THE IMPACT OF RACE AND EDUCATION ON GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR:
A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR

by
Rouel Cornejo Belleza
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University
February 2012
The impact of race and education on gifted students of color: A case study of high school
gifted students of color

by Rouel Cornejo Belleza

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA
February 2012

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIR 
Mark A. Angle, Ed.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS
Jose A. Puga, Ed.D.
Ashley L. Estapa, Ph.D.

CHAIR OF GRADUATE STUDIES 
Scott Watson. Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

Rouel Cornejo Belleza. THE IMPACT OF RACE AND EDUCATION ON GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR: A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR (Under the direction of Dr. Mark A. Angle) School of Education, February 2012.

The examination of the relationship between race and education continues today as diversity across the country increases, while achievement scores remain stagnant or decreases. Among K-12 public education students in the United States, 7% are identified as gifted with ¾ categorized as Caucasian. Gifted students of color are a minority within an already minority community. This case study explores the influences and impact of race, education, and giftedness among four gifted high school students of color. The participants shared in their understanding of the following: what it meant to be labeled as smart; relating with friends and the importance of their support; strength of family as the key to their involvement; few minorities within the school and program; rigor of gifted classes; status within the school; and culture at home. The lack of critical mass among ethnic minorities within the community and school, particularly within the gifted population, had an impact on student understanding and perceptions of the role of race.
Dedication

The effort, drive, and completion of this endeavor would not have been possible without the love, support, collaboration, and patience from the greatest impact any person could have on my life, my wife Ellie. Her selflessness and unconditional love for our family not only humbles me, but spoils me as well. The boys and I are unquestionably the most fortunate of all men. We love you, I love you. We did it!

The two most amazing sons a father could ever ask for were granted unto me by the love of God; I could not be happier that I was gifted with Mason and Logan. I realize that my time on this project came at the cost of time with each of you – I pray in the end that my journey will someday have a positive impact on each of your journeys ahead. When I look upon my family, I joyfully reflect on how blessed I am.

Without the love, care, and direction from my mother and father, I can only wonder as to the multiple directions my life might have taken me. Instead I am secure and confident that I am exactly where I am because of who my mother and father were and continue to be. Thank you, mom and dad.

I am thankful to God that He has allowed me to be in this position with my wife, my family, friends, and education. I am under no illusion as to the guidance, protection, and love I have and continue to receive from Him. Thank you!
Acknowledgement

I would like to recognize the impact Liberty University has had on my journey, reflection, and relationship with God. Thankfully, at Liberty, I have met wonderful people, among which is Dr. Mark Angle. From the moment we met, it was easy to recognize his supportive nature, his keen insight, and his servant perspective toward helping others. I had every hope of one day asking him if he would chair my committee and, so, it was over a year later that our paths crossed to accomplish this task together. You have given me the push and support necessary to finish. Thank you.

I am also grateful for the support and guidance of Dr. Puga and Dr. Estapa, who have given me insight and direction through this entire process as members of my dissertation committee. I appreciate the time and effort you both spent reading over my drafts and providing commentary to strengthen and embolden the work. I thank all of the professors at Liberty who have given feedback and care in helping me reach this point.

A countless many others have contributed to my journey, including, but certainly not limited to: S. Anderson, M. Nichols, K. Park, D. Hayes, R. Fletcher, E. Daniel, C. Schwaller, Shirley, Sue, Catherine, Sandy, and finally the wonderful women and men with Liberty University and Liberty Online.
# Table of Contents

Dedication..................................................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements........................................................................................................................................ iii  
Table of Contents........................................................................................................................................ iv  
List of Tables.................................................................................................................................................. vii  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................................ viii  

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION** ............................................................................................................. 1  
Background of the Study........................................................................................................................... 3  
Purpose of Study .......................................................................................................................................... 4  
Guiding Questions ...................................................................................................................................... 5  
Significance of Study ................................................................................................................................. 5  
Key Terminology ....................................................................................................................................... 6  
Summary .................................................................................................................................................... 8  

**CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE** ................................................................. 10  
A History of Gifted Education .................................................................................................................. 11  
The State of Education ............................................................................................................................. 21  
Demographics and Education ..................................................................................................................... 24  
The Gifted Student .................................................................................................................................. 27  
The Gifted Student of Color ...................................................................................................................... 31  
Summary .................................................................................................................................................... 41  

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY** ......................................................................................... 43  
Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................................................. 43
Design........................................................................................................ 43
Setting........................................................................................................ 46
Participants............................................................................................... 48
Data Collection Process.............................................................................. 50
Data Analysis............................................................................................. 55
Dependability & Credibility......................................................................... 56

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS..................................................................... 60
Overview..................................................................................................... 60
Procedure.................................................................................................... 62
Instrumentation........................................................................................... 65
Student Participation..................................................................................... 66
Guiding Questions........................................................................................ 98

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION..................................... 114
Overview..................................................................................................... 114
Guiding Questions....................................................................................... 116
Limitations................................................................................................... 123
The Role of the Researcher.......................................................................... 124
Implications.................................................................................................. 125
Future Research........................................................................................... 126

REFERENCES......................................................................................... 128
APPENDIX................................................................................................. 146
List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Data of the Students in the Participating School.......................... 48

Table 2: Demographic Data of Gifted Students of Color in the Participating School...... 63
List of Figures

Figure 1: Catherine CogAT: 2nd Grade................................................................. 68
Figure 2: Catherine ITBS: 3rd Grade................................................................. 69
Figure 3: Catherine CRCT: 5th Grade.......................................................... 72
Figure 4: Catherine CRCT: 8th Grade......................................................... 72
Figure 5: Shirley CRCT: 7th Grade............................................................ 79
Figure 6: Shirley ITBS: 8th Grade.............................................................. 79
Figure 7: Shirley CRCT: 8th Grade.......................................................... 80
Figure 8: Sue CogAT: 2nd Grade................................................................. 84
Figure 9: Sue ITBS: 3rd Grade................................................................. 85
Figure 10: Sue CRCT: 5th Grade............................................................... 87
Figure 11: Sue CRCT: 8th Grade............................................................... 87
Figure 12: Sandy CogAT: 4th Grade............................................................ 92
Figure 13: Sandy ITBS: 4th Grade.............................................................. 92
Figure 14: Sandy CRCT: 5th Grade............................................................ 95
Figure 15: Sandy CRCT: 8th Grade............................................................ 95
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

School programs for the gifted and talented seek to expose students to opportunities for greater creativity, motivation, leadership, academic achievement, and artistry (McBee, 2006). However, since the national inception of gifted and talented programs, which was established by the National Defense Education Act of 1958, a continued and historically consistent issue remains: the disproportionate and underrepresentation of students of color within gifted and talented programs (Callahan, 2005; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford & Moore, 2004, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006). The Executive Summary of the United States Department of Education’s National excellence: A case for developing America’s talent (1993) provided the following statements regarding giftedness and race:

The United States is squandering one of its most precious resources—the gifts, talents, and high interests of many of its students. This problem is especially severe among economically disadvantaged and minority students, who have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

According to Yoon & Gentry (2009), “race and ethnicity is one of the major issues facing gifted education in pursuit of a more equal representation of students” (p. 121). Henfield, Moore, & Wood (2008) explained that students of color who have been categorized as gifted indicated a lack of perceived support, expectations, motivation, and social or cultural connection to the gifted programs to which they belong. Underrepresentation within gifted programs is not the only issue, as gifted students of
color also struggle with societal and personal expectations, stereotypes, peer pressure, and racial identity (Grantham, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001; Whiting, 2009).

In the wake of continued economic decline, the federal government’s financial investment and attention for gifted and talented programs continues to diminish. According to the National Association for Gifted Children’s State of the nation in gifted education report (2008), less than five cents for every $100 spent is budgeted for gifted programs in K-12 schools. Oakland and Rossen (2005) state that “support for the programs [Gifted and Talented] is highly dependent on whether they meet local, state, and national needs” (p. 56). Strip (2000) explains that, in fact, “there are still many districts and schools in this country and others where the child is expected to lockstep through the regular curriculum, with little or no academic adjustment being made” (p. 39). Although 37 states have legislation written regarding gifted and talented programs, only 26 states fully or partially mandate programs to address gifted and talented student academic or artistic needs (Information Center on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2002). Program attention, funding, and support continue to be issues that plague each state and district regarding the most talented resources available through education.

Reflective of the broader societal, financial, and education issues of race and education, gifted and talented programs continue to be victim to the underrepresentation of diversity and the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy (Lewis, DeCamp-Fritson, Ramage, McFarland, & Archwamety, 2007; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Within gifted and talented programs, an estimated three million students, approximately 7%, compose the community of K-12 academically gifted students in the United States (National
Association for Gifted Children, 2008). Students of color identified as gifted constitute less than 25% of the gifted community, with no racial group representing more than 10%, indicating an inconsistency in proportion relative to the national population trends (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Oakland & Rossen, 2005). Gifted students are a minority within the school community and gifted students of color are doubly so. According to Ford and Grantham (2003), “at no point during its history has the field of gifted education been able to boast of having a representative number of minority students” (p. 224). There continues to be a need for education to meet not only the requirements of high-ability learners, but to also acknowledge, understand, and support the complexities inherent for students of color with regard to race, education, and giftedness.

**Background of the Study**

Race and education have been linked with one another since the landmark decision of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954). The examination of the relationship between race and education continues today under greater scrutiny as diversity, achievement, and mobility are measured through legislation, test scores, and national policy. Currently, students of color make up over one third of the student population in public schools with an anticipated rise in the future (LaDuke, 2009). Demographic estimations for the United States suggest that the percentage of people of color will rise to 38% by 2025 and as much as 47% by 2050 (Wong, 2008). The impact of the demographic growth and shifting will play a larger role in education as disproportionate numbers based on race continue to exist within the categories of achievement and giftedness (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Greene & Winters, 2002, 2005; Lewis et al., 2007).
Race and education can be difficult to address due to the sensitive nature of its context within legislation, academic achievement, affirmative action, economic funding, special education, and giftedness. The study of race and education is a complex social issue, as its relationship is bound by history, politics, psychology, and other social sciences (Baez, 2004). Gifted and talented programs within the school systems are hardly unaffected by the cultural influences of race and education (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Many of the issues associated with race within mainstream education are evident among gifted and talented programs. Issues of under-identification, retention, graduation rates, identity development within a majority Caucasian society, and cultural understanding are other issues facing race and education within gifted programs. Education must take a proactive approach in preparing its students, faculties, and communities for the inevitable cultural and ethnic evolution (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Boger, 2005; Hecker, 2005; Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potyin, & Royer, 2009).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore and understand the influences and impact of race, education, and giftedness among four gifted high school students of color from a county located in North Georgia. Recollections, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions that gifted students of color had regarding education required a comprehensive and contextual approach, which was accomplished through a case study design. This study examined and investigated the memories and emotions of gifted high school students of color from each level of their respective schooling experiences: elementary school, middle school, and high school.
Students selected were classified as “gifted” within their school system’s gifted program since elementary school. The state of Georgia itself has played a major role in gifted and talented programs. The categorization of giftedness in Georgia has existed since 1958 with the passage of the Georgia House of Representatives bill HR-246. This bill recognized the gifted population by providing specific funding and technical assistance within the Georgia public schools. Georgia became the first state to provide a systematic program with funding for its gifted and talented population (Georgia Department of Education). In 1983, The University of Georgia initiated the Gifted and Creative Studies program to further support gifted education.

**Guiding Questions**

Several questions guided this study in comprehensively understanding the challenges and realizations gifted students of color experience:

1. How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?
2. What internal factors have influenced their perspective on education?
3. What external factors have influenced their perspective on education?
4. How has race impacted their relationship with peer groups?
5. What support systems help gifted students of color?
6. What future aspirations do they have?

**Significance of Study**

Although previous studies have examined underrepresentation (Lewis et al., 2007; McBee, 2006; Oakland & Rossen, 2005; Rodgers, 2008), racial identity (Aberson, Shoemaker, & Tomolillo, 2004; Alexander, Brewer, & Uvingston, 2005; Harris, 2008),
and motivation (Oakland & Rossen, 2005; Rodgers, 2008) among gifted students, few comprehensive and descriptive studies have sought to understand race, education, and giftedness from a qualitative case study approach, utilizing the perceptions and experiences of gifted high school students of color. This study used in-depth analysis, multiple perspectives, and individual recollections regarding the students’ overall experiences for the purpose of assisting future students of color associated with gifted programs.

The information gathered from this study will assist educators in their understanding of the impact race plays on racial identity development, peer interaction, external support systems, and academic achievement. Additionally, gifted students of color and their families may glean information that will be helpful for their introduction to giftedness, transitions at each level of schooling, social interactions among gifted students and their families, social interactions among non-gifted students and their families within their racial make-up, racial identity development, and academic motivation.

**Key Terminology**

*Giftedness:* Defined in a variety of ways, most definitions include the demonstration of high intellect, creativity, motivation, and the ability to excel among a variety of academic categories.

*Gifted students of color:* Students who are self-identified as African American, Latino or Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, or Other will qualify for the criteria of students of color. Students of color who qualify for the gifted and talented program will be recognized as gifted students of color.
Giftedness in Georgia: According to the State Board of Education rule (SBOE 160-4-2-.38), students may qualify to be classified as gifted in one of two manners: the Psychometric Approach or the Multiple Criteria Approach. The Psychometric Approach requires a student in grades K-2 to score in the 99th percentile or a student in grades 3-12 to score in the 96th percentile of a nationally normed mental ability test, while also achieving a score in the 90th percentile in one of the following areas: total reading, total math, or total achievement of the test battery. The Multiple Criteria Approach requires a total score of a nationally normed standardized test in the 90th percentile in three of the four data categories (mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation). Among the tests utilized in scoring for nationally normed percentiles is the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), which is used to assess reasoning and problem solving; the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), which is used to assess content area; or the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children (WISC), which is used to assess intellectual functioning.

Racial and ethnic identity development: Often difficult to define as a social construct, Helms (1993) stated that racial and ethnic identity “refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). The process of racial understanding for people of color within the context of society is a transformational progression resulting in one’s awareness of his or her race within the framework of societal norms (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

Retention: For the purposes of this study, retention will be used primarily to describe incidents in which gifted students of color and their families make the conscious decision to matriculate out of the gifted and talented program within the school system.
Additionally, retention may be used to describe a gifted student’s decision to drop-out of formal schooling.

_Multicultural education:_ An understanding and focus on differences among peoples, ethnicities, abilities, and cultures in an effort to promote greater awareness and social justice (Chamberlin, 2008).

_External support systems:_ For the purpose of this study, external support systems will be recognized as formal or informal systems that exist within the school or the community to assist gifted students of color with school transition, family communication, peer interaction, or academic achievement.

**Summary**

An important study for examination is the psychological and social issues surrounding the development of gifted students of color (Buescher, 1985). Gifted students are often challenged with adjusting to academic or social surroundings that potentially isolate or alienate their existence (Buescher & Hingham, 1990). The adjustments and coping strategies for gifted students can vary based on their respective communities and situations. The community of gifted students within the United States is approximately 7% of school age children, which makes this group and their families a minority population within K-12 education (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). Despite the anticipated growth in diversity for the coming years, students of color are still a minority population plagued by issues of historically poor academic achievement with disproportional percentages. Within the gifted community, students of color are clearly a minority within a minority population.
Although a number of the issues gifted students contend with transcend race, ethnicity, and gender, there are specific and contextually significant differences students of color deal with that are unique to the racial and social construct within the United States. This comprehensive study of gifted students of color will provide a greater understanding of the differences associated with race and education within various gifted minority populations. Education, families, and students can benefit from the perspectives, experiences, and insight provided by this case study analysis.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Schools must deal with the infusion of influences by society at large: media, economy, history, and race. This historical and cultural impact on education can be traced from its influence on the school culture through accessibility, disproportion, curriculum, promotion, retention, and test scores (Tatum, 1997). Schools continue to be under pressure to educate a diversity of students with a diversity of needs through core subject material in an effort to prepare them for the global workplace (Sanchez, 2007). As both a social institution and learning environment, schools often reflect the community norms and standards. Race and education have been linked for years and the proper understanding of its influence upon one another can provide valuable insight and reflection upon societal values, needs, and aspirations (Dyson, 1996; Tatum, 1997).

