HOW TEACHERS CREATE TALENT DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS FOR STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS IN GIFTED PROGRAMS: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

by

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of
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

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How Teachers Create Talent Development Contexts for Students from Historically Underrepresented Populations in Gifted Programs: A Multiple-Case Study

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Sean, and my daughter, Madelyn. You are the reason I am here today and you inspire me to be the best version of myself that I can be. I love you both to the moon and back!
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<tr>
<td>CES</td>
<td>Centennial Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>CASEL</td>
<td>Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRP</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</td>
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<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<td>ELs</td>
<td>English Learners</td>
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<td>HSD</td>
<td>Hill School District</td>
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<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>K-W-L</td>
<td>Know – Want to Know – Want to Learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOS</td>
<td>Levels of Service</td>
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<td>NAGC</td>
<td>National Association for Gifted Children</td>
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<td>OCR</td>
<td>Office for Civil Rights</td>
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<td>PBL</td>
<td>Project-Based Learning</td>
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<td>RDCI</td>
<td>Relative Difference in Composition Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEM</td>
<td>Schoolwide Enrichment Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>Socioemotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>USDOE</td>
<td>United States Department of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>U-STS~PLUS</td>
<td>Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Under-Represented Students</td>
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<td>WES</td>
<td>Wendell Elementary School</td>
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Abstract

HOW TEACHERS CREATE TALENT DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS FOR STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS IN GIFTED PROGRAMS: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

Holly D. Glaser, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2020

Dissertation Director: Dr. Nancy Holincheck

The issue of equitable representation of students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds in gifted programs has challenged scholars and practitioners alike for decades (e.g., Feiring et al., 1997; Ricciardi et al., 2020; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). One effort to address this issue that has yielded promising results is the introduction of talent development programs as either replacements for, or gateway experiences to, traditional gifted programs (e.g., see Coleman, 2016; Horn, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study was to examine how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from populations historically underrepresented in gifted programs. Interviews and observations of two exemplar second grade teachers implementing a talent development model were conducted to explore the variety of ways in which teachers promoted the development of talent. Each teacher was considered a single case and data from their interviews and
observations were analyzed individually through two single case analyses, as well as across cases through a cross-case synthesis. Findings from the cross-case synthesis yielded four factors key to developing classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs: (a) collaborative relations of power, (b) impact of students’ culture, language, and experiences on instruction, (c) identity negotiation and construction, and (d) attending to the whole child. Elaborating on Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development, a new framework for creating classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs is presented. Implications for teacher preparation programs, schools and school districts, teachers, and future research are discussed.
Chapter One

The issue of equitable representation of students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds in gifted programs has challenged scholars and practitioners alike for decades (e.g., Feiring et al., 1997; Grantham, 2012; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Ricciardi et al., 2020; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). Efforts to address underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, English Learners (ELs), and students from poverty have led to modifications to gifted identification procedures (e.g., see Briggs et al., 2008; Lakin, 2016; Mun et al., 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Peters & Gentry, 2012), as well as the development of more inclusive gifted program models (e.g., see Harradine et al., 2014; Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius & Steenbergen-Hu, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018). While these efforts have made some headway in addressing underrepresentation, the most recent data available from the United States Department of Education’s (USDOE) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) show that there is still a long way to go in the quest for achieving equity.

In the period between 2000 and 2014, the levels of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted programs, as calculated by Ford’s (2014) Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI), only decreased by 15.5 and 13.6 percentage points, respectively, while underrepresentation of Native American students actually increased by 5.7 percentage points (USDOE, 2000, 2014a, 2014b). Data on
underrepresentation of ELs during a similar period is unavailable; however, reports from just two years apart in 2012 and 2014 indicate that levels of underrepresentation, like those of Native American students, also increased in that period – by a somewhat larger margin of 31.7 percentage points (USDOE, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2014b). Enrollment of students from poverty in gifted programs is not reported by the USDOE, but data collected by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Virginia suggest that underrepresentation of students from poverty in gifted programs may exceed that of both Black and Hispanic students (Callahan et al., 2013). Intersectional data analyzed by Siegle (2016) demonstrates that students from multiple underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., an English Learner who is Hispanic and living in poverty) have a much higher probability of being underidentified – by an average of 11 percentage points – than their fourth grade peers from non-underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., an English-proficient White student not living in poverty). A recent study found that White, Asian, and Hispanic students living in poverty were less likely to be identified for gifted programs than their peers (Ricciardi et al., 2020). These data suggest that underrepresentation is exacerbated when viewed through an intersectional lens, and that modifications to existing identification procedures and programs must take this into account if they are intended to effectively address this complex issue.

Factors Contributing to Underrepresentation in Gifted Programs

Underrepresentation in gifted programs has been attributed to multiple factors, including the ways in which giftedness has been conceptualized and how students are identified to receive gifted services.
Conceptions of Giftedness

Subotnik et al. (2017) classify historical and current conceptualizations of giftedness into three types of models: unidimensional, multidimensional, and systems or talent development. In unidimensional giftedness models, intelligence and giftedness are virtually synonymous terms, and giftedness can be measured through psychometric intelligence testing (e.g., Terman and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test). Multidimensional giftedness models incorporate additional factors like creativity and motivation to the idea of giftedness as intelligence, but view them as factors independent of one another, rather than factors operating within a complex system (e.g., Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences). Systems models of giftedness and talent development build on multidimensional giftedness models by exploring interactions between factors through an examination of environment or context (e.g., Barab & Plucker, 2002).

Identification Procedures

Unfortunately, while theoretical conceptions of giftedness have evolved, changes to identification processes for gifted programs, which still rely primarily on unidimensional giftedness models, have not followed suit (Subotnik et al., 2017). Such identification procedures heavily weight students’ scores on ability tests, despite research suggesting that such tests may be culturally and/or linguistically biased (e.g., see Lakin & Lohman, 2011; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Peters & Gentry, 2012).

The use of ability test scores as a primary source of evidence in gifted program identification, however, is only one way in which identification procedures have
contributed to underrepresentation in gifted programs. In many school districts, students do not even have the opportunity to be tested without being referred for gifted services, which originates most often with the teacher (McBee, 2006). Since the nomination stage is often the first stage in the screening process (McBee et al., 2016), teachers’ conceptions of giftedness and what that looks like in underrepresented student populations (Briggs et al., 2008; Brulles et al., 2011; Moon & Brighton, 2008) have a major impact on whether or not they choose to refer students. Once referred, the evidence provided and how it is used may be misconstrued by screeners (Castellano, 2002), creating an additional barrier for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Efforts to Address Underrepresentation**

The lack of equitable access to gifted education has led researchers and school advocates to implement identification practices designed to be more inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds as well as consider how these procedures align with evolving conceptions of giftedness (Hodges et al., 2018).

**Modifying Identification Practices**

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) recommends that multiple sources of evidence are utilized in the gifted program screening process, including the employment of varied assessment types (e.g., aptitude and achievement tests, performance assessments, and rating scales) that have been validated for use with culturally and linguistically diverse students (NAGC, 2011). Research suggests that inclusion of universal screening (the testing of all students at a particular grade level within a school district), nonverbal ability testing, domain-specific performance
indicators (rather than relying on generalized measures of overall academic performance), local or group-norming of ability test scores, parental input, student observations, and behavioral checklists are promising identification practices to address underrepresentation (Briggs et al., 2008; Lakin, 2016; Mun et al., 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Peters & Gentry, 2012; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). Despite these research-supported recommendations, identification data continues to reflect issues with equitable representation. As expressed by Callahan (2005), it seems clear that no “single, silver bullet solution” (p. 99) currently exists to address this complex challenge within gifted education.

**Aligning Identification with Programs**

As identification procedures and conceptions of giftedness have evolved, a concurrent challenge of ensuring alignment between conceptions, procedures, and programs has arisen (Peters et al., 2013; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). For example, students who perform well on the nonverbal section of an ability test (but not as well on the verbal sections) and are subsequently identified for a gifted program may not be successful in that program if it relies primarily on verbal strengths (Hodges et al., 2018). In this case, a tension exists between how giftedness is conceptualized from an identification standpoint and how it is conceptualized from a program design perspective. To address this, several universities and school districts have attempted to develop more inclusive gifted program models that subscribe to an expanded conception of giftedness both inside and outside of the classroom (e.g., Harradine et al., 2014; Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius & Steenbergen-Hu, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018). Many common
features of these programs include selection of culturally and/or linguistically appropriate curricula and instructional strategies, providing access to advanced curriculum, extending learning time beyond the regular school day, establishing strong family-school connections and advocacy support networks, continually evaluating programs, and paying special attention to social, psychological, and/or emotional development of students (Briggs et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2005; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; Plucker et al., 2017). Identification procedures for these programs tend to align with one another around a common conception of giftedness and/or gifted potential.

Unfortunately, program models of this nature do not abound in schools, or are offered as supplements or “front-loading” mechanisms to more traditional programs (Briggs et al., 2008). Front-loading, as defined by Briggs et al. (2008) is “the process of preparing students for advanced content and creative and critical thinking prior to the formal identification process or before advanced-level courses are offered” (p. 137). Some, however, may consider this term to be a loaded one, bringing to mind a fiscal transaction akin to Freire’s (2000) “banking model” in which content and skills are deposited into students so that they might be “rich” enough to participate fully in traditional gifted programs at a later date. This may be why the term “talent development” seems to be preferred by many scholars in gifted education and educational psychology.

Nurturing Students’ Gifted Potential Through Talent Development

Broadly, talent development might simply be defined as the recognition and development of students’ gifted potential or talents through systematic intervention.
Consensus on one definition of the term has not been reached in the field, despite the existence of a line of scholarship on talent development reaching back over twenty years (NAGC, 2015a). For some, the key component of talent development lies in its orientation toward identifying talent as a latent trait that might be nurtured in any student through matching talents to experiences and services within and outside of the school day (Treffinger & Feldhusen, 1996). In this model, “talents arise from many social, cultural, or circumstantial…factors outside the person’s internal, testable, cognitive abilities” (p. 185) – an argument that the context in which talents are developed and displayed matters. Renzulli’s Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM; as described in Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010), on the other hand, focuses on developing gifted and creative behaviors, rather than gifted and creative abilities, through flexible identification and programming. In both approaches, provision of appropriate learning environments is important to students’ development of talented abilities or behaviors (Barab & Plucker, 2002) and the ultimate goal of such models is to nurture students who will go on to become ethical, humane, democratic leaders (Renzulli, 2012; Treffinger, 1998).

While both talent development models mentioned above, along with several others (e.g., see Dai, 2017; Jarvin & Subotnik, 2015), situate the locus of talent development within the individual learner, other models (e.g., Barab & Plucker, 2002) emphasize “talent development as a transactional process that involves active transformation of individual, environment, and the sociocultural world” (p. 174). Talent or talented behaviors do not reside within the individual, but are distributed instead across how we understand a person-in-situation – and our understanding of what talent looks
like is impacted by what our sociocultural norms perceive to be talented. In this model, talent development “is not concerned with supporting the learner’s acquisition of knowledge, but instead focuses on establishing functional transactions through which individuals increase their potential to effectively participate in subsequent transactions” (p. 175). In other words, the emphasis in this notion of talent development is on supporting creation of “smart contexts” rather than “smart individuals” and, in particular, on individual-environment and student-owned interactions that both build meaningful connections to students and their lives and provide them with the intellectual and social capital necessary to participate successfully in gifted programs.

**Talent Development as a Replacement for Gifted Programs**

Program models that promote talent development may be considered as originating within one of two camps: talent development as a replacement for gifted programs, and talent development as a precursor or gateway to gifted programs. Renzulli’s SEM (Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010) is one example of the former; in his description of the model, he explains that his “ultimate goal is the development of a total school enrichment program that benefits all students and concentrates on making schools places for talent development for all young people” (p. 143). The SEM, along with the Enrichment Triad Model (embedded within the SEM), were meant to be the gifted program model within schools, rather than something existing as a supplement. Treffinger’s Levels of Service (LOS) approach (1998) as a talent development model was also intended to replace more traditional gifted programming models in which “some sort of accelerated or enriched ‘program’ was the norm” (para. 10). In this model, the first
level of service (Level 1) is accessible to all students, and the focus of the program is to offer progressively more services, ranging from Level 1 to Level 4, as student strengths, talents, and interests are recognized. In both the SEM and the LOS approaches, the focus is not on “who’s in and who’s out” but rather on the match between services and students’ demonstrated abilities or gifted behaviors. While both of these models allow for conceptions of giftedness as something that is mutable, rather than static, they rely heavily on exhibited ability or behaviors, whether on traditional intelligence assessments or through more nontraditional means, such as portfolios or sustained student interests. Further, while the design of such programs might be more inclusive of historically underrepresented students, neither was expressly (or solely) intended to address the issue of underrepresentation.

**Talent Development as Gateway Experiences to Gifted Programs**

Talent development models that fall in the other camp, as precursors or gateways to gifted programs, focus instead on students’ gifted potential and the capacity for that potential to be developed under a specific set of conditions within the learning environment. This type of talent development is viewed as a bridge for underrepresented students to gain access to more traditional gifted programming (e.g., Siegle et al., 2016).

One example of a program model that incorporates talent development in this manner is Project Excite, a collaboration between Northwestern University and several school districts in Illinois. Project Excite is a program that aims to increase the representation of Black and Hispanic students in accelerated and advanced high school math and science courses by providing academic and socio-emotional support services
outside of the school day (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Olszewski-Kubilius & Steenburgen-Hu, 2017).

Another model, proposed by Siegle et al. (2016), “pre-identifies” students for a preparation program that “provides learning experiences for talents to emerge…As a result of these activities, talents and abilities can be recognized during the identification process” (p. 116). The model does not target certain student populations specifically; rather, it includes in its pre-identification any student who might not have had the opportunities or experiences that would allow their talents to be recognized.

A third talent development model, Young Scholars (Horn, 2015), was developed by a large suburban school district as a means to address the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students, ELs, students from poverty, and students with disabilities in their gifted programs. The goals of the model are twofold: identify students who may not be identified through traditional gifted screening procedures, and develop potential in students in order to prepare them for challenging content and courses in K-12 education and beyond.

A fourth program, Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Under-Represented Students (U-STARS~PLUS), also aims to develop talent by providing K-3 students access to high-quality science curriculum during the school day for the purposes of recognizing and nurturing potential in historically underrepresented student populations (Coleman, 2016). The difference between this model and the previous three is that it is offered as a supplement to gifted
programs, but not explicitly as a “front-loading” mechanism, or preparation tool, for future participation in gifted or advanced course programming.

**The Need for Further Research**

In practice, gifted program models that emphasize talent development show promise in increasing equitable educational opportunity for all students, primarily due to their focus on the development of latent, unactualized potential (or capacity to participate in functional transactions, per Barab and Plucker, 2002) rather than exhibition of manifested abilities or achievement (Hodges et al., 2018). Further, results from these programs demonstrate their capacity to increase representation of underrepresented student populations in gifted programs (Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius & Steenburgen-Hu, 2017). However, it remains unclear how individual classroom teachers within schools that have successfully adopted a talent development model create contexts for developing the talents of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. Each of the programs described have specific guidelines around how, when, and what teachers should do to provide the optimal learning conditions for developing talent in students from underrepresented populations. The programs themselves seem promising - and show seemingly promising results - but are often part of a broader initiative within a school, school district, or university. As a teacher within a singular classroom, is it possible to create a context for talent development absent an initiative such as the ones described?

The purpose of this study was to examine what was happening in classrooms that have “successfully” implemented a talent development model. Classroom observations
and teacher interviews were used to develop an understanding of how teachers created classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. It is hoped that this multiple-case study will contribute to helping researchers, district personnel, and other teachers conceptualize ways in which teachers can establish a talent development context in their own classrooms.
Chapter Two

The latent research on talent development primarily focuses on program descriptions and program evaluations in which specific programs are described (e.g., U-STARs-PLUS, Coleman, 2016 or Young Scholars, Horn, 2015). A broad review of this literature indicates that the program’s design leads to a variety of curriculum used, students targeted, timing (offered during or after school, or on Saturdays), location (university or school setting), and teacher professional learning involved (e.g., Coleman, 2016; Horn, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius & Steenburgen-Hu, 2017). The goals of the existing studies on talent development largely revolve around analyzing the program’s effectiveness or impact. What is lacking in the literature is a study that explicitly uses one talent development program or model as a vehicle for understanding how teachers successfully create a context for talent development in their classrooms – which is where the current study fits in.

Barab and Plucker’s (2002) Theory of Talent Development

In order to design a study that transcends the bounds of a specific talent development program, a more generalized and universally applicable theory of talent development must be applied. Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development was selected for this study because of its central focus on the importance of context in recognition and development of talent. According to this theory, talent emerges “from the
dynamic transaction among the individual, the physical environment, and the sociocultural context” (p. 174). In other words, talent does not reside within the individual - it is not a trait that is either latent or manifest - but rather arises from the interaction of the student working within a particular learning environment that both explicitly and implicitly subscribes to certain sociocultural norms. Basically, this means that a student may appear talented in one setting, but not in another. Because the sociocultural context can never be removed from a setting (in this case, the classroom), it must be taken into account when attempting to understand how some actions appear talented and some do not.

The importance of examining the sociocultural context in schooling has its roots in sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory, according to Vygotsky, is “based on the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can best be understood when investigated in their historical development” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). Rather than being a function of either internal or external factors, Vygotsky believed development evolved from a combination of the two: “as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192, emphasis in original). In other words, development is a transactional process, mediated by the social and cultural systems embedded within the environment in which an individual operates. Further, while the individual’s development is influenced by the environment (which, in turn, is embedded within a particular sociocultural context), the environment and the other individuals within it are influenced by the individual, thereby resulting in changes in
both: “The dialectical approach, while admitting the influence of nature on man, asserts that man, in turn, affects nature and creates through his changes in nature new natural conditions for his existence” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 60). It is with this assumption - that individual and environment might come to new understandings through their interaction - that the theory of talent development from Barab and Plucker (2002) is posited.

While some of the basic tenets of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development were presented in the introduction, a more detailed explanation is now warranted. Before entering this discussion, however, it is important to outline the two ideas that differentiate their theory from other theories of talent development: (a) Talent is neither a trait, nor can it be possessed, and (b) The presence of talent is always embedded within context. According to Barab and Plucker (2002), some theorists describe talent and ability as traits that can be “possessed” and which “reside...in the head of the learner” (p. 166). In this way of thinking, “talent” and “ability” are nouns - entities that an individual has or does not have, regardless of whether they have been actualized. In contrast, Barab and Plucker (2002) use “talent” and “ability” as adjectives, “that may (or may not) be used to describe functional transactions among person-in-situation” (p. 166; similar to Renzulli, 2012). Talent, or talented interactions, emerge within a context that accounts for “sociocultural structures and relations” (Barab & Plucker, 2002, p. 174). As Barab and Plucker (2002) claim, other talent development theories either do not account for context, or “discuss the role of the environment or context, yet [do not]...directly articulate processes for how these interactions occur” (p. 166). For the latter, the individual remains the unit of analysis, while in Barab and Plucker’s (2002)
theory the focus is on the person-in-situation. In this study, the person in person-in-situation is the student; however, it is the teacher who, in large part, creates the situation, or context. With this in mind, the teacher’s actions and words are the objects under review.

The theory of talent development proposed by Barab and Plucker (2002) is grounded in five lines of thinking: ecological psychology, situated cognition, distributed cognition, activity theory, and legitimate peripheral participation. “Taken as a whole, these five perspectives suggest that ability does not exist as a collection of symbols or even relations within the head of an individual, but rather must be understood as a function of a person’s thinking in a situation” (Barab & Plucker, 2002, p. 173). It is through the “dynamic transaction among the individual, the physical environment, and the sociocultural context” (p. 174) that talent emerges - and through which our evolving conception of talent continues to develop. Borrowing from Gibson’s (1979/1986; as cited in Barab & Plucker, 2002) concepts of affordances and effectivities in ecological psychology, Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development claims that our view of a student’s abilities (effectivities) must take into account the affordances, or opportunities, provided to the student to demonstrate said abilities. Further, the transformation of a student’s ability to engage in talented interactions is impacted by their goals or motives (intention), as well as their attention to the “immediate situational (material and social) processes and structures” (p. 174) within the environment (Barab & Plucker, 2002).
Figure 1.


Applying Barab and Plucker’s (2002) Theory of Talent Development to Classrooms

From a practical standpoint, Plucker and Barab (2005) recognize that this theory may be difficult to apply to the lived experiences of teachers. As they alluded, application of the theory to the study of classrooms may require some additional discussion around how each of these interactions (individual-environment, environment-sociocultural context, sociocultural context-individual) can be broken down, particularly as they relate
to what is under a teacher’s purview. Figure 1 attempts to demonstrate this by combining the visual representation of interactions occurring within a talent development classroom (Barab & Plucker, 2002) with some possible constituent elements that might be useful lenses through which to view and describe what is happening in a classroom that has shown success historically in developing the talent of students from underrepresented populations. More specifically, the constituent elements outlined here are a selection of elements teachers can enact, and thus important to identify as potentially key factors in creating a classroom context where talent development can flourish.

**Interactions within Barab and Plucker’s (2002) Theory of Talent Development**

As represented in Figure 1, talent emerges as interactions between the individual, environment, and sociocultural context occur. While the teacher cannot fundamentally change the individual, or certain aspects of the environmental or sociocultural context, theoretically they can influence components of each.

**Impact of the Individual on Talent Development**

Although Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development may seem to focus most on how the context impacts a student’s capacity to engage in talented interactions, they explicitly state that they “are not discounting the contribution of individuals to the production of talented interactions” (p. 174). Because they view a person-in-situation as an integrated system, an individual’s perception of themselves may change based on the situation in which the student has been placed. For example, a student who has never experienced difficulty in completing assignments may fail to develop a growth mindset, leading to potential struggles and development of negative
attributions (e.g., I am a failure) when faced with a particularly challenging task. Or a student may fail to take advantage of the opportunities (or affordances) offered within a particular environment due to a lack of self-knowledge (Lo et al., 2019). Both of these examples demonstrate areas in which teachers might mentor students, thereby impacting the talent development process. Through explicit teaching of growth mindset and goal-setting, teachers may impact an individual’s capacity to engage in the person-in-situation integrated system.

**Impact of the Environment on Talent Development**

In Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development, “environment” seems to mean the physical environment, as described in the caption of the visual representation of their model. Yet in the body of the article outlining the theory, as well as the subsequent chapter discussing it from a practical standpoint (Plucker & Barab, 2005), no clear instruction is provided as to whether environment might encompass elements other than the physical. Given the research on how the affective environment impacts student performance, however, the decision was made to include that element, along with the physical, to describe the environment. Additionally, learning activities was added to the environment aspect because the selection of learning activities, along with the physical, may be something that is heavily influenced by school or district requirements. Further, while an argument for inclusion of learning activities as an influence on sociocultural context could be made, it is more likely that selection of learning activities is influenced by sociocultural context more so than it is an influence on sociocultural context. The inclusion of these three elements - physical, affective, and
learning activities - closely resembles Hertzog’s (2017) recommendation that “the physical space, content, family involvement, and most important, the affective climate in the classroom” (p. 222) should be considered when attempting a classroom “makeover” for talent development.

**Physical environment.** Hertzog (2017) cited Maxwell and Chmielewski (2008) in her argument that the physical design of a classroom is important for talent development: “They reported that when the environment is generic (containing little information about those who use the setting), students can feel that they are a low priority for the teacher” (p. 223). In their experimental study, the researchers found that students in classrooms in which the teachers had not personalized the design to their students demonstrated lower self-esteem than their peers in classrooms with personalized designs. Examples of personalization included student-created or -designed work, displays at the eye-level of students, and materials to which students felt directly connected. Additional recommendations from Hertzog (2017) on how to design a physical space conducive to talent development were to document student engagement by displaying photographs of them working in the classroom, as well as to incorporate elements, such as plants, that create a pleasing, aesthetic environment.

**Affective environment.** Much has been written about the many and varied socioemotional needs of gifted students, and research in this area has shown that attendance to students’ socioemotional needs is of paramount importance to their success (Neihart et al., 2016). It stands to reason, then, that socioemotional needs of students in a talent development classroom would be equally important, as it is within a safe and
emotionally-supportive environment that students can flourish best. Relationships between teachers and students can have a huge impact on how students choose to participate in the classroom. Teacher language that establishes high expectations, while also maintaining a respectful dialogue with students, has been shown to have a positive effect on the development of teacher-student relationships and on increasing student engagement (Denton, 2015). In the words of Rita Pierson (2013), “Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.”

**Learning activities.** A third element contributing to the environment aspect of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development is the nature of the learning activities offered in the classroom. Teachers who provide students with higher-level thinking activities and real-world connections and problems to solve are actually creating affordances through which students have the opportunity to display talented behaviors or effectivities (Plucker & Barab, 2005). In their view, “anyone can be talented, yet one needs the opportunity to engage in talented transactions to realize their giftedness” (p. 207). Unfortunately, many classrooms may only offer students access to learning activities that engage lower-level cognitive skills (Jackson, 2011, as cited in Hertzog, 2017) such as rote memorization, identification, and description (i.e., the lower levels of Bloom’s taxonomy) - thinking skills that, when displayed, do not denote “talent.” If, in fact, “classrooms are not the location for talent development but rather the context for a specific cultural milieu through which students develop understandings of what constitutes a talented interaction” (Plucker & Barab, 2005), the message being sent in classrooms where only lower-level thinking skills are rehearsed and/or valued is that
talent looks like knowing the right answer or being good at school. Further, classrooms in which the learning activities do not reflect or engage the strengths of the diverse backgrounds of its students automatically discount the unique experiences and talents they bring to the classroom.

One strengths-based educational approach used in increasing frequency throughout the last two decades has been the recognition and incorporation of students’ funds of knowledge in classrooms and school communities (Amanti, 2005; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Hensley, 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Funds of knowledge, as defined by Moll et al. (1992), are “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Central to the funds of knowledge perspective is that culture cannot be essentialized in such a way that teachers can simply be taught specific cultural norms to bridge a “discontinuity or mismatch gap” (Gonzalez et al., 2001, p. 116); instead, they must “focus…on the variability of practices, on how people ‘live culturally’…within their concrete social circumstances” (Moll, 2009, p. 455). This funds of knowledge perspective, in which students’ “ample cultural and cognitive resources” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134) are viewed as potential sources of educational capital, combats deficit paradigms by honoring the knowledge and experiences students bring to school and using them as resources for their learning (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Moll, 2009).

