanding of serving gifted students, and I will use that understanding to inform my own practice and to support others. I strongly believe that teachers are experts who have the power to make choices that directly benefit their students, and what you have shared will go towards increasing the expertise of others.

Again, thank you for your contribution to my study and to gifted education,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix L: Amazon Gift Card (Non-Winner) Email

[Insert name of participant],

Thank you for your participation in my study. I completed the drawing for Amazon gift cards, and your name was not drawn as one of the six winners. Though you did not win a gift card, I do want to thank you for your contributions to the study. Your time and efforts have increased my understanding of serving gifted students, and I will use that understanding to inform my own practice and to support others. I strongly believe that teachers are experts who have the power to make choices that directly benefit their students, and what you have shared will go towards increasing the expertise of others and my own.

Again, thank you for your time and contributions to my study and to gifted education,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix M: Department Chair Letter

As you know, in addition to being a teacher and instructional coach at our school, I am a Ph.D. student in Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment in the Spadoni College of Education and Social Sciences at Coastal Carolina University. In my role as a Ph.D. student for my dissertation, I am exploring how teachers adapt their classroom practices to meet the needs of their gifted students.

I want to interview several teachers who teach honors and/or AP classes at our school to learn more about this area. All interviews are voluntary, and they will take place after school hours and will be held online so as not to interfere with the school day. No teacher, student, or school names will be used in my dissertation. School and teacher participation is completely voluntary.

I would appreciate it if you would forward my request for participants to teachers at your department who are teaching honors and/or AP classes. In addition, you too may decide to participate in the study.

I have asked [Redacted] for permission to send this information via you, and he has agreed. There is no expectation that you must agree to forward my request. Though I have received permission from [Redacted] through the [Redacted] Office of Assessment to conduct my study, my study is not sponsored by [Redacted] and is not part of any expectations for your role as a department chair.

My reason for going through you rather than directly contacting teachers at our school is so that if teachers want to discuss with you their feelings about participating, they have an alternative to me in my role as the instructional coach.

If you are okay with forwarding my request for participants, I have pasted my request below for you to copy and paste into an email to send them.

I cannot share with you who agrees to participate as all participants will remain anonymous, but I do hope that once I complete this dissertation journey, I can share what I've learned from experienced teachers in gifted classes with others in our school and our district to provide additional ways to think about how we serve our gifted population.

If you have any questions, please let me know. We can schedule a time outside of our contract time so as not to interfere with the school day. If you have any concerns about my study, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix N: Post-Interview Follow-up Email

[Insert Participant's Name],

Thank you for participating in my study on teachers in gifted serving classrooms and how they make choices regarding the needs of gifted students. Your participation is much appreciated, and it has contributed to my understanding.

As I shared before, you have the option to review a summary of our interview and a transcription. I have attached a PDF copy of both. You will notice that in both versions your name and student names have been replaced with pseudonyms and that any references that identify your school or district have been removed.

You are not obligated to review either document, but as a participant, I do want you to have the option. You can review the documents and then contact me to make corrections, clarify or expand on an answer, share additional information, improve my understanding, or comment. As this study must be completed during this semester as part of my Ph.D. program requirements, please respond by [insert date] with any additional information or comments regarding the summary and/or transcript.

You are not required to reply or comment on either the summary or the transcript to still be applicable for the six $20 Amazon gift cards that will be drawn. That drawing will occur at a future date this semester, and all six winners will be notified at that time.

If you have any questions, please let me know. We can schedule a time outside of my contract time so as not to infer with the school day. If you have any concerns about our study, you may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah K. Conner, and she can also be contacted by phone [Redacted] or email DConner@coastal.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick G. Rabon

Appendix O: Member Checking Summary

01/06/2024 9:00 am Interview

- **Gifted education and brain development.**
  - Teacher with 29 years of experience defines giftedness as natural ease of learning and critical thinking, but notes that public education system does not account for changes in students' minds over time. Giftedness identification in elementary school may not correlate with giftedness in secondary school.
  - Teacher learned to work with gifted students through trial and error, reading, and personal experience.
- **The importance of experiential learning for gifted students.**
  - Teacher argues that technology has diminished empathy in students due to the lack of hands-on experiences.
  - Teacher highlights the lack of culturally enriching experiences for students, particularly in today's technology-driven world.
  - Teacher's teaching approach involves having students guide the classroom conversations, with the goal of scaffolding their learning and eventually having them work independently. Classroom is very student centered to allow a focus on conversation and collaborative meaning making.
- **Serving gifted students with emotional needs and work ethic issues.**
  - Teacher notes differences in scaffolding between CP and honors classes, which requires tailoring instruction to students' skill levels.
  - Teacher discusses the emotional needs of gifted students, including anxiety and learned helplessness, and how these impact their ability to take risks and embrace new learning.
  - Teacher highlights the challenge of pushing gifted students to a point of discomfort while avoiding the label of failure, which can lead to stress and emotional distress.
  - Teacher notes that a low work ethic prevents those with high intelligence from achieving academic success.
- **Exceptional students with advanced emotional intelligence.**
  - Teacher has had 15-20 students over the years who are "old souls" with advanced emotional and cognitive development, making them challenging but enriching to teach.
  - One such student stands out in the teacher's mind as particularly noteworthy due to their unique perspective and abilities.
  - A student with a voracious reading level and emotional control struggles with dating and family issues, and these issues manifested in the classroom.

- o Teacher recounts a moment when a student punched another student in the face after the first student made an offensive comment.
- o The speaker reflects on how the student's personal struggles outside of school, such as a difficult home life and cheating girlfriend, contributed to the outburst.
- o Teacher reflects on how past students influence current teaching methods, particularly in sensing emotions and empathy.
- **Student emotional struggles and teacher support.**
  - o Teacher shares a class discussion that led to students sharing personal experiences of of their fathers in relation to a class reading, leading to emotional discussion in class. Students opened up about their own experiences with father figures, creating a safe space for emotional expression.
  - o Teacher mentions a student who was gifted in multiple areas but lacked motivation and drive, with a challenging home life that impacted their academic performance.
  - o Teacher knows that some students may be dealing with personal issues that affect their academic performance, and is proactive in addressing these issues one-on-one.
  - o Teacher is empathetic towards students who are struggling, but she also has high expectations for them and encourages them to push themselves to overcome obstacles.
- **Advice given to researcher as a "new teacher" when working with a specific gifted student**
  - o Researcher shares a personal story about a student they had, seeking advice from the teacher. Researcher noticed a student, Jackson, was struggling in their AP Lang class due to weak writing and vocabulary, but had a strong brain and self-confidence issues. Research recounts how he connected with Jackson by understanding his passion for basketball and using it to teach him how to make arguments and use evidence in an academic setting.
  - o Teacher advises new teachers to "meet students where they are" and get to know them to create a comfortable classroom environment.
  - o Teacher highlights the importance of self-awareness in gifted students, citing their ability to seek out challenges despite potential difficulties.
- **Giftedness and education with a teacher and expert.**
  - o Teacher highlights the importance of recognizing and nurturing gifted students' unique strengths and abilities, including emotional intelligence and advanced cognitive abilities, which are often overlooked in traditional education.
  - o Teacher discusses the emotional needs of gifted students, including anxiety and learned helplessness, and the importance of meeting them where they are.
  - o Teacher also mentions the need to adapt to students' emotional issues and the limitations of relying solely on testing grades to measure giftedness.

- o Teacher believes the public education system does a poor job of handling gifted students, as there are many different types of giftedness and it's impossible to measure them all.