Education is a capable mechanism for addressing many societal issues as they relate to race; however, the years of disproportionality, underachievement, and lack of awareness have created avenues for lost potential, particularly among students of color (Boger, 2005; Bonner, 2003; Kurlaender & Yun, 2002a, 2002b; Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008). In this case, the racial minority within an already minority community of gifted students is yet another population who has arguably been underserved, but that is worthy of further understanding. Attention to the ramifications of race and education is a growing necessity as the United States continues to diversify in race and ethnicity (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Hecker, 2005; Lessard et al., 2009). A more focused understanding of the student of color population within the gifted community can serve to provide insight into acceptance, retention, acceleration, achievement, and
stereotypes that students of color contend with as a minority within a minority population (Ponterotto et al., 2001; Grantham, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Whiting, 2009).

**A History of Gifted Education**

Research suggests that the genesis of modern-day gifted and talented programs date back to 380 BC and the teachings of Plato, who sought to establish an environment in which youth could maximize their potentiality for learning (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008; Stewart, 1999; Heller et al., 2000; Wright, 2008). A philosophy for providing a separate learning arena for those with higher intelligences stems from Plato’s belief that such a pool of individuals would produce the necessary future leadership to further usher democracy (Heller et al., 2000; Wright, 2008). The connection of Plato’s early philosophy for providing a separate learning environment, an academy, for those whom he referred to as having intellectual superiority is the present-day equivalent to the university and post-secondary system found today, according to Cunningham & Reich (2006). The recognition and belief that students with higher intellectual capabilities might benefit from a different learning environment is a legacy from the early practices of Greek influence (Heller et al., 2000).

The history of gifted and talented programs in the United States has developed largely from an underwhelming drive in attention by its citizens and public leaders (Adler, 2008). If not for a handful of events, some ground-breaking research, and the political fall-out from the Russian satellite *Sputnik*, the awareness level to gifted and talented programs in the United States would have remained relatively low (Davis & Rimm, 1985). Although gifted and talented programs existed in the public schools as far
back as the 1860’s in St. Louis and areas of New York, there was little political, economical, or national attention given to programs for gifted and talented students until the introduction of specific research and testing on the intelligence of individuals (Horowtiz & O’Brien, 1985; Ross, 1994; Wright, 2008).

**Key contributors.**

Sir Francis Galton has often been referred to as an instrumental figure and researcher among the gifted and talented community (Davis & Rimm, 1985; National Association for Gifted Children, 2008; Heller et al., 2000). In 1865, he devoted a great deal of study to the concept of heredity with the understanding and belief that successful qualities are passed from one generation to the next. Through his studies, he later published the seminal work entitled *Hereditary Genius* (1869). Like his cousin before him (Charles Darwin), he detailed that intelligence was hereditary and born from natural selection. Galton’s study sparked the intelligence debate and created a need to further understand its future ramifications (Davis & Rimm, 1985). However, the debate also introduced the concepts of restrictions in breeding, eugenics, as well as the categorization and ranking of populations through traits (Jenson, 2002).

Alfred Binet and T. Simon, who together developed a means for measuring intelligence, became the founders for intelligence testing today (White, 2000). The categorization of gifted and talented is established in part by intelligence testing. In 1905, Binet and Simon set out to identify students who might benefit from special classes with special training. A test was created to rule out the subjectivity inherent in teacher, student, and parent bias. Through a series of attempts, Binet concluded that intelligence grew with maturation (Davis & Rimm, 1985). The measurement of tasks and abilities
subject to a student’s age was used as a comparative tool for “normalcy,” based on observations of other students in that same age group under natural settings (Siegler, 1992). Binet’s introduction of intelligence testing and a numerical measurement was different from Galton’s hereditary argument, suggesting that intelligence develops over time despite one’s ancestry.

The introduction of intelligence testing in the United States came when Henry Goddard brought from France and translated the Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale in 1918 (Zenderland, 1998). Henry Goddard was a significant leader during the start of the American psychometric movement. When he arrived in the United States, he distributed approximately 22,000 copies of the translated Binet-Simon scale, became instrumental in the establishment of intelligence testing on Ellis Island, promoted the use of the intelligence testing in public schools, and served on a testing team for the Army during World War I (Zenderland, 1998). He also became a contributor and advocate for special education and school reform. However, according to Zenderland (1998), Goddard was a eugenicist who promoted strict population growth among those he considered feebleminded and used the Binet-Simon tests as a measurement for categorizing such individuals.

Shortly after the introduction of the Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale to the United States, Lewis Terman of Stanford University (“father” of the gifted education movement) revised the test specifically for the American population (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). The publication and wide-spread use of the Stanford-Binet intelligence test by Lewis Terman in 1916 established the foundation for identification of intelligence and the criteria for “nationally standardized intelligence” testing (Oakland & Rossen,
The intention to provide students who demonstrated exceptional talents and required services beyond the mainstream educational curriculum became the objective for gifted and talented programs (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). Despite the fact that testing and research provided a level of understanding for intelligence, public attention and the strength of funding and support would come only after the launch of the spacecraft *Sputnik*, then later through the implementation of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Jolly, 2009).

**Federal involvement in gifted education.**

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 was designed to purposefully educate exceptionally talented students as a reaction to the competition from the Soviet Union in the advanced fields of math, science, and technology (Oakland & Rossen, 2005). Since the Soviet satellite launch of 1957 (*Sputnik*), the United States has made significant investments in human capital by focusing on the education for talented and gifted individuals. The combination of criticism on American education, coupled with the reaction to the Soviet advancement of technology, fueled federal funding toward all levels of education at a rate never previously experienced (Jolly, 2009). The NDEA of 1958 provided an expansive influence to education as a whole, while establishing the genesis of national gifted and talented educational programs in the United States (Flattau, Bracken, Van Atta, Bandeh-Ahmadi, de la Cruz, & Sullivan, 2006; Friedman, 2005).

The stimulation to education was provided by the NDEA (1958) by way of $1 billion over four years in loans, scholarships, and fellowships (Fleming, 1960). Flattau et al. (2006) noted that funds were also made available to states in an effort to increase the identification of gifted and able students with strengths in the fields of science,
technology, engineering, and math (STEM) via Title III and Title V. Title III provided improved equipment and materials for the fields of math, science, and foreign language, in addition to greater resources for teacher professional development (Jolly, 2009). The collaboration between researchers and teachers on the issues of educational advancement, identification, and reconstruction became an ancillary benefit to the reform movement (Dow, 1997). Title V provided funding for testing, guidance, counseling, and identification of gifted students (Fleming, 1960). Testing of potentially gifted students has since become the primary method for identification and categorization with talent searches and standardized batteries of aptitude and achievement testing (Flanagan, 1960; Flattau et al., 2006; Goldberg, 1958; Heward, 2000; Jolly, 2009).

The resurgence of attention to education from the NDEA (1958) focused on the academic needs gifted students required in the areas of curriculum, strategy, programming, and implementation (Flattau et al., 2006; Passow, 1957; Wolfe, 1951). Programs emerged as early as elementary school, focusing on the practical applications of science and independent study, while the secondary levels provided specialization and accelerated courses (Anderson, 1961; Havinghurst, Stivers, & DeHaan, 1955; Wiszowaty, 1961). The overall impact of the NDEA (1958) ushered a rise in general attention to education, established the new role of federal government, and emphasized rigor through the study of science and mathematics (Flattau et al, 2006; Jolly, 2009).

Although attention to gifted and talented programs reached its pinnacle during the space-war-program era, general awareness began to decline once again throughout the 60’s and 70’s (Adler, 2008). Public education interest shifted toward the economically, socially, and racially disadvantaged students, with an emphasis on equal opportunities for
the underprivileged. It was not until the 1970’s that gifted education found its way back into the political arena through Section 806: “Provisions Related to Gifted and Talented Children” (Public Law 91-230). From this law, funding allocations for gifted students was provided via “Titles III and V of the Elementary and Secondary Act and teacher education provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965” (Adler, 2008, p. 28).

In 1972, the Commissioner of Education, Sydney Marland, provided results from a study to the United States Congress specifically targeting the necessity of special education for the gifted and talented student population. The request for this study also sought to discover whether or not federal programs were meeting the needs of gifted students and, if not, what other programs might be necessary or recommended (Adler, 2008). The report by Marland, *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (1972) was also known as the Marland report. The Marland report spawned the most widely used definition for giftedness today and was the first national study on gifted education (Genshaft et al., 1995; Oakland & Rossen, 2005). The report also stated that students who were gifted and talented were being neglected in their academic needs and that the failure to address these issues would be met with apathy and a decline in intellect and creativity (Loveless, Parkas, & Duffett, 2008). According to the report by Marland (1972), “intellectual and creative talent cannot survive educational neglect and apathy” (p. 18).

The report was critical of the educational system in place for gifted students and suggested that federal, state, and local attention was lacking and ineffective in its implementation and direction. The report states, “the United States has been inconsistent in seeking out the gifted and talented, finding them early in their lives, and
individualizing their education” (Marland, 1972, p. 43). Among the priorities recommended were systemic in-service programs for key personnel working with the gifted and talented, support for further research and programming, the establishment of a Federal office, the need to evaluate and disseminate new information, the continued support for programs already in existence that provide exemplary work, and State leadership. However, according to Marland (1972), “the major deterrent, clearly, was the lack of sufficient funds to carry out significant program activity” (p. 85).

The information provided by the Marland report ushered in the establishment of the Office of the Gifted and Talented, which was housed inside of the United States Office of Education. Shortly after the creation of this department, the Gifted and Talented Children’s Education Act of 1978 was signed into law and established an increased national investment for gifted education, rising from $25 million to $50 million from fiscal year 1979 to 1983 (Jolly, 2009). However, during the Reagan administration, in 1981, the act was repealed, placing responsibility for the continuation of fiscal recourses toward gifted programs back onto the individual states (Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Adler, 2008). At this point in U.S. history, the public and political thirst and enthusiasm for gifted education waned with suggestions that gifted education and general education need not be separated, that gifted students could go without additional learning resources, and that equity within education was a greater priority (Renzulli, 2000; Ross, 1994; Heller et al., 2000).

In 1987, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Bill was passed with sweeping federal action, emphasizing the importance for the development of underserved gifted students (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994; Wright, 2008). Heeding the siren call from
the report issued by Marland (1972), “this loss [intellectual and creative talent] is particularly evident in the minority groups who have in both social and educational environments every configuration calculated to stifle potential talent” (p. 18). The Javits Program focused “on serving students traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs” (Wright, 2008, p. 21). Through the Javits’ National Research Center at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, along with a network of resources, over 100 different grant-funded projects and interventions have been produced in order to significantly improve achievement and performance at all levels for the traditionally underrepresented students (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). Funding for Javits’ programs and projects must meet specific criteria, which includes scientific research for the identification of students, professional development, the implementation of model programs, the dissemination of information and methodology, and the utilization of technology (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In 1993, the United States Congress published National excellence: The case for developing America’s talent. More than twenty years after the report from Marland (1972), National Excellence (1993) described the state of gifted education and coined the phrase “quiet crisis,” describing the national educational system and its continued failure in challenging its gifted students to compete on the global stage. As stated in the forward of the report by the Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley:

American education is now at a turning point—one that requires us to reach beyond current programs and practices. As the nation strives to improve its schools, the concerns of students with outstanding talents must not be ignored.

International tests comparing American students with those in other countries
show that students at all levels of achievement are not performing as well as students in many other countries (p. 5).

With global comparisons made regarding the educational mediocrity of students from the United States, *National Excellence* (1993) discussed the underperformance and dire implications of underachieving gifted students. According to the report, “most top students in the United States are offered a less rigorous curriculum, read fewer demanding books, complete less homework, and enter the work force or postsecondary education less well prepared than tops students in many other industrialized countries” (1993, p. 12). With glaring comparative deficiencies in the fields of mathematics and science, this report indicated that gifted students were simply not learning up to their potential abilities. Much like its predecessor report, this report, too, highlighted the neglect shown toward the identification process of minority students, leaving pools of potentially talented students unclassified and unchallenged. The summation of the report criticized the educational system with the following: too small of a percentage of students prepared for college-level work, comparatively low global performance among the U.S. highest achievers, and low analytical skill levels (Ross, 1993).

In 2001, a major change in educational assessment began when Congress passed the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. Essentially, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, NCLB, increased the federal role within public education. At its core, this controversial federal legislation was intended to provide a quality education to every child, seeking to improve student achievement in broad strokes, while holding states responsible for academic progress. Through continued debate among all parties
involved, including parents, educators, and politicians, the intent was understood, but its practice and application continue to be in question (Williams, 2005).

The avocation of a strong public school system and the belief that all students deserve the right to a good education has been a consistent theme running throughout U.S. history. Though the emphasis rests in the necessity for accountability through annual testing, some believe that the pressure created by NCLB on students and teachers has essentially been unbearable and potentially unattainable (Cole, 2005). Are standardized tests a valid assessment of how well a school, system, or individual student is performing? Is the measurement stick of NCLB the gauge by which one can truly assess student learning, growth, and development? Lederman and Burnstein (2006) refer to standardized testing as “instructionally insensitive” (p. 430). Many schools and states have reduced the requirements of electives, as well as course offerings, in order to make room for the requirements from testing through NCLB (Gutek, 2005). NCLB requires students and teachers to be evaluated according to standardized test scores, academic success through adequate yearly progress, specific improvements among subgroups within the educational community, along with the acquisition and retention of highly qualified teachers. Critical to NCLB, Ediger (2006) contemplates whether society can justify the enormous task of basing the educational progress of students solely on an annual test in grades three through eight, in addition to a high school exit test.

With the introduction to NCLB and its focus on student proficiency and remediation, particularly among the educationally low-achieving students, some believe that the majority of resources and attention have been allocated toward raising low-performing students at the cost of the highest achieving (Gentry, 2006; Kenney, 2007).
According to Sternberg (2008), maintenance of gifted or special needs programs has become the norm in the era of NCLB, as the concentration of efforts has redirected education toward testing, further reducing the promotion of educational diversity. Gentry (2006) suggests that the efforts made by NCLB not only fail to provide educational equity, specifically through testing among the economically challenged and minority communities, but also promotes academic proficiency over academic excellence, leaving the gifted communities with reduced resources. With incentives designed to increase the scores of borderline students, the potential for neglect among the high-achieving students exists. Since the early 1990’s and the introduction of NCLB, gifted education has seen a decline in attention and resources, promoted by the drive toward remediation and proficiency, rather than acceleration and meaningful learning (Gentry, 2006; Kaplan, 2004; Kenney, 2007; Sternberg, 2008; Tomlinson, 2002).

The State of Education

The Congressional report by Marland (1972) and National Excellence (1993) were both critical of the condition of education in the United States for gifted students; however, of equal concern in both reports was the general decline in the state of education: “at the same time we raise the ‘floor’ (the minimum levels of accomplishments we consider to be acceptable), we also must raise the ‘ceiling’ (the highest academic level for which we strive)” (National Excellence, 1993, p. 13). The passage of NCLB in 2001 was, in part, a reflection of the national frustration evident in the U.S. educational system’s poor performance relative to other industrial countries (Gentry, 2006; Sternberg, 2008). Since the year 2000, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) has measured the international performance of fifteen-year-old students.
old students in the fields of science, mathematics, and literacy. According to the PISA reports in 2006, the performance of fifteen-year-old students from the United States, in the field of mathematics, ranked 35th among 57 participating jurisdictions assessed around the world (Baldi, Jin, Skemer, Green, & Herget, 2007). When comparing the data of high achieving mathematic students in the United States, students at the 90th percentile, the U.S. ranked 29th compared to the represented jurisdictions (Baldi et al, 2007). The United States ranked 29th among 57 participating jurisdictions assessed for science, with approximately 9% performing at the highest levels and approximately ¼ of its students performing at the lowest level (Baldi et al, 2007). Although the results from the PISA assessments are not the only evaluative tool used for measuring international student achievement, the National Center for Educational Statistics (federal entity reporting directly to the U.S. Department of Education) relies on these results to compare, analyze, and report on the state of education from a global perspective.

The PISA comparisons among other countries place context to the educational output of the United States; however, they do not articulate the masses of students of color who continue to disproportionately fall behind within the educational system or who are never assessed for the gifted population. In certain areas of the country there already exist statistical cases in which the minority population is the “majority population in many of the nation’s public schools” (Wong, 2008, p.31). With approximately 70% of high school students graduating within a four year time span, only 57% of Native Americans, 56% of African Americans, and 52% of Latinos graduate on time, compared to 78% of Caucasian students (Greene & Winters, 2002, 2005). The social, economic,
and moral cost to the United States, should this educational trend continue, could prove to be devastating for the future.