Classrooms that utilize the funds of knowledge approach are staffed with teachers who can both identify and incorporate their students’ funds of knowledge into the learning environment. Identification of these funds of knowledge might be conducted in
multiple ways: through home visits, interviews with parents or students, student interest surveys, attending community events, and actively engaging students in conversations and activities that allow them to discuss their hobbies, talents, and home lives (Hensley, 2005; Lindahl, 2015; Stout, 2011). After identifying the funds of knowledge their students bring to the classroom, teachers can use “students’ knowledge and prior experiences as a scaffold for new learning” (Amanti, 2005, p. 135) by incorporating them into lesson and unit plans through real-world problem application, guest speakers, and student choice projects. The practice of utilizing students’ funds of knowledge in classrooms represents a shift in teachers’ focus from students’ deficits to students’ strengths.

The U-STARs~PLUS talent development model (Coleman, 2016) demonstrates that shifting teacher thinking from focusing on student deficits to focusing on student strengths enables teachers to more readily recognize gifted behaviors in students from historically underrepresented populations. Fundamental to this shift is the intentional move from “promot[ing] interventions that focus on minimizing risk and remediating deficits” to “focusing on maximizing children’s potential by creating environments that respond to their strengths” (para. 16), what Coleman described as an “at-potential,” versus “at-risk,” mindset. Using the Teacher’s Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS), teachers within the U-STARs~PLUS talent development model systematically and intentionally document evidence of gifted behaviors in students from underrepresented backgrounds. Observations are conducted while students are exposed to engaging and rigorous science curriculum, allowing teachers opportunities to see students
in potentially new and different learning environments. This is a similar approach to the Young Scholars Model (Horn, 2015), in which all students receive access to critical and creative thinking lessons that allow teachers to observe students’ exhibition of gifted behaviors while students interact with rigorous content.

**Impact of the Sociocultural Context on Talent Development**

The third aspect of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development is the sociocultural context, which describes the implicit and explicit ways in which different behaviors are identified as talented or not, based on the values inherent in a particular sociocultural tradition. Barab and Plucker (2002) state that “an important part of exhibiting talented behavior involves understanding how to act in a manner that is consistent with those ways that have been socioculturally endorsed…” (p. 174). This statement implies that teachers have some control over whether behaviors are seen as talented or not based on the standards they set, which are grounded within a particular set of sociocultural norms. With approximately 80% of the teacher workforce comprised of White, non-Hispanic educators in 2015-16 (Taie & Goldring, 2017), however, the question of “cultural disequilibrium” comes into play (Bergeron, 2008, p. 5) when considering how teachers might view talents in students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Barab and Plucker (2002) do not provide much guidance around how teachers might influence sociocultural context. However, because the focus of this study is to understand how teachers can create contexts for developing talent of students historically underrepresented in gifted programs - many of whom are from culturally diverse student populations (Ford, 2014; Ricciardi et al., 2020), culturally responsive
pedagogy (CRP) as a teacher-enacted element within the sociocultural context has been added as an integral component of the model.

Culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy, and its associated terms (e.g., culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, culturally responsive instruction), originated as a theoretical framework with Ladson-Billings’ seminal article (1995), in which she outlined three central tenets: “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 483). Teachers using culturally responsive pedagogy were distinguishable by their conceptions of self
and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge in the classroom (see Figure 2). In the two decades since Ladson-Billings’ work was published, many scholars have continued to further refine the meaning of culturally responsive teachers (notably, Gay, 2018). In their review of the literature, Carter and Darling-Hammond (2016) outlined five dimensions of culturally responsive teaching: “(a) cultural competence, (b) an ethic of deep care, (c) awareness of knowledge as socially constructed, (d) a sense of efficacy, and (e) development of sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 606). When teachers adopt culturally responsive pedagogy, they not only begin to shift their instructional practices but also their thinking around students and their capacity for learning. In doing so, their beliefs about students also experience a change – from a focus on student deficits to a focus on student strengths (Santamaria, 2009). Students report greater interest in school and feelings of belonging when teachers use real-life examples, connect with previous knowledge, and establish a climate of respect (Byrd, 2016).

In terms of establishing a context for talent development in the classroom, the use of culturally responsive pedagogy as an element of the sociocultural context addresses Plucker and Barab’s (2005) emphasis on “providing environments in which [students] can thrive academically” (p. 204) as a means for reconceptualizing talent development. If exhibiting talented behavior is in large part attributable to understanding how a particular sociocultural context recognizes talent (Barab & Plucker, 2002), the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in a classroom holds the power to change how both teachers and students view talent and what constitutes talented behaviors through their interactions with one another, the environment, and the evolving sociocultural context. To reiterate
Vygotsky from earlier: “The dialectical approach, while admitting the influence of nature on man, asserts that man, in turn, affects nature and creates through his changes in nature new natural conditions for his existence.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 60). In this case, “nature” might be interpreted as the interaction of the student and teacher (collectively, the “man”) with the environment and the sociocultural context. It is through the interactions of all three (man/teacher/student, nature/environment, and nature/sociocultural context) that “new natural conditions” (or, new ways of viewing what constitutes a talented interaction) evolve.

**Teachers’ conceptions of giftedness.** While the sociocultural context in which talent development emerges might be heavily influenced by teachers’ use of culturally responsive pedagogy, another element crucial to defining how talent is socioculturally endorsed is the teacher’s conception of what giftedness or talent looks like. Teachers who hold more dated beliefs about what talent is and how it is displayed may fail to identify talents in students despite their use of culturally responsive pedagogy. The interaction of these beliefs with the creation of the talent development context warrants a separate research question that focuses on teachers’ understanding of giftedness in students. Because the underlying beliefs teachers hold might be difficult to unearth, emphasis is placed on what they say they believe, as well as how they discuss their students and talent development.

Historically, giftedness, ability, and/or talents have been viewed through entity-based theoretical models (Barab & Plucker, 2005). These models promoted the idea that students either possess gifts/abilities/talents or they don’t, and it was possible to measure
such traits through psychometric assessments. Evolving conceptions of giftedness, such as Renzulli’s Three Ring Conception of Giftedness (see succinct description in Renzulli, 2012), view giftedness “as a developmental set of behaviors that can be applied to problem-solving situations” (Renzulli, 2012, p. 153), which develop over time and under certain circumstances. This view of giftedness as a set of latent abilities or behaviors allows space for talent development programs to work; however, they continue to place emphasis on the individual as the owner of talent and talented interactions, rather than acknowledge the role of the situation and the interaction of individual and situation in talent development. Because a student’s engagement in talented interactions provides the evidence of talent, the creation of a situation in which talent is defined beyond “schoolhouse giftedness,” defined by Renzulli (2012) as “students who are good lesson learners in traditional school achievement” (p. 151), can only be accomplished if teachers also subscribe to a different conception of giftedness. Teachers who define giftedness as a trait that is either possessed or not, or who perceive evidence of giftedness as high scores on assessments without attending to the work students produce in class, may inadvertently sabotage their own efforts to create contexts for talent development. Additionally, teachers who express doubts about how a student was selected for participation in a gifted or talent development program without consideration of how the environment and sociocultural context might be inhibiting or depressing the expression of talent (see examples in Barab & Plucker, 2002, p. 168) may still subconsciously subscribe to traditional conceptions of giftedness.
One example of this line of thinking expressed by some scholars in the field of gifted education in recent years has been how the pursuit of equity impacts the “excellence” of the gifted programs offered to students (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Because talent development models are promoted as one method for achieving greater equity in identification of students for gifted programs, it would be remiss not to comment on such models’ potential ramifications for the excellence of the gifted programs to which they are connected. As a term, “excellence” implies that a certain standard will be met; in this case, it means that a certain standard of educational experiences will be offered to students found eligible to participate in gifted programs. The danger of such a term as “excellence” is that it could be construed as “the way we currently do things” – or a simple reinforcement of the traditional gifted programs already in existence. In a recent article debating this topic, Peters and Engerrand (2016) state that “what is needed is a process that not only balances equity with excellence but also identifies students who are representative of the larger student population without drastically changing the nature of existing gifted program services” (p. 163, emphasis added). The implication here is that the existing gifted programs are providing excellent educational opportunities for all students, not just for a few. Moore et al. (2005), however, would question the assumption that gifted recruitment efforts, without subsequent examination of gifted services, are enough. They propose that research should also be conducted on the retention of students, specifically Black students, in gifted education programs in an effort to better understand how existing programs are, or are not, meeting the needs of every student identified for participation.
Peters and Engerrand (2016) go on to ask if identification systems modified with the goal of achieving greater equity in gifted programs would “still assure the necessary and appropriate challenge remain[s] present in gifted education services, or [if] such a system [would] simply admit some students who do not really need the program just for the sake of increasing diversity” (p. 166). The concern they express with this statement is whether equity is being pursued for the sake of increasing representation numbers or if it is pursued with the goal of ensuring equitable educational opportunities are offered to those students who actually need it. While they do not convey an issue with pursuing equity in gifted education, they do frame efforts to increase equity as existing in a virtual tug-of-war with efforts to maintain gifted programs’ excellence:

Any proactive effort toward greater equity in gifted education programs will involve some sacrifice. Because of the level of economic and educational inequality that exists in the United States, it seems likely that no gifted education program can have perfect equity or even greater equity without sacrificing some of the focus on excellence. (p. 168)

This framing of equity and excellence as almost diametrically opposed entities reinforces the status quo of keeping gifted programs as they are by paying lip service to equity efforts that increase representation without problematizing what is meant by the term “excellence.” Further, they promote an entity-based model of giftedness, as they view efforts to increase equity (i.e., talent development models) as threats to the quality of the instruction provided in more diverse gifted education programs. Teachers who engage in language such as this could be inhibiting the creation of a context for talent development
by sending the message that allowing “man” (student and teacher) to impact, and be impacted by, “nature” (environment and sociocultural context) in an ever-evolving negotiation and renegotiation of talent threatens the quality and content of the education provided in gifted programs.

**Understanding How Talent is Developed in Classrooms**

It is important to note that the elements impacting each of the three areas in Barab and Plucker’s (2002) talent development theory are by no means an exhaustive list of what might be under a teacher’s purview in a talent development classroom. However, the delineation of several of these elements provides a lens through which these classrooms, and specifically the words and actions of the teachers, might be described. Further, these elements are not outlined for the purposes of serving as an evaluation tool; rather, they provide a common language for describing the findings in terms of concepts and strategies that should be familiar to all teachers while also leaving the door open for additional ideas to emerge.

As described in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to identify concrete actions teachers can take in order to set up their own version of a talent development classroom. Because the beliefs teachers hold about what appears talented (and what does not) impacts their actions, an examination of teachers’ conceptions of giftedness in effective talent development contexts is also important. The ideal context for this study would allow access to classrooms with teachers implementing a talent development model with a proven track record of success in addressing underrepresentation for
multiple student populations. One such model is the Young Scholars Model (Horn, 2015).

**Young Scholars: A Promising Talent Development Model**

Young Scholars originated as a potential solution to a problem identified by a large, suburban school district – how to address underrepresentation in its gifted programs. In existence for over a decade, the model has become widely known in the field of gifted education for its dual purposes of identifying and nurturing gifted potential in students who may not be found eligible for gifted programs through traditional screening measures (Horn, 2015). Young Scholars has been adopted by school districts in at least three states (Minnesota, Maryland, and Virginia), and has been mentioned as a promising program in a variety of NAGC and scholarly publications (e.g., Mun et al., 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Preliminary research on Young Scholars suggests that its use in schools throughout the district has positively impacted the identification of underrepresented students for gifted programs, and provided greater access to rigorous learning opportunities designed to prepare students for increasingly challenging material (Horn, 2015). These promising macro-level results have led to several scholars in the field of gifted education expressing interest in further developing its research base in order to better understand its success with multiple underrepresented student populations (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

The Young Scholars Model is built around the three “As”: access, advocacy, and affirmation. Students are identified as Young Scholars as early as possible, beginning in kindergarten, and are thus entitled to increased access to advanced curriculum, well-
informed and educated advocates, and consistent reinforcement and affirmation of their gifted potential. In order to achieve these goals, schools that have adopted the Young Scholars Model commit to addressing underrepresentation of students in gifted programs through collaboration, leadership, and a shared commitment to the model’s goals.

Students are identified for Young Scholars through a multidimensional portfolio process that includes nonverbal ability test scores, the Gifted Behaviors Rating Scale, ongoing assessments, and exposure to model thinking lessons in critical and creative thinking. Teachers in schools who have adopted the Young Scholars Model participate in professional learning opportunities that increase their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching, instructional strategies to elicit higher-level thinking, and understanding of how students from culturally and linguistically diverse populations might demonstrate evidence of gifted potential. Scaffolded learning experiences are also a key element of the model and may include additional support within and beyond the classroom, such as through after school and summer school programs. Proactive communication with, and involvement of, parents is also considered important and encouraged through translated written communications, language-accessible workshops, and participation in field trips.

**Study Goals**

From a talent development standpoint, the Young Scholars Model emphasizes finding and nurturing students from underrepresented populations in order to prepare them for increasingly challenging material they will encounter in later elementary, middle, and high school (Horn, 2015). In fact, the context in which schools develop students’ potential is a key component of the model: “Schools can be powerful agents of
change when they provide a context in which students are able to develop potential that might not be realized without the opportunities that a school setting can provide” (Horn, 2015, p. 29). This focus on context provides a rich environment in which a study attempting to extrapolate universal conditions for talent development might take place. Broadly, the goal of this study is to utilize interviews with, and observations of, teachers implementing the Young Scholars Model as a vehicle through which to examine how educators “in the trenches” create contexts for talent development of, and conceptualize giftedness in, students from underrepresented populations in their classrooms.
Chapter Three

Underrepresentation of certain student populations in gifted programs has been a serious challenge the field of gifted education has attempted to address for decades (Ford, 2014; Ricciardi et al., 2020). One idea that has yielded promising results is the introduction of talent development programs as either replacements for, or gateway experiences to, traditional gifted programs (e.g., see Coleman, 2016; Horn, 2015). Numerous talent development approaches exist, however, and research on these approaches has focused primarily on outcomes achieved when schools or school districts follow a specific set of guidelines and practices written into the program design itself. Broader theories of talent development have been proposed (e.g., Barab & Plucker, 2002; Dai, 2017; Gagne, 2015; Lo et al., 2019; Siegle et al., 2016), but there is no research on how or if these can be applied to all general education classrooms. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how teachers create a context for talent development, and if how they create that context can be better understood through Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development. A multiple case study approach was selected as the design to explore how teachers create these contexts and entailed using interviews and classroom observations. From these data, collected in the form of individual cases, an examination of the variety of ways in which teachers can promote
talent development was explored. In particular, this embedded, exploratory multiple-case study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs?
2. How do teachers implementing a talent development model understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs?

**Research Design**

This qualitative study was focused on how exemplar teachers create a context for talent development in their classrooms through their actions (research question #1) and stated beliefs (research question #2). Because of the complexity involved in examining these research questions, a case study method was selected for the research design. According to Yin (2018), “a case study...investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). Thus, the utility of a case study design for this study lay in its situation within a real-world context (actual classrooms) that cannot be divorced from the phenomenon (creating talent development contexts).

In order to better understand how talent is developed in students in a general sense, there is a need to take a closer look at what is happening across multiple classrooms implementing a talent development model described in the literature as having a proven track record of success – the Young Scholars Model (Horn, 2015). In this study, the “case” was defined as a teacher who was “successfully” implementing a
talent development program within their classroom at the time of this study, situated within the “context” of a specific school (see Figure 3). “Successful” implementation was defined as demonstrating positive outcomes in terms of developing talent of students from underrepresented populations, as determined by the school’s principal. Embedded within these cases were two separate units of analysis, each addressing a separate research question: a teacher’s actions (research question #1) and a teacher’s stated beliefs (research question #2). Data collected from these classrooms enabled analysis both within and across teachers to determine salient actions and beliefs of “successful” talent development classroom teachers. Given the necessity of looking both within and across individual cases in which there is more than one unit of analysis, an embedded, multiple case-study design was used for this study.

Figure 3.

Embedded, multiple-case study research design. Adapted from Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.) by R. K. Yin, 2018, p. 48.
Yin (2018) defines an embedded, multiple-case design as the “selection of two or more cases that are believed to be literal replications...contain[ing] embedded subunits” (pp. 59-60). In this study, the replication was implied in the fact that both teachers (the “cases”) were selected because of their “success” in implementing a specific talent development program (the Young Scholars Model). However, the logic for inclusion of multiple cases, rather than a single case, was to attempt to understand how teachers might develop contexts for talent development in a variety of ways, even within a prescribed talent development model (in this case, the Young Scholars Model). The multiple-case design allows for variation between cases, as both an individual case analysis, as well as a cross-case synthesis, was conducted (see Figure 4). Additionally, because the focus of this qualitative study was on looking at a few cases deeply rather than on many cases broadly, only two teachers (“cases”) were chosen for participation.

**Setting**

The present study took place in two second grade general education classrooms, each within a separate elementary school located in the same school district and designated by the district’s gifted program coordinator as a “high-implementer” of the Young Scholars Model based on the district’s own evaluation tool. An elementary school was the ideal context for this study considering that talent development programs, particularly gateway models such as Young Scholars, promote early identification and services for underrepresented students with the aim of preparing them for more traditional gifted programs, the identification for which can begin as early as the primary grades (Callahan et al., 2013).
Figure 4.

Research design map. Adapted from Qualitative research design: An interactive approach (3rd ed) by J. A. Maxwell, 2013, p. 9.

School District

Hill School District (HSD; a pseudonym) is a large, suburban school district in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Over 25% of the students receive access to free and reduced-price lunch and approximately one-fifth receive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. The demographics of the district population are highly diverse, with over 40% of students designated as Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Two or More Races. Enrollment in the district’s gifted and
talented programs demonstrates slight favor for White and Asian students, and some underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students (see Figure 5). In order to preserve the identity of the school district under study, enrollment of students identified as Native American/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander have not been included in Figure 5; however, both demographic groups are also underrepresented in the district’s gifted programs.

Figure 5.

Comparison of total district enrollment to enrollment in gifted and talented programs in Hill School District, by racial/ethnic background.

HSD identifies students for a variety of part-time and full-time gifted service options (see Figure 6). Students are considered for part-time services by a local screening
committee at the school level. Part-time services can be delivered through additional differentiated activities in the classroom, or through a pull-out service delivery model.

Students identified to receive additional differentiated activities in the classroom can be added or removed from these services as needed; however, students identified to receive services through a pull-out model (hereafter, “pull-out”) can only be removed with parental permission.

**Figure 6.**

*Gifted program delivery options in HSD.*

Pull-out services usually mean that students in grades 3-6 are removed from the regular classroom to work with the school’s full- or part-time gifted resource teacher and a small group of other identified students for one hour per week in their area of academic
strength. Full-time services for grades 3-6 are provided in approximately one-third of the elementary schools throughout the school district, with students found eligible for those services through a district-level screening process using multiple criteria, including abilities assessments, teacher commentary, student work samples, and parent feedback. Each elementary school has a designated school to which they send students found eligible for full-time services. Students receiving full-time services are placed in one classroom in which they receive access to advanced and above grade-level content in all four content areas: language arts, math, social studies, and science.

As described, eligibility for pull-out and full-time services are determined through different processes. While students can be screened and provided with differentiated services before third grade, students do not typically participate in pull-out services prior to then unless the school implements the Young Scholars Model, the talent development approach used in many of the elementary schools across the district. Both elementary schools in which this study took place use this approach to develop talent in their youngest underrepresented students for the purposes of preparing them for identification for full- or part-time gifted services beginning in third grade.

**School Sites**

In collaboration with the district’s gifted program coordinator, five elementary schools were selected from the over 100 elementary schools in HSD. School site selection was based on the following criteria:

1. The school was deemed to be a “high-implementer” of the Young Scholars Model based on a district-created evaluation rubric.
2. The school was designated as a Title 1 school, a label often applied to denote high enrollment of students living in poverty.

3. The school enrolled more Black and Hispanic students than White and Asian students, as both Black and Hispanic students are typically underrepresented in gifted programs.

4. The school provided ESOL services to at least 10% of its student population, as students from linguistically diverse backgrounds are also typically underrepresented in gifted programs.

Principals at each of the five school sites selected were contacted about the purpose of the study. Interested principals were asked to submit the name of a second grade teacher who had been most “successful” at developing the talent of students in their classroom based on identification numbers and teacher evaluations from previous years. Of the five school principals contacted, two responded with the names of teachers who met the selection criteria.

**School A: Centennial Elementary.** Centennial Elementary School (CES; a pseudonym) is a large elementary school enrolling over one thousand students in grades PreK through sixth grade. The school boasts a preschool program, offers before and after school care, and provides both full- and part-time gifted services for identified students. At the time of this study, English Learners (ELs) comprised more than 50% of the school’s population. More than three-quarters of students received access to free and reduced-price meals and over half were designated as Black or Hispanic.
School B: Wendell Elementary. Wendell Elementary School (WES; a pseudonym) is a large elementary school enrolling over 800 students in grades PreK through sixth grade. The school boasts a preschool program, offers before and after school care, and provides both full- and part-time gifted services for identified students. At the time of this study, English Learners (ELs) comprised more than 40% of the school’s population. Approximately two-thirds of students received access to free and reduced-price meals and over half were designated as Black or Hispanic.

Participants

Two general education Grade 2 classroom teachers consented to participate in the study, one from CES and one from WES. Second grade teachers and their classrooms were the focus of this study because second grade is a pivotal year for talent development in HSD; during second grade, HSD students are identified for part-time and full-time gifted services that will begin in Grade 3. Further, because students from underrepresented populations could be identified for talent development beginning in kindergarten, second grade classrooms are likely to include the most “Young Scholars” since, theoretically, at least some of those students will end up being placed in full-time gifted education classrooms beginning in third grade.

Participant 1: Sophie

Sophie (a pseudonym) is a second grade general education classroom teacher at CES who holds both a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in Education. At the time of the study, Sophie was in the middle of her third year of teaching. CES is the only school where Sophie has taught outside of the schools in which she completed her student
teaching, which she said did not include any cultural or linguistic diversity. Despite never having taught in a Title I school prior to CES, Sophie said that she chose the school because she connected with the principal in her interview and now can’t imagine teaching anywhere but a Title I school because she finds it so rewarding.

Sophie’s class is part of an “ESOL pod” – an arrangement in which three second grade classrooms share one assigned ESOL teacher. As a result, Sophie’s class is comprised of many English Learners, including some who are designated as newcomers, or students who are new to the country. Of the eighteen students in her class, four were previously identified as Young Scholars and she was monitoring an additional three. All seven students either identified as, or being monitored for, Young Scholars were ELs. While Sophie felt her teacher education program prepared her well for helping struggling students, she stated that she did not think it prepared her for working with students who needed an extra challenge. In her two and half years as a teacher at CES, she has gradually been learning how to provide her students with access to challenging material, and has begun working more closely with her gifted resource teacher within the most recent school year in order to do this. Over the previous summer, she participated in professional learning on the Young Scholars Model because she was teaching Young Scholars summer school.

**Participant 2: Blair**

Blair (a pseudonym) is a second grade general education classroom teacher at WES who holds a Bachelor’s degree in Communications and a Master’s degree in Education. At the time of the study, Blair was in the middle of her sixth year of teaching.
WES is the second school where Blair has taught; she spent her first three years at a Title I elementary school in her college town teaching first grade. During student teaching, Blair did not see a lot of cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic diversity. She chose her first school because she connected with the principal while she was teaching in a summer school program and, when she decided to move back to the area where she was from, she decided she wanted to remain in a Title I school. The current principal of WES was a family friend and Blair said she connected with his focus on effort and attitude in their interview. While she would like to remain teaching in a Title I elementary school, she stated that she knows she may need to make a change once she has a family because of competing demands between kids and school.

Blair’s class is a special education inclusion class with a high population of ELs. A special education instructional assistant spends a good portion of the day in her classroom working with approximately four to six students. Students in Blair’s class come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Of the nineteen students in her class, six were previously identified as Young Scholars and she was monitoring an additional two. Five of the six students currently identified as Young Scholars were also ELs, and both of the students she was currently monitoring are also ELs. While Blair also felt her teacher education program prepared her well for helping struggling students, like Sophie she stated that she did not think it prepared her for working with students who needed an extra challenge. Additionally, the school where she taught for the first three years of her career did not offer any sort of gifted services to students, so it is at WES that she was introduced to methods and curricula for challenging students. She has also begun
working closely with her gifted resource teacher within the last year to implement lessons to engage students in higher level thinking. Blair has taken courses on implementing project-based learning (PBL) but has not received any professional learning on the Young Scholars Model.

**Recruitment Procedures**

Prior to contacting potential schools and participants, approval from George Mason University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought and obtained in September 2019. To meet school district research approval requirements, a sponsor from HSD was identified and an application was submitted to their research approval committee in October 2019. Following a rigorous research approval process, HSD authorized the study in late January 2020, after which the district’s gifted program coordinator identified five potential school sites as “high-implementers” of the Young Scholars Model based on the district’s evaluation tool created for that purpose.

Principals at the “high-implementing” elementary schools were contacted via email about the study in early February 2020. Two of the five principals indicated both a willingness to participate in the study and a second grade teacher who they felt met the selection criteria. These teachers were ones who they believed (based on their own evaluation tool and/or observations) were most successful at implementing the Young Scholars Model in their classroom. Identified teachers were then contacted by the researcher to confirm their interest, answer any questions about the study, and to set up the initial interview. In this email, the consent form was also shared.
Data Sources

In this study, semi-structured interviews, field notes from classroom observations, and analytic memos were used to gather information related to addressing both research questions (see Table 1). The first research question asked how a teacher creates a context for talent development in their classroom. In Chapter 2, a framework for describing the context was proposed (see Figure 1) and elements over which teachers may have influence were identified. These elements were explicit teaching of goal-setting and mindset, establishing a personalized and socially- and emotionally-supportive learning environment, utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy, and providing access to higher-level thinking and authentic lessons that incorporate students’ funds of knowledge. The second research question, which looked at how teachers define and perceive giftedness in students, is addressed through examination of the final element: expressing more contemporary beliefs about giftedness and how it is demonstrated. In order to provide a rich and in-depth description of each case, multiple sources of evidence were collected, in order “to develop converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2018, p. 127) and to avoid bias inherent in using a single data collection method (Maxwell, 2013). Because these cases did not involve implementing an intervention, but instead sought to understand what was happening in these classrooms, data was collected on both cases at the same time.
Table 1

Methods Matrix for the Present Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Do I Need to Know? (RQ)</th>
<th>What Information Might Help Me Answer This Question? (Data)</th>
<th>How Might I Find Out This Information? (Data Sources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| RQ1: How do teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs? | ● Description of physical environment (walls, furniture layout, instructional space, evidence of student personalization) | ● Field notes from classroom observations  
● Analytic memos  
● Final interview question #3 |
|                             | ● Description of affective environment (statements teachers make to students, observed reactions of teacher to students, statements teacher makes in interview, classroom rules and/or procedures) | ● Field notes from classroom observations  
● Analytic memos  
● Initial interview questions #1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8  
● Final interview questions #4, 5, 8 |
|                             | ● Description of learning activities (incorporation of higher-level thinking, use of culturally responsive instructional strategies, real-world and authentic problem-solving, explicit teaching of goal-setting and growth mindset) | ● Field notes from classroom observations  
● Analytic memos  
● Initial interview questions #2, 3, 5, 7, 8  
● Final interview questions #1, 2, 5, 7 |
|                             | ● Use of culturally responsive pedagogy | ● Field notes from classroom observations  
● Analytic memos  
● Initial interview questions #3, 4, 5, 7, 8  
● Final interview questions #1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 |
| RQ2: How do teachers implementing a | ● Teacher’s statements and observed reactions to students during lesson observations | ● Field notes from classroom observations  
● Analytic memos |


talent development model understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs?