Throughout the history of public education, Heller et al. (2000) has chronicled the shifts in political, social, and educational attitudes, from the need for social equality to the need for improved higher achievement through gifted and talented students, which often has been perceived as elitist. The United States has grappled with providing resources for the majority of students while fostering the growth of the minority gifted. If not for the catalyst of competition from the Russian satellite, along with a handful of Congressional reports (Marland, 1972; National Excellence, 1993) criticizing the national approach to gifted education, interest in gifted and talented programs has been sporadic andwaning in its attention (Wright, 2008). The issue of educational downturn is not isolated to the general education core, but has spread among the highest-achieving students as well. Loveless, Parkas, & Duffett (2008) summarize an analysis by Matthew Springer (2008) to provide the following understanding of giftedness in the current era of NCLB:

high achievers gained…they made gains in schools facing NCLB sanctions-and did not show gains in schools immune from sanctions because the schools had previously made adequate yearly progress (AYP)-the opposite of what one would expect if schools were redirecting resources away from high achievers in response to NCLB’s incentives (p. 15).

Added to the ambivalence of passion for giftedness in the U.S. with the passage of NCLB and its emphasis on basic skills and proficiency, gifted and talented students have failed to impress as even “the highest-achieving American students fare poorly when compared
with similar students in other nations” (National Excellence, 1993, p. 19). The global competitiveness and readiness of U.S. students continues to be an issue at all levels.

Already, fewer resources are provided and utilized for gifted and talented programs, as less than five cents for every $100 is budgeted for gifted programs K-12, according to the National Association for Gifted Children’s State of the nation in gifted education report (2008). In large part, due to past and present efforts made to remediate and raise the level of the lowest achieving students in public education, many schools have been forced to fiscally and educationally cater to the masses, rather than specialize in specific programs (Loveless, Farkas, & Duffett, 2008; Strip, 2000). Program attention, funding, and support continue to be issues that plague each state and district regarding the most talented resources available though education. It has essentially been left to the individual states to finance, academically support, and define giftedness (Information Center on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2002; Oakland & Rossen, 2005).

Demographics and Education

Throughout history, the political will and social interest in education for students of color has fluctuated since the decision of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954). The history of education and race within the United States has been linked with one another in both positive and negative ways (Henfield et al., 2008; Kozol, 2005; Tatum, 1997). The current estimates suggest that the demographic status of approximately one third of public school students come from an ethnic or racial background of color (LaDuke, 2009). The United States is projected to increase its population of citizens of color to be slightly less than 50% by 2050 (Wong, 2008). Education must take a proactive approach in preparing its students and communities for
the inevitable cultural and ethnic evolution (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Boger, 2005; Hecker, 2005; Lessard et al., 2009). Students of color have contended with the complexities of education through a tumultuous history, bias within the community, and psychological perceptions of achievement and success (Baez, 2004). The cost of failing to adequately educate all students in the United States is reflected in the high drop-out rate; however, more troublesome are the specific drop-out rates for ethnic minorities. Educators, policymakers, and researchers must address the “the various issues of educational disparities between ethnic and racial groups” (Fontanella, 2008, p. 2). With a growing number of uneducated students, particularly those of color, the fabric of democracy may unwind with the potential increase in criminal behavior, medical expenses, unemployment, and tax revenues, while at the same time U.S. global competitiveness may be subject to strain and increased demand (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Amos, 2008).

No longer can a country afford to lose potential employees when the job market requires a specific educational baseline. NCLB sought to address the need of remediation, particularly among the subgroups of ethnic and racial minorities. A continued and deeper understanding of the relationship between race and education continues to be an imperative goal, as many prospective jobs for the near future, in the U.S. and abroad, require at least one post-secondary degree (Hecker, 2005). If an improvement in academic success among Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans were to rise to the level found among Caucasian students by 2020, the collective personal income would increase the U.S. economy by $310 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Greene & Winters, 2005). Tied to the potential increase
in earnings for graduates is the opposite impact for failing to achieve a competitive work-ready force: an increase in criminal and medical costs for individuals who do not contribute back to society through taxes and employment.

The cost could be enormous and, at times, unquantifiable as Amos (2008) suggests regarding the rate in criminal behavior, fluctuation in individual wage-earnings, as well as economic growth within the United States relative to high school graduation. The state of Georgia currently suffers tremendously with an estimated loss of $15.5 billion in wages over a lifetime because of the low percentage of high school graduates, particularly among students of color (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). With such emphasis and focus on the plateau of high school graduation, the concept for meeting and improving the needs of the gifted and talented students remains a secondary, if not tertiary, concern for most of the political and societal masses (Gentry, 2006; Loveless et al., 2008; Wright, 2008).

Research has indicated that a strong connection between household income and race exists as it relates to educational success (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Boger, 2005; Greene & Winters, 2005). Circumstantially, the concentration of students of color tends to exist within a similar concentration of low socioeconomic housing as measured by Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), with approximately 50% of African American and Latino students attending schools in which 75% receive FRPL (Boger, 2005). With schools in which the majority is the minority, schools with high poverty are five times more likely to promote only half of their student body within a four year time frame (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Within the pool of minority students there may potentially be gifted and talented individuals who have yet to be identified or perhaps retained within
the program itself (National Excellence, 1993). As early as 1972, the Congressional report by Marland (1972) warned of “the assumption that gifted and talented come from privileged environments…there is ample evidence that highly gifted children can be identified in all groups within our society” (p. 30 & 33).

The United States depends on all of its citizens to be informed, productive, and contributory. The current data provides a bleak picture of education’s failings as it relates to graduation at large, particularly regarding the academic success among students of color (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Among gifted students of color, “special efforts are required to overcome the barriers to achievement that many economically disadvantaged and minority students face” (National Excellence, 1993, p. 35). The influences that impact race and academic achievement may be found at all levels of education from the categories of Special Education (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Delgado & Scott, 2006) to Giftedness (Callahan, 2005; Ford & Moore, 2004; Rogers, 2008). Although the discussion of race and education has existed for many years, the overwhelmingly obvious demographic changes that will occur in the United States will bring to surface the deficiencies that have already been exposed through the elevated drop-out rates among students of color, the disproportionalities within Special Education and Gifted Programs, as well as the estimated cost to society at large.

**The Gifted Student**

Much has been made of the global competitiveness and capabilities U.S. students have relative to their counterparts in other countries as the future for the worldwide marketplace of economics, politics, and innovation depend on the cultivation of bright and talented minds (Gentry, 2006; Loveless et al., 2008; National Excellence, 1993;
Wright, 2008). Cuypers and Haji (2006) suggest that the successful student of the future is also one that is self-governing. Although not all students naturally self-govern, the continued effort to develop students into independent critical thinkers is a necessary ingredient for sustained and engaged citizenship. Students who are gifted have a need for critical thinking and independence (Winebrenner & Berger, 1994). Every student should be afforded the opportunity to comprehend material at a pace appropriate for their achievement level through the utilization of effective teaching practices. Loveless et al. (2008) suggest that “the next generation of accountability in education must build on that accomplishment to maximize the attainments of all students, including America’s highest achievers” (p. 37).

Gifted students are often different from other students based on a number of factors related to learning and achievement, including learning speed, depth of contextual understanding, as well as a significant mix of curiosity and concentration (Maker, 1982). Although gifted students are adolescents who deal with typical adolescent issues, their giftedness may be the root to problems associated with impatience, social immaturity, manipulation, perfectionism, neglectfulness, and the need for logical interpretation of direction or rules (Clark, 1992; Gagne, 1991; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009; Martinson, 1974; Webb, 1994).

The definitions for giftedness vary to some degree based on location, district, and state. Arguably the most influential of definitions came from the Marland (1972), which provided characteristics and qualities for establishing gifted and talented programs (Genshaft, Bireley, & Hollinger, 1995; Oakland & Rossen, 2005). Characteristics from Marland’s report (1972) included the following: intellectual abilities, specific
academically based aptitude, creativity in thinking, leadership, artistic abilities, and psychomotor skills. Shaunesy (2003) found that a number of states refrained from including psychomotor skills as a criterion for giftedness. As education is primarily a state function, the federal definitions for giftedness are adapted for individual state use, which ultimately creates a varied definition from state to state (Shaunesy, 2003; Oakland & Rossen, 2005).

According to the National Association of Gifted Children (2010), the definitions for giftedness differ with numerous interpretations. However, the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) uses the following definition based on what the organization terms as “a foundational definition” for giftedness: “A gifted person is someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression” (National Association of Gifted Children, 2010). Other definitions from the field used by the NAGC include: The Javits Act of 1988, the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement of 1993, the Columbus Group of 1991, the Gagné definition of 1985, and the Renzulli definition of 1978 (National Association of Gifted Children, 2010).

The Javits Act of 1988 highlights the following areas regarding gifted students: "higher performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools in order to develop such capabilities fully” (National Association of Gifted Children, 2010). Another definition used from U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement of 1993 incorporates an additional statement on cultural groups and economic status (National Association of Gifted
Children, 2010). The Columbus Group definition speaks to high cognitive abilities as a characteristic of giftedness, while adding a focus for the psychology of the gifted student: “the uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally” (National Association of Gifted Children, 2010).

According to Gagne (1985), a separation between aptitude (giftedness or natural abilities) and skills (talent) exists in his model. With five domains within the aptitude category (intellectual, creative, socio-affective, sensory-motor, and “others”), Gagne believed these genetic aptitudes could be witnessed and measured on an everyday basis. Renzulli (1978) used a definition which combined three types of traits (specific abilities, high motivation/commitment, and high creativity) and one’s ability to develop and apply them. The state of Georgia defines a gifted student as an individual with a “high degree of intellectual and/or creative ability(ies), exhibits an exceptionally high degree of motivation, and/or excels in specific academic fields, and who needs special instruction and/or special ancillary services to achieve at levels commensurate with his or her abilities” (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2010).

Despite the differences that exist in definition, a general collection of characteristics and traits help define behaviors of gifted students, which includes the following: exceptional memory, logical thought processing, creativity, competitiveness, perfectionism, imagination, and curiosity (Clark, 1988; Horowitz & O’Brien, 1985; Strip, 2000). The misconception exists that gifted students are studious, obedient, well mannered, and passive (Jolly, 2009; Strip, 2000). Although these characteristics may be a part of giftedness, other characteristics such as insecurity, the inability to socially
adjust, boredom, loneliness, and defiance have also surfaced as issues gifted students deal with (Reis & McCoach, 2000; Reis, Colbert, & Hébert, 2005). According to Rodgers (2008), ethnic identity as defined by Ford (2002) and Grantham and Ford (2003) is an additional factor of struggle that has emerged among gifted students.

**The Gifted Student of Color**

There are approximately three million gifted students identified in the United States with over 75% categorized as Caucasian and no other racial group above 10% (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Gifted students of color are a minority within a minority community. The intellectual and social adjustments gifted students of color experience can be different by virtue of race or ethnic background “as the content of social stereotypes is shaped by the nature of the intergroup context in which they are formed” (Alexander, Brewer, & Uvingston, 2005, p. 781). Although education has been touted as the equalizer for opportunity and growth, many within the minority community have witnessed disproportionate numbers in achievement, test scores, graduation rates, and giftedness classification (Herr, 1999). Often cited as a negative sentiment among students of color, the gifted and talented programs have been viewed as a privileged community for Caucasian students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Rodgers, 2008). The correlations of “acting” or “being” white, as it relates to students of color and academic achievement, signifies the importance of self-identification, peer identification, and societal stereotypes (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Because of the rich history of civil action and activism in the United States, race and education continue to be topics for current debate. Students of color often deal with issues of identity development as it relates to race, ethnicity, status, imagery, stereotypes,
and discrimination (Aberson et al., 2004; Alexander et al., 2005; Herr, 1999; Sias, Drzewiecka, Meares, Bent, Konomi, Ortega, & White, 2008). The self-identification of students of color can impact their friendships among peers, as well as their relationships with their teachers (Harris, 2008; Sias et al., 2008). Gifted students of color deal with issues of identity development much the same way mainstream students of color do, with the added dimension of giftedness, which has the potential to separate or divide friendships within a student’s ethnic or racial community (Aberson et al., 2004; Henfield et al, 2008; Rodgers, 2008). The potential conflict of racial identity adds a dimension of social issues that can be unique for gifted students of color. Other issues that have impacted the perceptions of race, education, and giftedness among gifted students of color include the cultural background of the student’s family and the value of differences that exist in contrast to the mainstream norms (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Family intervention, input, and socioeconomic status often play an instrumental role in a student’s ability to succeed academically (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Boger, 2005; Greene & Winters, 2005). These issues are tied to race and ethnicity and its impact on student perception and behavior.

**Issues with identification and retention.** The historical issue of the underrepresentation of minority students within gifted programs has been a source of criticism for researchers, practitioners, and educators for years (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Marland, 1972; National Excellence, 1993; Borland, 2003). Pendarvis and Wood (2009) state that the “failure to provide equitable representation in gifted programs characterizes most gifted programs” (p. 496). Both the U.S. Department of Education and the National Research Council’s Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education concur
on the issues and impact of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Oakland and Rossen (2005) cite several reasons for the lack of identification of students of color for gifted programs: failure for nomination, the utilization of national norms as guidelines for identification, and test bias. In 1993, the National Excellence report addressed the following:

```
Schools must develop a system to identify gifted and talented students that:
Seeks variety—looks throughout a range of disciplines for students with diverse talents;
Uses many assessment measures—uses a variety of appraisals so that schools can find students in different talent areas and at different ages;
Is free of bias—provides students of all backgrounds with equal access to appropriate opportunities;
Identifies potential—discovers talents that are not readily apparent in students, as well as those that are obvious (p. 33).
```

Singleton, Livingston, Himes, and Jones (2008) add that negative stereotypes and teacher attitudes also contribute to the lack of identification for students of color. Despite the research and efforts by national organizations and federal agencies, a gap continues to exist for what King, Kozleski, and Lansdowne (2009) refer to as “high-quality education” for students who have talent, but have historically been marginalized in mainstream education (p. 17).

The nomination process for consideration of acceptance into gifted and talented programs often is the gatekeeper, as “those not nominated typically are not considered by the GT [gifted and talented] committee and thus are not eligible for GT programs” (Oakland & Rossen, 2005, p. 58). Although teachers are not necessarily the only adults able to nominate students for screening, their involvement and awareness is critical at the
nomination stage, as the volume of interaction and contact with individual students provides a comprehensive understanding of their given achievement and abilities (King, Kozleski, & Lansdowne, 2009; Oakland & Rossen, 2005; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). Ford and Grantham (2003) discuss the concept of “deficit thinking” and explain that “educators hold negative, stereotypical, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly” (p. 217).

The issue of lowered expectations is also relevant when dealing with students of low socio-economic backgrounds (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Boger, 2005). Professional development for educators to help them better understand giftedness as it manifests itself through culturally or economically diverse students can provide a means for greater awareness throughout the nomination process (Singleton et al., 2008).

Issues related to testing become another obstacle for entry into gifted programs. Test bias continues to surface as a point of contention among researchers as cultural norms, verbiage, and experiences are explored through the use of verbal and nonverbal testing for identification purposes (Lewis et al., 2007; McBee, 2006; Warne, 2009). Previous studies on race and education have failed to take into account the immeasurable factors found in norms, values, and practices by focusing too much on measurable data via surveys, interviews, and databases. The use of standardized measuring instruments, such as IQ tests, has essentially given scientific legitimization to educational discrimination (Baez, 2004). In the wake of the growing racial diversity among schools, standardized tests measuring aspects more aligned to American culture and proficiency, rather than intelligence, became the standard practice (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Gould, 1995; Hilliard, 1992). These same instruments are currently used and argued against by
researchers who suggest that students of color are denied access to gifted and talented programs because of the cultural bias of standardized testing (Lewis et al., 2007).

As the concept and circumstances surrounding the identification of students of color into gifted programs continues to exist, the other issue of equal concern is the retention of gifted students of color within gifted programs (Matthews, 2006; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Warne, 2009). Gifted students of color are already a minority within a minority population and culture. For students of color, the concepts of communication, expectations, connections, racial identity, and perceptions may be slightly different from the norms of the larger gifted and educational community (Bonner, 2003; Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Ford, 1998; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Warne, 2009). According to Hansen and Toso (2007), “the interaction of race with any other variable affects a student’s vulnerability” (p.31). The cultural differences in perceptions and attitudes can play a role in how students view others, themselves, and education (Tatum, 1997).

**Family and education.** The characteristics, strengths, and vulnerabilities of gifted students impact not only the student, but their academic surroundings, as well as their familial settings. Although there is conflicting information on the psychological adjustment issues gifted students face compared to non-gifted students, the parenting of a gifted child has been associated with its own set of particular nuances (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). According to Solow (1995), part of the difficulties parents face when raising gifted children is their own lack of knowledge and framework for understanding the developmental, social, and mental issues gifted students deal with. Parental support and encouragement can play a large role in a gifted student’s development; however,
parenting a gifted child may have different requirements, as parents have the “additional challenge of promoting their child’s development, in the context of not knowing what strategies, approaches, and activities are most helpful to their child, and how these differ when parenting a non-gifted child” (Morawska & Sanders, 2009, p. 165).

Family dynamics continue to play a large role in student achievement, particularly for gifted students (Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009). The need for families to understand their additional responsibilities relative to raising gifted students is coupled with a family’s need to educationally and communicatively interact with their local schools. Parents of gifted students care for the emotional and social well-being of their child; however, a good number of parents are also interested in knowing how to better understand and guide their child through the educational options, classes, and programs available to them (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). This need for families to be more informed of the educational terrain speaks to the opportunity for a connection and growth of parental involvement among gifted families. However, the historic relationship between minority families and education has been argued to be lacking in support, communication, and transparency (Chamberlin, 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Lewis et al., 2007; Lohman, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Whiting, 2009).

Communication and participation are theoretically practices teachers, students, and parents are involved with on a continuous basis; however, Ford (1996) suggests that too few schools make the effort to establish a partnership with diverse families, particularly those of gifted students. The history between education and race has been filled with negative perceptions, attitudes, misunderstandings, and mistrust between educators and families of color (Chamberlin, 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Fordham &
Ogbu, 1986; Lewis et al., 2007; Lohman, 2005; Whiting, 2009). The misunderstanding and mistrust of education is something families of color must often suspend; the same issues must also be a priority for educators to improve upon as communication of programs, tests, and responsibilities are vital for school and community partnerships (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Hansen & Toso, 2007).

**Minority within the minority.** For students of color to find success within the gifted and talented programs, they must come to an understanding that participation in such programs has a positive impact and benefit in their lives. Participation and success in gifted programs can often be the result of one’s perception of benefits, rewards, or disadvantages (Berlin, 2009; Grantham, 2004). Henfield et al. (2008) submit that despite a student of color meeting the requirements for giftedness, “many [African Americans] choose not to participate in advanced, accelerated, or gifted education programs” (p. 433). The 2008 study by Henfield et al. focused primarily on African American students; however, the information gleaned from their research on improved recruitment and retention is useful in understanding attitudes and perceptions of giftedness and education within the minority community. The researchers Henfield et al. (2008) use the term “educational isolation” in an effort to explain the minority experience within the already minority gifted population (p. 436). The following conclusions were reached in the Henfield et al. (2008) study, which addresses a number of retention issues facing gifted students of color today: issues with peer interaction, lowered teacher expectations, the concept of acting white, and a lack of understanding of racial identity.

The balance of perceptions gifted students of color have for themselves is mixed between the positives of personal and academic growth while countered by the social
issues and stigmas associated with giftedness (Berlin, 2009). The stereotypes gifted students of color endure from their peers continues to be among the more negative issues students deal with today (Henfield et al., 2008; Romanoff, Algozzine, & Nielson, 2009; Whiting, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). According to a number of researchers (Cross, 1991; Henfield et al., 2008; Kozol, 2005; Tatum, 1997) tied to the stereotyping involved with race from society at large is the concept and understanding of racial identity for the minority student. The Cross model (1991) of racial identity includes five stages of development (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and commitment) at which students of color vacillate between and through as their experiences and understandings develop relative to societal, racial, ethnic, and personal identifications.

**Racial identity.** The process by which one understands racial identity can be, and is often influenced greatly by, one’s experiences in an academic setting (Tatum, 1997). For students of color, the struggle to place oneself in the context of history, education, society, and among their peers can prove significant, particularly for gifted students of color (Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993; Henfield et al., 2008; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). As the concept of racial identity attempts to explain the internalization and understanding of race for people of color, its overall development is hardly linear with the potential to impact academic achievement among students of color particularly during their school-age years (Cross, 1971, 1991; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Henfield et al., 2008, Tatum, 1997).

Immersed within the idea of racial identity development is the concept of “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996). The idea among students of color that certain attributes
are more closely related and aligned with Caucasian identity and Caucasian culture is the concept of acting white (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996). The belief among non-gifted students of color that characteristics such as the use of Standard English, high academic achievement, school involvement beyond athletics, and giftedness was an indication of a student’s desire to be Caucasian rather than their respective ethnic or racial identity (Henfield et al., 2008). This often leads to a lack of connection from within one’s own ethnic or racial grouping, creating further isolation and confusion, which can lead to a desired removal from the gifted programs in order to re-associate with their racial and ethnic peers (Berlin, 2009; Whiting, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009).

**Further issues of understanding race and education.** For various reasons, a percentage of gifted students will remove themselves from their existing gifted program or potentially drop-out of school altogether. Students who drop-out of school and are gifted have been studied by a number of researchers with conflicting data for drop-out rates among gifted students ranging from 3% to as high as 25% (Irvine, 1987; Marland, 1972; Matthews, 2006; Rimm, 1995; Robertson, 1991). The broad criteria used within these respective studies, along with the various data sources and definitions for “giftedness” and “drop-out” has contributed to differences in drop-out percentages (Matthews, 2006). Despite the conflicting numbers and percentages of drop-outs, the information obtained by the studies, according to Matthews (2006) seemed to indicate a similar set of commonalities among gifted drop-outs: ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status all play a role in the number of drop-outs among gifted students.

Matthews (2006) studied a southeastern population of gifted students beginning in the seventh grade using the Talent Identification Program as the criteria for giftedness
and the North Carolina Education Research Data Center (NCERD) to coordinate in identifying giftedness and drop-out students. The data from Matthews’ study aligned with previous studies regarding a higher percentage of male, minority (in this case, African-American), and low socioeconomically categorized students as gifted drop-outs. Based on his conclusions, Matthews went on to state that “it will become increasingly important to understand how giftedness or talent may interact with socioeconomic and cultural factors to influence students’ educational decisions” (p. 220).

Studies and research by Kurleander and Yun (2002a, 2002b) on the matter of race and academic achievement have focused on the perceived value of diversity in education, the perceptions of school, achievement, and advancement from students of color at the high school level. With the use of the Diversity Assessment Questionnaire (DAQ) at three separate high schools, Kurleander and Yun were able to assess student exposure to diversity from a classroom, curriculum, and peer interaction perspective. In many cases, the students believed themselves to be better prepared to deal and work with the diversity of society because of the impact teachers, their school, and their peers have had on their day to day experiences. Research has provided a number of reasons why students, regardless of race or socioeconomic background, succeed. Among the many characteristics sited by Lessard et al. (2009) are the strong influence and impact of teachers, the ability to build relationships, and the ability to utilize resources. Although these characteristics for success are apparent to schools and students, education has historically failed in its efforts to meet the needs of students of color. Continued studies on this issue are important contributions to the greater body of work surrounding race, perceptions of education, and achievement.
This understanding may provide a greater awareness for issues related to race and difference. Education has the responsibility to prepare its students with the virtues and values necessary for good citizenship, democratic growth, and cultural responsiveness (Davis, 2006; Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008). The need for a greater understanding and insight into the racial and ethnic perceptions of academics and achievement among gifted students of color can further serve education by providing an opportunity for a wider variety of perspectives, which in turn encourages dialogue on issues of diversity and provides a counter-balance to mainstream views (Lee et al., 2008). This context of information can support the communicative, reflective, and emotional methodology necessary for the appreciation of diversity, particularly for the gifted community.

**Summary**

Race and education continue to be issues that require further research. As the population of students grows in greater diversity, the naivety of ignorance as to the impact race plays on society and education can be economically and socially harmful for the future (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Amos, 2008; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Boger, 2005). Within the discussion of race and education are the three million gifted and talented students who arguably are the academically elite, critical thinkers who compose approximately 7%, of the K-12 community (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). Students of color within this group make up less than ¼ of the overall gifted population (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

As issues of underrepresentation and retention continue to exist within the gifted community, it is vital that education learn as much as it can from the limited numbers of gifted students of color as possible in order to better understand their perspectives on
identification, socialization, support, motivation, and achievement. Gifted students have the potential for underachievement “based on negative attitude to themselves, characterized by an unfavorable self-image, negative self-esteem and a low level of the sense of self-worth” (Dyrda, 2009, p. 133). Students of color within education have historically experienced less success than their Caucasian peers at all levels. The implication that race and ethnicity play a role in a student’s socialization, identification, and success within education has been addressed by a number of researchers (Berlin, 2009; Cross, 1991; Henfield et al., 2008; Kozol, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Whiting, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). The opportunity to learn and understand the issues of race, education, and achievement from the perspectives of the top students of color is invaluable to providing an environment which is socially aware, diverse, and academically inspiring for all.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs, perceptions, history, and support systems utilized by gifted students of color. To explore the relationship that race and education have on gifted students of color in a North Georgia suburban high school, a qualitative research design was employed.

Theoretical Framework

Taken primarily from the works of Cross (1971), Helms (1984), and Tatum (1997) on racial identity development, the theoretical framework for this study recognizes that one’s perspective and outlook are subject, in part to their racial identity. How one views the systemic constructs (education and government) along with societal norms (sociology and psychology) may be altered based on the interaction and impact of race in one’s life (Cross, 1971; Tatum 1997; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). According to Tatum (1997), students of color grow to emulate and accept the norms and values associated with the dominant culture or community. In the United States students of color in predominantly Caucasian communities, in this case Rogers County may grow to initially suspend their racial identity impacting perspectives on race, friendships, education, and self (Tatum, 1997). Cross (1971) argued that through a progression of developmental stages, racial identity is ultimately internalized through the positive attributes associated with their own racial background.

Design

Qualitative research, with its diversity of approaches, provides an opportunity to delve deeply into the social context and meaning of its subject’s reality (Ary, Jacobs,
Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The application of a qualitative research design can come in several forms, including case studies, ethnography, phenomenological study, naturalistic observations, and grounded theory (Ary et al., 2006; Bowen, 2005, Creswell, 2007). The goal of a case study approach, as described by Ary et al. (2006), “is to arrive at a detailed description and understanding” (p. 32). Recollections, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions gifted students of color have regarding education, race, and giftedness required a comprehensive and contextual approach available through a case study design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although other qualitative approaches were considered, a case study design provided the platform for utilizing multiple sources of informational data (interviews, artifacts, observations, and documents) within a contextual framework in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of perspective from gifted students of color (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). According to Webb (1981), case studies provide “insight into how things get to be the way they are” (p. 47).

In a study on at-risk giftedness, Saunders (2003) utilized a case study approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of her subject. By providing background information, behavioral observations, testing materials, and interpretation, she provided a thorough description of the student’s livelihood, influences, and behaviors. From the exploration of detailed and in-depth data from multiple sources comes the product of a case study (Creswell, 2007). Through the use of a case study approach, I was able to provide a more contextually accurate and holistic natural accounting of student perceptions of race, education, and its impact on giftedness.
A case study approach also provided the flexibly to observe, compare, and contrast various aspects of information gathered. According to Graham and Anderson (2008), case studies are an appropriate method for recording insights within a natural setting. Case study recordings of real-time, real-life events provide for a more complete, contextually accurate, and meaningful analysis for understanding the issues related to race, education, and giftedness. In order to truly understand the learning environment and the experiences of gifted students of color, it was necessary to explore beliefs, perspectives, and history through a series of in-depth interviews.

According to Ary et al. (2006), “the interview is one of the most widely used methods for obtaining qualitative data” (p. 480). The interview process provided an opportunity for investigating the internal and external factors that influenced attitude and action among each participant. The interviews also summarized specific themes that existed among the various student perspectives. The amalgamation of recollections, attitudes, and perspectives helped develop signs of commonality which were then examined for patterns of beliefs. The data collection of academic artifacts from each participant helped to further describe and elaborate on student experiences at each of the grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school). The academic records and transcripts from each student further supported their recollections of positive or negative academic experiences as indicated through grades or test results. Observations conducted on each of the participants provided a contextual understanding of their social environment and their interactions with peers.

This study collected descriptive data from multiple sources which were further interpreted for meaning, relevance, and importance. The respective backgrounds of each
participant, their history, and their experiences all played a role in their perspectives regarding race, education, and giftedness. This type of complexity and comprehensive study required a format that allowed for an understanding of context and history within specific realities (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007; Taylor & Bogdon, 1998).

**Setting**

Rogers County (a pseudonym) is a Northeastern Georgia school district located outside of metropolitan Atlanta, GA. There are approximately 37,000 students enrolled from preschool to high school. Approximately 28% of the student body in the district are eligible for free or reduced lunch, 25% are students of color, 13% are categorized as gifted, 12% are students with disabilities, and 3% are English language-learning students (ELL). The Rogers County School District has over 20 elementary schools, one intermediate school, over five middle schools, over five high schools, one alternative school, and two centers. It should be noted that within the past five years a new high school was recently opened. The entire system is coordinated by the Central Office and the Board of Education. The central office consists of the Superintendent, a number of Assistant Superintendents, a number of Directors, a number of Coordinators, and one Police Chief.

*Rogers County School District.* The Rogers County School District (RCSD) ranks high in the state of Georgia when it comes to graduation rates, testing scores, and salaries for teachers. RCSD is one of only three Metro Atlanta districts to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress three years in a row, while achieving three State Platinum Awards, two State Gold Awards, one State Silver Award, and four State Bronze Awards. Four schools were also recognized as a Title I Distinguished School. Five of the six high
schools within this district have been recognized as “High Performing Schools” by both the Governor of Georgia and the State School Superintendent. Five of the six high schools within this district rank in the top 25 high schools within Georgia. Collectively, the district reported an 80.7% graduation rate.

**Marshall High School.** Marshall High School (a pseudonym) is one of six high schools in this district. The Marshall Innovation Zone consists of three elementary schools, one intermediate school, and one middle school which feed directly into this high school. Marshall High School (MHS) functions on a traditional seven period, two semester schedule. The school day is divided into seven 55-minute periods. Students have the opportunity to take among twelve to fifteen Advanced Placement (AP) courses ranging from Literature to Music. The MHS community is composed primarily of Caucasian families; majority of the population resides in surrounding sub-divisions with homes ranging from the mid to upper $200,000 to $1,000,000. The rise in population and an influx of families into the community have resulted in a 10% increase in population growth for the residing area.

Approximately 67% of the faculty at MHS have a Masters degree or higher. MHS was recently awarded, for the second year in a row, the state's *Gold Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement* and has also been recognized as a *Georgia School of Excellence*. MHS is a thriving, successful educational institution as evident from the school’s test scores, grades, athletic programs, and parental support. There are approximately 2,200 students in grades 9 through 12 and the school functions on a traditional seven period, two semester schedule (Table 1).
Table 1

Demographic Data of the Students in the Participating School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th># of Students</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2203</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>1095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school has approximately 20% of the student body on free or reduced lunch, 19% are minority students, 7% are students with disabilities, 6% are English Language-Learning students (ELL), and approximately 20% are gifted.

Participants

The participants selected for this study were purposefully sampled from a specifically targeted population, being categorized as both gifted and of color, based on the school district’s data base system, which codes each student for giftedness and ethnicity. A letter was sent to each of the potential participant’s home, informing them of the study and explaining the benefits and risks involved. When the participant and their parent accepted the request, I then conducted a phone interview with each participant to inform them of the study in more detail and to ensure their understanding of the anonymous nature of their involvement. Although both audio and video recording devices were used, parents were given the opportunity to decline my use of such recording instruments during the interview.
**Giftedness.** Data to quantify each participant’s giftedness was acquired through school records and validated test scores. RCSD adheres to the guidelines established by the state of Georgia’s Education Program for Gifted Students: State Board of Education rule (SBOE) 160-4-2-.38 (State of Georgia Department of Education, 2010). According to SBOE 160-4-2-.38, students may qualify in one of two manners: the Psychometric Approach or the Multiple Criteria Approach. The Psychometric Approach requires a student in grades K-2 to score in the 99th percentile or a student in grades 3-12 to score in the 96th percentile of a nationally normed mental ability test, while also achieving a score in the 90th percentile in one of the following areas: total reading, total math, or total achievement of the test battery. The Multiple Criteria Approach which requires a total score of a nationally normed standardized test in the 90th percentile in three of the four data categories (mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation).