- Statements teachers make about students regarding their perceived abilities or strengths during the interviews

- Initial interview questions #2, 3, 6, 7, 8
- Final interview questions #7, 8

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

Interviews are critical components of case-study research (Yin, 2018) and may provide information missing or unavailable from the observation (Maxwell, 2013). Thus, another major source of evidence for this study was semi-structured interviews with the two teacher-participants. Each teacher participated in two audio-recorded interviews, one prior to the first observation and one after schools had closed, within approximately one week of the last completed observation. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately one hour (see Appendices C & D for interview protocols). The interviews served multiple purposes: to explore teachers’ definitions and perceptions of gifted students, and to follow up on questions that arose after observations and preliminary analysis of the data.

Initial interviews were conducted in late February 2020. Before the interview began, the researcher reviewed the consent form with each participant, answered any remaining questions, and obtained signatures. At the conclusion of these initial interviews, four half-day observations were arranged with each teacher, two in the
morning and two in the afternoon, during March 2020. The final interviews were scheduled to occur immediately following the fourth observation in each classroom.

Unfortunately, a global pandemic of the novel coronavirus was declared in early March of 2020; as a result, schools abruptly closed in the middle of the study. Thus, these final interviews were conducted in mid-March 2020, approximately one week after the final observation in each classroom, via the videoconferencing platform Webex.

Field Notes from Classroom Observations

Four observations of each teacher were scheduled: two during the first half of the day (before lunch) and two during the second half of the day (after lunch). The purpose of scheduling half-day observations in this manner was so that the observer created the least amount of distraction as possible when entering and exiting the classroom. Additionally, since content area instruction in elementary classrooms typically follows a similar daily schedule, having observations at different times of day would allow for observation of a broad range of instruction across multiple content areas. As some studies have shown, elementary teachers may feel more or less comfortable teaching different content areas based on their background knowledge and prior schooling experiences (e.g., see Hammack & Ivey, 2017). Thus, observations across all four content areas would enable the observer to see the teacher in at least one content area with which s/he feels most comfortable. Unfortunately, in the course of this study, schools closed abruptly due to the global pandemic of the novel coronavirus. Of the four scheduled observations of each teacher, only one was conducted in Sophie’s classroom prior to the shutdown, while two were conducted in Blair’s.
According to Yin (2018), classroom observations allow you the opportunity to observe “some relevant social or environmental conditions” (p. 121) - a key piece of evidence when attempting to reconstruct how a teacher is creating a context for talent development. While observations can be formal or informal (Yin, 2018), in this study, the observations leaned more toward the formal end of the spectrum, with the researcher taking field notes during the observation in order to document salient activities and interactions observed in the classroom, as well as its physical layout and classroom routines. Field notes were organized into a six-part template (see Appendix E) that consisted of (a) teacher statements, (b) teacher actions, (c) room organization, (d) teacher approach to questions, conflict, and class expectations, (e) classroom routines and procedures, and (f) questions for the teacher. The taking of field notes in this study was important because field notes offer an opportunity to not just describe what happened, but to also record the observed interactions (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 18) and “functional transactions” (Barab & Plucker, 2002) that may not be apparent from interview data alone. Following the recommendations of Emerson et al. (2011), the field notes included “concrete and sensory details” (p. 32) attempting to both “show” and describe people’s reactions, emotions, and interactions, as well as the researcher’s general impressions of what seemed significant or important.

Analytic Memos

Immediately following each classroom observation, the researcher reviewed the observation field notes and wrote two analytic memos that served as both an initial stage of data analysis, as well as an additional data source. The format of the first memo was
open-ended; its purpose was to elaborate on information recorded in the field notes, as well as to provide initial thoughts on what was observed. The second memo was semi-structured; its purpose was to think explicitly about the elements of culturally responsive educational practices observed in the classroom. Drawing on Powell et al.’s (2017) refinement of the pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy identified through Powell and Rightmyer’s (2011) extensive literature review, this second memo included six section headings, one for each pillar of culturally responsive pedagogy they identified, as well as their associated indicators. These six pillars were (a) classroom relationships, (b) family collaboration, (c) assessment practices, (d) instructional practices, (e) discourse, and (f) critical consciousness. Any examples of pillars that were demonstrated during the observation were recorded in the appropriate section.

**Ethical Considerations**

IRB approval was sought from George Mason University, the researcher’s home institution, prior to the conducting of any research activity. IRB reviewed the application to ensure that ethical principles were being taken into account throughout the study’s design, including ensuring that the perceived risks to human subjects involved in the research were minimal. Once approval was obtained through IRB, research approval through the school district was sought. Only after both of these processes were completed were principals and teachers contacted for possible participation in the study (see recruitment procedures).

Teachers consented to participate in the study prior to any classroom observation or interview occurring. The researcher was concerned, however, that teachers may have
felt compelled to consent because they were recommended by their principal; as one of their potential evaluators, they may not have felt like they could say no. On the other hand, they may have felt honored to have been recommended and wanted to participate for that reason. While impossible to gauge the teacher’s relationship with the principal, the researcher did speak with the principal about not pressuring the teacher to consent. It was also communicated to the teachers that the content of their interviews, observations, and lesson artifacts would not be shared with their principals, and the findings from the study will contain no identifiable information. Further, it was explained through both the consent form and in person that participation in the study is completely voluntary, will not have an impact on their evaluation, and can be withdrawn at any time.

Another consideration for the participants was the amount of time they were being asked to devote to the study outside of the regular school day. Both interviews were approximately one-hour in length and occurred outside of regular school hours. Since this would be considered unpaid time, teachers were provided a stipend for participation in the two interviews.

Because this study is not intended to be an evaluation study nor is it attempting to make a statement about the Young Scholars Model used in the district, it is not anticipated that the school district and its employees would have any reason to fear bad publicity resulting from their inclusion in the study as communicated to teachers, principals, and district administrators. Regardless, it will be important to ensure that publications which arise from conducting the research do not contain any identifiable information that might give away the district’s identity. For example, HSD has a unique
service delivery model for gifted services, so extreme caution should be taken (and extensive member checking conducted) when discussing its naming and levels. Additionally, identifiable demographic information has been reported in rounded numbers, or in relation to one another, if the specific percentages might make it easy for readers to identify HSD as the district in the study.

There were no benefits to teachers who participated in the study beyond being compensated for the time they spent participating in interviews outside of school hours. The only risk to teachers identified ahead of time was the potentially distracting nature of having a researcher observe for four half-days in the classroom. To mitigate this, the researcher set up in an unobtrusive location specified by the teacher and refrained from engaging in potentially distracting behaviors (e.g., no cell phone or laptop usage). Notes were taken on pen and paper so as to eliminate the distracting sound of typing.

**Data Analysis**

During the course of the study, interim analysis was conducted continuously in order to better inform the subjects of interest during subsequent observations and the content of the final interview. After each interview and observation, as well as during the interim analysis, the researcher engaged in memoing in order to continue refining her thoughts and to “develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105).

Transcription of interviews occurred within one week of recording, and participants were asked to member check transcripts to confirm their accuracy and/or to make any desired changes to statements they made. Through transcription, the researcher
became more familiar with the data and began to notice patterns, identifying some core themes (Boellstorff et al., 2012) and relationships between the data (Maxwell, 2013).

After transcription, the second step of the data analysis process was continuous cycles of coding, which were not conducted in a single fell swoop, but over the course of multiple reviews (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Saldana, 2016). This began with low-level coding, followed by greater and greater levels of codes as patterns and unusual statements began to emerge in the data. Saldana (2016) speaks of doing this in cycles, while Emerson et al. (2011) are more open-ended; however, both agree that data should be reviewed and coded multiple times. In this study, initial interviews were coded immediately following transcription and prior to the first classroom observations. The writing of the two analytic memos (open-ended and culturally responsive pedagogy) after each observation served as an initial coding and elaboration on the observation field notes. Information gathered from this interim analysis informed future observations and the final interview. Because interim analysis occurs throughout the study, coding of both participants’ data was completed at the same time. After this initial round of open coding, two additional cycles were completed, after which each individual code was printed onto notecards and sorted by the researcher to generate potential categories, which became subthemes and then themes. The additional two rounds of coding followed by theme generation occurred one teacher at a time.

Because the strategies described above, which, collectively, Maxwell (2013) would call, “categorizing strategies” may “create analytic blinders” (p. 112), a separate read of all of the data was conducted again. In this third step, the focus was on “look[ing]
for relationships that connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 113, emphasis in original). Looking at the data through this more holistic lens allowed for greater sense to be made of the context and the “big picture” - allowing the researcher to identify potential connections that were hidden through the “fracturing” of the data entailed by categorizing strategies. Bringing each piece of data together - interview transcripts, field notes, and analytic memos - and analyzing it as one unit illuminated relationships impossible to see when conducting analyses on each item separately.

The fourth step of the analysis process was finalizing themes based on the codes generated from the data and the holistic read of all the evidence. Boellstorff et al. (2012, p. 166) would call this stage two of data analysis – the thematizing stage. During this time, the researcher was looking for patterns, categorizing data, developing higher-level and global themes across cases, identifying juxtapositions, and finding critical incidents or events. This led back to the systematizing phase of coding, as these stages are iterative, until sufficient analysis had occurred and the researcher felt that the generated themes represented the interview and observation data (Boellstorff et al., 2012). At this time, a critical friend was engaged to read through a sampling of the data, and discuss the developed themes with the researcher. These conversations resulted in some slight adjustments to the final themes shared in the findings section.

After individual cases were independently analyzed, a cross-case synthesis was conducted, and it was at this time that the use of connecting strategies in the individual analysis became extremely important. Yin (2018) states that
ignoring the holistic feature of the cases by decomposing them into separate variables [such as in quantitative research] is precisely what is to be avoided...Instead, the goal is to retain the integrity of the entire case and then to compare or synthesize any within-case patterns across the cases (p. 196).

Thus, the first step in this process was to identify any within-case patterns, which was done through the use of the categorizing and connecting strategies described above. Patterns of overlap across the cases were identified and examined (Yin, 2018), yielding a higher-level set of themes than those generated through the single-case analyses. A final analysis of the participants’ responses to the interview questions related to how they define, support, and nurture talent development was included as a final theme for research question #1. The critical friend engaged to read through and discuss the single-case analyses was again asked to review and discuss the themes from the cross-case synthesis until agreement was reached.

Validity

Maxwell (2013) uses validity to “refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 122). By this he does not mean that there is one objective truth, but rather that there must be “some grounds for distinguishing accounts that are credible from those that are not” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 122). Because there is no standard against which we can compare our interpretations to determine their validity, we must instead find ways to test those interpretations against other explanations that might be more credible (Maxwell, 2013). These tests concern addressing threats to validity, sometimes referred to as “rival
explanations” (e.g., Yin, 2018). According to Maxwell (2013), how you address validity should be incorporated in your research design through delineation of the threats that may exist, and the strategies you might use to handle them. Two of the broadest types of threats he identifies are researcher bias and reactivity.

**Researcher Bias**

Bias, or subjectivity, is defined by Maxwell (2013) as “the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher” (p. 124). Since it is impossible to eliminate this bias, Maxwell (2013) states that it is important to understand a researcher’s values and expectations, and then to outline the strategies that will be used to minimize the risk of their resultant subjectivity. One way in which to do this is through explicitly discussing your potential biases and identifying how you intend to deal with them in your research. I have done this through a researcher identity memo (Maxwell, 2013).

**My researcher identity memo.** Before I delve too deeply into this memo, I think it important to point out that this is the only place in my proposal in which I am writing from the first person. This is an intentional decision; while elsewhere in the proposal, the inclusion of first person was avoided, the absence of first-person usage here, in my identity memo, would present some philosophical issues - namely that of distancing myself from a reflection involving myself. Further, while the remainder of this proposal appears (at least on the surface) to be absent of me, it is in fact a topic that I would not have chosen had it not been one I thought personally important in the first place. The intent, then, of this researcher identity memo is to “explore [my] assumptions and
experiential knowledge” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 46) and to identify potential advantages and disadvantages to these, as well as outline a plan for how I plan to address them.

When I decided to embark upon a Master’s degree in teaching, I applied and was accepted into a program just a little too late to begin coursework in the same semester. As a result, I was introduced to a professor who taught a course on gifted students that started a few weeks into the semester - the only one in which I was eligible to enroll at that time. Eager to begin, I elected to take the class, and as the semester progressed, I realized not only how much I was learning about gifted students, but also how much I was learning about myself. Having grown up receiving gifted services myself but never delving at all into the socioemotional aspect of being “gifted,” many characteristics of my personality that I had previously seen as quirky or “over-” could now be explained, including my deep sense of fairness and justice.

One of the readings in the course introduced me to the topic of underrepresentation in gifted programs (specifically, of culturally diverse students) and, unfortunately, even ten years later, the issue continues to prevail in gifted education. Both then and now, I remember feeling a sense of great injustice, especially since the text even at that time said this had been a challenge in the field for decades. However, my sense of fairness was not the only reason that this issue became such an important one; to me, this seemed yet another example of how racism has privileged some groups over others in many aspects of our society. Growing up between the Pacific Northwest and the South, I have seen many examples of racism - overt and covert - and it has shaped the lens through which I view society, and the issues of power and equity that exist within it.
Early in my teaching career, I had the opportunity to begin working in a school district in which specific attention was being paid to addressing the issue of underrepresentation. In fact, the school district in which I taught is the district in which this study will take place. As both a classroom teacher and as a gifted resource teacher in a Title I school, I was able to enact the Young Scholars talent development model in order to better identify and match student strengths with an appropriately challenging curriculum. My experiences in the classroom and in working with teachers showed me how important the classroom teacher is in recognizing and developing the talent of students, particularly those from populations historically underrepresented in gifted programs. I worked with teachers who demonstrated great interest in seeking out student strengths, and others who could only see the deficits. Conceptions of giftedness and how it might be exhibited varied widely based on a teacher’s individual schooling and teaching experiences, and the identification of students from underrepresented populations who did not conform to these ideologies was an uphill battle. While I truly believe that most teachers attempted to keep the best interests of their students in mind, the ways in which they believed this could be accomplished did not always align with contemporary theories of giftedness and talent development. Further, their implementation of the Young Scholars Model was often inconsistent; many expressed confusion about what they should be doing in their classrooms to support it, or thought it simply meant an extra pull-out lesson with me once a week, even if they had been teaching in the school for years. Others would go through the motions of offering a piece of the gifted education curriculum to their students identified as Young Scholars, but did
so within an environment and/or sociocultural context that did not allow for alternative demonstrations of talented behaviors. This was frustrating; however, looking back I know that it was also likely frustrating for teachers who may or may not have been creating contexts for talent development even if it did not look like implementation of the Young Scholars Model.

As teachers, many programs and initiatives are thrown our way each year, and each year those programs and initiatives may change. If there were a way for teachers to reflect on concrete actions and conceptions of giftedness that better lend themselves to talent development without needing to feel like they are implementing yet another program, the goal may seem like an achievable one. Alternatively, if a teacher could look at their current implementation of a talent development model, such as Young Scholars, and have a common language for reflection on how they are meeting its ultimate goal - developing talent in underrepresented students, they may be able to walk away with a greater sense of ownership, and perhaps even set goals around their areas for improvement. Either way, the connection between big idea (i.e., a program) or theory and the lived experiences of teachers might become just a little tighter.

As a former teacher in the school district under study, and one who has implemented the Young Scholars Model, I will have the distinct advantage of having an insider’s view of the district and its organization, as well as of the program itself. In another sense, however, this is also a disadvantage, as it is entirely possible that my previous experiences and knowledge will color my interpretations of the data collected through my observations and interviews. It will be very important for me to avoid
“reading between the lines” such that I impose my own previously held assumptions onto the cases under study. “Living” in the data - listening to the audiorecorded interviews, reading and rereading field notes, and writing researcher memos - will be important in an attempt to take on a more “emic” perspective. Coding strategies like in vivo coding, in which the participant’s own words are used as codes (Saldana, 2016), could help protect against only seeing a single story through a unifaceted lens. During the coding process itself, codes will be marked with high-, mid-, or low-inference notations so as to continue to keep in mind the scale used, and to ensure that sufficient evidence has been provided to back up high-inference claims. In other words, if all codes are high-inference codes, the validity of the codes would be called into question because it would be unclear how I jumped from the participant’s statement to an inference that may or may not be biased toward my own positionality (i.e., knowledge of the district or program) or desire to avoid “black swans” in my data. Memoing and identification of a critical friend outside of HSD with whom I can discuss and review codes will also help me to recognize assumptions that may arise based on my prior experience in the school district.

Reactivity

In addition to researcher bias, another common threat to validity in qualitative research is reactivity or, in interviews, reflexivity. Maxwell (2013) defines this as “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (p. 124). For observations, the threat of reactivity is much less than that of interviews, because the observer is less likely to influence how the participant acts in a more natural setting. This is likely especially true in a classroom, in which a myriad of other observers (e.g.,
principal evaluators, parent volunteers, instructional coaches) may have already visited the classroom earlier in the school year, thus acclimating students to ignoring visitors - especially those who are not there to interact with them. For interviews, reflexivity is a much more serious issue; as Maxwell (2013) states: “what the informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and interview situation” (p. 125, emphasis in original). In order to mitigate this threat to validity, what the participant says in the interview should be considered in relation to what the participant does and says in the observations. Thus, another reason to conduct interim analysis was to identify any areas of discongruity and incorporate those as questions in the final interview.

**Additional Strategies for Checking Validity**

Maxwell (2013) outlines multiple strategies for guarding against validity threats; however, he cautions against simply including these “as though they were magical spells that could drive away the validity threats (and criticism of the proposal)” (p. 125). Thus, the strategies chosen for this particular study were done so as thoughtfully as possible and for specific reasons.

**Member checking.** The interview protocol was not shared with teachers ahead of time and, because they were semi-structured interviews, the protocol did not reflect all of the questions that ended up in the interview transcript. Because one of the research questions explicitly asks how teachers understand giftedness in students, it was important to offer teachers the opportunity to review the interview transcript and revise their answers after having some additional “think time” (a process Maxwell, 2013, calls “respondent validation” but is more commonly known as “member checking”). After
providing both the initial and final interview transcripts to the participants for review, both teachers approved them as transcribed with no changes.

**Rich data and triangulation.** The use of the second analytic memo on teachers’ use of culturally responsive educational practices to draw inferences about teachers’ use of culturally responsive instruction could be problematic if only one example is used to inform a pillar. For each observation, as many examples as possible to support a pillar were sought, in addition to information gathered through interviews. Yet again, interim analysis was important here, as it illuminated pillars that needed additional examples or clarification.

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and memoing was an important component of the transcription process. Field notes from observations not only attempted to capture events occurring in the class, but also details *showing* student and teacher reactions to these events (rather than telling), outlining researcher impressions, and describing routines and classroom organization (see field notes section above).

Maxwell (2013), citing Becker (1970), states that this dual collection of rich data through interviews and observations may help to mitigate biases inherent in the use of only one or the other. Having multiple, and varied sources of evidence, can also lead to what Yin (2018) calls data triangulation, or the convergence of evidence from different data sources that corroborate one another. Multiple sources of rich data (or evidence) can reduce misinterpretation of what was singularly observed or stated and address a study’s construct validity (Yin, 2018).
Comparison. Maxwell (2013) states that comparisons can be used in qualitative studies, “particularly in multicase or multisite studies” (p. 129). Because this study was a multiple-case study, a cross-case synthesis was conducted after each case was individually analyzed. The beauty of designing this study as a multiple-case design is that it showed that there is no “right” way to create a context for talent development. While there were areas of overlap between the two cases, there were also areas of divergence, as evidenced in the single-case analyses. The cross-case synthesis, however, pulled together those themes that converged across both cases. The findings from this synthesis can add to the burgeoning literature on the topic of how teachers can develop talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs.
Chapter Four

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to understand how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from populations historically underrepresented in gifted programs, and if the ways in which they do this can be understood through Barab and Plucker’s (2002) talent development model. Two second grade teachers implementing the Young Scholars Model for talent development each participated in two interviews and were observed either once or twice in order to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs?

2. How do teachers implementing a talent development model understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs?

Each teacher was considered a single case and data from their interviews and observations were analyzed individually through two single case analyses, as well as across cases through a cross-case synthesis. Findings from the single case analyses, organized by research question, are reported first, followed by the cross-case synthesis.

Single-Case Analysis: Sophie

Over a three-week period in late February and early March 2020, the first teacher, Sophie, participated in an initial interview, one classroom observation, and a final
interview, the latter of which occurred approximately one week following the classroom observation. Data was transcribed and coded for themes related to each of the two research questions.

**Findings for Research Question #1: Creation of Talent Development Context**

The first research question sought to understand how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. A single-case analysis of Sophie’s data yielded three main themes, within which subthemes were also identified. The three main themes were:

(a) Sophie gives students choice as a mean of disseminating power and encouraging students to take ownership of their learning, (b) Sophie knows her students and designs her classroom and instruction to help all students succeed, and (c) Sophie creates a classroom environment that promotes students’ socioemotional development.

**Theme 1: Sophie gives students choice as a means of disseminating power and encouraging students to take ownership of their learning.** In both her interviews and observations, Sophie emphasized the ways in which she provides students choice in her classroom. The choices she offers, in both sense-making and product, shift the power in the classroom learning environment from teacher to teacher-with-the-students. Choices like these also allow students to “show what they’re capable of” because, as Sophie notes, “if I had told the one who used the computer to make me a poster, they might not have shown me all of their thinking and all that they learned throughout the unit” (Sophie Initial Interview). Thus, providing students with choice allows them to take what they are learning and make it their own.
Subtheme 1.1: Sophie offers choice in how students engage in classroom learning activities. As she teaches whole and small group lessons, Sophie allows students to stand and move around as needed. For example, during the classroom observation, Sophie led multiple small groups for reading instruction. During one of these groups, a student was standing and moving around, all while still paying attention. Sophie did not indicate, either verbally or nonverbally, that she wished for the student to stop (Sophie Observation Field Notes). This observation was reinforced during the final interview, in which Sophie stated,

Two students that I have, their desks are right next to the carpet. They touch the carpet because they need to move around a lot. So if we are at the carpet and they need to go back to their seat during the lesson, their seats are right there. So they can sit there and still see… (Sophie Final Interview)

Sophie recognizes that some students may need the flexibility to move around during learning; thus, she structures the environment so that these students can both have this need met and continue to participate in the instruction.

While whole group focus lessons are typically taught on the front carpet or in the classroom library, independent work can be completed anywhere around the room. “Aside from math and maybe independent reading, I don’t really have them do much independent work at their seat. They’re always allowed to work around the room if they want” (Sophie Final Interview). Students can choose to work at or under a table in the back of the classroom, on the carpet in the front, in the classroom library, or at their seats.
For language arts, students are also allowed to choose from “a tub of pillows, stuffed animals” (Sophie Final Interview) while they are engaged in reading and writing tasks.

In addition to offering choice in how students physically engage in learning, Sophie empowers students to choose when and what they engage in during both independent work and homework. Language arts includes three rotations during which students can choose from four different activities: technology, word work, writing, and independent reading (Sophie Observation Open-Ended Analytic Memo). On Fridays, buddy reading is another option. Students are expected to complete certain tasks within each of the four activities throughout the week, but “it’s up to them when they do it” (Sophie Final Interview). During a recent Social Studies unit on Famous Americans, Sophie ended a focus lesson on George Washington by providing students with a wide selection of books from which they could choose for further exploration. They could then independently or buddy read their choices before coming back together as a whole group to discuss what more they had learned. Then, on Fridays, Sophie “give[s] them a chance to either go on the laptop and use one of the [district] resources to research more or look in a book maybe they used earlier in the week” (Sophie Final Interview). For weekly homework, students receive a choice board on Mondays that has to be turned in by Friday. Throughout the week, they complete four of the nine options, representative of all four content areas (Sophie Initial Interview). There are no requirements on what must be completed on an individual night; rather, students can choose when the four activities they choose will be completed, as long as they are done by the end of the week.
Subtheme 1.2: Sophie offers choice in how students demonstrate their learning.

Rather than ask students to take a “paper pencil test,” Sophie believes in having students choose “how they express themselves.” This might look like telling students they need to create a weather report, but then allowing them to choose what that product looks like – such as a poster or a Flipgrid video (Sophie Initial Interview). Or it might be a museum exhibit on one of the famous American they have learned about with students selecting who they want to focus on, how they present it during the exhibition (e.g., giving a speech or taping a notecard to their work), and if they want to work individually, with a partner, or in a small group (Sophie Final Interview).

Another way in which Sophie allows for choice in how students demonstrate their learning is by designing tasks that allow for open-ended response.

I don’t use advanced curriculum every day…it’s not feasible to do that. But I would say, I think what sets it apart is just allowing them to make it their own. If I give everyone the same option, they’re [Young Scholars] the ones who are going to take it and soar with it and show me more than the other students may show me. Even with my everyday regular curriculum. If my number of the day today is two-fifths, some of my students are going to draw me an area model and say two-fifths and color in two out of the five [while] they might write me a problem that says, ‘Holly got one-fifth of the pizza and Sophie got one-fifth of the pizza, how much should they have in total?’ (Sophie Initial Interview)
By leaving the task open-ended, Sophie liberates students from the limited thinking she might receive had she told them how they needed to show the number of the day; instead, she gets responses that reflect where students are along the learning continuum.

**Theme 2: Sophie knows her students and designs her classroom and instruction to help all children succeed.** The students in Sophie’s classroom hail from a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Sophie demonstrates awareness of the varied ways in which these experiences impact students and plans her room and instruction accordingly. She views all students as having talent that can be fostered and does not limit access to challenging learning opportunities, instead providing students with the scaffolding and support they need to engage in such learning (Sophie Final Interview).