**Students of color.** Students coded categorically as African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, or Other will qualify for the criteria of students of color. Each participant was classified as gifted since elementary school. Within RCSD, students are eligible for admittance into the gifted program as early as second grade. Each participant was at least in their sophomore year of high school in an effort to minimize issues of maturation and provide for greater retrospection and reflection of experiences, as students in the ninth grade often have transition issues moving from a middle school model to a high school model.

Participants and their parents were contacted to inform them of this study. For the students and parents who consented to participation, each student was initially interviewed for introductory and historical demographic purposes before narrowing the
selection to the current four students; this selection was based in part on the available diversity within the sample group. The experiences and perceptions of the four students varied based on a number of factors including race, gender, and attitude.

**Data Collection Process**

This study took place at one public high school with four gifted students of color. Through multiple sources of information, the collection of data included semi-structured interviews, academic artifacts, school records, and observations. Purposeful sampling was employed due to the specific type of students studied with criteria that included race, giftedness, and age. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), sampling is purposeful and rarely random. Interviews, data collection in the form of academic and personal documents, observations, and field notes were used throughout the study; as described by Ary et al. (2007), “case studies use multiple methods such as interviews, observations, and archives to gather data” (p. 32).

Academic artifacts (report cards) and records (cumulative school files) were acquired with permission (Appendix C, D, and E) in order to compose an accounting of each participant’s relationship, history, and achievement within the public schools. These artifacts helped provide the necessary demographic details in order to complete a comprehensive picture of the student from an academic perspective, which indicated academic likes and dislikes, consistency, changes in academic achievement, or issues of transition (from elementary to middle and middle to high school). Observations helped provide a social perspective on each participant in order to better understand those whom they associated with during non-structured periods, what type of friendships they had, and with what racial or ethnic groups they interacted with.
The semi-structured interviews were conducted after school hours with approval (Appendix C, D, and E), following the specific script written in Appendix A and B. Two interviews were conducted for each participant and were completed over a period of approximately two months. Although the scripted interview questions were used to guide discussion, follow-up queries were also asked to provide greater clarity, to expand on a point, or in direct response to an answer given. The ability to assess a response with an immediate point of clarification from the researcher provides the opportunity for greater information (Yin, 2009). Through the use of digital video and audio recording devices, I conducted three interviews in the High School Counseling Conference Room and one at the local public library.

**Student artifacts and academic records.** Artifacts and academic records were collected from each participant from elementary school to high school. Documents existed in the form of academic grades, transcripts, school attendance records, teacher notes, commendations, standardized test scores, discipline records, or personal journals. The data collected was analyzed to examine patterns that existed in combination with transitions, interactions, or events. All data was then categorized in an effort to discover themes that existed at each of the grade levels. These documents were used to further support emotions, beliefs, or perspectives experienced by the respective participant. A student portfolio was created for each student in order to organize, compare, and contrast experiences over the span of each participant’s academic career. This information was then used to corroborate the comments made during the interview.

**Observations.** General observations were conducted over a timeframe of one month. In all observational settings, I acted as a complete observer, allowing the students
to conduct their daily routines with no attempt to alter their natural environment. Prior arrangements were made with the administrators to allow me space within the school in the least intrusive manner.

As grades and transcripts are able to provide an understanding of a student’s academic abilities and strengths, the focus of my observations were based on learning more about the students social interactions during non-structured and non-academic periods. The lunchroom observation was the primary observation platform for accomplishing this goal, as this period of time provided no restrictions as to where students sit and with whom they sit. With approximately 500 students at lunch, students have the opportunity to choose their own social environment. In addition, with such a large number of students in the same room, this enabled me to remain relatively unnoticeable. With the focus on the student social setting and interactions, I employed a specific approach for examining the subjects themselves, the physical setting, their activities, and those of their peers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007)

Understanding which groups these students intermingled with assisted in providing a more comprehensive picture of their social circles and potentially the depth of their friendships, as well as corroborating their perspective of the relationships they share with friends (Berlin, 2009; Tatum, 1997; Whiting, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Copious field notes were taken during observations in order to record each participant’s interactions and exchanges. Two-column memoing was utilized to record factual data in addition to researcher observations. Reflective notes were also taken to provide personal accounts emphasizing “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 122). Recording devices were not utilized
during observations to respect the privacy of students and teachers not participating in this study.

**Interviews.** An explanation of the study was conducted through initial phone conversations. The participants were given details of the methodology to explain the purpose of the study (Appendix C). Once consent had been provided by the parents, a schedule for interviews was devised. Ary et al. (2006) suggest that in-depth volumes of information can be quickly acquired through the interview process. Each interview was conducted at a time and place of convenience for the respective participants. The interviews were conducted over a timeframe of approximately two months. Specific interview questions (Appendix A and B) led the discussion, allowing the opportunity for flexibility and follow-up based on the participant’s responses. Each participant’s interview was digitally recorded for accuracy. Notes from the interview were taken using two-column memoing with researcher observations included. Transcriptions from each interview were reviewed with the respective participant in order to verify key thoughts and words through a process of member checking. The application of member checking is an important practice as it “may help the researcher gain further insight and/or call attention to something that he or she missed” (Ary et al., 2006). Member-checking is an opportunity for the participant to validate that the information matches their experience (Curtin & Fosey, 2007).

The guiding questions to be further addressed in Chapter Four are as follows:

**Guiding Question #1.** How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels? This question allowed the participant to reflect on their first experiences in the gifted program (as early
as second or third grade). The opportunity to recall the transitional periods from elementary to middle and middle to high school was also provided through this guiding question. I followed-up with questions related to academic achievements that occurred throughout the various levels of their education. I also attempted to invite open dialogue regarding their first experiences with their understanding and experiences of race and giftedness.

**Guiding Question #2.** What internal factors have influenced the student’s perspective on education? Ascertaining the motivational or attitudinal drive within each participant assisted in determining perceptions on their experiences with education as a gifted student of color.

**Guiding Question #3.** What external factors have influenced the student’s perspective on education? An understanding of the social and cultural environment was necessary for framing perspectives and beliefs that influence achievement.

**Guiding Question #4.** How has race impacted the student’s relationship with peer groups? The issue of race can be a complex issue. An understanding of its impact to individuals and society at large can be difficult to express. This question explored the connection and recognition of race with the respective participant.

**Guiding Question #5.** What support systems help gifted students of color? Students described the systems that exist to assist them through their educational experiences. The systems of support existed through formal programs, peer assistance, or external factors, as described by the participant.

**Guiding Question #6.** What future aspirations do the students have? The participant’s involvement in the gifted program often suggested advancement to post-
secondary education and beyond. What is the result of the participant’s time in the gifted program as it relates to future aspirations?

**Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2007), the formation of an organized database from multiple data sources, in this case interviews, transcripts, documents, memoing, reflective notes, and observations, establishes a functional method for detailed analysis. For the purposes of drawing commonalities and generalizations from the information gathered, categories were developed and further analyzed (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). The ability to break apart data, therefore establishing patterns of similar categories, allowed me the opportunity to further assess and cross-reference those items into descriptive themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Approaching data analysis from the perspective outlined through Creswell’s “data analysis spiral” (2007, p. 150), I evaluated data in ascending analytical circles, continuously assessing and interpreting at every stage before moving forward to the next. The analysis of data began immediately through a logical and orderly process of assessing and arranging all data from interviews, transcriptions, document reviews, and observation notes. This organizational method for managing data allowed me to later classify and describe the information in patterns, categories, and themes in order to provide a comprehensive insight into the participant’s view of race, education, and giftedness. Creswell (2007) suggests that “during this process of describing, classifying and interpreting, qualitative researchers develop codes or categories and sort text or visual images into categories” (p. 152). This analytical approach involved both my interpretation of the researcher along with my continued analysis as a component to the
overall process (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that the researcher was the necessary instrument to deal with the flexibility and complexity inherent in studying the human experience.

From a phenomenological point of view, I sought to explore and further understand each participant’s perspective from their individual experiences and realities. Ary et al. (2006) underscores this notion by stating each “experience has different meanings for each person” (p. 33). Through the use of open coding, I compared, categorized, and conceptualized themes, thoughts, or emotions from multiple sources of data to understand relationships and experiences each participant had with education, race, and giftedness. Large themes were drawn from coding and refined based on patterns and the reoccurrences of phrases or words. Coding categories were developed and keyed in order to work with the descriptive data. Two-tier coding involved the extrapolation of themes in comparison to events that occurred based on transcription details in the interview process. Coded data was reviewed several times to verify patterns with the assistance of collegial feedback.

**Dependability & Credibility**

Research quality can be authenticated by the trustworthiness of its methodology (Bowen, 2005). In order to achieve structural corroboration as defined by Ary et al. (2006), multiple data points are required in order to increase credibility within a qualitative study. To establish confidence with the results of this study, credibility was supported through specific measures such as triangulation, member checks and feedback, two-column memoing, along with quasi-statistical data. The need to analyze various data sources for similarity and/or agreement is a necessary component in supporting evidence
of credibility, as described by Ary et al. (2006), as the “researcher wants to find support for the observations and conclusions in more than one data source” (p. 505). As credibility is essential within a qualitative study, the ability to support confidence and truthfulness within the data sources is an obligation which must be upheld through the corroboration of information utilizing multiple data points (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Curtin & Fosey, 2007).

**Triangulation of analysis.** Analysis of data using multiple tools and perspectives provides strength, support, and accuracy to the overall findings (Patton, 2001). By employing techniques of open coding, two-tier memoing, evaluation, and interpretation, I provided credibility to the results. Data acquired from the recording devices was transcribed and reviewed with each participant for accuracy, also known as member-checking. Additionally, data from school records and transcripts was acquired and analyzed. The explorations of academic and personal documents were examined to provide details that align with specific occurrences in the respective participant’s life. The cross referencing of academic data relative to their career aspirations, the examination of their standardized testing as a measure of content retention, and the extensive interview process were instrumental in establishing a foundation for credibility and dependability. Observation notes were then used to complete a more comprehensive picture of each of the participant’s perspectives. Once all data was acquired, notes, recordings, and observations were collected, cross referenced, and analyzed for similarities, points of emphasis, and feedback. This was necessary in order to provide strength, support, and accuracy to the overall findings (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007).
The use of multiple data sources from audiotapes, transcripts, interviews, emails, documentations, and observations allowed me to verify accuracy, support credibility, and ensure the adherence of ethical considerations inherent in studying students in depth. Through the additional process of feedback, a professional colleague was utilized to provide an objective secondary perspective to the data analyzed throughout the interview and data analysis process. A third and final level of interpretation occurred through a peer group session of collegial doctoral candidates who provided additional feedback and interpretation of the analysis.

**Member checks.** Upon the completion of each interview with the participant, I independently and meticulously transcribed the data recorded from both the digital audio and video recorder. The transcript of each interview was immediately emailed directly to the participant for verification, feedback, and accuracy. Each individual was given a timeframe of three days to verify the transcript and email a response back indicating that the transcript of the interview was *accurate, accurate with modification, or inaccurate/not acceptable*. In all cases each of the participants’ responses to the transcriptions they received were returned without indication for modification or rejection. I provided ample opportunity to the interviewees to add additional thoughts, should any supplementary information be supportive to any of their previous statements; this overall practice is known as member-checking (Creswell, 2007).

**Audit trails.** A full accounting of time, calendar dates, and actions was established in order to provide details of every step taken during the course of this research; a practice known as audit trail (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
Quasi-statistical data. Charts and graphs were used to illustrate academic patterns from elementary school to high school.

Two-column memoing. I utilized this technique during interviews and observations, allowing for factual data to be gathered along with observational comments. The information gathered was later reviewed and coded for themes and cross referenced with the digital audio and video recorder. Through the cross referencing process, I was able to corroborate specific notations, emotional patterns, points of importance, and visual cues noted in real-time during the interview with the technology of video and audio recordings, thus allowing me the opportunity to review, repeat, and validate the initial notations taken (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Curtin & Fosey, 2007).

A color coding system was devised in which each of the interviews was scoured for positive and negative emotion, along with emphasis of importance by the interviewee. Blue highlights indicated positive emotions while red highlights indicated negative emotions. A yellow highlight indicated an emphasis in their statement.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The impact of the demographic growth and shifting within the United States will continue to play a large role in education as disproportionate numbers based on race continue to exist within the categories of achievement and giftedness (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Greene & Winters, 2002, 2005; Lewis et al., 2007). With approximately three million gifted students identified, over 75% categorized are Caucasian and no other racial group is listed above 10% (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The community of gifted students within the United States is approximately 7% in grades K-12 (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008), which makes this group and their families a minority within the educational community, and gifted students of color a minority within an already minority population. Underrepresentation is not the only issue facing gifted students of color, as underachievement can also manifest itself through this unique dynamic of self-reflection, self-esteem, and self-identification (Dyrda, 2009).

Overview

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore and understand the influences and impact of race, education, and giftedness among four gifted high school students of color from a county located in North Georgia. This study examined and investigated the memories and perspectives of gifted high school students of color from each level of their respective schooling experiences (elementary, middle, and high school). Students of color identified as gifted constitute less than 25% of the gifted community with no racial group representing more than 10%, indicating an inconsistency
in proportion relative to the national population trends (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Oakland & Rossen, 2005). According to Yoon & Gentry (2009), “race and ethnicity is one of the major issues facing gifted education in pursuit of a more equal representation of students” (p. 121). Henfield (2009) explains that students of color who have been categorized as gifted indicated a lack of perceived support, expectations, motivation, and social or cultural connection to the gifted programs they belong. This study used in-depth analysis, multiple perspectives, and individual recollections regarding the students’ overall experiences for the purpose of assisting future students of color associated with gifted programs.

Graham and Anderson (2008) state that case studies are an appropriate method for recording insights within a natural setting. Case study recordings of real-time, real-life events provide for a more complete, contextually accurate, and meaningful analysis for understanding issues, in this case related to race, education, and giftedness. The participants selected for this study were purposefully sampled from a specifically targeted population who were categorized as both gifted and students of color based on the school district’s data base system, which codes each student for giftedness and ethnicity. Qualitative data was acquired through the use of detailed interviews, transcripts, school records, and observations. The information gathered was then collected and organized in order to address the following guiding questions for gifted students of color:

- How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?
- What internal factors have influenced their perspective on education?
- What external factors have influenced their perspective on education?
• How has race impacted their relationship with peer groups?
• What support systems help gifted students of color?
• What future aspirations do gifted students of color have?

**Procedure**

The gifted students of color from Marshall High School (MHS), of the Rogers School District (RSD), were the selected participants for this study. After receiving consent from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix E), as well as a required consent form from the Assistant Superintendent’s Office of the RSD (Appendix D), the building principal and the Counseling Department Chairperson of MHS were contacted to inform them of the proposed study and to ask permission to use the Counseling Conference Room as a location for interviewing students during non-school hours. With discussions over the phone and via email with the Assistant Superintendent of RSC, the MHS Principal, and the MHS Counseling Department Chair, the consent to utilize the conference room space was granted with the requirement that all interviews were conducted immediately after school and with at least one member of the counseling department present in the counseling suite, where the conference room was also located. In all cases, each student interviewed was informed that another staff member was in the suite in the event that they had any questions or concerns.

Additionally, upon approval for this study from the Assistant Superintendent of RSD, I was granted limited data rights to MHS in order to access the names and addresses of students who qualified under the requirements for giftedness and ethnic/cultural background. A total of 37 names qualified as gifted students of color among the 535 gifted students in the school, making the percentage of gifted students of
color less than 7%. As the targeted participants were at least in their sophomore year of
school, an effort to minimize issues of maturation, approximately 40% of the gifted
students of color population were immediately disqualified (Table 2). With 22 eligible
participants remaining, the necessary consent forms were dispatched to their respective
addresses. A total of five students responded back with either further questions or an
agreement to participate in the study. After conducting the initial informational phone
interview with the students, four participants remained as the fifth simply no longer
expressed an interest to participate. The required consent forms were signed by the
students and parents, then returned as the coordination of interview times was established
for each respective individual.