**Subtheme 2.1: Sophie considers the impact of students’ languages, cultures, and experiences on learning and teaching.** With such a large number of English Learners in her class, Sophie is cognizant of the challenges they might face in learning and participating in a classroom taught solely in English. In addition to the supports the school provides, such as working in small groups with the ESOL teacher or accessing books in their home language through the school’s library, Sophie plans instruction with students’ language needs in mind. For example, she frequently uses the ‘Color, Symbol, Image’ visible thinking routine because it is less writing-intensive and allows students to put what they are visualizing down on paper (Sophie Initial Interview). While teaching the critical reading lesson during the classroom observation, Sophie paused during the reading to ensure students understood the more complex vocabulary: “Does anyone know
what the word ‘torrents’ means? Anyone want to take an educated guess?” (Sophie Observation Field Notes). For the social studies unit on famous Americans, Sophie developed differentiated note-taking sheets for students. “So for my ESOL kiddos, my notetaking sheets already have the information pretty much printed. They have to fill in a few blanks and it has a lot of pictures on it” (Sophie Final Interview). In considering what books to add to her classroom library, Sophie tries to add books in students’ home languages because she recognizes that, while students may still be learning to read in English, that doesn’t mean that they don’t know how to read in general. “So that’s where the books from other languages definitely come in. So they are still getting that practice” (Sophie Final Interview). Sophie sees that developing literacy in students’ home language is important even as they are developing literacy in English.

Several of Sophie’s English Learners are also newcomers and for them she is concerned with both accessibility and engagement.

Because I definitely see, especially with some of my newcomers who they’ve got so much in their head, they just can’t verbalize it yet. So some of the activities that we do, sometimes they can be really tough because it requires a lot of writing. For them I try and take what we do and not make it any easier but make it accessible for them, so that they can also participate in the class conversation. They can participate in the presentation of their work, that sort of thing. (Sophie Initial Interview)

This focus on ensuring language is not a barrier to students’ participation is also reflected in the way that Sophie sets up her classroom. For all of her English Learners, but
especially her newcomer students, Sophie tries to seat them next to another student who speaks the same language as them. This provides opportunities for her newcomer students to “rehearse what [they] want to share in English next with the person next to [them]” (Sophie Initial Interview), as well as engage their peers in helping to translate if needed (Sophie Initial Interview). For those students whose parents do not speak English, even if the student speaks it fluently, Sophie allows them to check out books in their home language from her classroom library to read to their parents, or for their parents to read to them (Sophie Final Interview).

In addition to language, Sophie recognizes that culture and experiences outside of school have an impact on what she does in the classroom. In math, Sophie shared that she needs to be “cognizant of…the ways in which they’ve learned math in different countries or the way that they’ve learned math from their parents” (Sophie Final Interview). The example she provides is that some students might have learned strategies for breaking apart tens and ones while others may have only learned the standard algorithm. She places emphasis on having students share these varied strategies so that they can feel acknowledged and proud, while also showing them new ways of solving a problem (Sophie Final Interview). Social studies is another content area in which Sophie says she needs to be more aware.

A lot of kids have learned things from their parents about people that we learned about or events that we’ve learned about. And maybe they have their biases from their parents. I just have to try and teach them in the most objective way possible and try and make it relevant to them. (Sophie Final Interview)
Sophie’s awareness also extends to the community institutions where students might go – places like churches and restaurants. She tries to “tie those into our learning whenever we can” and “give them a chance to sort of share what they’re doing within the community” (Sophie Final Interview). Sophie mentioned that her students don’t always seem aware that they frequent many of the same places within the community. Thus, providing these opportunities to share not only helps students bring more of themselves into the classroom, but it also encourages them to find and build connections with one another.

Sophie also reflects on how her students’ language and culture have played a role in helping her choose books for lessons, or stock new books in her classroom library. One example she noted was when she mentioned the story of the Three Little Pigs to her class, she was surprised to find that some of her students had never heard of the story (Sophie Final Interview). Another was from her first year of teaching, when she had a newcomer student who spoke and read only in Arabic. As Sophie evaluated what resources she had in her classroom for her, she realized that she didn’t own a single book that her student could read during independent reading. She quickly rectified this by purchasing some books that were written in Arabic, “and then because of that I realized, oh, I’ve lots of Hispanic students. I should probably do the same for Spanish” (Sophie Final Interview).

Prior to this, Sophie described her classroom library as being stocked with donated books from a retiring teacher and “cutesy books” with great pictures or cute storylines. “Now I try to buy the ones that have characters that look like them or characters that come from similar places or similar backgrounds as my students so they can connect more with them” (Sophie Final Interview).
Bringing students’ experiences into the classroom is another way that Sophie designs lessons with which students can connect. During their social studies unit on famous Americans, Sophie found that students weren’t particularly engaged by learning about Christopher Newport. While many had heard of George Washington and, thus, were excited to learn about him, Newport was just some guy who had founded Jamestown – a town they had no connection to or experience with. However, when Sophie mentioned that Jamestown wasn’t far from the College of William and Mary, one student said, “Oh my goodness, my cousin goes to college there” (Sophie Final Interview). The culminating project for this unit was to have students design a museum exhibit on the famous American of their choice. Sophie shared that, in prior years, students were asked to design a monument to their chosen person; however, she realized that many students had never seen a monument…but they had been to a museum, either in person or virtually (Sophie Final Interview). The change from designing a monument to a museum exhibit didn’t change her students’ learning outcomes, but it did become a project that was much more relevant to their own experience, or lack thereof. Beyond social studies, Sophie considers students’ experiences in something as simple as the writing prompts she assigns. “I want to leave it very open ended. I don’t want them to have to write about one topic that they’re unfamiliar with” (Sophie Final Interview). Her own experience as a student having to write about an experience she’d never had (going to a waterpark) is one that she doesn’t want to replicate for the students in her classroom.

Subtheme 2.2: Sophie provides access to challenging material to all students through scaffolding and support. When asked how she supports the Young Scholars in
her classroom, Sophie said that she provides opportunities for them to think more deeply about the instructional content. “With them there’s a lot of showing their thinking, making or explaining their thinking, so they’re using that critical lens” (Sophie Initial Interview). The work she provides her Young Scholars is also usually more advanced (Sophie Final Interview) and intended to challenge them (Sophie Initial Interview). For example, in math, all students are provided with math menus that include choices that have been differentiated based on individual need. Sophie’s Young Scholars receive activities that are different from other students (Sophie Initial Interview). For an upcoming unit on addition and subtraction, she noticed that several students had already met the second grade standard; she intends to advance them to the third grade standard rather than limit them to content they have already mastered (Sophie Initial Interview).

This access to deeper thinking isn’t limited to her Young Scholars. Sophie explained that she utilizes advanced curriculum, designed to encourage higher level and creative thinking, but that she “want[s] to give my whole class that same experience” (Sophie Initial Interview). A barrier she encountered to implementing these types of lessons early in her teaching career was her lack of knowledge around how to challenge students. However, after implementing several advanced curriculum units during Young Scholars summer school the previous year, she noticed how much more engaged my students were doing those activities than just doing some of the other ones that I had been giving in years past. Either some of the kids were struggling with some of the M$^3$ ideas and some of the ideas were just such abstract concepts for them. But then you could see them wrap their head and
their brain around it and then they have their aha moment and they would know exactly what we were doing. And I saw that and I’m like, okay, they’re getting really excited about a buddy game where they flip over number cards to make a big number. So I was like, ‘I can take that and put it in my classroom this year.’ I just pulled things that I did over the summer, integrated them with my whole class this year. (Sophie Initial Interview)

She began to feel that she could “take bits and pieces and use it for my whole class and then just differentiate and scaffold it” (Sophie Initial Interview) for her English Learners and students who had not been identified as Young Scholars, lamenting that she had not provided those resources to her students in her first two years of teaching (Sophie Initial Interview).

One example of how Sophie provides access to advanced curriculum for all students could be seen in the classroom observation. During language arts, Sophie prepared students for a *Jacob’s Ladder* lesson focused on the learning objective, “Critical readers notice stereotypes in text and illustrations” (Sophie Observation CRP Memo). To hook the students into the lesson, Sophie reminded students of the word, “stereotype,” which they had been talking about in previous lessons. She began by asking students what they believed to be true of princes and princesses, and recorded their thinking on chart paper using a black marker. To support students in coming up with additional ideas, she asked questions such as “What do you think princes and princesses look like?” and “How are princes and princesses portrayed in stories you’ve read before?” Nearly all students participated and seemed engaged in sharing their preconceived notions of
princes and princesses (Sophie Observation Field Notes). Next, Sophie stated that they would be reading a series of stories over the next few days that might challenge some of the ideas they’d just written down. Before Sophie read the story of the day aloud to the class, she distributed a copy to all of her students so that they could follow along with her. Throughout the story, she asked comprehension questions (e.g., “Let’s think about this. The princess showed up and what did she look like?” and “The queen says they need to figure out if she’s a real princess or not. What does the queen do?”) and scaffolded some of the vocabulary (e.g., torrents) to ensure students understood what was happening (Sophie Observation Field Notes). When the story ended, Sophie had the students return to their initial chart and this time used a gray pen to record students’ new thinking around princes and princesses – in particular, those ideas that challenged the ones they had written previously. Again, she used questioning to help tease out some important departures from their previous thinking. Sophie shared that the things people might think about other people may sometimes be untrue, and relates this to the ideas of stereotypes and bias: “We may all have beliefs about others that are true or untrue. We need to recognize when we have a bias in our heads but also know that it may not be true or untrue for all people” (Sophie Observation Field Notes). She closed the lesson by having students respond to a series of stereotypical statements made about boys and girls then asked for volunteers to share why they agreed or disagreed with the statement using the agree/disagree sentence frames posted next to the carpet (Sophie Observation Field Notes). When she released students to their seats to work on the bottom rung of the ladder independently (a question that involved retelling the story), she pulled a group of
English Learners to the back table with her and asked them to verbally retell what had happened, then showed them how to record their thinking in English (Sophie Observation Open-Ended Memo).

In her final interview, Sophie stated that this lesson was typical of her reading instruction – focus lesson, time for turn and talk, then independent work and reading rotations – and that for Jacob’s Ladder lessons in particular she thinks that, “it’s more helpful for them to talk to someone else first, get kind of an idea of what they could say, share out here are some other ideas. And then go back and work on it on their own” (Sophie Final Interview). She noted that this lesson was especially powerful for her Young Scholars, who were able to take their responses to another ladder question about the characteristics of a real princess far beyond the discussion they had engaged in as a whole group.

Because that critical literacy unit, the whole point of it is to sort of take what you’re given from the text…and talk back at it and give your thoughts and your explanation as to why you either agree or disagree. And you want them to get to that point where they do, maybe they don’t agree with the author and they’re giving their opinion, not just saying what we [teachers] want to hear. And I feel like I was able to see a lot of my Young Scholars’ opinions when we did that activity… (Sophie Final Interview).

Building this willingness to think more deeply, however, requires that teachers give students opportunities to demonstrate their potential and to take risks (p. 19, Initial Interview). When asked in the final interview how a student might describe what it’s like
to be part of her classroom, Sophie thought they would say, “You’re always able to share your thinking and know that you’re not going to be wrong” (Sophie Final Interview). She noted that, even when correcting students’ errors (such as in math), she encourages continued risk-taking by first telling students what they have correct, then frames what needs to be fixed as, “Here is right, and here I want to work on a little bit more” (Sophie Final Interview).

Theme 3: Sophie creates a classroom environment that promotes students’ socioemotional development. Sophie understands the importance of supporting students socially and emotionally, in addition to academically. She promotes students’ development of a growth mindset through goal-setting and reflection opportunities, and fosters respectful discussion and collaboration through modeling and scaffolding. Sophie also recognizes that affirming students, and encouraging them to affirm themselves and one another, can be a powerful means for keeping students engaged and motivated in the classroom.

Subtheme 3.1: Sophie engages students in reflection and goal-setting. As a reflective teacher, Sophie engages her students in reflection, as well. Sometimes this looks like a simple analysis of how their thinking has changed over time, such as in the princes and princesses lesson (Sophie Observation Field Notes). Other times this takes on the form of a quick share after a math lesson, when students will either share something they completed on their math menu or a strategy they applied during the week (Sophie Final Interview). Additionally, at the end of each day, Sophie assigns a reflection prompt for them to write about for five minutes. Prompts may be centered around what students
learned about in a particular content area, or a reflection on how they were good communicators or collaborators that day and what might they do to improve in that area (Sophie Final Interview).

Building in reflection also leads naturally to setting and tracking personal goals. At the beginning of the year, students wrote in their reflection journals about a collective goal they wanted to achieve in second grade. They then individually broke this collective goal down into individual goals for each quarter and, along with Sophie, tracked their progress toward them. For some students, this involved them coming up with their own goals and plans for reaching them; for others, this meant Sophie provided additional scaffolding, then removed that scaffolding once students were ready: “Like for one of my students in particular, one of his goals was to count to 100. That was something that I kind of edged him at, I pushed him in that direction. But then we do check-ins and make sure that he was reaching his goal” (Sophie Final Interview). Once the student had met his goal, he got to choose the next one.

To support the idea of goal-setting, Sophie engages students in activities that encourage their development of a growth mindset. At the beginning of the year during reading workshop, Sophie introduced the idea that some books might be “just right” for them right now and some books might be books they could hope to read someday – later this year or far into the future. She modeled this by bringing in two books of her own, calling one a “just right” book and the other a “someday” book, then had students identify books that were “just right” or “someday” books for them. “And then so they could see, right now I might be reading at a level A, but someday I’ll get to the level D” (Sophie
Final Interview). She continued the conversation through her introduction of optimism during their time for Positivity Project and “talked about how in order to reach your goal, you have to persevere, you have to be optimistic…We have to have a growth mindset that you will achieve your goal, or you can if you try your hardest” (Sophie Final Interview).

In her initial interview, Sophie related the idea of talent development to growth mindset. When asked, “How would you define talent development?” she said

I think just being able to nurture their strengths and build up their weaknesses, help them turn their weaknesses into strengths and they themselves will want to succeed and they’ll want to do better and they’ll understand, ‘Oh, I am really good at this. Or I could get better at this. Maybe I’m not right now. That’s our whole power of yet, I’m not there yet. I’ll get there.’ (Sophie Initial Interview)

Sophie sees how empowering it can be for students when they are able to acknowledge their accomplishments and set goals around areas they want to improve in the future. The notion of being able to turn “weaknesses” into strengths supports the concept of growth mindset – nothing is set in stone and, through effort, gains can be made.

**Subtheme 3.2: Sophie fosters a classroom community built on collaboration and respect.** Sophie designs opportunities for students to collaborate with one another. During the classroom observation, she encouraged students to find a partner who they didn’t normally work with during the morning meeting activity (Sophie Observation Field Notes). In one of her interviews, Sophie shared that students have a writing partner from whom they receive feedback.
They’ll meet with their writing partner, get some compliment sandwich feedback, and then they’ll go back and they’ll start working or they decide, my partner really helped. I’m going to continue working with them because they helped me make my book even better. Sometimes they get better feedback from the other students than they even do for me. (Sophie Initial Interview)

At this point in the school year (March), Sophie noted that students feel comfortable asking others for help (Sophie Initial Interview), and she has encouraged this by seating students in table groups (Sophie Final Interview). Further, she has found that students reflect on their own work based on what they hear from their peers. During a recent small group math lesson with her Young Scholars, students independently solved a problem, then each shared the strategies they used to arrive at their answers. After listening to everyone, she said that some students mentioned they wanted to try a strategy that seemed to work particularly well, or even noticed that their answers were incorrect but now had a strategy for fixing their mistake (Sophie Final Interview).

Sophie and her students demonstrate respect through their words and actions. In the classroom observation, Sophie framed language she used with students around what she wanted them to do rather than what she wanted them to stop doing. Her communication with students was respectful as she reminded them of expectations: “No, thank you. Calm body,” “I’m going to wait for us to refocus,” and “I need eyes on me and bubbles” (Sophie Observation Field Notes). Additionally, when possible, she used nonverbal signals and private comments to keep students from feeling targeted. Sophie also ensured that students entering the class from a late bus had a place to sit for morning
meeting by requesting students widen the circle (Sophie Observation CRP Memo).

However, Sophie was not the only one who demonstrated respect during the observation. When students shared the secret handshakes they created with their morning meeting activity partners, all students watched attentively (Sophie Observation Field Notes). During the discussion on stereotypical statements about boys and girls, students utilized the sentence frames provided to respectfully agree and disagree with those who held differing opinions (Sophie Observation Field Notes). As reading rotations were happening, one student spilled her drink on her desk and two other students helped her clean it up without prompting (Sophie Observation Field Notes). In her final interview, Sophie explained that she keeps her classroom door open because she notices that when she closes it, students get really loud. If she keeps it open, students “know that there’s people, other classes that are working so they stay a little quieter” (Sophie Final Interview).

Another way in which Sophie demonstrates respect for students, as well as encourages collaboration, is through promotion of shared decision-making. As a whole group at the beginning of the year, they developed the classroom expectations: “We came up with a giant list, edited it, and then came up with those four and then they signed” (Sophie Final Interview). Students also collectively decided on the expectations for using pillows, such as how many people could use each one and where it could be used (Sophie Final Interview). Students decided on the name for the “chill zone” (Sophie Final Interview) and, with Sophie’s assistance, categorized the books in the classroom library (Sophie Final Interview). Within each of their table groups, students chose how they
wanted to organize the supplies in their table caddies and, according to Sophie, each group has found their own method for doing so. “One group who they decided together that they want all of the dark crayons to be in one group and then all the light crayons to be in another part of the caddy and the glue sticks need to be here” (Sophie Final Interview). Through organizing their supplies in this way, Sophie noted that this helps students realize they need to respect everyone else’s space.

**Subtheme 3.3: Sophie affirms students, while also promoting students’ self, peer, and family affirmation.** Sophie is conscious of the power of teacher affirmation and seeks opportunities to ensure students feel affirmed. For example, rather than selecting children’s books as the mentor texts they use in the classroom, she uses the stories her students write.

I’ll copy them and they’ll be published in our library and those will be my mentor texts. And then they’ll see, ‘Oh, I did that. I’m a published author in Ms. Sophie’s library.’ And so it helps them build that confidence… (Sophie Initial Interview) She also uses student work as examples without calling out students by name. While other students may not know who created it, the student who did can feel good that their work is being used (Sophie Initial Interview). Further, “they get so excited and they just want to do better and do it more often” (Sophie Initial Interview). While Sophie didn’t show any student work as examples during the classroom observation, she did affirm students after a small group reading lesson by telling them to “kiss your brain” (Sophie Observation Field Notes). She also ensured that she greeted every student as they entered
the classroom (Sophie Observation Field Notes), and signed her morning message with “Love, Miss Sophie” (Sophie Observation Field Notes).

Sophie also encourages students to affirm their peers, such as through their compliment sandwich feedback during writing (Sophie Initial Interview) or by having them post affirmations to one another on their kindness wall (Sophie Observation Field Notes), as well as themselves. Student-drawn book labels and speech bubbles are displayed in the classroom (Sophie Observation Field Notes). When a student is particularly proud of advanced work they completed or an illustration they drew, “they want to be able to go tell the teacher across the hall…So they get really excited about showing off their work and I think when they get excited about their work then they are building that talent” (Sophie Initial Interview). In fact, Sophie says that support and “making them feel as though they can achieve a goal or just making them feel like they’re capable” (Sophie Final Interview) are key to talent development.

Providing opportunities for affirmation from family members is also a focus for Sophie. One of the ways she encourages this is by sending quick notes to parents after school letting them know if their child did something great that day. “So then they get their kid off the bus…and they tell their child, ‘Oh, I heard you did so good at school today’” (Sophie Final Interview). Another is through communicating with parents through ClassDojo, where she posts pictures of what students are doing throughout the day, and providing access to products that students complete using technology such as Flipgrid. This helps her students feel like their families are involved and interested (Sophie Final Interview). “A lot of my Young Scholars students get very excited to show
their parents what they’re working on in schools…So it definitely gets them excited about their learning and motivated to want to do better” (Sophie Final Interview). She also plans writing celebrations so that families can come in and celebrate their students’ hard work. For these activities, students can invite any family member they like to hear them read the books they wrote (Sophie Final Interview). By communicating how students are doing, and inviting families into the classroom, Sophie creates a pathway for families to affirm their students and for students to feel affirmed by their families.

Subtheme 3.4: Sophie considers students’ socioemotional well-being when making instructional decisions. Sophie attempts to understand her students’ schooling experiences and how they are impacted by language and culture. For example, students’ homework choice boards may include selections such as read for 20 minutes or write a math problem for one of your family members to solve. Sophie said that many of her students tell her that they read their book or math problem to their families in English, then translate it into their home language for their family member to understand, “so [they are] always constantly flipping back and forth between those two languages, which has to be exhausting” (Sophie Initial Interview). With her newcomer students, she didn’t want them to “feel any different” so she purchased books in Spanish and Arabic that the class is reading in English so that they can follow along in their home language (Sophie Final Interview). For those entering her classroom after attending school in another country, she says that she knows school might have been a “scary, scary place for them to be” and so she wants “for them to have that sense of security within my classroom” (Sophie Final Interview). After schools abruptly closed in the spring due to coronavirus,
she expressed concern that the language acquisition of her English Learners that were at an ESOL Level 1 will suffer without the practice opportunities provided at school (Sophie Final Interview).

Sophie also takes students’ socioemotional needs into account when considering who to recommend for gifted education services.

There are some that I think get very anxious and very nervous when it comes to challenging work…So when I see those students, I don’t want to hold them back…But I am also trying to be aware of the fact that [full-time gifted services] might be too much for them right now. (Sophie Final Interview)

For these students, she recommends them for Young Scholars and/or part-time gifted services. She shared a story about herself in second grade and how she was being considered for full-time gifted services. While she loved reading and writing, she felt little confidence in herself in math. “So it’s something that I try and consider if I was like that as a seven, eight year old, things aren’t much different for students that might be in the same boat as I was” (Sophie Final Interview). By taking the whole child into account rather than just their academic needs, Sophie considers classroom environments in which students might succeed best.

In addition to being aware of students’ socioemotional needs and considering how those needs should impact students’ academic placements, Sophie also incorporates socioemotional learning into the school day. In addition to participating in Positivity Project lessons on a daily basis, a focus this year has also been on being mindful. With the help of the school’s guidance counselors, Sophie teaches students mindfulness tools
and grounding exercise they use in morning meeting and closing circle (Sophie Final Interview). In fact, during the morning meeting observed, Sophie chose a student volunteer to lead the group in a deep breaths exercise (Sophie Observation Field Notes). Sophie also taught students “calm down strategies” that they could utilize in their classroom “chill zone” in order to “calm their bodies [and] bring themselves back so that they’re ready to learn” (Sophie Final Interview).

**Findings for Research Question #2: Understanding of Giftedness**

The second research question sought to understand how teachers implementing a talent development model understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. Because the planned number of observations was cut short due to school closures, a single-case analysis of how Sophie described her Young Scholars and how she determined who she recommended for full- and part-time gifted services across her initial and final interviews was conducted. While she identified many characteristics (e.g., creative thinking, maturity), the three themes that arose across both interviews were (a) students’ motivation, (b) desire and excitement for learning, and (c) the quality of their work.

**Theme 1: Motivation.** Sophie mentioned student motivation in three different exchanges across both interviews. In her initial interview, motivation was framed as the “want to do better” (Sophie Initial Interview) and being able “to move on to that next step in their work” (Sophie Initial Interview). Motivation in the final interview was associated with the “want to do well,” the “want to succeed,” and the “want to do the work” (Sophie Final Interview). The three (out of four) Young Scholars she recommended for full-time
gifted services “automatically all the time are very motivated…” (Sophie Initial Interview), implying that the type of motivation Sophie is looking for specifically is intrinsic motivation. This inference is supported by her statement that one of the questions she asks herself before referring a student is “you know would they rise to that role of doing things on their own, initiating the work without necessarily being asked to…” (Sophie Final Interview).

**Theme 2: Desire and excitement for learning.** In addition to motivation, Sophie mentioned that, when recommending students for gifted services, she looks at a student who “wants to learn more” (Sophie Initial Interview) and their “excitement about learning” (Sophie Final Interview). While one could argue that an association between wanting to learn more and motivation might exist, the language Sophie used in framing motivation implied that her interpretation of motivation was the want to succeed or the will to get started. Thus, it made the most sense to group these two ideas as a separate theme.

Sophie shared a story about a student’s desire to learn more during her initial interview:

One of them said to me the other day that we were learning about solid, liquid, and gas and his brother is in middle school and he walks up to me. He goes, ‘I learned a new gas yesterday.’ I was like, ‘Okay, what’s your new gas that you learned?’ He was like “Xenon and neon.” And I’m like, ‘Wow, where did you learn that?’ And he said, ‘I was studying my brother’s periodic table at home.’
He’s just like a sponge. He wants to learn more and when he does he holds onto it. (Sophie Initial Interview)

She went on to say that this desire for learning, seeking out challenges, and asking questions is what sets the Young Scholars she did recommend for full-time gifted services apart from the one that she did not. She also noticed this characteristic in a student she had been considering recommending for Young Scholars before schools closed. In the weeks following the closure, teachers were scrambling to get things up for students while districts figured out the new pivot to virtual learning. Sophie had gone through and posted several items to her Google Classroom site and noticed that, less than a week after schools had closed, this student she had been monitoring had posted a read aloud for the class, complete “with the little stopping points, look at the pictures, ask the questions” (Sophie Final Interview) just as she does when conducting a read aloud with her students.

**Theme 3: Quality of work.** A third item Sophie considers when deciding who to recommend for full-time gifted services is the quality of work a student produces. By this she means their “great attention to detail,” particularly in writing (Sophie Initial Interview), as well as the depth of their thinking (Sophie Final Interview). For example, Sophie discussed the completed work she received from students after the *Jacob’s Ladder* lesson observed.

With the *Jacob’s Ladder* that I did, for example, some of the students gave me one- or two-word responses using the words that I had already written on the
board. And others got extra pieces of paper because they wanted to really explain and go more in depth. (Sophie Final Interview)

She also noted that all the students she recommended for full-time gifted services make an effort to include the new words they learn from the Positivity Project (e.g., open-minded, prudent, enthusiasm) in their writing and conversation, and correctly at that (Sophie Initial Interview).

A final note. In the final interview, Sophie was asked if she believed that talent could be developed in all students. Her answer was yes, but “the rate at which it can be developed varies. I think the level of their talent definitely varies, as well” (Sophie Final Interview). At first glance, it may seem like Sophie is subscribing to the myth known in gifted education as, “All children are gifted.” However, her qualification that talent varies by level and rate of development implies that she does see something that sets these students apart and that, namely, they are the characteristics noted above.