Table 2

Demographic Data of Gifted Students of Color in the Participating School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In coordination with the students and their respective schedules, interviews took
place after school at MHS in the Counseling Conference Room. The standard procedure
for visiting a school in this district requires the visitor to enter from the administrative
building to acquire a visitor pass which must be worn throughout one’s time on campus. Each visitor is required to not only check into the school, but also check out of the school upon the conclusion of the visit. After providing the appropriate information to the front office (administration) and acquiring a visitor pass, I proceeded to the counseling suite in which the Counseling Department Chair and I met to discuss timelines and logistics. We met in this fashion for each of the four interviews and the Chair remained in the counseling suite for each of the interviews.

As an initial phone interview had already taken place before the coordination of the face-to-face interview, a rapport between researcher and interviewee had previously been established. At each of the interviews, the tools present for recording information included a laptop computer, a digital audio recording device, a digital video recorder, a note pad, and pens. All interviewees (and their parents) consented to the digital audio recording of the interview; however, one interviewee’s parents did not consent to the digital video recording of their student. In that particular case, I explained and showed the student that although the video recorder was on, the lens cap remained over the lens and the video recorder faced directly into the wall, thus rendering the video component inoperable, however, still allowing for the audio component to remain active. This student was also able to see the black screen from the recording at all times. I explained that the reason the digital video recorder remained on in this case was to provide a secondary recording device in the event the initial digital audio recorder failed. With all other participants, it was also explained that two recording devices were used for redundancy purposes.
Instrumentation

The data acquired for this study was taken from a variety of collection methods utilizing several methods, primarily the face-to-face interview. For approximately two months, school records, test scores, grades, transcripts, observations, and interviews were examined in order to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the gifted students of color and their perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs regarding race, education, and giftedness. In all cases, two sets of interviews were conducted: an initial phone interview (Appendix A) and a face-to-face interview (Appendix B). Transcripts from the interviews were transcribed and reviewed with the respective participant in order to verify key thoughts, words, and recollections. Notes from the interview were taken using two-column memoing with researcher observations included. Upon the collection of interview data, the information was examined, categorized, highlighted, and re-organized in themes as they related to the guiding research questions.

In accordance with the consent forms required by the RSD in order to conduct research within the school district, I signed and was provided a release of educational records for the purposes of research (Appendix D). With this release I was granted limited permission to access student data which included their school transcripts, school grades, test scores, demographic information, and cumulative records. The review of such files served to supplement, support, or potentially contradict the information acquired through the interview process. Additionally, the data gathered outside of the interview helped support the use of multiple data sources thereby further verifying accuracy, dependability, and depth to the study.

65
Student Participants

With 37 gifted students of color at Marshall High School, 15 were initially deemed ineligible by me because of their freshman year status at the school. Twenty-two students and their families were contacted with five respondents over the span of three weeks. After three weeks, an additional postcard was sent out with a final request for participation. All five respondents were contacted to conduct the initial phone interview (Appendix A); however, only four remained as one participant verbally expressed, through the course of information and communication gathering, his lack of interest or desire to further participate. For the purposes of this study, the following student names are pseudonyms.

Catherine. Catherine was born in the state of Indiana to a Caucasian mother and a Filipino father. She attended kindergarten and approximately one month of first grade in Washington State until her family moved to Georgia and the Rogers School District. From that point forward, she attended the same elementary and middle school feeding into Marshall High School. Catherine has a younger brother who is in fourth grade and categorized as gifted, as well as a younger sister who is in seventh grade.

Catherine is currently in her sophomore year at MHS. Catherine has a relaxed but playful personality, as she responded to the interview questions with comfort and humor. She also has a competitive drive to achieve in meeting the expectations of her parents who both believe she is capable of straight A’s throughout her educational career. In her sophomore class, she ranks 168 out of approximately 600 students, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.6 and a numeric grade point average of 88.5 unweighted and 90.643 weighted (includes additional points for Honors and Advanced Placement level
classes). At the moment, she has completed seven high school credits; three were Honors classes. Her current six-period sophomore schedule includes 3 Honors courses. By the time Catherine graduates from high school she plans to have taken 3 or 4 Advanced Placement classes. Although she considers herself to be a hard working individual, she also recognizes that she is a procrastinator, as she failed to complete a necessary essay last year in order to take an advanced level Social Studies course this year. At the moment, she sits in an on-level Social Studies course of which she is doing very well; however, admittedly, she acknowledges that the challenge in that class is quite weak.

Catherine is extremely outgoing with friends and family. She enjoys meeting new people, talking with friends, sports (Lacrosse), and school. She finds herself attracted to group work, as she enjoys the collaboration, debate, and communication with others. Catherine is devoted to three things outside of school: her family, for whom she is thankful for the culture of respect her parents raised her in; lacrosse, which she plays for the high school; and her church. She considers herself to be knowledgeable of her cultural background and heritage as she states, “I know a lot.” Her grandparents on her father’s side, both Filipinos, live in the same town and often attempt to provide context and history through foods, celebrations, and oral accounts whenever they are together. She and her grandparents are active in the Filipino community within the area.

**Elementary school.** Education has always been a priority in her family, as both of her parents pushed her to accomplish as much as possible. Catherine believes that her parents pressure to achieve helped balance her tendencies to procrastinate and referred to her parental pressure as “good pressure.” As Catherine attended a RSD elementary school, most students were qualified for giftedness in second or third grade as the
Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) is administered in the second grade and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) is administered in the third grade. Both are nationally vetted tests utilized to assist in qualifying gifted students within RSD. Catherine’s CogAT Composite Percentile Rank was 92%, with particular strengths in the Verbal and Quantitative portions of the test (Figure 1). However, her ITBS scores the following year showed a Composite Percentile Rank of 99% (Figure 2). These tests, along with her teacher’s recommendation, qualified Catherine for the gifted program in the Rogers School District. However, Catherine’s family declined the acceptance into the gifted program and, according to Catherine, it was largely because her parents were unfamiliar with the program and uncomfortable with the potential changes that might occur for her.

*Figure 1: Catherine CogAT: 2nd Grade*
Despite her family’s declination to participate in the gifted program at the elementary level, it was at this point that Catherine came to view herself differently. She had previously recalled being different than other students as she was reading as early as kindergarten and when her teacher would leave the room, she would have Catherine read to the class in her absence. Although Catherine had always believed herself to be bright and “smart,” the validation of that belief through the results of testing emboldened and guided her direction with higher expectations for herself. Knowing that many of her peers had achieved percentile ranks between 50 and 80, Catherine remembered thinking to herself, “I must be really smart.” Although she did not participate in the gifted program throughout her elementary school years, her parents expressed pride in her
acceptance; however, they were hardly surprised by the results as they expressed recognition of her ability and potential early on.

Throughout elementary school, Catherine found much of the work to be easy and often wondered what the gifted students in her class did when they left one day a week for their pull-out gifted class. She knew they were being challenged in different ways, as they often spoke about what they were doing in their class when they went away: learning a different language, working on projects, and advancing concepts covered in Science or Social Studies. She admitted that her desire to participate in the gifted program was quickly tempered by her knowledge of the extra work they had in relation to the free time her class had when the gifted students went away for the day. She recalled there being little point in having lessons when the gifted students left, as they made up approximately half of the class, so her teachers would often not give assignments or much work on those days.

Most of the friends Catherine had during elementary school were students who participated in the gifted program. She remembered very few students of color in the gifted program, but also made a statement that, at the elementary school level, she did not recall race playing a role for herself or in any conversations among friends. She did note that on a number of occasions students would ask her what a “Filipino” was and make statements like “fil-a-what” or “are you Philistine”? Apart from comments and questions, race and culture were of little discussion among her friends. The friendships she had among the gifted students, however, were clearly different from her other relationships in school; she and her gifted friends often communicated differently with more meaningful conversations. At the elementary level, Catherine remembered with
distinction that the gifted students understood one another more and were better able to relate to one another.

**Middle school.** It was in middle school (fifth through eighth grade) when Catherine became fully immersed in the gifted program with the Rogers School District. With parental approval, she began her first classes in the advanced levels and, according to Catherine, “it was awesome and I didn’t realize what I was missing.” She found the pace and content of her classes to be more challenging, as they did not have to slow down or repeat lessons as often as they did through her elementary school years. Catherine was no longer bored in class and found the work load and the other students to be equally as excited and engaged as she was.

Socially, she extended her network of friendships as three elementary schools fed into her middle school. She recalled a large shift among her friends, as the friends she once had in elementary school were no longer the friends she had while at middle school, in part because of the gifted program.

Catherine felt happy, confident, and comfortable in the gifted program as she did not realize the extent of her abilities prior to her participation in the program. Although the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT) is not utilized for qualification into the gifted program, it does indicate levels of academic achievement at grades 5 (Figure 3) and 8 (Figure 4), as measured by the Georgia Performance Standards of education. In each case, Catherine achieved excellent scores, indicating her ability to learn and retain the required knowledge for advancement into the next grade. Additionally, these scores were an indication of her academic excellence in school, her work performance, and her overall abilities.
**Figure 3: Catherine CRCT: 5th Grade**

![Bar chart showing scores in Reading, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies for 5th grade]  
- **Passing** scores are in blue.  
- **Exceeds** scores are in red.  
- **Raw Score** are in green.  

**Figure 4: Catherine CRCT: 8th Grade**

![Bar chart showing scores in Reading, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies for 8th grade]  
- **Passing** scores are in blue.  
- **Exceeds** scores are in red.  
- **Raw Score** are in green.
Among the gifted student body, she noticed that very few were of color and those that were of color were mostly of Asian descent. In middle school, all of her friends were female and gifted, and of that group one was Asian and two were African-American, with the rest of her friendships consisting of Caucasian students. Like many middle school students, friendships began to strengthen; however, Catherine believed she had more of an impact on her friends than her friends did with her. Because of her enthusiasm for school and the projects they were given, she felt as if many of her friends grew excited about school in large part due to her eagerness to learn and do her best. Her family continued to be a source of guidance and strength for her as their expectations for school increased even more now that she was in the middle school and a participant in the gifted program.

**High school.** Thus far, Catherine has found the high school gifted classes to be more challenging with greater flexibility. With an interest in the field of Science and a future desire to be involved with Sports Medicine, she has enjoyed the offerings of Chemistry, Biology, and Anatomy. According to Catherine, many of the students who were in these classes chose to be in them, so the level of conversation, interest, and involvement was outstanding. The volume of work has also increased as the Honors level courses are more difficult and accelerated in pace and content. Catherine is quick to acknowledge that the homework amount is extremely high in all of her gifted classes, but accepts it as preparation for collegiate level work.

Her friendships have expanded and diversified more than before, although she has maintained many of her friendships from the middle school. Among her friends, the vast majority still within the gifted population, Catherine suggested that race was a factor with
intelligence as the students of color among the gifted population tended to be more within the Asian population. She commented that friends would often make reference to the stereotype of Asian students being smart, with the expectation that she would get nothing short of an “A”. Catherine acknowledged the expectations and stereotypes of Asian students, but hurtfully recalled a moment when friends jokingly told her that if she got less than an A- in class that her parents would not allow her to have dinner that night. Although she knew her classmates were joking, the commentary brought to the forefront the concept of racial and cultural stereotypes within her friends and the school. With few other gifted students of color in her grade level and in the school, discussions of race, according to Catherine, have often been reduced to simply racial jokes. Although she does not find them to be amusing, many still use jokes in an effort to be funny; however, she knows that regardless of what is said, “someone will get offended.” Unfortunately, the topic of race is rarely discussed in school apart from the topic of culture in a Social Studies class.

Catherine believes that the gifted courses she has taken have given her the ability to see things differently. She suggests that one’s racial background should not dictate how smart or hardworking one can be. She believes that students of color should be treated like the norm and not stereotyped by schools, teachers, or classmates because of their race. Cultural upbringing has played a large role in Catherine’s life and it is this upbringing that she believes has helped her succeed. The expectations her parents have had with her and the dominance of educational excellence has shaped her outlook and her beliefs. She is more driven because of the culture of respect her parents have instilled. If she did not grow up in that type of culture within the home, she feels as if her
development and passion would be filled with negativity. She is excited for the possibilities of college and has aspirations to attend Georgia Tech University, studying Sports Medicine.

Shirley. Shirley was born in India to Indian parents who immigrated to Canada when she was approximately two months old. She attended kindergarten and part of first grade in the Toronto area until she and her family moved to the United States where she completed her first and second grade years in a public school in Columbia, South Carolina. For work related reasons, she and her family moved back to Canada after her second grade year to the Windsor area, where she remained until she completed fifth grade. She and her family returned to the United States at the start of her sixth grade year, where she attended public school in Georgia. In the middle of her seventh grade year, she transferred to the Rogers School District, where she completed middle school and moved on to attend Marshall High School. She has one 12-year-old sister who is also categorized as gifted.

Shirley is currently in her junior year at MHS. She has an eager and curious personality, as evidenced by her questions regarding this study and the responses other participants gave relative to her own. Shirley also considers herself to be a perfectionist with a competitive drive to achieve. Shirley is currently number one in her junior class of approximately 480 students, with a cumulative grade point average of 4.0 and a numeric grade point average of 97.5 unweighted and 102.3 weighted (includes additional points for Honors and Advanced Placement level classes). At the moment, she has completed 13 high school credits, nine of which were Honors courses and two were Advanced Placement courses. Her current six-period junior year schedule includes two Honors
courses and three Advanced Placement courses. By the time Shirley finishes high school, she plans to have taken a total of 10 Advanced Placement courses in an effort to better prepare her for the rigors of college. She presents herself to be a hard-working and determined student.

Shirley considers herself to be a mix between an extrovert and introvert; she expressed her joy in being with her friends, but not necessarily being the outspoken one of the group. She finds a great deal of comfort and support from her family and considers her parents to be major influences on her life. Like a typical teenager, she enjoys being with friends, most of whom are gifted students. She is an avid reader and enjoys watching television. According to Shirley, she is quite knowledgeable of her cultural heritage and background, as she often returns to India every three to four years and participates in Indian heritage festivals in the surrounding area.

**Elementary school.** The classification into the gifted program occurred in Shirley’s fourth grade year, which was the earliest year possible for qualification into the gifted program at her elementary school. She had an Overall Composite score in the 99th percentile on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). Because of the results from the WISC, coupled with observations from her teachers along with her overall academic performance, she was placed in the gifted program. The gifted program consisted of a single teacher providing instruction in all subject areas with a class cohort that moved from one grade to the next. The elementary school was small in population and the gifted program according to Shirley was “really small.” She recalled the cohort of students she belonged with to have somewhat kid-like characteristics, yet they were all very determined and focused on grades. The grading scale was based on a 0-5 scale, 5
being best. Shirley remembered her academics being very important to her, as she was very aware of how easily one might slip from a grade of “4” to a “2” instantly.

Qualifying for the gifted program was important not only to Shirley and her parents, but also to others around her. She quickly realized that other students and families who were not part of the gifted program viewed her differently while some “felt really in awe of me,” which gave her a sense of pride. As a student, she was always driven to learn as much as possible. Before being part of the gifted program, Shirley felt out of place both academically and socially, as she thought back to the type of students in her classes before fourth grade and then after. The students who were not gifted had different priorities than she did, while the gifted students presented more of a challenge as they had the same level of understanding of materials as she did. This helped develop competitiveness within her, as being gifted was not enough; she wanted to shine within the program so she placed high expectations for herself, which exceeded those of her friends and family.

Within the gifted program during her elementary school years, Shirley estimated that 90% were students of color with the majority being Asian. Her school was small, with approximately 500 students in grades K-5 and the vast majority of the school was Caucasian. With such a high number of students of color within her gifted class, she believed she understood the concept of race early on as she had friends from all parts of Asia, including other Indian friends, Black friends, and Caucasian friends. Although she was friendly with her peers in school, she never considered her friends to be much of an influence in her life. Her main motivation came from within as she constantly challenged
herself with school as a self-proclaimed perfectionist, “I just couldn’t let things go, which is probably why I tried so hard”.