Single-Case Analysis: Blair

Over a three-week period in late February and early March 2020, the second teacher, Blair, participated in an initial interview, two classroom observations, and a final interview, the latter of which occurred approximately one week following the second classroom observation. Data was transcribed and coded for themes related to each of the two research questions.

Findings for Research Question #1: Creation of Talent Development Context

The first research question sought to understand how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented
populations in gifted programs. A single-case analysis of Blair’s data yielded four main themes, each of which are further broken down into subthemes: (a) Blair frames learning and engagement around a culture of collaboration and shared power, (b) Blair models and supports students in developing a critical perspective and in becoming independent thinkers and academic risk-takers, (c) Blair demonstrates a high level of engagement in helping her students succeed, and (d) Blair creates a learning environment in which students’ diverse interests, talents, and identities are reflected, constructed, and affirmed.

**Theme 1: Blair frames learning and engagement around a culture of collaboration and shared power.** Blair sees herself as a facilitator or guide rather than the purveyor of knowledge. Her classroom is a collaborative place where students are also teachers and teachers are also students. Blair shares power with her class by making space for their voices to guide the learning and by offering them choice in how they engage in that learning.

**Subtheme 1.1: Blair and her students learn in dialogue with one another and their peers.** In her classroom, Blair does not look at learning as something that is transferable from one person to another, but rather as something that occurs in dialogue with someone else. She sets up opportunities for students to collaborate with one another because she believes “they’re going to learn so much more from each other than they are from just me” (Blair Final Interview). For example, during a classroom observation students provided feedback to one another on the persuasive letters they had been working on. They used this feedback to then help them make revisions to their next draft (Blair Observation 1 CRP Memo). In an upcoming lesson that didn’t occur due to school
closure, Blair had planned to incorporate an M² math unit in which students had to develop strategies for breaking numbers apart to help the meerkats Dru and Teller. “Giving them the opportunity to share their strategies with each other I thought was also going to be really powerful for them” (Blair Final Interview). She described this sharing of strategies as “teach[ing] each other.” For another upcoming observation, Blair had planned for students to publish their persuasive letters from the explorers PBL. They were going to create a podcast or film a video, after which they would partner up to offer feedback to one another, as well as themselves. Then, the students would have rerecorded their podcasts or videos based on what they and their partner identified as something they did well and something they wanted to improve upon (Blair Final Interview). “I think really it’s just getting them to think, getting them to talk to each other…I try to keep that going as much as I can” (Blair Final Interview). By providing myriad ways for students to offer feedback to each other, Blair ensures that students not only get to talk to, but also teach, each other.

The students are not the only ones learning in dialogue with one another, however. Blair makes it clear that she is learning right along with her students. Throughout both of her interviews, she described how she was constantly amazed by what her students were able to do when provided with opportunities to engage in higher level thinking.

And I think that has kind of been my biggest takeaway this year is like wow, they’re able to do so much already at such a young age. And if every child was
getting these opportunities and learning how to think this way, it would be
amazing to see what this generation could do as adults. (Blair Initial Interview)

Several times Blair made remarks that demonstrated how her students have been
challenging her notions of what they can do at this age. In considering how the teaching
of critical and creative thinking skills has impacted her conversations with students:
“Sometimes I’m like, ‘What are you saying?’ Like you’re eight years old, how am I
having these conversations with eight year olds?” (Blair Initial Interview). In a discussion
about who should decide what should be learned in history: “I kind of stepped back for a
second and I was like, ‘These are eight year olds.’ And how many eight year olds are
having these discussions about who writes history, who decides what we’re learning
about?” (Blair Initial Interview). Students have also impacted how Blair views her
effectiveness as a teacher. When Blair shared that almost all of her students had already
made a year’s growth in reading by the midyear benchmark, she attributed this to the one
thing she has changed in her teaching: “making sure that I’m giving more of these
opportunities for critical and creative thinking” (Blair Initial Interview). In her final
interview, she shared that this was now her favorite part of her teaching, and that she
wishes there was more training for teachers on how to provide all students with these
opportunities (Blair Final Interview).

As Blair learns in dialogue with her students, she also learns in dialogue with her
colleagues. In particular, Blair shared that she has worked closely with her gifted
resource teacher to make advanced curriculum more accessible to her English Learners
and students with disabilities (Blair Initial Interview). Use of these resources is required
at least once quarterly; however, Blair and her gifted resource teacher find ways to incorporate them into instruction at least weekly (Blair Initial Interview). One example of the resources Blair uses is *Jacob’s Ladder*. During the first classroom observation, Blair read students a book, *Last Stop on Market Street*, then met with small groups during reading rotations to complete a *Jacob’s Ladder* discussion. At the end of the observation, she shared that the activity had been developed by her and the gifted resource teacher. The original ladder utilized the book, but didn’t align with the student learning outcome of identifying the author’s message, so they rewrote it (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). In addition to utilizing *Jacob’s Ladder*, Blair co-plans project-based learning (PBL) units in social studies and science with her gifted resource teacher and has taken multiple professional learning courses offered through her district on the topic (Blair Initial Interview).

**Subtheme 1.2: Blair provides space for student voice to guide learning in the classroom.** Blair described how she has relinquished much of the control she initially felt she needed to have in her early years of teaching. She realized

…that they’ve got this and kind of letting them guide the learning more than me guiding the learning…Like I guide what standards we’re learning but there’s a lot of giving them the opportunity to think through things and let them have that productive struggle, and invent things themselves almost, and come to their own conclusions. (Blair Initial Interview).

One example of how Blair makes space for student voice while still aligning the learning with the standards is through her use of PBL in science and social studies. At the
beginning of a PBL unit, students are introduced to a driving question and then generate a list of questions they need answers to (the Need to Knows) in order to accomplish the goal. Besides the current PBL on explorers (“How can you, as a concerned second grader, create a podcast to persuade instructional services whether or not we should honor European Explorers?”) posted on the Social Studies bulletin board in the classroom, evidence of work from another PBL hangs behind the door with the driving question: “How can you, as a sports team, create an emergency broadcast to warn people about an incoming storm?” (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). Because students generate the list of “Need to Knows,” their voice weighs heavily in how the learning around that particular standard progresses. Another example is Blair’s move to student-led book club discussions. During the second observation, Blair met with several small groups for a discussion on a specific book the group had all read (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). In the interview afterward, she mentioned that this is the point in the year when she usually makes this transition, but it is difficult for students because they are so used to talking to the teacher rather than to one another. Her goal with these discussions is to get students to the point where they are completely student-led and “ultimately give them more opportunities to share their voice and their perspectives” (Blair Final Interview).

This inclusion of student voice in guiding learning is also evident in the flexibility Blair allows in the daily schedule. Her focus is less on ensuring they stick to it by the minute and more on ensuring students have ample time for processing. “I’m not going to say, ‘Oh, it’s 1:50. It’s time for math. We have to stop.’ I’ll give them opportunities to continue so that they feel they have the time they need to take risks” (Blair Final
Interview). This flexibility was also demonstrated in morning meeting during one of the classroom observations. When students volunteered to answer the share question, Blair took the time to call on every single student, and provide a related comment, before moving on to the next. Considering that every student except one elected to share, the share activity took much longer than in the first classroom observation, yet Blair made no mention of the time to her students (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes).

Student voice was also incorporated as students developed their classroom and carpet expectations, and as they considered what it meant to be a critical thinker and communicator (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). The classroom is filled with evidence of a variety of student voices: handwritten post-its with traits of a critical thinker or communicator (Blair Final Interview), signatures on the collaboratively developed classroom agreements (Blair Observation 2 Open-Ended Memo), and ideas for why students should, or should not, learn about Christopher Columbus and Christopher Newport (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo). If Blair’s goal is to be “more of a facilitator than a giver of information” (Blair Final Interview), it seems clear that she engages students in learning collaboratively alongside her and in sharing decision-making opportunities.

**Subtheme 1.3: Blair gives students choice in how they engage with learning.** Blair offers students choice in the learning activities they participate in during a lesson. For example, in the first observation, students were asked to select any of the draft persuasive letters they had written to share with a peer for the purposes of receiving feedback (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). In the second observation, students were
again offered choice – this time in selecting which of their persuasive letter drafts they wanted to publish and turn in for a grade (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). During morning meeting that same day, students were allowed to choose whether they participated in the activity – a GoNoodle video that had them spreading out around the room and moving. When several students chose not to participate, Blair did not communicate, verbally or nonverbally, that she was displeased, explaining that she continues to offer the activity because students ask for it even if they don’t always participate (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). At the conclusion of their student-led book discussions, Blair spread out four books from which students could choose for their next book club. Students would be allowed to select their top two choices and the teacher would decide which of those two books the student would read (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). As students enter the classroom each morning, Blair greets each one by having them choose from five different greeting options (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes).

Another way in which Blair provides choice to students is in where they can sit during independent work time.

I like to have a variety of spaces. I don’t have full-on flexible seating, but I like to try to be flexible in where students sit when they’re doing independent work. So, I have a round table,…a small lower down square table…I also like to have a lot of carpet space…I think I have three small carpets and then my large morning meeting carpet. (Blair Final Interview)

Blair continues that she is not personally comfortable sitting in a chair all day, so she wants to make sure her students have freedom to move around so that they can be
comfortable as they complete their work. She is even okay with them laying around on the floor, “as long as they’re working” (Blair Final Interview). This attention to students’ comfort by providing them choice in how they work demonstrates Blair’s deep care for her students – in both concern and action.

**Theme 2: Blair models and supports all students in developing a critical perspective and in becoming independent thinkers and academic risk-takers.** Blair views critical and creative thinking as skills that can be developed in all students given enough scaffolding and practice opportunities. Questioning, in particular, is one critical thinking skill upon which Blair places importance; her goal is to ensure students leave her classroom with the capacity to question and “think for themselves” so that, ultimately, they can effect change. In order for students to feel comfortable stretching their thinking in this way, Blair models and supports students in developing a growth mindset and taking academic risks, reframing mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures.

**Subtheme 2.1: Blair believes all students can be taught the skills of critical thinking and creativity through appropriate scaffolding and frequent practice.** Blair views higher level thinking as a set of skills that students can be taught, but thinks that schools often resort to “more basic levels of thinking…right versus wrong answer type thinking” (Blair Final Interview) rather than thinking that is more rigorous and open-ended. Given enough scaffolding and support, however, Blair believes that all students can learn to think at a higher level.

All students are able when they’re taught that [higher level of thinking], they’re all able to rise to the occasion. Some students might need a little bit more support
on the way… We might need a scaffold just like we would for students who are English Learners, for students who have disabilities. We can put supports in place for those students, but they’re still able to have that higher level of thinking and to be more open with their thoughts and more creative and critical with the way that they’re thinking. (Blair Final Interview)

Further, Blair defines the “development” part of talent development as being partially about providing these scaffolds to students so that they can access higher level thinking (Blair Initial Interview).

However, Blair does more than just say she incorporates scaffolds – she also outlines how she supports students in developing higher level thinking. Beyond simply identifying potentially difficult vocabulary words, Blair breaks down advanced prose for students, rather than shy away from reading a book with challenging language. For example, in the first observation, Blair read the book Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena and stopped at the sentence, “Sometimes when you’re surrounded by dirt, you’re a better witness for what’s beautiful.” She asked students what they thought it meant, then led a discussion to ensure everyone understood before moving on (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). She scaffolds academic conversation by teaching students how to use the sentence starters she has posted in the classroom to frame their thinking for Partner Talks and Math Talks (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). She differentiates her guided questioning to ensure students rise to the thinking objective, as she did in her small groups as they completed the Jacob’s Ladder activity, without removing the rigor (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). Blair also levels the support she provides during a
difficult task to ensure students are operating within their zone of proximal development, providing more guidance to some and less to others (Blair Final Interview).

Blair focuses on ensuring all students are provided with practice opportunities to utilize their critical and creative thinking skills “every single day” (Blair Initial Interview). This includes lessons that help students develop “problem-solving” (Blair Initial Interview), “out of the box thinking,” “open-ended thinking,” and “questioning” (Blair Initial Interview), as well as giving them time to “crea[t] e things,” “think beyond just what the information is,” and consider how what they’re learning “appl[ies] to my life now…[and] to the world today” (Blair Initial Interview). In addition to the resources she brings in from Jacob’s Ladder and M2, Blair supports the development of these skills through discussions in whole or small group lessons across content areas. For example, during the second observation, Blair read a story Colors of Us by Karen Katz that led to a conversation around skin color and differences among people (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo). Other examples include the discussions around Last Stop on Market Street and who decides what is important for them to learn in social studies (Blair Final Interview), as outlined in the next section.

Subtheme 2.2: Blair encourages students to question the world around them and to think for themselves. One critical thinking skill Blair draws particular attention to is questioning. Blair encourages students to question what people tell them is true or important – even her – and to think about how people’s motives and perspectives impact their thinking around an issue or idea. An example she offers is the introductory
discussion they had when embarking on their latest PBL unit on explorers and whether they should be studied by second graders (Blair Initial Interview).

What stood out to me when we were introducing this whole PBL, I had one student…raise her hand…And she was like, ‘Well, why are we deciding if it’s good or bad? If we’re learning about them, doesn’t that automatically mean they’re good?’ And I was like, ‘Well, yes and no. All people make good choices and bad choices. And you have to think of the perspective of who it is that decided how history was written because at some point it was a series of decisions that led to ‘These are the people we’re going to learn about.’ It was a group of people deciding.’ And she was like, ‘Well, who decides?’ And I was like, ‘That’s something we need to think about. Who is it deciding? What is their perspective? What is it that they are hoping we take out of this and do we agree with that?’ And it turned into a long discussion…[and they asked] ‘Wow, I had never thought of this…Should we always listen to you Ms. Blair? You’re our teacher.’ I was like, ‘Well no, because I also have personal perspectives and I have biases that I try not to, but I’m also human.’ (Blair Final Interview)

Reflecting on this discussion, Blair said that, beyond the project itself, she wants them to be able to continue applying this sort of questioning in their future. She sees it as a learned skill that students can develop, but one that is not necessarily taught in schools. In fact, she believes that, intrinsically, students may know how to think this way at some point, but that “society almost teaches us not to” (Blair Final Interview). Thus, Blair
thinks it is a teacher’s responsibility to ensure that students learn how to question, and are encouraged to do so.

A skill that might be considered prerequisite to questioning is the ability to think independently, or getting students to “think for themselves” (Blair Initial Interview). Blair expressed that she wants students to “find their own answers and come to their own conclusions” (Blair Initial Interview) rather than look to her to have all the answers, a notable change from when she began her teaching career. “So I was definitely more on that end [of looking for regurgitated answers] where now, I’m more on the end of, you guys are going to figure this out on your own…” (Blair Initial Interview). In addition to encouraging independent thinking in lessons, Blair also supports students in utilizing this skill in their social interactions. During the classroom observation, Blair asked the students in each of her book club discussion groups if they wanted to keep their book or turn it in now that they were finished with it. As students were making their decisions, she warned them against making a decision based on what their peers decided: “And you guys can make your own decision. Just because someone says they want to turn it in doesn’t mean that you have to” (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes).

Subtheme 2.3: Blair models and supports the development of a growth mindset.

In Blair’s eyes, students aren’t willing to take risks and step outside of their comfort zone unless they feel like it’s okay to make mistakes. Otherwise, they will just “try to play it safe” (Blair Final Interview). Instead, she discusses how she has consciously sought to develop a classroom culture where students know that “it’s okay to fail, even if you make
a mistake, mistakes are proof of learning” (Blair Final Interview). When asked how she thought her students would describe what it’s like to be part of her class, she said,

I would also hope that they would think that…they have opportunities to try new things and take risks. I also tell them to be risk-takers a lot and that the worst thing that can happen if they fail is that they’ve learned something new. They know what not to do next time. (Blair Final Interview)

Blair supports this notion of looking at failure as a learning opportunity through discussion of growth mindset and the concept of “yet.” Students set goals every quarter, as well as develop hopes and dreams at the beginning of the year and New Year’s resolutions in January. During one of the classroom observations, they were even asked to set one for the day (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). They apply strategies of a growth mindset in their goal-setting by looking at what they want to be able to do as something they cannot do “yet” and focusing on progress they have made, in addition to identifying next steps and setting new goals (Blair Final Interview).

As Blair supports students in developing a growth mindset, she also models a growth mindset of her own. In the initial interview, Blair described herself as someone who never turns down an opportunity for learning, which is how she and her gifted resource teacher ended up being the only ones in the school piloting a district initiative (Blair Initial Interview). When outlining her rationale for choosing to teach at this particular school, she stated that she felt the principal’s vision – a focus on effort and attitude, rather than grades, for academic honor roll – aligned with her own (Blair Initial Interview). Later, she discussed how she was able to transition from being a teacher who
needs to be in control of students’ learning to a teacher who lets students guide their learning: “And I think my comfort level with failing, for lack of a better word, has gotten better. So I’m more comfortable being like, ‘Alright, let’s try this, if it’s horrible, oh well, we’ll try again tomorrow, do something different.’” (Blair Initial Interview). In fact, this increased willingness to take risks was one of the pieces of advice she had for teachers new to implementation of the Young Scholars Model, along with giving students opportunities to fail and not being afraid to try new things (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes).

**Theme 3: Blair demonstrates a high level of engagement in helping her students succeed.** Through both words and actions, Blair communicates a deep level of care for her students’ academic and socioemotional well-being. She helps students learn to identify and process their emotions, as well as become advocates for themselves. She recognizes the connection between learning and students’ socioemotional experiences within and outside the classroom and holds students to high expectations through respectful reminders and redirections. Blair’s goal is to teach her students that the classroom is a shared space and that they all have a “collective responsibility for keeping it nice, keeping it organized, and working together to do that (Blair Final Interview). Whether it’s through considering how to best meet their academic and socioemotional needs or keeping expectations high, Blair demonstrates deep care in helping her students become successful.

**Subtheme 3.1: Blair demonstrates deep care for students’ academic and socioemotional well-being.** Blair understands that attending to students’ academic needs
requires that their socioemotional needs also be taken into account. For example, when considering who to recommend for full-time gifted services, she evaluates whether they have a growth mindset. “There are some students who are going to thrive on a challenge every single time, are always going to be okay if they make mistakes. And there are some students who aren’t there yet” (Blair Final Interview). These are the students she is concerned may become overwhelmed or stressed by full-time services, and thus may consider part-time services for them instead (Blair Final Interview). Another example of this deep care can be seen in the way Blair expressed concern about her students’ emotional state when learning resumed following the abrupt closure of schools.

I also know that before we left, there was a lot of anxiety…Even if we do start learning in some capacity, whether it’s in person or online, it’s going to take a lot of time to just work through the feelings that we’ve all had this month…Before I can expect them to learn, I need to make sure that they feel safe…This keeps bringing to mind Maslow’s hierarchy of needs…if these kids are not secure in everything that’s going on in the world, we’re never going to get to that top layer of being able to learn. (Blair Final Interview)

One thing Blair did right away in an attempt to lessen the “extra-long summer slide” was request donations from friends and family to send her students care packages with supplies such as books, a journal, a math workbook, pencils and crayons (Blair Final Interview).

Another way in which Blair demonstrates deep care for her students’ socioemotional well-being is through teaching them how to recognize what they and
others may be feeling, as well as strategies for coping with those feelings. Blair’s classroom is the only one in the school currently utilizing the Positivity Project, a curriculum that teaches students about a new character trait each week. Blair incorporates it right after morning meeting each day and has covered traits such as enthusiasm, kindness, love, gratitude, and perspective. She weaves these words into the content she teaches, such as when she asked students if the boy in Last Stop on Market Street was showing gratitude (Blair Observation 1 CRP Memo), and asks students to recognize these traits in others, such as through reflections in closing circle (Blair Initial Interview) or asking them during morning meeting share to consider a time when they had cheered on another’s success (Blair Observation 1 Open-Ended Memo). Blair recognizes that students bring their home lives into the classroom, as well, and said she has done a lot of work in the last several years teaching students how to cope and process through both positive and negative events that may be happening at home (Blair Final Interview).

Blair also focuses on encouraging students to become “problem-solvers” and self-advocates by helping them develop a sense of when they need to ask for help and when they can help themselves (Blair Initial Interview). Blair view self-advocacy as a life skill (Blair Initial Interview) and hopes that the skills students are building in this area within the classroom will transfer to their lives outside the classroom. “When they grow up they’re going to be in a position where they’ve learned these skills and they’re going to be able to advocate, not just for themselves, but whatever it is that they’re passionate in” (Blair Initial Interview). Thus, while Blair refers students for Young Scholars if they
don’t seem to have any adult advocates (Blair Final Interview), she simultaneously develops students’ skills in advocating for themselves.

**Subtheme 3.2: Blair respectfully communicates and holds students to high expectations.** Blair helps students be successful in her classroom through proactively and reactively reminding students of the expectations and procedures. She anticipates potential management issues by using questioning to remind students of her expectations such as “I’m going to put on music. What does that mean?” (Blair Observation 1 Open-Ended Memo). She scaffolds directions so that students don’t get bogged down in multi-step tasks: “Everyone has their writing folder and a piece of paper. Go ahead and grab that and eyes on me for the next direction” (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). She lets students know when time is about to elapse and gives them a short period of time to complete what they are doing before joining her on the carpet for the next activity (Blair Observation 2 Open-Ended Memo). She posts guidance on what Quiet Time, Switching Centers, and Take a Break should look and sound like, along with two different versions of the Voice Level chart, as references for students. Finally, the collaboratively-developed carpet and class expectations are posted in central locations and referred to when needed (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes).

When students are not meeting expectations, Blair respectfully redirects them. For example, when a student blurted out during the whole group discussion, Blair responded, “You had a great idea, but I can’t hear you because you didn’t raise your hand” (Blair Observation 1 Open-Ended Memo). In the second observation, students were taking too long to select their pens for peer editing. Blair said, “We’re going to sit for a minute
because if we keep walking back and forth, we won’t hear the directions” (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). This couching of the redirection with a reminder why the expectation is important is something Blair does often, such as when one student was running through the classroom and she said, “Please be safe. I don’t want you to hit your head” (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). Providing this background to students (rather than an implied or literal “Because I said so”) demonstrates Blair’s respect for them.

Another way in which Blair demonstrates her respect is in the way she differentiates her management techniques for individual students. For most students, a gentle reminder suffices; with others, such as the students rolling around on the carpet during reading stations, a gentle reminder is followed by a firm one (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). Blair confirmed this observation by saying that her response depends on the student. While some students respond well to the idea of taking a break or going to a buddy classroom, others do not. When possible, she tries not to send students out of the classroom because it undermines her relationship with the student (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo).

**Theme 4: Blair creates a learning environment in which students’ diverse interests, talents, and identities are reflected, constructed, and affirmed.** Blair’s students are a diverse group, hailing from a variety of racial/ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. As a result, Blair designs a classroom that is reflective of the diversity in her students, while also providing students opportunities to reflect on what it means to be different from one another. She provides space for students’ individual interests and talents to be affirmed by her, their peers, and their
families. The result is a learning environment that allows students to reflect on and construct their identities and receive affirmation for their interests, talents, and accomplishments.

**Subtheme 4.1: Blair creates a classroom reflective of the diversity of her students.** Blair’s classroom reflects the diversity of the students she teaches. Reference posters on the wall depict cartoon people with a variety of skin colors, hair types and colors, and gender (Blair Observation 1 CRP Memo). Class photos from prior years are displayed behind the teacher’s kidney table. Students’ birthdays are written on laminated cupcakes, and their names are the first words written under the appropriate letters on the Word Wall (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). Blair intentionally leaves space on her walls at the beginning of the year to hang students’ academic work and artwork because she knows they “tend to get more excited about the pictures that they draw” and so that they “know that it’s also their room and they can decorate it, as well” (Blair Final Interview). In fact, students’ artwork, as well as their hopes and dreams for the school year, cover almost an entire wall of the classroom (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes).

In addition to the clearly visible ways in which her students are reflected in the classroom, Blair also pays special attention to her classroom library and, in particular, the biographies she included. During one of the classroom observations, a complete list of books in this section was compiled and it included selections on Sonia Sotomayor, Selena, Michelle Obama, Simone Biles, Cristiano Ronaldo, Mae Jemison, Stephen Curry, and Malala Yousafzai, to name a few (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). When asked about the provenance of the books in her classroom library, she shared that all of the
books were hers – none had been provided to her by the school – and that she had been intentional in her selections.

I try really hard to be very aware of what cultures and nationalities, in that sense of the word culture, my students are coming from…Every year I go through my classroom makeup and say, ‘Okay, what students do I have? What books do I need so that they can themselves represented in the work of what great people have done?’…not just in terms of nationality but also in terms of gender…Different careers that might have stereotypically been thought of as male-dominated careers. I want them to see women in those places. And same for people of different backgrounds and ethnicities. I want them to see themselves in my classroom library…” (Blair Final Interview)

Through careful curation of books in her classroom library and in her read-alouds, Blair ensures her students are seeing and reading books with protagonists that look like them, rather than “always reading books about little white boys” (Blair Final Interview).

Subtheme 4.2: Blair designs learning opportunities that allow students to reflect on their diverse identities and experiences. A whole group reading lesson, including the read aloud, was observed in each of the two classroom observations. The books chosen for each were not only reflective of the students in Blair’s classroom, but also led to discussions in which students reflected on their diverse identities and experiences. Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena looks at a boy and his grandmother exploring the issue of poverty and includes characters with diverse skin colors, bodies, abilities, ages, and socioeconomic status (Blair Observation 1 CRP Memo). Blair had students
considering the differing perspectives of the boy and his grandmother, stopping throughout to ask what they believed each character might be thinking or feeling. At the end she asked students to consider what message the author was trying to send, at which time students made reference to one of their recent Positivity Project words, “gratitude” (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). *Colors of Us* by Karen Katz focuses on a girl who wants to paint a picture of herself, but is having trouble figuring out which color to use for her skin. After her mother takes her for a walk to see all the different shades of color that people’s skin can be, she is able to create a picture of people with varied shading, rather than the simple brown she was thinking of using before (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo). As Blair reads the story aloud, one student says, “That’s me!” (Blair Observation 2 Field Notes). After asking questions throughout the story around how the characters were looking at skin color, Blair asks students to identify the author’s message. During the ensuing conversation, students discuss how everyone looks and dresses differently, and that being different is a good thing and, in fact, what makes everyone unique (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo). Blair reinforces this by reminding students that even within simplistic groupings like “Black, White, and Brown,” there are differences in terms of what people look like – and that’s okay (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo).

**Subtheme 4.3: Blair incorporates multiple pathways for affirmation of students’ individual interests and talents.** Blair provides affirmation to her students by ensuring that they feel seen and heard. As they enter the classroom each morning, she greets each student by name (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). When they express goals for the future, such as wanting to become a principal, she tells them that they can become one if
they want to (Blair Observation 1 Field Notes). She asks them what is going on in their lives (Blair Observation 2 CRP Memo) and encourages them to pursue their individual talents and interests. For example, during an M² math unit on measurement, Blair described how one student who loves to build things decided to take their learning one step further:

And we were doing a unit…on measurement where Dru and Teller, who are our meerkat friends…got in a car accident, they needed some crash testing done, using measurement to figure out what type of car they should buy. And this student went home and built them a life-sized car…And I didn’t just tell him, okay well this is your car that you built at home when we went to do our crash test. We were also building seat belts on egg cartons in school that we crash tested…Well when it came time for the crash testing, he also had the opportunity to crash test this car… (Blair Initial Interview)

Not only did Blair affirm the student’s interest by letting him crash test his car, she also then had him consider how he might revise its design after the test.

However, Blair is not the only person providing affirmation to students in the classroom. Students are also encouraged to provide affirmation to their peers. In fact, Blair believes that “peer affirmation can be even stronger than when it comes from me” (Blair Initial Interview). One way in which she encourages peer affirmation is through the sentence frames she posts on the critical and creative thinker and communicator bulletin boards, such as “I saw ___ so others could understand them when they ____” and “I saw ____ use their imagination to think of new ideas when ____” (Blair Observation 2 Field
Another is through closing circle, when Blair gives them prompts to help them reflect on what they’d noticed their peers doing that day, such as who had exhibited a particular trait from the Positivity Project. This culture of affirmation likely led to one student exclaiming about the student who built his own car: “Ms. Blair, I am so proud of this kid. He was such a critical and creative thinker, he worked so hard” (Blair Initial Interview).

Blair also involves families in providing affirmation to students through constant communication. Blair describes herself as being “very active on Twitter” (Blair Final Interview), posting about what they are doing in the class for families to see. When students complete PBLs, she will send the product home or provide access to a digital version through printed QR codes. She invites parents in for share fairs, read alouds, and for students’ birthdays (Blair Final Interview). One student constantly asks her to post the projects they are working on to Twitter so that he can show his mom. She sees having those opportunities for “talking points” between students and families as sources of excitement and engagement for her students (Blair Final Interview).

**Findings for Research Question #2: Understanding of Giftedness**

The second research question sought to understand how teachers implementing a talent development model understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. Because the planned number of observations was cut short due to school closures, a single-case analysis of how Blair described her Young Scholars and how she determined who she recommended for full- and part-time gifted services across her initial and final interviews was conducted. The
three themes that arose across both interviews were (a) students’ critical thinking, (b) creativity, and (c) potential ability.

**Theme 1: Critical thinking.** In both interviews, Blair discusses the idea of students “not just regurgitating information” (Blair Initial Interview) but rather “being critical with the way that they’re thinking” (Blair Final Interview). These students think beyond the information they have been provided to “think critically” and to question (Blair Initial Interview). Their thinking may even challenge Blair’s own opinions and includes an explanation for “the why behind their ideas” (Blair Initial Interview).

**Theme 2: Creativity.** In addition to critical thinking, Blair also pays attention to students’ creativity. Blair mentions students’ capacity to create things (Blair Initial Interview), such as the student who built his own car (Blair Initial Interview), and being “more open with their thoughts and more creative” (Blair Final Interview). When Blair discussed a particular group of Young Scholars who had made exponential growth in reading this year but had started the year reading right at grade level, she attributed their lack of growth in previous years to “someone [not] fostering those skills that they already had, or someone [not] encouraging them to do those things” (Blair Initial Interview). Interestingly enough, Blair describes this group of students as “some of my most creative thinkers” (Blair Initial Interview).

**Theme 3: Potential ability.** When considering who to identify for full-time gifted services, Blair looks at students’ potential, rather than just their ability, which she perceives as something they might not yet be exhibiting. “The first thing that I take into consideration is just their ability and where I can see the potential that they have, not
necessarily the ability they have right at that moment, but the potential I see in them” (Blair Final Interview). Blair describes talent as something that “comes in many ways” (Blair Initial Interview) and can be fostered in all students, although a little bit more in some than in others, to whom it may not come as naturally (Blair Final Interview).

**Cross-Case Synthesis**

Once each single case was analyzed holistically for within-case patterns, a cross-case synthesis was conducted to identify patterns across both cases. Themes and subthemes from each case were compared for areas of overlap related to each of the two research questions.

*Findings for Research Question #1: Creation of Talent Development Context*

The first research question sought to understand how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. The cross-case synthesis yielded four areas where the single cases of Sophie and Blair converged: (a) collaborative relations of power, (b) impact of students’ culture, language, and experiences on instruction, (c) identity construction, and (d) attending to the whole child. Table 2 organizes each of the single case subthemes by these areas. Some subthemes are repeated twice as their constituent elements related to more than one area (e.g., power and whole child).
### Table 2

**Areas of Convergence Across Single-Case Subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Sophie Subthemes</th>
<th>Blair Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative relations of power</strong></td>
<td><strong>Co-construction of knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sophie fosters a classroom community built on collaboration and respect.</td>
<td>• Blair and her students learn in dialogue with one another and their peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to challenging material</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sophie provides access to challenging material to all students through scaffolding and support.</td>
<td>• Blair believes all students can be taught the skills of critical thinking and creativity through appropriate scaffolding and frequent practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing power with students</strong></td>
<td>• Sophie offers choice in how students engage in classroom learning activities.</td>
<td>• Blair respectfully communicates and holds students to high expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sophie offers choice in how students demonstrate their learning.</td>
<td>• Blair gives students choice in how they engage with learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sophie fosters a classroom community built on collaboration and respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowering students</strong></td>
<td>• Sophie provides access to challenging material to all students through scaffolding and support.</td>
<td>• Blair encourages students to question the world around them and think for themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Blair demonstrates deep care for students’ academic and socioemotional well-being.</td>
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<td>• Blair provides space for student voice to guide learning in the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of culture, language, and experiences</td>
<td>Sophie considers the impact of students’ languages, cultures, and experiences in learning and teaching.</td>
<td>Blair believes all students can be taught the skills of critical thinking and creativity through appropriate scaffolding and frequent practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
| Identity construction | Sophie considers the impact of students’ languages, cultures, and experiences in learning and teaching.  
Sophie affirms students, while also promoting students’ self, peer, and family affirmation. | Blair creates a classroom reflective of the diversity of her students.  
Blair incorporates multiple pathways for affirmation for students’ individual interests and talents.  
Blair designs learning opportunities that allow students to reflect on their diverse identities and experiences. |
| Whole child | Sophie engages students in reflection and goal-setting.  
Sophie provides access to challenging material to all students through scaffolding and support.  
Sophie considers students’ socioemotional well-being when making instructional decisions.  
Sophie fosters a classroom community built on collaboration and respect. | Blair models and supports the development of a growth mindset.  
Blair demonstrates deep care for students’ academic and socioemotional well-being.  
Blair respectfully communicates and holds students to high expectations. |

**Theme 1: Collaborative relations of power.** A cross-case synthesis of the within-case patterns revealed that collaborative relations of power was an area where the single cases of Sophie and Blair converged. According to Cummins (2009), power
relations might be broken down into a continuum with “coercive” relations of power located at one end and “collaborative” relations of power located at the other. He defines coercive relations of power as “the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group, or country” (p. 263). He contrasts this with collaborative relations of power, in which the concept of power “is not a fixed quantity but is generated through interaction with others. The more empowered one individual or group becomes, the more is generated for others to share” (p. 263). Through this lens, empowerment means “the collaborative creation of power;” in contexts such as these, students feel their voices are heard and respected and their power of self-expression amplified (p. 263).

In Sophie’s and Blair’s classrooms, both teachers established collaborative relations of power with their students. Knowledge was an entity that was co-constructed in collaboration with others rather than something “delivered” through instruction. Access to challenging curriculum and materials was provided to all students as a means of empowerment rather than reserved for a select few. Choice was offered in myriad ways as a means to share power with students and allow them to engage in learning through methods and materials that met their individual needs. Finally, teachers empowered students to think critically and question in order to think beyond information and perspectives provided.

**Subtheme 1.1: Co-construction of knowledge.** In both Sophie and Blair’s classrooms, knowledge is something that is socially constructed through collaboration rather than an entity that is bestowed from teacher to student. Students learn from, and
help, each other. Sophie’s students assist her in translating for their peers and Blair’s students share strategies for solving a particular math problem in multiple ways. On the mornings when some of her students attend the school’s “Stretch Your Brain Club,” Sophie gives them time to teach their peers about what they learned. When selecting mentor texts, Sophie utilizes books her students have written and published to their classroom library “so that they see they’re being used there, that they’re being the teacher right now” (Sophie Initial Interview). Through discussion about complex topics such as stereotyping and bias or differences based on skin color, students in both classrooms engage in meaning-making through dialogue with their peers and their teacher. They provide feedback to one another on their writing in both classrooms, as well as on project drafts in Blair’s classroom, with both teachers acknowledging that they believe students get more from their peers’ feedback (at least sometimes) than they do from the teacher herself. In both, knowledge isn’t so much about finding the “right answer” as it is about processing through the information provided – and thinking “beyond” it.

Another way in which both teachers support students’ co-construction of knowledge is through collaboration on what students learn and how they learn it. Blair identifies herself multiple times as a “guide” or “facilitator” rather than a “purveyor of knowledge.” She states that she chooses the standards students will learn, but that they guide where they go with it. This is particularly the case in science and social studies, which she teaches largely through PBL, an instructional model that incorporates a great deal of student voice in directing what needs to be discovered, and how students might accomplish that. Sophie also utilizes PBL, describing one she completed on weather and
another she is currently completing on famous Americans. When discussing a typical social studies lesson, Sophie mentioned that some days she will have students work with her to complete a Know-Want to Know-Want to Learn (K-W-L) chart, in which students identify what they know, want to know, and have learned about a particular topic. She provides her Young Scholars with opportunities to facilitate small groups – something she says they do better than some of the collaborative team meetings she attends as an adult (Sophie Initial Interview).

Both teachers report feeling amazed by what they see some of their students do – evidence that they are learning right alongside their students. Sophie marvels over the attention to detail some of her students have at the age of seven, while both Sophie and Blair remark on the complex conversations they have with their students. At the beginning of the year, Sophie set aside a folder for each student where she could place work that “wow”ed her; as a result, she has identified three additional students to monitor for Young Scholars. Blair described a recent activity in which students had to choose if Christopher Columbus should be honored. One student said that he should be honored because he helped Queen Isabella, which in turn made her more powerful – and there weren’t many powerful queens at the time. This was a perspective Blair stated that she had never considered (Blair Final Interview). Blair reflected on the unprecedented growth students have made in reading through the first six months of school and attributed it to the work she had been doing with critical and creative thinking. Both teachers’ continued remarks about what students are able to do as second graders, or as seven or eight year
olds, demonstrate that Sophie and Blair are learning just as much from their students and what they are capable of as their students are learning from them.

**Subtheme 1.2: Access to challenging material.** Sophie and Blair agreed that all students should have access to material that challenges them and, in particular, develops their skills in higher level thinking. Unfortunately, this access is not something that can be taken for granted in all schools; thus, Sophie and Blair are exerting their power in ensuring all of their students, no matter their label, receive such access. Blair stated that she attempts to incorporate opportunities for students to practice their critical and creative thinking skills every day. Sophie didn’t specify how often she provides all of her students with these opportunities, but she said she had come a long way from only incorporating them once per quarter. In fact, beginning with her second year of teaching, she started to invite her gifted resource teacher in to co-teach lessons with her, as well as to introduce her to additional resources. Since teaching Young Scholars summer school the previous year, Sophie said that she takes bits and pieces from different curricula and incorporates them as often as she can.

Beyond offering lessons and activities that challenge students, Sophie and Blair also make those lessons accessible – in other words, granting both *access* and *accessibility*. They do this through leveling the support provided – more to some and less to others, as needed – and through guided questioning and encouraging use of sentence frames in class discussions. By offering scaffolds and supports, both teachers believe challenging material can be made accessible to students, even though neither felt their graduate programs in education prepared them for how to do that. If this feeling is shared
by other teachers, it may explain why Blair believes that some educators in Title I schools may not think that their students can do this level of thinking. “Sometimes I think a lot of people, especially in Title I schools, get a little overwhelmed by those [advanced curriculum] resources, thinking my students aren’t able to access it at this level” (Blair Initial Interview). Thus, in taking the initiative to learn how they can make such materials accessible to their students, Sophie and Blair exert their power in order to promote student empowerment.

**Subtheme 1.3: Sharing power with students.** Choice was a theme across both cases and it is through providing choice to students that both teachers were able to cede some of the power typically reserved for teachers within the classroom to their students. Sophie and Blair each allowed students choice in where they located themselves during independent work time, whether it be on a carpet, at or under small tables, at their desks, or lounging with pillows and/or stuffed animals. At times, they each offered choice in whether students participated in an activity, such as when Sophie allowed students to decide if they wanted to write a morning meeting share question or when Blair let students choose whether or not they participated in the GoNoodle morning meeting activity. Both discussed allowing choice in products, whether it be which famous American they focused on for their projects or if they created a video or podcast for their persuasive writing piece. Sophie spoke about how she allowed students to move around during instruction – something that was also observed during a lesson – as well as how she tries to write tasks that allow for open-ended responses, such as assigning a number of the day but allowing students to choose how they achieve it. Sophie also discussed
how she runs her reading rotations – allowing students to complete activities in whatever order they choose – and the homework options she supplies students.

In both classrooms, Sophie and Blair provided opportunities for shared decision-making. Creation of classroom expectations was an exercise in which students in both classes engaged. Sophie’s students also decided how they wanted to categorize the books in her classroom library, what the rules around pillow usage would be, and what they wanted to name the area they ended up calling the “chill zone.” Blair’s students developed the expectations for sitting and working on the carpet, as well as how they would define being a critical and creative thinker and a good communicator.

**Subtheme 1.4: Empowering students.** To some degree, each teacher attempts to instill a critical perspective in students. Sophie described the goal of the critical literacy unit she was currently teaching, of which the princes and princesses lesson was a part, as getting students to

> take what you’re given from the text…and talk back at it and give your thoughts and your explanation as to why you either agree or disagree. And you want them to get to that point where they do, maybe they don’t agree with the author and they’re giving their opinion, not just saying what we want to hear. (Sophie Final Interview)

Blair also focused on getting students to question the world around them, going so far as to tell them that they should even question her and her perspective. In doing so, both teachers broke up the coercive relations of power, in which students might be told what is
both true and important with no regard for the underlying motives or perspectives of those in positions of authority.

Another area where Sophie and Blair converged was in helping students to build independence through both action and thought. Both teachers placed their students in groups in order to build up their independence from the teacher by encouraging students to first seek assistance from their peers. Blair mentioned several times that she wanted students to be able to “think for themselves” and Sophie discussed being impressed with the responses on a recent *Jacob’s Ladder* activity when students thought “beyond” what the class had brainstormed together. Both teachers discuss advocacy – Sophie in terms of teacher and parent advocacy, and Blair in terms of teacher, parent, and students’ advocacy for themselves and others. They also consider students’ futures. Sophie reflected on how what she was doing with students would impact them in the next grade level; Blair reflected on how what students were learning might impact them beyond K-12 schooling.

**Theme 2: Impact of culture, language, and experience.** A diverse range of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds were represented in the students that comprised Sophie and Blair’s classrooms. Each teacher discussed how they provided scaffolds for their English Learners through academic language support (e.g., vocabulary or figurative language) and were aware of different cultural or background experiences in math (e.g., knowing algorithms instead of knowing how to break down numbers). Blair stated that she utilized scaffolds she has acquired through her work with the ESOL teacher, who was based in her room the previous year, including sentence starters to help
students frame their thinking. She also shared that she was sensitive to the fact that parents from different cultural backgrounds may not know or feel empowered to advocate for their students if that wasn’t the tradition within their own cultures; thus, she connects them with the resources they need in order to do so. Sophie identified specific strategies she used with her English Learners, such as the Color, Symbol, Image visible thinking routine, and scaffolds she provided like differentiated note-taking sheets and seating near another student who speaks the same language. She also detailed how she attends to language when selecting books for her classroom library and takes students’ background experiences into consideration when designing projects or assignments. For example, Sophie noted that many of her students had never seen a monument firsthand; thus, she modified the “design a monument” project this year to become a “design a museum exhibit” because she knew her students had either been to a museum in person or virtually. Sophie also mentioned how she related Christopher Newport to a place students were familiar with (College of William & Mary) and avoids writing prompts about topics about which all students may not have experience (e.g., water parks).

**Theme 3: Identity construction.** Sophie and Blair both design a learning environment that supports students in constructing their own identities, defined here as students’ exploration of what makes them unique or “who they are” as individuals. In selecting books for their classroom libraries, both teachers sought texts that allowed students to see characters that looked like them or that came from similar backgrounds. Blair also considered gender.
So, like within my classroom library, for example, I have a biography section. And every year I go through my classroom makeup and say, "Okay, what students do I have? What books do I need so that they can see themselves represented in the work of what great people have done?" And I also not just in terms of nationality but also in terms of gender, making sure I have a lot of books about really great things that women have done so that my girls can be like, "Wow, I can be a scientist. I can be an athlete." Different careers that might have stereotypically been thought of as male-dominated careers. I want them to see women in those places. And same for people of different backgrounds and ethnicities. I want them to see themselves in my classroom library and in the books that I'm reading. (Blair Final Interview)

In other words, literature is not simply a means through which students can see themselves reflected, but also an avenue through which they might explore and negotiate who they are and who they want to become.

Blair also ensured the classroom reference posters were reflective of students’ diverse skin colors, hair types and colors, and gender. Sophie and Blair each offered affirmation to students, while also designing explicit opportunities for students to affirm themselves and their peers. Family engagement was another means through which students were affirmed. Both teachers invited families to attend student project celebrations and share the work students were doing through media such as ClassDojo or Twitter. Sophie emailed notes to families timed so that they were received right as
students were getting off the bus, while Blair provided access to digital projects students completed through applications like Flipgrid.

In addition to ensuring students were reflected in the classroom environment and received affirmations from the teacher, their peers, their families, and themselves, Sophie and Blair each engaged in thinking about how instruction supported students in constructing their identities. Sophie discussed how she purchased the Spanish and Arabic versions of books her class was reading in English so that students who needed those books in their home languages could “see we’re reading the same book, just different languages” (Sophie Final Interview). In doing so, she honored students’ linguistic backgrounds, comprising one element of “who they are,” while also helping them engage in reading with their peers, another group in which they have membership. Blair incorporated texts as tools for promoting positive identity construction and negotiation around poverty and race. For example, in Matt de la Pena’s *Last Stop on Market Street*, a boy and his grandmother explored what poverty really means – and it had nothing to do with material possessions. In Karen Katz’s *Colors of Us*, a girl came to know more about herself and others through exploring how to represent people of all skin colors in her art. Both texts offered a multidimensional and strengths-based look at authentic contexts in which students lived, and sent the message that differences between individuals are not only okay, but also, as one student noted, what makes people unique. As Rudine Sims Bishop wrote,

> Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human
experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (1990, p. ix)

Through the use of texts with characters and stories that gave students “mirrors, windows, and doors” into their lives, Blair provided opportunities for them to consider who they are and where they fit within the world as they know it.

**Theme 4: Whole child.** Sophie and Blair both stressed the importance of attending to students’ socioemotional needs alongside their academic ones. When considering who they wanted to recommend for full-time gifted services, they each took into account students’ reactions to challenging activities – whether they induced anxiety or stress. They both expressed concern about placing students in an environment that might overwhelm them, either because the student isn’t yet ready for that kind of challenge or because they might feel too much pressure. Each teacher has discussed growth mindset with students, has students setting and tracking their own goals, and uses some means of student reflection, whether it be reflecting on what they have learned or reflecting on what they might do differently. Sophie and Blair also described their classrooms as places where students feel like they can take risks and make mistakes. Both taught students character traits through incorporation of the Positivity Project and strategies for taking a break or calming down. Sophie and Blair differentiated how they managed student behavior based on how individual students responded, and kept their communication with students respectful. They had and held high expectations for students during lessons and it was clear that students knew their respective teacher’s signals and routines.
While both teachers had concerns about students after schools closed abruptly, their concerns varied slightly. Academically, Sophie was concerned about her newcomer students in particular and the progress they had made in acquiring English. She didn’t know if students would have someone to practice with at home, or if the supports she was able to provide at school would be available. She also wasn’t sure about their access to computers or to a WiFi connection. Sophie was concerned for her students who were still reading below grade level – what that “summer slide” would look like in the coming months (Sophie Final Interview). Blair was also concerned for students’ academics, particularly their growth in reading, which she predicted would end up in an “extra-long summer slide,” as well as resources families had at home to assist students (Blair Final Interview). To help alleviate some of this, she gathered donations from friends and family to send students academic care packages.

From a socioemotional perspective, Sophie was concerned about students being left home with either older siblings or nobody at all. Blair discussed that students were feeling anxious before school closed and she didn’t know how they were handling things now that schools had closed so abruptly. She was concerned about whether students were getting the three meals a day that used to be provided to them at school, and if they were aware of the community resources that had been set up for that purpose. Before school could resume, she recognized that students’ lower-level needs from Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs would have to be addressed before they would be able to move on to academics.

Sophie and Blair’s understanding of talent development. The preceding four themes around how teachers create talent development contexts for students from
historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs emerged as a result of comparing the within-case patterns from the single cases of Sophie and Blair. To strengthen this cross-case synthesis, however, it is important to consider how these two teachers understand what it means to create a classroom context where talent is developed in their own words, then compare this understanding to the four themes that emerged. Both teachers were asked directly how they defined and supported talent development in their classrooms, as well as if they believed talent could be fostered in all students. Because the goal of the single-case analyses was to identify within-case patterns, elements of each teacher’s responses emerged when they converged with other sources of evidence within the case. For the purposes of the cross-case synthesis, however, both teachers’ responses to these three questions were compared holistically in order to understand how they believed a classroom context for talent development might be created. This understanding was then compared to the four themes that emerged from the cross-case synthesis.

Sophie and Blair both focused on identifying and nurturing students’ strengths and talents as key ingredients in a talent development classroom. They believed that all students could be pushed to think more deeply through appropriate scaffolds and supports, with Blair focusing specifically on upping the rigor and moving away from activities in which students simply regurgitate information. Blair also stated that she believes students can be taught the skills to think critically, problem-solve, question, and create. Sophie and Blair each discussed providing opportunities for students to showcase their strengths, or for them to recognize the strengths of their peers, stating that this
affirmation helps build students’ confidence (Sophie) and pride (Blair). Both alluded to building students’ self-efficacy. Sophie mentioned that making students feel capable was extremely important, and Blair encouraged students to become self-advocates.

Connections are evident between Sophie and Blair’s expressed understanding of talent development and the four themes that emerged through the cross-case synthesis. Believing that all students can be pushed to think more deeply when provided with scaffolds and supports aligns with the themes of collaborative relations of power and the impact of culture, language, and experience on instruction. Ensuring students have opportunities to showcase their strengths and receive affirmation connects to collaborative relations of power and identity construction. Building students’ confidence, pride, and self-efficacy relates to the theme of attending to the whole child.

Conclusions. What does it mean to create a classroom context for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs? For these classrooms, it meant that teachers developed classrooms in which collaborative, rather than coercive, relations of power were established. Students and teachers became co-constructors of knowledge and teachers provided access to challenging material to all students through scaffolds and supports. Offering choice and opportunities for shared decision-making allowed teachers to share power with students, and encouraging independence and a critical perspective helped to empower them. The cultures, languages, and experiences of students in these classrooms was not ignored, but rather considered and leveraged to implement changes in instruction and the learning environment. Teachers provided “mirrors, windows, and doors” through which students
might construct and negotiate their identities, and demonstrated concern for the whole child by considering both their academic and socioemotional needs. A strengths-based focus with attention to students’ self-esteem and self-efficacy rounded out the areas of overlap between both classrooms.

**Findings for Research Question #2: Understanding of Giftedness**

The second research question sought to understand how teachers implementing a talent development model understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. The cross-case synthesis yielded three areas of convergence between Sophie and Blair: (a) observable behaviors, (b) interpreted behaviors, and (c) giftedness/talent as potential.

**Theme 1: Observable behaviors.** Sophie and Blair each identified behaviors they would expect to observe in a student they would recommend for gifted services. For Sophie, quality of work was a key indicator, which she defined as attention to detail, depth of thinking or thinking beyond what had been discussed, and application of their learning (e.g., vocabulary from Positivity Project) across content areas. Blair looked at students’ critical thinking, including students’ thinking beyond the facts provided, questioning, challenging of opinions, and providing rationale for their ideas. She also identified students’ creative thinking through their creation of things (e.g., the car) and being open-minded.

**Theme 2: Interpreted behaviors.** In addition to observable behaviors they looked for when recommending a student for gifted services, Sophie and Blair also noted behaviors that might be considered subject to teacher interpretation. For example, Sophie
looked for students who demonstrated a motivation to do well, succeed, or “do better.”
While some of the ways she defined motivation could be considered objectively observable (e.g., getting started right away, moving on to the next step in their work), the others, such as the “want to do well” and the “want to succeed” would likely be more subject to her judgment or interpretation. Sophie also identified students’ desire to learn more as a behavior she considered when making a recommendation for gifted services. Both Sophie and Blair referred to students’ potential as a quality they look for or try to build. Neither defined potential as something that could be considered quantifiable, yet both thought they could identify it when they saw it.

**Theme 3: Giftedness/talent as potential.** The idea that talent can be fostered in all students was shared by both Sophie and Blair. Both also believed that students began with different levels of talent, and that talent can be developed more in some students than in others. The notion of talent as potential was also important – while Blair explicitly stated that she looks not only at the ability students exhibit now, but also the potential ability they may exhibit later, when recommending students for gifted services, Sophie stated multiple times in her initial interview that she wanted to provide students with opportunities to build and show their potential. When both teachers were asked what set their Young Scholars apart from the other students they recommended for full-time gifted services, Sophie said the only difference was that the other student was not a language learner while Blair said the difference was in levels of parent advocacy. In other words, neither Sophie nor Blair see giftedness or talent differently in their Young Scholars than
they do in their students in general. Further, they both believe in the idea that talent is something that can be grown, rather than remain static.