**Middle school.** It was in middle school that Shirley and her family moved to Georgia for work related reasons. When she first started in sixth grade, she attended a middle school outside of RSD where she was accepted into their gifted program based on her status in Canada. However, because of the transition from one school system to the other, the receiving middle school placed her in three on-level courses which frustrated Shirley in the beginning. Coming from a school in which her cohort was with her every day, she enjoyed the changing of classes and the variety of students she interacted with. Shortly after the first few weeks of school, she was quickly transferred into all gifted courses as the teachers became aware of her academic abilities. After her sixth grade year, she moved into the RSD district and completed middle school, which fed directly into Marshall High School. Although the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT) is not utilized for qualification into the gifted program, it does indicate levels of academic achievement. At the end of seventh grade, she took the CRCT (Figure 5) and exceeded in every category but one. By the end of her eighth grade year (Figure 6), she took the ITBS and showed a Composite Percentile Rank of 99%, further validating for RSD her qualification into the gifted program. Additionally, at the end of her eighth grade year, she took the CRCT (Figure 7) and, once again, exceeded on every category.
Figure 5: Shirley CRCT: 7th Grade

Figure 6: Shirley ITBS: 8th Grade

**Percentile**

- Overall: 99
- Science: 97
- Math: 95
- Sources: 93
- Language: 98
- Comprehension: 99
- Reading: 99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>92</th>
<th>94</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Unlike her Canadian school, in which the minority population within the gifted program was so high, a huge demographic shift occurred when she came to RSD. The number of students of color within the school was far less than what she was accustomed to, as was the number within the gifted program. She often believed that she had to push herself even more among her new friends, who were primarily Caucasian. She felt as if her willingness to push harder than her peers marked a difference in work ethic and performance, which she noticed among the other Asian gifted students, but not as much among her Caucasian friends. She remembered that a lot of her Asian friends had contempt for some of the Caucasian students because their work ethic was not as strong.
as theirs, “but I wasn’t like them,” she stated, as she viewed her work ethic to be stronger than her Caucasian colleagues.

**High school.** From an academic standpoint, Shirley believed she was competing against very bright students who had the talents of photographic memories, strong test taking skills, and rote memory; however, Shirley has accepted this as a challenge, stating that “knowing the information isn’t enough, learning how to apply it is more important.” She expressed a desire to move on to a new challenge in life, hinting that college was a change she would be eager to accept. Although she finds high school to be an excellent opportunity to socially network and continue to learn, she awaits the next level of competition and trial in her life, which she believes exists at the collegiate level.

Shirley does enjoy the social aspect of high school, as her group of friends has expanded beyond those in the gifted program through her interactions with students in her elective courses, at the bus stop, and in various clubs. She admits that she now has friends who do not care about academics as much as she does and she finds it refreshing because they are just as motivational to her as her gifted friends have been. Shirley has come to see people past the status of their intelligence. However, her competitiveness and perfectionist traits continue to be the driving force when it comes to school. Despite having a broader range of friendships and perspective on academics, she recognizes she is vulnerable to being challenged by her gifted friends, which drives her to continue working hard and remaining focused.

Shirley, at times, sees racial tension heightened among her friends and references the successes Asia is having in the global marketplace as a point of contention in conversations with friends. She expressed concerns that competition presented by other
countries is not making the United States more competitive or eager to advance. She fears that such competition is only making citizens in the U.S. more angry and fearful of others. Her experiences with some of her classmates has been negative in that they make comments about her and her background rather than raise their competitive spirit suggesting, “they don’t have that yet.” In India, she explained, education is a number one priority and she sees that priority among surrounding Indian communities in the United States. She and her Indian friends talk about the cultural emphasis they place on education and work ethic. According to Shirley, there is no classification of giftedness in India so for her family and friends, both here and in India, being categorized as gifted is important and in her family they have always believed that “rising above the rest is better.” Shirley has high aspirations of attending a top-tier school to study in the field of Science.

**Sue.** Sue was born in the state of Louisiana to a Japanese mother and a half Caucasian, half Puerto Rican father. Since she first started public school, she has attended the same elementary and middle school in RSD feeding into Marshall High School. Sue has a younger sister who is in sixth grade and categorized as gifted and an older sister who is in her senior year at MHS.

Sue is currently in her junior years at MHS. Sue has a very confident and nonchalant personality, as she seemed relatively unaffected and reluctantly revealing with some of her answers to the questions asked throughout the interview. She considers herself to be both competitive and a perfectionist as it relates to her academic career. In her junior class, she ranks 19 out of approximately 480 students, with a cumulative grade point average of 4.0 and a numeric grade point average of 94.3 unweighted and 97.4
weighted (includes additional points for Honors and Advanced Placement level classes). At the moment, she has completed 12 high school credits, eight of which were Honors classes. Her current six-period junior schedule includes two Honors courses and two Advanced Placement courses. By the time Sue graduates from high school, she plans to have taken six or seven Advanced Placement classes.

Sue considers herself to be an extrovert. She is very social among her friends and has a broad diversity of friendships because of her involvement and commitment to the marching band. She enjoys music of all types and feels most comfortable when music is playing in the background. Outside of school, her passions are band and her friends. Over the years, she has become proficient with a number of instruments including the tenor saxophone, the alto saxophone, the piano, trumpet, and flute. She considers herself to be somewhat knowledgeable about her cultural background; however, she admitted that she and her mother only rarely discuss the culture of Japan. At this point, she sees her father only on occasion. Her mother and father separated a number of years ago, so she spends little time with her father to discuss his cultural heritage.

*Elementary school.* Although education has always come easy to Sue, she explained that her mother sought early on to avoid pressuring her children to overachieve and hyper-focus on school. Sue explained that as a backlash to the culture her mother experienced in Japan with hours of homework, school on weekends, and pressure to exceed on tests, her mother took a more hands-off approach and perspective to education. My notes throughout the interview revealed an ease and comfort with Sue’s perspective on education and the lack of pressure she placed on herself. As Sue attended a RSD elementary school, most students were qualified for giftedness in second or third grade,
as the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) is administered in the second grade and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) is administered in the third grade. Sue’s CogAT Composite Percentile Rank was 93% with particular strengths in the Nonverbal and Quantitative portions of the test (Figure 8). Her ITBS scores the following year showed a Composite Percentile Rank of 90% (Figure 9). These tests, along with her teacher’s recommendation, qualified Sue for the gifted program in the Rogers School District.

*Figure 8: Sue CogAT: 2nd Grade*
Sue recalled that a number of her classmates were in the gifted program and that it seemed to her as if the “cooler” kids were the gifted students. Although she never saw herself as particularly smart or different from other students, she does remember that, upon receiving admittance into the gifted program, her grandfather made contact with her to express his happiness and pride. She thought this was strange as they did not often speak with one another, yet he went out of his way to make contact with her when he heard the news. Academically, Sue found the work to be relatively easy and she enjoyed her gifted classes more than her regular class as she seemed to take particular pride in the status of leaving the classroom for the gifted program.

All of the friendships Sue had at the elementary level were with other gifted students. She did not remember seeing any students of color in the gifted program, “I
remember people but they were all white.” She does not recall the topic of race being discussed in elementary school at all. Her best friend was Caucasian and she recalls having a number of friends from both genders. Being a part of the gifted program, she and her friends talked about working hard and staying in advanced classes. Sue wanted to make her parents proud and always wanted to do better than her older sister, whom she has been competitive with since elementary school.

**Middle school.** Sue always believed she belonged in the gifted program. None of her friends or family were surprised with her status in the gifted program, as this was something they expected from her as well. At the middle school, three different elementary schools merged, providing a greater pool of friendships to develop for Sue, who has described herself as extremely social. Although her friendships expanded, all of her friends remained within the gifted population. Sue still did not find the academic component to be a struggle as she maneuvered through her middle school years.

It was at this point that Sue began to contemplate her future as it related to academics. Ever since she was young, she has maintained a desire to attend Louisiana State University (LSU). Being in the gifted program and coming to realize what she was capable of accomplishing pushed her to focus on what she would need to do to gain acceptance into LSU. Although the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT) is not utilized for qualification into the gifted program, it does indicate levels of academic achievement at grades five (Figure 10) and eight (Figure 11), as measured by the Georgia Performance Standards of education. In each case, Sue achieved strong scores indicating her ability to learn and retain the required knowledge for advancement into the next grade.
Figure 10: Sue CRCT: 5th Grade

Figure 11: Sue CRCT: 8th Grade
The number of students of color among the gifted population was low, as Sue’s friends were all in the gifted program and all but one was Caucasian. She recalled an African-American friend whom she had who was also gifted, and she said she still is friendly with him today. Beyond this particular friendship, Sue stated that race did not play much of a role in middle school with her or her friends. Her parents did not really discuss the issue either.

**High school.** Until her junior year, Sue had never had to really focus and organize the academic component of school as it had come rather easy to her in previous years. With her classes this year, she considers this to be a true challenge for her, especially with her commitment to the marching band, her friends, and the much heavier workload of junior-level courses. She always knew she could work hard when it was required of her, she simply felt that she never had to, which is now taking some adaptation on her part to adjust to the rigors of two AP and two Honors courses, along with her extra-curricular responsibilities. Her competitive drive and perfectionist qualities reveal themselves when she feels pressured to do well, although she explained on a number of occasions that the pressure to succeed academically does not come from her parents, particularly her mother. She still wants to do better than her older sister and that competition now exists for the sister as well. They are both engaged in trying to compete with one another with grades and accolades from teachers.

Sue does not believe that race has ever played much of a role in her life or perspective on education. She knows that people have high expectations for her, but she believes her expectations are the only expectations that count. Conversations among her friends have never revolved around race and the topic is rarely brought up in school.
among friends, teachers, or curriculum. A number of her friends revolve around the marching band, with the vast majority of them in the gifted program, and all but a few are Caucasian. She commented in passing on having two gifted friends of color, but explained little more about her relationship with them. According to Sue, race only comes up because her friends make comments on her potential ability to get scholarships because she is a minority. When pressed to discuss that further, Sue simply shrugged her shoulders.

In closing, Sue commented on a conversation she and her mother recently had about the state of education in the United States relative to Japan. Her mother was explaining how tests were more difficult and given more often as the benchmark for progression in Japanese schools and that students and parents would often be pressured to study and succeed in passing these tests. Her mother knew from her own experiences the pressure and difficulties associated with a culture centered on those academic demands. Sue pondered that perhaps that was why her mother left Japan and moved to the States, in part because she did not care for such an environment. Her mother’s expectation is that she always works hard; however, she has never restricted Sue from doing what she wanted. According to Sue, “that’s probably a cultural thing” that her mother had to deal with growing up which shaped the way her mother has raised her and her siblings. Sue has expectations to attend LSU and study either Social Science or Music.

Sandy. Sandy was born in Mexico to Mexican parents who immigrated to the United States before Sandy began public school in Georgia. Sandy and her family moved into the Rogers School District at the start of her first grade year. From that point
forward, she attended the same elementary and middle school feeding into Marshall High School. Sandy is an only child.

Sandy recently graduated from MHS this past Spring. Sandy has an eager and pleasing personality, as she sought to be as helpful as possible throughout the interview process. She even asked if she could assist with the project during our initial phone interview. She has a maturity and retrospection to be expected from a high school graduate, as she reflected upon the questions with thought and deliberation. As a recent graduate, she finished high school with a competitive senior class ranking of 188 out of approximately 400 students, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.3 and a numeric grade point average of 83.3 unweighted and 87.5 weighted (includes additional points for Honors and Advanced Placement level classes). With over 26 high school credits, 12 were Honors classes and 6 were Advanced Placement classes. She is currently at the university level studying on a full scholarship.

Sandy is extremely social among friends and family, as she suggested that she often feeds off of the energy of others. She enjoyed putting pressure on herself as she often sought to do her very best in school. Throughout high school, Sandy was heavily involved with her church and attended teen programs since her middle school years. Even now, when she returns home, she often seeks out her friends from church to associate with and share experiences. As a student born in Mexico with Mexican parents, she considered herself to be knowledgeable about her cultural heritage and background. She referred to family celebrations in the past where family members and friends would bring traditions, ceremonies, and attire from their native land. She is very conscious of her Mexican heritage and language, as she had to learn English at an early age in order to
help her parents communicate with her school, their bank, and assist with medical conversations between physicians and her parents. Sandy remembers having to bridge the language gap between her parents and the community at large.

*Elementary school.* Sandy was an eager student, as she always sought to please her parents. She considers her elementary school years to be “weird” years because she did not exactly find a niche of friends or classmates to be comfortable with. While many of the gifted students in her school were categorized in either second or third grade, she was not admitted into the gifted program until her fourth grade year. Because many of the students had already formed friendships and associations with one another before her acceptance into the program, she often felt out of touch and on the outside socially among the group. Sandy’s CogAT Composite Percentile Rank was 86% with a particular strength in the Quantitative portion of the test (Figure 12). Her ITBS scores showed a Composite Percentile Rank of 86% (Figure 13). Although her CRCT scores were not a factor in admittance into the gifted program, she did reach the *exceed status* in Reading, Language Arts, and Math, explaining her ability to learn content as well as corroborating her academic strength. It was this combination of tests, as well as teacher recommendation, which qualified her for the gifted program at this time.
Sandy recalled being motivated to do well in large part because of her status as a gifted student. She believed that many of the students looked up to the gifted students.
and so her drive to succeed was fueled by that impression. Because she started the gifted program a year or two after most of the other gifted students did, she found herself somewhat isolated from the others and often initially excluded from the already formed social groups and cliques. Although there was one other Latina student in the gifted program, Sandy did not recall spending much time with her in school; however, their families knew one another and they did spend a good deal of time with one another outside of school in their neighborhood.

Sandy’s family was shocked to find out about her admittance into the gifted program as they were unfamiliar with what it was. It fell on Sandy to explain and interpret the program to her parents as best she could in order for the proper paperwork to be completed. Her parents were excited, as they had always believed her to be a bright, smart, and hard working student; the validation of the test results and teacher recommendation was a source of pride for her family. A definite point of contention for Sandy was the lack of outreach she felt the teachers and program facilitators gave to her parents. Although her parents spoke another language, Sandy believed that with more effort on the part of the school, her parents could have been more informed, updated, and involved. She recognized the level of involvement and volunteerism many of the other students’ parents invested in their students’ education and she felt that because of the language differences, she was deprived of her parent’s involvement. She seemed to remark of this issue as a point of regret.

Sandy enjoyed the challenge and change in classes associated with the gifted program. She found the nature of learning to be different, as she worked hands-on with projects and games, learning more about leadership, logic, puzzles, and history.
Although she recalled a couple of other students of color among the gifted program, she did not associate with them much during the school day. Much of her association with the Latina student occurred in the neighborhood and with family celebrations. She recalled the curiosity other students had regarding her race as they asked her questions about her background and language; however, she states, “I didn’t notice race too much in elementary school.”

**Middle school.** Sandy found middle school to be a wonderful developmental time period in her life as it relates to education and personal growth. Academically, she enjoyed the small class sizes and the opportunity to learn from her classmates. She felt that she better understood her work habits, thought process, and perspectives on education at this point. She socially became more comfortable with her gifted peers as she showed greater involvement within her classes. This was in part because several elementary schools merged into one middle school, providing a greater pool of students for her to interact with. She remarked that being involved in the gifted program taught her that grades were not enough and that continued growth and development were key ingredients to future success. Although the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT) is not utilized for qualification into the gifted program, it does indicate levels of academic achievement at grades five (Figure 14) and eight (Figure 15), as measured by the Georgia Performance Standards of Education. In each case, Sandy achieved excellent scores, indicating her ability to learn and retain the required knowledge for advancement into the next grade.
Figure 14: Sandy CRCT: 5th Grade

Figure 15: Sandy CRCT: 8th Grade
One aspect that was of particular difficulty for Sandy in middle school was the socio-economic differences that existed within the school. Although three elementary schools merged into one middle school, this school was located in a particular area of town associated with affluence. She noted, with some difficulty, the isolation she felt because many of the students came to school with “cool” book bags and clothes, items she and her family could not afford. Despite being academically capable among her peers, she did not fit in because she was not wearing “that” kind of pants or carrying a cell phone or laptop. Sandy recalls with clarity that the technological revolution had just started during her middle school years as “everyone” had the latest laptop and computer, except for her, which she believes limited her resources and ability to accomplish work efficiently.