**Conclusions.** How do teachers in talent development classrooms understand giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs? From the standpoint of these two teachers, giftedness or talent is something that is partially observable and partially subject to interpretation. Part of what makes the latter so ambiguous is that both teachers conceptualize giftedness or talent as something that can be fostered. When given appropriate supports, students might exhibit this potential. However, both teachers also believe that there are limitations to how much a particular student’s gifts or talents might be grown. Each stated that all students have talents that can be nurtured, but that the levels at which those talents begin – and how far they can expand – are dependent upon the individual student, as well as upon the access and supports they are provided. Essentially, then, both teachers subscribe to the idea that giftedness is not static and that environmental conditions (i.e., learning activities, classroom climate) contribute to its growth, or lack thereof – an idea that directly aligns with teaching within a talent development context.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings from the single-case analyses and cross-case synthesis demonstrated that Sophie and Blair were similar in many ways, but also different, in terms of how they create contexts for talent development of, and conceptualize giftedness in, students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. While both established collaborative relations of power with students, they approached this in different ways.
Choice and voice were provided in both classrooms; however, the degree of emphasis placed on each varied, as evidenced by the subthemes from the single-case analyses. Knowledge was co-constructed with students, with Blair emphasizing her role as a “guide” or “facilitator” and Sophie discussing how students teach one another. Access to challenging material was provided by both teachers, and both illuminated myriad ways in which they made this material more accessible to their students. Students in both classrooms were empowered to “talk back at” (Sophie) and question (Blair) authors of texts and/or people in positions of authority. Collectively, Sophie and Blair considered language, culture, and background experiences in designing their classrooms and instruction, with each attending to different aspects such as understanding impact on parent advocacy (Blair) and making learning authentic to students’ experiences (Sophie). The learning environment enabled students to construct and negotiate their identities through representation in classroom library books (both) and décor (Blair), numerous methods of receiving affirmation, considering how ELs might feel “othered” (Sophie), and engaging students in conversations around differences (Blair). Students’ academic and socioemotional needs were joint concerns for teachers, and both took these needs into account when considering how to recommend for gifted services. Giftedness or talent was viewed as potential and both teachers relied on observable and interpreted behaviors in identifying that potential. Sophie looked at motivation and the desire to learn more, while Blair considered critical thinking and creativity.

In the following chapter, the findings from the single-case analyses and cross-case synthesis will be discussed in terms of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent
development, elaborated on in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2) to include possible constituent elements teachers might enact in classrooms to create contexts for talent development. A framework for considering talent development through a rehumanizing lens will be introduced, and implications for teachers, teacher preparation, and further research will be discussed. Limitations of the study will also be noted.
Chapter Five

Achieving greater equity of representation for students of culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse populations in gifted programs has been a key focus of the field for decades (e.g., see Callahan, 2005). Suggested solutions have included modifying identification procedures (e.g., see Briggs et al., 2008; Mun et al., 2016; NAGC, 2011; Peters & Gentry, 2012), implementing different program models (e.g., see Olszewski-Kubilius & Steenbergen-Hu, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018), and eliminating gifted services altogether. As researchers and districts alike have wrestled with this issue, they have developed program models intended to serve as gateway, or replacement, experiences for traditional gifted programs. These alternatives, collectively known as talent development programs or models, include the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010), U-STARS~PLUS (Coleman, 2016), the Levels of Service Approach (Treffinger, 1998), and the Young Scholars Model (Horn, 2015), each with its own unique structure for designing classroom and school contexts conducive to talent development. Research on these program models have yielded promising results in terms of increasing representation of those students historically underrepresented in gifted programs. Absent formal adoption of such models, however, an equity-minded educator passionate about increasing representation of their own students in gifted programs might be left to wonder, “How might I create such a context?”
The purpose of this multiple-case study was to attempt to understand how these classroom contexts for talent development might be created. Interviews and observations of two teachers identified as successful in implementing a talent development model were analyzed to understand how each individual teacher created a context for talent development in their respective classrooms, as well to extrapolate conditions common to both. Findings from these single-case analyses and the cross-case synthesis were shared in Chapter 4. Now those findings will be considered against the extant literature on talent development, including Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development elaborated on in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2). A discussion of how the findings might illuminate a path for rehumanizing talent development will follow, after which implications and limitations of the study will also be discussed.

**Relating the Findings to the Expanded Theory of Talent Development**

In Chapter 2, Barab and Plucker’s (2002) transactional theory of talent development was expanded to include constituent elements that teachers might enact in classrooms to develop the talents of their students (see Figure 2). The original theory described talent as something that is defined and negotiated through interactions between person and situation. These functional transactions, specifically between the individual, physical environment, and sociocultural context, result in the co-defining of the concept of “talent.” From a practical standpoint, the theory does not provide teachers with concrete actions or ideas they might incorporate in order to create a classroom context more conducive to talent development. As a result, for this study the theory was expanded (see Figure 2) to include elements teachers might enact to impact each of the
three aspects of the theory: individual, physical environment, and sociocultural context. It was posited that this elaboration on the theory, grounded in additional literature on talent development, might help us understand and describe what was happening in these two classrooms. While there were many connections between the expanded theory and what was observed in the two classrooms, there were also significant differences. The differences between the expanded theory of talent development and the single-case analyses lie mostly in what became two of the themes of the cross-case synthesis – establishing collaborative relations of power and engaging students in identity construction and negotiation. Neither power nor identity are represented in the expanded theory, and yet they encompass half of the overlap between the single cases. The ensuing discussion identifies overlap between each area of the expanded theory and the study’s findings, then proposes a new framework that incorporates the two main areas of missingness – identity and power.

**Individual**

For the first aspect, the individual, the elements of “goal-setting” and “growth mindset” were added. Though teachers should not seek to fundamentally change students as individuals, they can impact how students conceptualize and approach tasks through explicit teaching of goal-setting and growth mindset. Further, they can help students come to better understand themselves and their own “developing and developable abilities, capacities, and skills” (Lo et al., 2019, p. 5) in relation to the affordances, or opportunities, that a learning context provides. Lo et al. (2019) describe a teacher who looks at talent as something that can be developed as one who “becomes a
catalyst…help[ing] students realize possibilities of action afforded by a learning context through inducing their motivation and agency” (p. 6).

The single-case analyses of Sophie and Blair demonstrated that both teachers incorporate explicit teaching of goal-setting and growth mindset into their instruction. Sophie incorporates reflection journals, in which her students not only reflect on what they’ve learned or their application of a particular skill, but also create and track progress toward quarterly goals. Sophie described how she utilizes the Positivity Project as a means to reinforce conversations around setting goals: “One of the words that we focus on was perseverance and optimism. So with that, we talked about how in order to reach your goal, you have to persevere, you have to be optimistic” (Sophie Final Interview). Blair likewise has her students setting goals each quarter, as well as considering their goals for the day, as they did during one of the observed morning meetings.

In terms of growth mindset, both teachers have introduced the concept of “yet,” in which students conceptualize something they cannot do as something they cannot do yet. This language is important in developing a growth mindset because it implies the possibility that you could learn how to do something were you to set your mind to it. Blair describes this when she says,

We do a lot of growth mindset work in my room where we’re constantly goal-setting, we’re constantly talking about, ‘Okay, we’re not going to say I can’t do this. It’s I can’t do this yet, or this is hard for me right now.’ (Blair Initial Interview)
To support the development of a growth mindset in students, each teacher focuses on creating an environment in which students feel like they can take risks. They also offer choice and voice – connecting to student agency – in an effort to engage and motivate students.

The subthemes that emerged from the single-case analyses supported the inclusion of both the “goal-setting” and “growth mindset” teacher-enacted elements in the expanded version of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development. An additional element of “academic risk-taking” should also be introduced, as this was a focus for the teachers in both classrooms. Risk-taking is connected to growth mindset in that a growth mindset situates mistakes as learning opportunities, rather than failures; removing the fear of failure supports students in wanting to take additional risks.

**Environment**

The second aspect of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development, the physical environment, was expanded to become simply the “environment,” to which the elements “physical,” “affective,” and “learning activities” were added. Hertzog (2017) described a physical environment conducive to talent development as aesthetically-pleasing and personalized – one in which students might see themselves reflected in photos, artwork, and artifacts displayed in the classroom. In Sophie’s classroom, students were represented on the walls through their hopes and dreams, their signatures on the class expectations, the affirmations they had written to each other and the teacher posted to the affirmation wall, and on the coloring chart located in the chill zone. Books in the classroom library reflected their diverse cultural and linguistic
backgrounds, and table groups were given an opportunity to personalize their spaces through organization of their shared supplies. Both Sophie and Blair’s rooms were aesthetically pleasing, in that they were organized, not messy, and included some sort of decorative elements such as string lights or colorful lamps. Blair’s students were represented in the wall of student artwork, in the individual responses on the social studies and communicator and critical and creative thinker bulletin boards, and in their signatures on the class expectations poster. Classroom library books featured culturally and linguistically diverse characters and biographies of women working in male-dominated fields.

Scholars and researchers (e.g., Denton, 2015; Neihart et al., 2016; Pierson, 2013) describe an environment that meets students’ affective needs as one in which students feel safe, emotionally supported, and respected and where teachers focus on holding high expectations and building positive relationships with students. Sophie made specific mention of how she wanted her students to feel safe as some of her students had shared that, in their experiences in previous schools, they had not felt that way. Blair discussed safety in terms of students feeling like they could take academic risks, and when she reminded students not to run across the classroom. Both teachers incorporated the Positivity Project to teach students’ character traits, and included multiple methods for students to feel emotionally supported through teacher, peer, self, and family affirmation. Respectful teacher language and teacher-student, as well as student-student interactions, was also an important subtheme that emerged from each of the single-case analyses. Additionally, expectations were co-created with students and teachers held students to
those expectations during the classroom observations. Both Sophie and Blair also placed special emphasis on ensuring students’ socioemotional needs were met concurrent with their academic needs, stating that they took this into account when considering who to recommend for gifted services.

Learning activities, the third element added to environment, concerned providing students with access to opportunities for higher-level thinking and problem-solving, as well as ensuring those activities built on students’ strengths and funds of knowledge (Coleman, 2016; Horn, 2015; Moll et al., 1992; Plucker & Barab, 2005). Both teachers made it very clear that they believed all students could and should access activities that engaged them in deeper thinking, and that these activities should be made accessible to students through scaffolds and supports. Critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and questioning were all skills that they believed could be taught. Sophie and Blair each discussed building on students’ strengths as one method for supporting talent development, and paid attention to students’ culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in designing lessons that were authentic to them and their experiences. Neither teacher mentioned the term “funds of knowledge” and yet both teachers incorporated these funds in some way into the classroom learning environment. One aspect of the learning activities not included in the original expanded theory but observed in the classrooms was how teachers incorporated activities that engaged students in constructing and negotiating their identities. The omission of identity construction from the expanded theory ended up becoming an important aspect of both classrooms.
**Sociocultural Context**

The third aspect of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development, sociocultural context, was expanded to include the elements “culturally responsive pedagogy” and “conceptions of giftedness.” Because Barab and Plucker (2002) state that behaviors are viewed as talented when they are enacted in a way that is “socioculturally endorsed” (p. 174), culturally responsive pedagogy was added to sociocultural context because it holds the power to change how teachers and students define and negotiate those interactions considered to be “talented” (Ford, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing on Powell and Rightmyer’s (2011) literature review and subsequent refinement (Powell et al., 2017) of the pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy, a culturally responsive classroom was described as one that views classroom relationships, family collaboration, assessment, instruction, classroom discourse, and critical consciousness through a culturally responsive lens. While at least two of the scheduled classroom observations were canceled due to the pandemic school closure, it was clear that both teachers utilized culturally responsive teaching practices. For example, Sophie and Blair both demonstrated deep care for students’ academic and socioemotional well-being and created classroom expectations alongside students. Their students knew the classroom routines and procedures and teachers held students to high expectations in how they moved, interacted, and transitioned within the classroom. Both teachers used respectful tone and language with students, and scaffolded academic discussions by encouraging students to use agree/disagree sentence frames. Students in both classrooms were reflected in the classroom library books and the wall displays.
Collaboration with peers was encouraged and framed so that students could learn from one another through peer feedback.

Sophie and Blair engaged families in multiple ways, inviting them into the classroom throughout the year and keeping positive communication lines open. By incorporating project-based learning into their classrooms, both teachers incorporated authentic assessment and, through goal-setting, taught students to self-assess. Sophie and Blair considered students’ background experiences, culture, and language in terms of how they designed the learning environment and their lessons and scaffolded academic language through sentence frames and word walls. Each discussed how they supported their English Learners in accessing learning materials and focused on methods for developing student strengths. Participation was encouraged through multiple engagement techniques and students’ home language was considered in identifying books for the classroom library. Discussions in which different perspectives were welcomed occurred in both classrooms and each teacher had students exploring contemporary issues such as bias, stereotyping, racism, and poverty.

The second element introduced to sociocultural context, teachers’ conceptions of giftedness, was unique in that it was one that might have an impact on, as well as be impacted by, sociocultural context. This theorized bidirectional interaction resulted in the creation of the second research question around how teachers perceive giftedness in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. The idea was that teachers who hold more traditional views of giftedness, as a trait or ability students either possess or don’t possess (Plucker & Barab, 2005), may not believe talent can be
fostered in students. However, teachers who believed that giftedness or talent might be
grown would understand the importance of talent development and engage all students in
developing that talent (Barab & Plucker, 2002). Both Sophie and Blair subscribed to this
second view, as evidenced by their interviews and observations. They stated that all
students have talents that can be nurtured and that giftedness is something that can be
seen as potential – meaning it can be grown. Sophie set up a system of folders in which
she collected work from any student that “wowed” her and Blair identified several
students who had not been on her gifted resource teacher’s “radar” in previous years.
Both had students in mind that they were monitoring to be identified as Young Scholars.
However, neither Sophie nor Blair subscribed to one of the common myths in gifted
education: “All students are gifted” (NAGC, n.d.). While both acknowledged that talent
can be fostered in any student, they also stated that they believed some students had
greater potential in terms of how far that talent might grow than others. This did not keep
them from providing access to challenging material for all students, which was important
because it was through this access that they noticed behaviors in students they didn’t
necessarily predict they would see.

Looking Beyond the Expanded Theory

As detailed in the previous sections, connections between the findings and the
expanded version of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development were
apparent. Yet the expanded theory does not capture two of the higher-level themes
revealed in the cross-case synthesis – collaborative relations of power and identity
construction. Were a teacher to examine their practice at the granular level using the
elaborated model in Figure 2, they may never consider the role of identity and power in creating classroom contexts for talent development – two themes that may play a critical role in developing talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. In other words, they might focus on several strategies such as explicit instruction in goal-setting and growth mindset or increasing the access to, and accessibility of, challenging materials for students without consideration for how power and identity impact the creation of talented interactions. Although helpful, these actions may only serve to advance the “dominant axis” of equity while ignoring the “critical axis” – the axis that is arguably most important.

In her work on rehumanizing math education, Rochelle Gutierrez (2009) argues that many efforts at addressing equity are framed along a dominant axis of access and achievement – an axis she states helps students learn how to “play the game” (p. 6). Access refers to the provision of resources to students to improve their “opportunity to learn,” while achievement refers to students’ performance outcomes when provided with this increased access. In terms of talent development, equity efforts framed around this dominant axis would look like teaching students the higher level thinking skills our society values, such as critical and creative thinking, then giving them plenty of opportunities to practice and demonstrate those skills in the classroom, with the idea that more students would be identified for gifted services by virtue of learning how to “play the game.” This cycle aligns well with how Barab and Plucker (2002) and Lo et al. (2019) describe their transactional-based theories for understanding talent development, in which talent is understood through interaction with others. Lo et al. (2019) state
transactional gifted education pleads with educators to imagine schools as not only a context for learning but also a context for talent socialization – a place where students can become familiar with, and appreciative of, the multiple forms of human potentials and endeavors… Transactional assessment should focus on providing further growth and sustaining evidence necessary for justifying referral decisions on more advanced learning opportunities. (emphasis in original, pp. 7-8)

Barab and Plucker (2002) advance a similar idea when they claim that “an important part of exhibiting talented behavior involves understanding how to act in a manner that is consistent with those ways that have been socioculturally endorsed” (p. 174). Both Barab and Plucker (2002) and Lo et al. (2019) view talent development as, effectively, teaching students to “play the game” through talent socialization/sociocultural endorsement. By learning how to “play the game,” students produce evidence of talent that will justify teachers recommending them for gifted programs, reducing talent development to a gateway experience as discussed in Chapter 1. Yet what might be lost as students are “socialized” – as they learn to “play the game?” By “treating students as if they [were] interchangeable with others – with little or no attention to their identities” (Gutierrez, 2018), might we succeed in achieving greater equity at the expense of dehumanizing our students? In other words, are we essentially asking students to reproduce what we believe talent looks like rather than co-construct the meaning of talent through interaction with one another?

Gutierrez (2009) addresses this issue in identifying the need for a second dimension in how we frame our efforts to pursue equity. She calls this second dimension
the “critical axis” and places identity and power at either end. Her argument is that many students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds leave some aspect of themselves behind when they enter the classroom door. This separation of their identity outside the classroom from their identity within the classroom further marginalizes these students by not allowing them to draw on their own “rich cultural and linguistic resources” (p. 5) and by sending the message that their perspectives are not “socially valorized” (Civil, 2006; as cited in Gutierrez, 2009, p. 5). Identity feeds into power, which Gutierrez interprets as “tak[ing] up issues of social transformation at many levels” (p. 6). She characterizes this axis as teaching students to “change the game.” In terms of talent development, equity efforts framed around this critical axis would look beyond teachers using culturally responsive pedagogy. They would also involve teachers creating a learning environment in which students might see their identities from outside the classroom reflected and negotiated in a way that they engage in learning as who they are, not who the teacher wants them to be – in effect, “rehumanizing” them. Further, a teacher attending to the power factor along the critical axis would equip and empower students to take on a critical perspective within and beyond the classroom’s walls.

Elsewhere Gutierrez (2018) describes the inclusion of this second critical axis as a means for “rehumanizing,” an idea that she sees as a step beyond simply seeking “equity.”

Unlike ‘equity,’ which can seem to represent a destination, ‘rehumanizing’ is a verb; it reflects an ongoing process and requires constant vigilance to maintain and to evolve with contexts…I use the term rehumanizing as opposed to
humanizing (Paris and Winn 2013; Rosa and Orey 2016; San Pedro and Kinlock 2017) to honor the fact that humans (and other living things) have been practicing mathematics for centuries in ways that are humane...In many ways, we do not need to invent something new; we simply need to return to full presence that which tends to get erased through the process of schooling. (p. 4, Gutierrez, 2018)

By privileging talent socialization over valorization, talent development can easily become a means for erasing the myriad ways in which our students exhibit their talent beyond the classroom’s walls. If talent development has gone down the path of removing students’ identities by encouraging reproduction of the current dominant view of talent, “rehumanizing” it would mean that we would make space for individual personhood; specifically, for our students’ individual identities to aid in the negotiation, rather than socialization, of what it means to be talented. Further, to promote this collective co-construction of knowledge around what talented transactions look like, power and, in particular, collaborative relations of power must also be addressed.

In reviewing a plethora of transactional models of talent development (e.g., Barab & Plucker, 2002; Dai, 2017; Lo et al., 2019), none include explicit attention to identity and power. Yet based on the findings from this study, any model for talent development that aims to not just identify more students for gifted programs, but to also rehumanize it must include identity and power as key components. It is with this charge that a new framework for creating classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs is presented (see Figure 7). Based loosely on the expanded theory from Chapter 2 (see Figure 2), this framework
reimagines talent development in classrooms such that students from historically underrepresented populations might feel empowered to be their authentic selves as they negotiate with their peers and teacher what it means to be talented.

**Figure 7.**

A framework for understanding how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs.
A Framework for Reimagining Talent Development

The rationale for expanding Barab and Plucker’s (2002) original theory of talent development in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2) was to explicitly identify how teachers might create classroom contexts for developing talent of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. This expansion built on their position that “educators must support the development of smart contexts – not simply smart individuals” (p. 175), as well as support students’ “successful participation” in these contexts. As detailed above, however, this expansion on Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory did not fully explain how the teachers in this study created talent development contexts in their classrooms. Furthermore, their original theory did not include teachers as a key actor in the functional transactions between student, environment, and sociocultural context. While they clearly stated that educators must create these contexts for talent development, they did not include teachers themselves as someone with whom students might interact as talent was negotiated. The relegation of the teacher to creator, or to enactor as in the expanded theory, ignores the very role they have in these transactions – as another actor.

The framework presented in Figure 7 returns to the basic idea of Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development, then modifies and elaborates it. In Barab and Plucker’s (2002) original theory, sociocultural context was one of the aspects with which the individual student and the physical environment interacted. While it played a role in the interactions of individual-sociocultural context and physical environment-sociocultural context, it was somehow absent from the interaction of individual-physical
environment. And yet, arguably, sociocultural context imbues everything that happens in the classroom, including the way in which individual students might interact with the physical environment. It is possible, however, that Barab and Plucker (2002) subscribed to a definition of sociocultural context that does not match the one presented now. Though Barab and Plucker (2002) used the terms “sociocultural context” and “sociocultural relations,” they never defined exactly what they meant by them. In this study, sociocultural context is defined as the social and cultural practices and beliefs that simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, a given society’s perceptions of truth and value. Thus, sociocultural context was reimagined to become the context within which these talented interactions occur, rather than one aspect impacting two of the three.

Another major modification from Barab and Plucker’s (2002) original theory of talent development was the inclusion of the teacher as one of the three aspects. This was important because the absence of the teacher implies that they are not a fellow co-constructor of knowledge with students. In this study, the teachers’ beliefs around students’ capabilities were both influenced, and influenced by, their interaction with students. The remaining two aspects – individual and physical environment – were changed to students and learning environment, respectively; the latter to encompass affective environment and learning activities, in addition to the physical, and the former to acknowledge students interacting within themselves as constructors of knowledge.

Identity, culturally responsive pedagogy, collaborative relations of power, and whole child are the major themes identified in this study’s cross-case synthesis and, as discussed, are well-supported by existing literature. In considering how these four themes
related to creating a classroom context for talent development, it was determined that these were actually factors that mediate, or influence, each of these functional transactions. During the conversion of themes to mediating factors, “impact of culture, language, and background experiences” was reconceptualized as “culturally responsive pedagogy” to better describe both that theme, as well as its overlap with several aspects of the others (e.g., development of a critical perspective). These four mediating factors are important components of this framework, and are represented around the outside edges of the classroom oval.

Teachers who want to establish classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs must be mindful of these four factors as they design their learning environment and establish relationships with, and between, students. For example, as argued earlier, providing students with opportunities to both construct and negotiate their identities in the classroom rehumanizes talent development in that students can be their authentic selves, as well as consider how those authentic selves relate to what they are learning. Establishing collaborative relations of power empowers students to take on a critical perspective as they evaluate others’ motives and perspectives. Focusing on the whole child ensures teachers are considering both students’ academic and socioemotional needs, and utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy makes explicit the connection between learning environment and students’ cultures, languages, and background experiences. Specific strategies for addressing each of these four factors in a talent development classroom have been enumerated in the Implications for Teachers section below.
The framework outlined above has implications for the education community in helping us to conceptualize how we might support teachers in establishing classroom contexts for talent development (see Figure 8). Teacher preparation programs can focus on foundation skills such as an understanding of gifted education, child development, and culturally responsive pedagogy in order to construct a solid base upon which schools and school districts might build. Schools and school districts can implement professional learning centered on developing talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs and evaluate existing program models for both inclusivity and humanization. Teachers, armed with these foundational skills from their teacher preparation programs and the professional learning on talent development provided by their schools and districts, can incorporate specific strategies for addressing each component of the talent development framework as part of an instructional approach for reaching all students, not just a few. Future research can focus on the implementation and efficacy of this framework, as well as contribute to the growing literature on equity and talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs.
Figure 8.

A multi-tiered approach to supporting teachers in developing classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs.

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

According to the most recent State of the States report (NAGC, 2015b), only one of the forty responding states required preservice teachers to receive coursework on working with gifted and talented learners. Eleven states were considering making changes to teacher preparation standards to address gifted and talented learners, while two were considering changing licensure requirements. This aligns with earlier research that found preservice teachers received less than two hours of preparation in how to identify and serve advanced learners (Farkas & Duffett, 2008). Similarly, the teachers in
this study expressed that they left their teacher preparation programs with no understanding of how to challenge their students. This lack of knowledge has many implications for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. First, teachers who have received no professional learning or preparation on what giftedness or talent looks like may subscribe to outdated conceptions of giftedness and talent as something that is static and easily measured by an ability or aptitude test. Second, teachers who have been prepared to address the needs of struggling students without attention to how to challenge some, or all, students are being sent the message that remediating deficits is more important than building on strengths. Third, teachers may be unaware of the longstanding issue of equity in gifted education, as well as the role they play as gatekeepers to gifted services both within and outside their classrooms. To address these issues, teacher preparation programs need to include coursework in gifted education into their planned curricula. This coursework should engage preservice teachers in reconceptualizing giftedness and talent as something that is mutable and can be grown through access to challenging material. It should identify issues of equity in gifted education alongside issues of equity in other areas, such as special education, in which students who are historically underrepresented in gifted programs tend to be historically overrepresented in special education programs, and engage them in problematizing why this is so. Finally, teachers should be taught how to ensure their lessons engage all students in higher level thinking, as well as strategies for increasing the accessibility of challenging material for English Learners and students with disabilities.
The importance of addressing students’ socioemotional needs in the classroom is a theme not only within gifted education (e.g., Neihart et al., 2016), but also within general education. Socioemotional learning (SEL), defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (n.d., para. 1), is imperative in designing a classroom context for talent development. According to a meta-analysis conducted by CASEL (Durlak et al., 2011), SEL demonstrated significant positive differences in development of socioemotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as academic performance, when compared to students in classrooms where SEL was not promoted. Transformative SEL, defined as “a process whereby students and teachers build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences, learn to critically examine root causes of inequity, and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems” (Jagers et al., 2018, p. 3), focuses on addressing issues of equity in education and includes identity construction, power, and culturally responsive pedagogy as key supporting factors. Yet despite research demonstrating the efficacy of SEL, most teacher preparation programs do not address how to develop students’ SEL with their preservice teachers. A survey of a representative sample of university-based teacher preparation programs across all fifty states found that an overwhelming majority required coursework focused primarily on developing preservice teachers’ SEL without a requisite focus on developing their capacity to support students’ SEL (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). To
support teachers in creating classroom contexts for talent development, teacher preparation programs must incorporate transformative SEL into their coursework. Building preservice teachers’ foundational skills in transformative SEL will prepare them for helping their future students construct and negotiate their identities within the classroom; done explicitly, this can have positive impacts on student outcomes. Further, instruction in transformative SEL promotes the sharing of power (Jagers et al., 2019), aligning well with the collaborative relations of power factor in the framework for reimagining talent development.

Considering that many of the student populations underrepresented in gifted programs are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the importance of teachers utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms cannot be overstated if they hope to create a context for talent development. Teacher use of culturally responsive pedagogy has been linked to positive student outcomes in all content areas (Aronson & Laughter, 2016); however, use of such pedagogy must not be simplified to a checklist of items teachers can implement to ensure they are culturally responsive (Sleeter, 2012). Instead, culturally responsive pedagogy must become a method of approaching teaching and therefore should be a vital component of any teacher preparation program. As teacher education places more emphasis on preparing culturally responsive teachers, they must not lose sight of increasing preservice teachers’ capacity to engage themselves and their students in developing a critical consciousness. A recent study of preservice teachers’ expressed dispositions related to culturally responsive pedagogy revealed that most focused on academic success and cultural competence with
little attention to sociopolitical or critical consciousness (Truscott & Stenhouse, 2018) – a finding correlated with other research. Yet in the current study, both teachers incorporated learning activities that engaged students in developing a critical perspective and this contributed to their establishment of collaborative relations of power. As teacher educators, we must examine if and how we are incorporating the explicit teaching of culturally responsive pedagogy in our preparation programs, and ensure we are attending to all of its aspects, rather than just a few.

**Implications for Schools and School Districts**

As teacher preparation programs focus on establishing foundational knowledge and skills in gifted education, transformative SEL, and culturally responsive pedagogy, school districts and schools must also provide ongoing professional learning in these areas for teachers. In districts and schools where gifted services are provided, professional learning should not only focus on the logistics of identification process, but also on the ways in which general education teachers might support the development of higher level thinking in all students. A small study of districts’ local plans for the education of the gifted found that only one-fourth included professional learning on developing higher-level thinking in students, while more than half addressed the topics of differentiation and supporting students’ socioemotional needs (Glaser & Hayden, 2019). Further, talent development was only mentioned in 13% and the terms “equity,” “diversity,” and “underrepresentation” were mentioned once, twice, or not at all in nearly 50% of plans. If schools and school districts are committed to addressing issues of equity and underrepresentation in their gifted programs, they must make these priorities clear to
their personnel, and offer professional learning that demonstrates this commitment, such as alternative pathways to identification and recognizing gifted behaviors in students from historically underrepresented populations.

In addition to professional learning, schools and school districts must evaluate their current model(s) for providing gifted services to students through the lens of developing talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. First and foremost, they should consider if the current model(s) for providing gifted services promotes opportunities for teachers to develop talent in all students. This may entail identifying how the distribution and accessibility of current resources impacts students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or investigating how equitable the services being offered really are. Next, they should explore how current identification procedures empower or mitigate gatekeeping. Third, they should examine how students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs are faring once identified for gifted services, as suggested by Moore et al. (2005). Funding and human support should also be considered during this program evaluation. Professional learning, curricula, resource teachers, and universal screening come with a price – following the “money trail” can become an opportunity for reflection on the current and future priorities of gifted services.

**Implications for Teachers**

Teachers who want to create a classroom context for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs should begin first with the mindset that talent development is an approach to teaching rather than
activities done here and there. Believing that all students can access challenging material is an initial step; ensuring it is accessible is the next. When teachers design talent development contexts, they should be mindful of four critical factors: identity, culturally responsive pedagogy, collaborative relations of power, and the whole child. Practical strategies for addressing each factor are identified below.

**Identity**

Based on the findings from this study, the first factor in establishing a classroom context for talent development is identity. Students should feel like they can be their authentic selves, as well as be exposed to learning experiences that help them construct and negotiate those identities. Examples of ways in which the teachers in this study helped students construct their identities included having discussions around literature that reflected students’ diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and ensuring classroom libraries were stocked with books that reflected students’ diverse cultures and languages. Teachers were mindful of ensuring students could “see themselves” in books, especially when it challenged current norms such as women in Science, Technology, and Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. Providing space for students to take pride in their prior knowledge and their academic work fueled affirmation from families and peers, as well as from the teacher and student themself.

In her book, *Cultivating Genius*, Gholdy Muhammad (2020) suggests additional ways in which teachers might incorporate methods for understanding and teaching identity. For example, teachers can design activities in which they ask students how they see themselves, either directly or, as seen in this study, through related text. Students can
participate in “Who are you?” conversations with peers, in which they have one-minute partner discussions around the answer to that question. They then rotate to have the same discussion with another peer, except this time they cannot repeat what they said previously. Multiple rotations end up yielding deeper conversations. Another activity in which teachers can engage students in understanding their identities is to ask them to write their name stories, an exploration of not only how they received their name but how others may perceive it and why. Creating digital stories or utilizing Photovoice as a means for students to further explore themselves through taking photos or videos of their community is yet another strategy for helping students explore who they are (see also Sackett & Dogan, 2019). Muhammad asks teachers to approach planning for identity by asking themselves, “How will this lesson/unit plan help my students to learn something about themselves or others?” (p. 78).

In addition to assisting students in constructing and negotiating their identities, teachers themselves should also engage in deep thinking around who they are and want to be as an educator. One of the teachers in the study explicitly described her role as a guide or facilitator – a role she did not initially take in her early years of teaching. By moving away from the idea of the teacher as a purveyor of knowledge toward students guiding their own learning enabled her to relinquish some of the control she thought she needed to have over students’ learning. In that sense, teacher identity in terms of teacher role directly impacts how students are engaged in learning. Other aspects of teacher identity that impact the classroom include how the teacher assigns themselves membership in a various racial/ethnic, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and a number of other groups.
Teachers who consider how their membership in these groups may create bias, then work to confront and change their biases, will inevitably be more successful at helping students to confront their own biases. Development of a critical consciousness in students necessitates development of critical consciousness in teachers, too.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

A second factor identified in this study as having an impact on how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development is culturally responsive pedagogy. A recent study by Ricciardi et al. (2020) demonstrated that Black students, regardless of socioeconomic status, were identified for gifted services at lower rates than White, Asian, and Hispanic peers, even when controlling for poverty. It seems clear that utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy continues to be an important approach (Ford, 2014), especially in light of the numerous studies demonstrating its positive impact on students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Furthermore, professional learning centered around culturally responsive pedagogy coupled with knowledge of gifted education may help teachers better identify gifted potential in students from culturally and linguistically diverse populations, including Black students.

In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Zaretta Hammond (2015) argues that culturally responsive teachers, like the teachers in this study, must seek to develop students who are independent learners. She presents the Ready for Rigor framework that highlights four areas of practice to which teachers should simultaneously attend in order to create a culturally responsive learning environment: (a) awareness (e.g., identify own cultural lens and sociopolitical position), (b) learning partnerships (e.g.,
develop authentic connections and trust with students and hold them to high standards);
(c) information processing (e.g., understand how culture impacts the brain and utilize
brain-based processing strategies), and (d) community building (e.g., integration of
cultural elements into the classroom and developing rituals and routines). Beyond
practice areas, Gay (2013) identifies four specific actions in which teachers should
engage in order to become more culturally responsive teachers. The first action
teachers should take is to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about students from culturally
diverse backgrounds. Gay states that “there is an underlying fallacy in the pathological
perceptions of communities and students of color that needs to be debunked…the
assumption of universal marginality, powerlessness, and disadvantage” (2013, p. 54). She
suggests teachers consider if their attitudes and beliefs about students are rooted in an
inherently deficit-based mindset and work to build on students’ strengths, such as their
funds of knowledge. The second action teachers should take is to anticipate and counter
resistance to the adoption of culturally responsive teaching practices, including barriers
they create themselves. Culturally responsive teaching involves more than just
concentrating on surface-level aspects of culture; teachers should be willing to address
issues of inequity, injustice, and oppression, as well. The research shared earlier on
preservice teachers’ dispositions lacking in the area of critical or sociopolitical
consciousness only reinforces Gay’s argument. However, in addition to working on
developing their own and their students’ critical consciousness, Gay also suggests that
teachers examine the instructional materials and texts being used in the classroom and
critique them based on representation (or lack thereof) of different races, cultures, gender,
and social class as well as their focus on safe versus contentious or contemporary versus historical issues. The third action teachers should take is to critically examine how fundamental the understanding of culture and difference, including their own culture and difference, is to implementing culturally responsive teaching. Gay notes that teachers cannot meet the needs of their students by pretending that culture and difference do not exist; “to ignore them is to assure that the human dignity and learning potential of ethnically, culturally, and racially diverse students are constrained or minimized” (2013, pp. 61-62). This argument speaks to the idea presented earlier that incorporating opportunities for identity construction and negotiation are essential to rehumanizing talent development. The fourth action teachers should take is evaluate how culturally responsive teaching connects to research-based “best practices” for all students generally and within particular content areas. This is not an easy endeavor, however, as culturally responsive teaching naturally involves teaching to the students within a particular context, and this context varies across classrooms. Powell and Rightmyer (2013) point this out in their discussion of the extensive body of research on “best practices” in literacy instruction, which “generally ignore the sociocultural context within which learning occurs…Even the best of practices will fail us…if we ignore the sociocultural and political dimensions of literacy and language acquisition” (p. 154). Thus, teachers who aim to be culturally responsive must consider how culturally responsive teaching practices might extend or add to their areas of expertise in general and content area instruction.
Collaborative Relations of Power

Findings from this study indicated that the third factor teachers should consider when developing classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs is establishing collaborative relations of power. Cummins (2009) juxtaposes collaborative relations of power, defined as power generated through interactions with others, with coercive relations of power, defined as “the exercise of power by a dominant individual…to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group…” (p. 263). He locates these two types of relational power at the opposite ends of a continuum in recognition that the degree to which coercive and collaborative relations of power are exerted varies. Importantly, Cummins acknowledges that interactions between educators, students, and communities are never power-neutral; thus, teachers can implement strategies for moving the relations of power within their classrooms toward the collaborative relations end of the continuum.

In an article written for the practitioner journal, Teaching for Excellence and Equity in Mathematics, Rochelle Gutierrez (2009) identifies additional considerations for establishing collaborative relations of power in classrooms. First, teachers should be mindful of student voice in learning – not just in who is doing the talking, but also in who decides what will be taught. Second, teachers should consider what comprises “knowledge” and how it is constructed in the classroom, as well as incorporate opportunities for students to critique society. Third, teachers should seek to empower students not just in terms of their achievement, but also in terms of their own personal goals. Finally, teachers should help students develop agency.
In this study, teachers established collaborative relations of power within their classrooms through a variety of strategies. Both teachers incorporated project-based learning, in which students guide the direction and research they do around a particular topic. They provided opportunities for students to engage verbally and nonverbally through a variety of grouping structures: individually, in partners, within small groups, and as a whole group. Critical literacy and questioning provided avenues for students to feel empowered to take a critical stance on the perspective and importance an authority figure placed on a particular topic or viewpoint. Both teachers provided students many choices in how they engaged with, and demonstrated, their learning. When appropriate, they allowed students to choose their level of participation in an activity and to sit where they wanted during independent work. In terms of products, they provided choice in who or what they focused on, and the format the final product would take. Teachers also shared power with students by co-constructing various classroom expectations and in allowing students to name certain areas of their classrooms.

*Whole Child*

The findings from this study demonstrate that considering the needs of the whole child is the fourth factor teachers should consider when establishing classroom contexts for talent development. Teachers in this study recognized that students’ socioemotional needs were just as important as their academic needs. As stated previously, research from CASEL supports the idea that socioemotional learning improves students’ affective and academic outcomes. They recommend several practices for facilitating socioemotional learning within the classroom (CASEL, 2020). First, teachers should incorporate explicit
instruction on students’ socioemotional competencies in both developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive ways, and provide opportunities for student reflection. They should integrate socioemotional learning into their content area instruction, rather than reserving it for a certain time of the day. Students should be engaged as problem-solvers and decision-makers in the classroom so that they feel their perspectives are important. Teachers should establish learning environments that are culturally responsive and focus on providing support to, and building relationships with, students. Classroom management should include “discipline policies and practices [that are] instructive, restorative, developmentally appropriate, and equitably applied” (p. 2). This point is especially important considering that current data on school discipline demonstrates disparities in how it is applied to students from different racial and ethnic groups (USDOE, 2018). CASEL (2020) states that partnerships with families based on authentic relationships and collaboration are more productive, and recommends teachers expand their understanding of their own socioemotional needs and cultural competencies – two ideas also echoed by Hammond (2015). Finally, just as the teachers in this study noticed connections between academic and socioemotional needs, teachers should integrate socioemotional learning into academic and behavioral supports. In a summary brief on transformative SEL, Saavedra and Nolan (2018) reinforce that cultural integration (i.e., connecting students’ cultures to academic content), classroom community building (e.g., through morning meeting, goal-setting, and collaborative problem-solving), and promoting racial/ethnic identity development (e.g., examining
beliefs and biases, affirming cultural heritage and individual strengths) are also important practices to consider.

**Implications for Research**

Little extant literature focuses on helping teachers understand how they might create contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. Research in this area consists of studies examining the effectiveness of various talent development models or theoretical papers proposing new theories of talent development. Teachers in classrooms without access to specific program models need more guidance around how they might create classroom contexts for talent development. While this study is an initial step in that direction, additional research is needed for elaboration and refinement.

One outcome of this study was the creation of a framework (Figure 7) for reimagining talent development. Within this framework, talent was conceptualized as something that arises from the interactions of students, teachers, and the learning environment, mitigated by identity, collaborative relations of power, culturally responsive pedagogy, and attending to the whole child. While this framework represents how the teachers in this study created contexts for talent development, its efficacy should be explored further through additional research. These studies might focus on exemplar teachers identified through similar or different methods from those who participated in this study and include the additional observations that became impossible to complete during the course of this research. Specific attention might be paid to the factors of identity and power as they are not explicitly included in other theories of talent.
development to date. The creation of a classroom context for talent development of historically underrepresented students in gifted programs might be investigated through the lens of how teachers imagine their roles in the classroom or identify with a particular race, ethnicity, culture, and/or language. Interviews and surveys with students in these exemplar classrooms could also yield some useful data by looking at talent development from the inside-out rather than the outside-in. Such research would help further refine the framework, or lead to the development of something new.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations. School sites and participants were selected based on recommendations from the district’s gifted coordinator and the school principals. In the middle of the study, the novel coronavirus pandemic caused schools to shut down, thereby decreasing the number of classroom observations of each teacher. Finally, only classroom teachers implementing one model of talent development were included in the study.

**Selection of Participants**

Participants were purposefully selected through a rigorous, multi-stage process, but this process left room for some subjectivity. This study capitalized on a series of rubrics at the district and school level to capture exemplar teachers “successfully” implementing a talent development model. While school demographics, an objective criterion, played a role in the selection of school sites, rubrics inevitably include a human component, thus making them somewhat subjective, even if the rubrics themselves include rigorous criteria.
An alternative method for selecting exemplar teachers could have consisted of pulling data on all teachers’ number of recommendations of students from historically underrepresented populations for gifted services and students’ subsequent eligibility or ineligibility for those services. This could demonstrate that a) teachers are advocating for students from historically underrepresented populations and b) they are successful in doing so. However, this alternative method for selecting teachers presents its own limitations. First, it is not clear if this data has been collected in such a way that it could be parsed by teacher referral and subsequent eligibility status. Second, the classroom teacher is not the only educator involved in the recommendation process. Referral and eligibility information likely more accurately reflects the efforts of multiple stakeholders, rather than just the teacher themselves. Finally, eligibility decisions are made holistically based on a number of criteria, only one of which may consist of the teacher’s recommendation. Information such as student test scores may skew a file toward eligibility or ineligibility regardless of the teacher’s level of advocacy for a particular student.

**Novel Coronavirus Pandemic**

The data for this study was collected in February and March of 2020. In the middle of data collection, the world became focused on the novel coronavirus and it was officially declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Within two days, the school district in which the study took place had been closed and did not reopen for in-person classes for the remainder of the school year. Prior to school closure, an initial interview had been conducted with both teachers. One observation had occurred in Sophie’s
classroom and two had occurred in Blair’s classroom. After schools closed, additional observations were impossible; however, final interviews were able to be conducted via the videoconferencing platform Webex.

Had the global pandemic not shut down schools, the three and two classroom observations, respectively, that were missed would likely have yielded additional evidence that could have then been incorporated into the single-case analyses and the cross-case synthesis. Further, because schools shut down so abruptly, only one content area was observed in each classroom – language arts. Based on what the teachers said they had planned for the additional observations, it would have been useful to observe how identity and power in particular would have been addressed in other content areas. These additional observations could strengthen recommendations for teachers in terms of content-specific strategies they might use to create a talent development context, as well as provide insight into their level of comfort in co-constructing knowledge across all content areas.

Context

In order to understand how teachers might create a classroom context for talent development of students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs, teachers who were already “successfully” implementing a talent development model were selected to participate. Both teachers were located within a school district that implements the Young Scholars Model, which has demonstrated promise in increasing access to gifted services for students from culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. However, other talent development models,
such as U-STAR~PLUS, have also proven successful in addressing equity issues in gifted education. As this was the first study to utilize teachers’ successful implementation of a talent development model as a means to understand how they might create classroom contexts for developing talent, only one school district implementing one model was selected for the study.

To build on the findings from this study, additional talent development models that have demonstrated success in increasing representation of students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds should be included in future research. This study was conducted in one school district utilizing one model; however, other models exist that might lend additional insight to this study’s findings. Further, this study took place in second grade general education classrooms as that was a critical year for gifted program identification within this particular school district. Other school districts may have a different critical year. Classrooms at multiple grade levels might be included in future studies, as could different classroom contexts, such as part-time services with the gifted resource teacher. While this study looked specifically at general education classroom teachers, specials and resource teachers may also play a key role in developing talent of students. Looking at how these teachers develop talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs might add further depth and complexity to this framework.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers create classroom contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented
populations in gifted programs. Elaborating on Barab and Plucker’s (2002) theory of talent development, findings from this study supported the design of a reimagined framework for talent development. This framework recommends that teachers attend to four factors in creating these contexts: (a) identity construction and negotiation, (b) culturally responsive pedagogy, (c) collaborative relations of power, and (d) the needs of the whole child. Both teachers in this study viewed giftedness and talent as potential, and something that can be fostered in all students. They asserted that all students should have access to challenging material, rather than reserving these opportunities for just a few.

The students in the classrooms where this study took place represented a broad range of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. One class was designated as an “ESOL pod” and the other was a special education inclusion classroom. Both teachers remarked on how much growth they had seen in their students this year, with Blair specifically attributing her students’ growth in reading to her focus on developing their skills in critical thinking, creativity, and questioning. Rather than focusing on remediation, they placed emphasis on giving students room to grow; in effect, they removed the “ceiling” of what they believed students were capable of and left space for students to “wow” them.

The findings from this study demonstrate that talent development is more than a checklist of strategies a teacher can enact. While these strategies may support developing talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs, they need to be enacted within a framework that attends to identity, power, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the whole child. With this mindset, teachers leave space to
have their own views transformed on what students of this age can do – in effect, co-
constructing what talented interactions look like. They make space for students to “wow”
them – to learn about students’ capacity from the students themselves. They develop a
culture in which students are encouraged to thrive as their authentic selves without
having to leave their potential at the classroom door.

Talent development should not be a gateway experience in which teachers train
students to demonstrate behaviors that justify a referral to a gifted program, nor should it
be a replacement for gifted programs. Instead, talent development should be an approach
used with all students. It should be a process that is transformative for both teacher and
students and centered on the fundamental belief that all students can, and have a right to,
access rigorous learning that builds on their individual strengths. If we shift our approach
to talent development from “this is what we do for certain students” to “this is what we
do for all students,” we remove the power of teacher as gatekeeper, identifying who has
potential and who doesn’t. We move from remediation to empowerment – from looking
for what students should do to allowing students space to show what they can do.
Reimagined in this way, talent development becomes a process for the social and cultural
negotiation, rather than reproduction, of talent and excellence in gifted education.
Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: December 12, 2019
TO: Nancy Holincheck
FROM: George Mason University IRB
Project Title: [1495226-2] How Teachers Create Talent Development Contexts for Students from Historically Underrepresented Populations in Gifted Programs

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: December 12, 2019
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the IRB office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Kim Paul at [email protected] Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

Please note that department or other approvals may also be required to conduct your research.

GMU IRB Standard Operating Procedures can be found here: https://rdia.gmu.edu/topics-of-interest/human-or-animal-subjects/human-subjects/human-subjects-sops/

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.
Appendix B

Teacher Consent Form

How Teachers Create Talent
Development Contexts for Students
from Historically Underrepresented
Populations in Gifted Programs

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

GMU IRB #: 1495226-1

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research is being conducted to understand how teachers can create contexts for talent development of students from historically underrepresented student populations in their classrooms. You are being asked to participate in this research because your principal has recommended you as a teacher who has experienced success in implementing your school district’s talent development model.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to schedule four classroom observations, each approximately two to four hours in length, with Holly Glaser, a Ph. D. candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. In order to see a range of instruction, two of these observations will be scheduled to occur in the morning, and two will be scheduled to occur in the afternoon. In addition to the four classroom observations, you will be asked to participate in two interviews, each less than one hour in length, also with Ms. Glaser. The first interview will occur prior to scheduling the first observation, and the final interview will occur after the last observation has been completed. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. After transcription, audio recordings will be destroyed and transcriptions will be kept confidential; only members of the research team will have access to these files.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS
There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in talent development within gifted education.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential. The audio file from the interviews will be labeled with a research code rather than your name. If reference is made to your name during the interview, your name will be replaced with the assigned research code when the audio file is transcribed. Only the researchers on this project will have access to the identification key. The audio recording will be stored on secure servers and will be destroyed once transcription is complete. Any individual comment that might be used in a report or publication will be
presented anonymously or with a pseudonym. De-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

PARTICIPATION
In order to participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older, teach second grade in a general education classroom, and be nominated by your principal based on your previous success implementing your school district’s talent development model.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you.

If you choose to participate, you will be entitled to receive $200.00 in compensation for your time. Compensation will be distributed via check at the final interview. There is no partial compensation benefit to you if you do not complete the study.

CONTACT
This research is being conducted by Dr. Nancy Holincheck and Holly Glazer, Ph.D. candidate, in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Both researchers may be contacted for questions or to report a research-related problem; Dr. Holincheck may be reached at [contact information] and Holly Glazer may be reached at [contact information]. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at [contact information] if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT (Check ONE)

_____ YES. I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study. I consent to be audio-taped during the interviews.

_____ NO. I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I do not agree to participate in this study.

Name (printed, first and last) ____________________ Signature ____________________

Date Consent Provided ____________________

IRB: For Official Use Only

Project Number: 1495226-1

Institutional Review Board
Appendix C

Initial Teacher Interview Protocol

Script: Thank you for meeting with me today. I have about 10 questions I want to get through with you. At times, I may need to cut some of these questions short in order to be respectful of your time.

1. Tell me a little about yourself and how you came to teach at this school.
   a. Probe: How long have you been teaching at ___ Elementary?
   b. Probe: Why did you choose to teach at this school?

2. As you know, your principal recommended you for this study because of your experience implementing the Young Scholars Model. How did you first learn about the model, and what have you come to understand about it?
   a. Probe: What does it mean a teacher for you to enact it in your classroom?

3. [As you know/as you stated], one of the purposes of the Young Scholars Model is to help teachers develop talent in students from historically underrepresented populations in gifted programs. How would you define talent development?
   a. In what ways do you support talent development in your classroom?

4. How long have you been working with Young Scholars students, and what has that experience been like for you?

5. What are some of the typical ways in which you support Young Scholars in the classroom?
   a. Would you say that’s representative of how you support all the students in your classroom, or is this something you only do for Young Scholars students?
   b. How do you see these strategies helping you develop the talent of your Young Scholars students?
6. Now I want you to think about the Young Scholars students you have in your classroom right now. For the purposes of student confidentiality, let’s refrain from using any student names.
   a. Are there any Young Scholars students who you would recommend for AAP screening, either for full-time Level IV or for part-time Level III services?
      i. What sets these students apart from the other Young Scholars in your class?
   b. Are there any students who have NOT been identified as Young Scholars who you would recommend for AAP screening, either for Level IV or Level III?
      i. How do these students differ, if at all, from the Young Scholars students you are also recommending?

7. What advice would you give to teachers who work with students identified as Young Scholars?

8. What other information would you like to share about your work with Young Scholars, or the Young Scholars Model in general?
Appendix D

Final Teacher Interview Protocol

Script: *I have about 10 questions I want to get through with you. At times, I may need to cut some of these questions short in order to be respectful of your time.*

1. Thank you for welcoming me into your classroom to observe some of your lessons. In thinking of those lessons, do any really stand out to you as having been particularly successful with your Young Scholars students?
   a. If so, can you recount the lesson and describe why you felt it was particularly successful?
   b. If not, can you think of a lesson that I did not have a chance to observe that was particularly successful with your Young Scholars students? If so, can you describe the lesson and explain why you felt it was particularly successful?

2. Would you say that the lessons I observed were typical of your classroom instruction?
   a. If so, in what ways?
   b. If not, how were they different?

3. One of the things I love about visiting classrooms is seeing the different ways teachers choose to organize them. What are some things you had in mind as you decided how to organize your classroom this year?

4. As elementary teachers, we both know the importance of teaching beyond the content standards. What are some socioemotional strategies or metacognitive tools that you think are important to include in your teaching?

5. How do you think culture plays a role in student learning? How do you see that impacting your work with Young Scholars students?
6. How do you think community and family influence what happens in the classroom? How do you see that impacting your work with Young Scholars students?

7. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your work with Young Scholars students or about gifted education in general?

8. This last question is purely a philosophical one. Do you see talent as something that can be developed in all students? Why or why not?
### Field Notes Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Subject(s):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does the teacher say?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• During instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>• When directing &amp; redirecting</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Classroom management</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What does the teacher do?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Nonverbal communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lesson activities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How is the classroom organized?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Classroom sketch</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Description of space</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How does the teacher address...?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Questions</td>
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<td>• Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What routines and procedures does the teacher have in place?</strong></td>
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<td>• Transitions</td>
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<td>• Rules</td>
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<td>• Collaboration</td>
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<td>• Seatwork</td>
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<td>• Carpet</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Questions for the teacher</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


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Biography

Holly D. Glaser graduated from Elmira High School, Elmira, Oregon, in 2001. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Oglethorpe University in 2005 and her Master of Arts in Elementary Education from Pacific University in 2011. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies, Holly taught fourth grade general education and fourth grade gifted education in both Virginia and Oregon, as well as served as a gifted resource teacher in a high-poverty school. She was nominated for the Region IV Teacher of the Year award by the Virginia Association for the Gifted in 2015. Holly has presented her research at multiple national conferences, including AERA and NAGC, and her work has been published in several peer-reviewed journals and books.