Another aspect of middle school that became apparent to Sandy was the role race played among conversations with students. For her, she thought that students really began showing prejudice with commentary such as “oh every Mexican is illegal,” which she often heard among the other students. She felt uncomfortable in class and often was attacked by classmates to answer questions regarding minority status, stereotypes, and governmental programs toward particular racial groups. Regardless of her gifted status, her gifted classmates tended to harass her the most, particularly when a lesson was taught about Civil Rights, immigration, and laws affecting minorities throughout history. As a result, she became closer to her church friends as she spent more time with them than she did with her peers at school. As one of only a few Latinos in the gifted program, Sandy felt a pressure to exceed expectations and represent her heritage, which only drove her to
work harder. According to Sandy, her teachers played a major role in pushing her to excel, which she believes is why she grew closer to her teachers.

**High school.** Now focused on her academic goals of graduating at the top of her class, she entered high school, dedicated and driven to succeed. Through her earlier years in high school, she enjoyed the gifted classes because of the quality of teachers, the small class sizes, and the content of work. Although she had more to do in each of her classes, the quality of the lesson was something Sandy believed was worth the extra effort. She also began high school seeking to be involved in everything from student government to the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) club. She had an excitement and eagerness to achieve, to be involved, and to succeed. Sandy saw high school as a means for preparing for the next step: collegiate living.

In her junior year of high school, Sandy became less involved, more detached, and introverted. She explained that she began spending more time by herself, studying by herself, and reducing her overall involvement in school. A form of depression swept over her when teachers and her counselor questioned her legal status in the United States. This issue came up initially when discussion of scholarships and financial aid were topics discussed among friends and school personnel. When Sandy learned of the limitations placed on her ability to qualify for scholarships and aid, she developed an attitude of hopelessness, stating, “what’s the point in even trying so hard if I can’t go to college.” She came to believe she was wasting her time and her interest in school waned, as evidenced by her grades at the end of her sophomore year and the whole of her junior year. If not for her senior year teachers, who continued to push her to explore all avenues for college admission, she felt as if she would have given up hope. When her friends
began speaking of colleges they applied to, she simply gave vague answers, waiting to find out what type of private scholarships she might be awarded. All of the schools she applied to were private schools.

Sandy’s friends were unfamiliar with her legal status, however, she felt as if they stereotyped her because of her heritage and racial background. She saw changes in some of her peers as they speculated as to why she stopped working hard in class, began spending less time at school, and separated from her friends. Sandy suggested that if she were more like everyone else, “no one would have really noticed,” and felt that they noticed only because she was Latina. She missed spending time with her friends because, apart from race, she connected with them very well. She recalled the intellectual conversations they would share, the physics problems they would attempt to solve while eating lunch, and the world event debates that occurred among them. In the end, she credits her teachers and her parents for helping her refocus on the future and overcoming the depression she endured. By taking initiative to acquire more information about college admissions and financial aid, she was able to apply and be accepted to a number of universities in the surrounding area.

**Guiding Questions**

Through the use of guiding questions, this study sought to better understand the perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs gifted students of color had regarding race, education, and giftedness. The following questions helped frame an understanding of these topics from a collective of participant responses, notes, cues, and achievements:

1. How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?
2. What internal factors have influenced their perspective on education?

3. What external factors have influenced their perspective on education?

4. How has race impacted their relationship with peer groups?

5. What support systems help gifted students of color?

6. What future aspirations do they have?

Through the interview process and the data analysis development, I found that a number of common themes were expressed and encapsulated by each of the students through the course of their schooling experience: what it meant to be labeled “smart”; relating with friends; strength of family; few minorities; rigor; status; and culture at home. Although their experiences and, thus, their perspectives differed somewhat from one another, the common themes previously listed surfaced throughout each interview in some form or fashion. Each of the participants’ experiences with their respective gifted program varied to some degree from the impact of academic rigor to the relationships that developed with other gifted students; however, their experiences with the gifted program itself were seen as positive and beneficial to their future interests and endeavors. Each of their outlooks on education is mapped with futures involving college, and, in some cases, graduate schooling. Their impressions of their capabilities and levels of preparation for the rigors of future schooling are met with confidence in their own skills, mental abilities, and dedication to work.

Guiding Question #1: How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels? The introductory period into the gifted program began at the elementary level for each of the participants; however, their induction into giftedness differed from person to person. In
Catherine’s case, she qualified into the gifted program as early as second grade, but did
not enroll due to her family’s reluctance to fully participate. In Shirley’s case, she was
involved in the gifted program in fourth grade, the earliest grade available at her
Canadian school. Sue joined the program early in elementary school and found it to be
more interesting than her regular classes, but did not recall the classes to be as rigorous as
she had originally imagined. Sandy did not join the program until her fourth grade year,
while many of the other students had already been part of the program since second
grade; she felt as if she was on the fringe in terms of timing and relationships.

A number of themes emerged for these students during their elementary school
years that were common to each: the validation of their intelligence, a sense of belonging,
and the status of giftedness. The validation of their intelligence as a product of their test
results and entrance into the gifted program was common among all of the students
interviewed. Each discussed their pleasure with the concept and thought of being smart.
Despite their prior beliefs of their intelligence, the results of testing increased their
confidence and self-esteem, with one commenting: “I thought I did OK, normal like
everyone else and then they sent home a form with all of your scores on it and all of my
friends were getting like 50th percentiles or 80th percentile and I got in the 99th percentile
for everything.” The pride of each of the participants was evident and also included the
pride of family members, as one student stated, “they were really proud…and they
wanted to make sure I knew that I had to shine.” Several participants commented on
distant family members or neighbors calling their parents to express congratulations for
their daughter’s admittance into the gifted program. The combination of these
occurrences initiated a wave of self-confidence and reassurance that would grow and strengthen over time for each of the students.

Another common theme among the students was a sense of belonging. Each of the participants complained about the regular classes being too slow, boring, or repetitive. Once the students joined the gifted program, all became fully engaged and happier with the materials taught and the friendships made. One participant commented: “You could converse with them [gifted students] and they wouldn’t be calling you nerdy all the time and I guess you have a better connection because we have our priorities similarly aligned.” Another stated: “All of my friends except maybe one were ‘gifted’ kids because I could relate to them more than to the kids who were not.” The ability for the participants to find commonality with their gifted peers was important as the self-recognition of their academic and mental abilities began to materialize, so, too, did the social need occur for them share, compare, and relate.

According to each of the participants, there existed a positive status among students who belonged in the gifted program. For three of the participants, at the elementary level, they were taken out of their regular classes once a week for the entire day, while the remainder of the class would essentially conduct review work. One of the participants, whose elementary school was in Canada, remained in a specific gifted cohort in which all of the students in her class were gifted. As described by one, “a lot of the ‘cooler’ people were in it so it was kind of like a good thing to be in the gifted program.” Another commented, “I remember being labeled as a gifted student everyone looked up to those students so there was a lot of motivation knowing that I was a gifted student.” Particularly at the elementary level, the label of gifted carried with it a sense of
higher status within the school, not only among the other students, but especially among the gifted students. Whether this higher status was self-perceived or actual, each of the participants recognized a difference and sense of culture that existed within their respective school.

The middle school years for each of the participants honed a level of academic maturity not previously experienced. Students discussed a greater sense of responsibility coupled with more pressure to succeed. One student expressed that “At that point I was really serious about my academics; that was what I lived for because I knew that I wanted to graduate at the top of my class at the high school so middle school really gave me that push.” Another student stated: “I wanted to have the highest grades because it just made me feel better about myself knowing that I was smart.” The combination of academic intensity, student maturation, and the prelude to high school rigor provided a platform for each of the participants to examine their outlook and efforts as they became more familiar with their own abilities and skills. The middle school years also brought about a sense of social development for the participants, as each began their involvement with various clubs and organizations, thus expanding their friendships and social experiences. The sense of ownership for their work and the excitement of an expanded sense of independence and social freedom truly engaged and energized each of the participants to recall favorably their middle school experiences.

At the middle school level, simplified discussions regarding race and culture began to surface within the student body. With few other students of color in the community, and fewer so in the gifted program, a number of participants were engaged in discussions to address questions and comments from their peers regarding their race and,
in some instances, other races; at times the student commentary was naïve, through the form of questions, while other times student statements were quite specific in their remark. One student commented that although she was in the gifted program with everyone else, the majority being of Caucasian background, they still saw her as a minority and would question her when discussions or debates occurred in class. Another student stated: “I think in general that’s when students really started getting judgmental…that’s when stereotypes really started hitting,” referring to the middle school years. The participants maintained friendships primarily with other gifted students and a few discussed the friends of color they had as one or two among the group; however, each of them stated individually the commonality that “they were all pretty much still all white.” In all, none of the participants discussed situations in which an actual dialogue to reach understanding on race was had with any friends. It appeared that in most cases the questions or comments were made, addressed, then dismissed shortly afterwards from further scrutiny.

Much of what the participants shared regarding their perspective of giftedness at the high school level related more toward future benefits and outcomes rather than current experiences. The commonality among the participants focused on their relationships. Like many other teenagers, their relationships with their friends were marked as high priority, along with the pride in their work and the acknowledgement of the rigorous nature of their advanced classes. Each spoke highly of their friends as their social outlet and academic equals. They recognized that, at the high school level, they are all in competition with one another to get the best grades in the same classes, as many of the students knew who was number one in the class, who was number two in the class,
and how many points separated the two; however, while in the midst of competition with one another, they were also motivators and study group partners “who were just as serious about education as I was,” commented one student. Individually or collectively, they took pride in the work they accomplished, as each recognized the volume of time and effort they produced in order to achieve their respective grade, rank, or test score.

In discussions regarding the future, each addressed the different benefits they perceived existed because of their participation in the gifted program. They shared in their commentary the rigorous nature of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. A number surmised that, because of the rigorous workload and organizational requirements from AP courses, they were better prepared for collegiate learning. Another discussed the benefits of acquiring college credit while still in high school, referring to AP courses and scoring well on AP exams, thus qualifying them for college credit. One commented on the greater likelihood of acquiring academic scholarships because of their high academic achievements and test scores. Each of the participants already had the collegiate level of living and learning on their minds, while one admitted that she was ready now for the next step and challenge to occur, suggesting she had already mentally, socially, and academically prepared to move on to the next level of education: “I know what my potential is in high school…I’m ready for the next challenge.” Their involvement in the gifted program clearly shaped their outlook for the future with plans for preparation in the arena of academics, organization, programs of study, and in some cases admission into a specific college.

Although the participants reached a more mature and more experienced level of understanding, their discussions on race, diversity, and ethnicity were still somewhat
limited among their high school peers. Even their self-understanding of their own race relative to the context of history, economics, and condition within the greater society was somewhat lacking. One participant even commented: “I don’t think race has even played a role for me.” Those who did comment on the impact of race addressed their focus on the repeated remarks on the continued use of stereotypes by classmates about smart Asians or illegal aliens. Although the commentary existed, none of the participants ever engaged in true debate about the issues, as they either perceived the statements to be either joking in nature or uneducated in its foundation. In every case discussed, none of the participants engaged in dialogue to diffuse or correct any erroneous statements about one race or ethnic group. At least one participant accepted some of the stereotypical beliefs stating that “it seems that race is kind of a factor in how smart you are.” This inability to connect race within the greater context of society may be due in part to a lack of racial understanding and development which will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Overall, each of the participants’ experiences with their respective gifted program was positive, as it gave each of them a sense of self-confidence and recognition of their own intelligence. Participating in the gifted program also provided a sense of pride, belonging, and status for each of the students. Many commented on the fact that working among other gifted students gave them an opportunity to finally communicate and collaborate at a level previously unachieved due to the inclusion of mixed-level students. All of them readily admitted that gifted students were admired, as acceptance into the gifted program was an aspiration for many of their peers, primarily at the elementary level. They took pride and enjoyed the attention that was given to them. They also appreciated the possible future benefits of their participation in the gifted program and
recognized that the product of their effort, work, and dedication potentially will yield a more prepared and foundationally secure future with college and career.

Guiding Question #2: What internal factors have influenced their perspective on education? Among a general collection of characteristics and traits that are common in defining behaviors of gifted students are competitiveness and perfectionism (Clark, 1988; Horowitz & O’Brien, 1985; Strip, 2000). Each of the participants readily defined themselves as both a perfectionist and as competitive throughout their elementary, middle, and high school experiences. If they are not competitive among their peers or siblings, they are competitive with themselves to attain a better grade than previously achieved. Each of the participants is equally self-described as a perfectionist, unwilling to accept mediocrity or normalcy. These two traits have driven their progress through school and have guided their perspective on education, work, and life. Many of the participants attributed their drive for education as a product of the cultural upbringing they experienced, with a high priority on excellent grades, a consistent and continuous work ethic, along with the love and support of their family.

A common theme and statement among the participants regarding their drive for excellence was “I still want to get the best grades and I want to be the best,” or “I have to push myself to be not just a hard worker but also picking things up on my own and going out of my way to learn things to be smarter.” The drive to excel is clearly a common trait among gifted students and is no different in this case among gifted students of color. Perhaps the fact that there were so few other students of color within their peer group explains their additional drive to represent their minority group positively. Ironically, the participants’ drive for excellence was not necessarily selfish or exclusionary, as a number
of the participants saw value and merit in assisting their peers in achieving their academic goals. Perhaps this speaks to the camaraderie found among students who are gifted or the collective nature of teenagers and the relationships they forge with one another.

**Guiding Question #3: What external factors have influenced their perspective on education?** Without hesitation, each of the participants remarked on their family as the cornerstone of support through their schooling, personal issues, and overall development. Family was remarked as the number one external factor of influence with friends and teachers a distant second and third. The dedication, guidance, and devotion their families shared with each of the students was obvious as they happily spoke of their overall relationships and the moments of intervention, sympathy, or empathy they provided. Despite each family’s high expectations of their respective student, the participants found comfort and solace in their family’s care, as stated by one participant, “being with my family distracts me from all the pressures I have at school.”

High academic expectations have been a constant in the lives of each participant from their elementary years to their high school years. The willingness of their parents to provide assistance in academic work, transportation to and from school events, participation in school meetings, along with the establishment of a consistently high benchmark of A-level” work is common among each student interviewed. Although not all of the parents required an A, they required the effort and work associated with that mark. The culture created within the respective homes mirrored one another in that love and support for their student existed in an atmosphere of dedication, hard work, and productivity. “They just wanted me to do my best because they know my potential…they want me to be happy and they want me to have a good future,” expressed one student, as
she thought about the impact her parents have had on her academic career. One other student described family support and assistance like a “security blanket” which has watched over and protected them for many years. The students described the environment within their home as a cultural mix of their ethnic backgrounds with that of the mainstream society. Each of the participants discussed the concept of work ethic as one of the primary priorities within the family and home and all linked that characteristic to their ethnic background. One participant suggested that “cultures that teach their kids at a young age to always be respectful, and get good grades, and always do your best” provide the foundation for positive outcomes.

Far less discussed was the influence of friends and teachers, although participants addressed their impact in some detail. High school friends, in particular, were important factors in their lives; however, their connection to their friendships as external factors of influence was less associated than with family. In one case, a participant described the impact she had on her friends as a motivator for school rather than the impact they had on her, suggesting that her friends became more engaged because they saw that she was. In another case, a student discussed the broadening of friendships that occurred over the years through extra-curricular activities; however, some of those friendships were students who lost interest in school that potentially had the ability to negatively influence them. Universal among all of the participants was the connection they shared with other gifted student friends as it related to commonalities, shared interest, personality traits, and conversational topics. Although they valued their relationships with their friends and saw them as a necessary social outlet, relief, and reassurance, they were less likely to view
them as influential external factors shaping their perspectives. Each of them believed that they and they alone shaped their views on education and life.

Only two of the participants highlighted the influence of their teachers as an external impact on their lives. One discussed the enjoyment she had in being pushed to achieve more from teachers who expressed an interest in who she was as a person. Another described a similar experience through Advanced Placement classes, in part because of their smaller sizes and also because of the volume of outside-of-class time students spent with their teachers. Common regarding the experiences students spoke about their teachers was the extra effort teachers took to build a relationship beyond the four walls of the classroom; those who supported them through academic bowls or athletic events and those who reached out to learn more about them as individuals made an impact that was recalled upon with appreciation and gratitude. Despite the positive impact they experienced with their teachers, none of the participants attributed their role as an external factor of influence.

**Guiding Question #4: How has race impacted their relationship with peer groups?** The friendships each of the participants had within their respective schooling years existed within a majority Caucasian population, with the exception of one participant whose two years in the gifted program at her elementary school in Canada had a majority minority population. Each of the participants was enrolled in the same middle and high school with a population percentage of approximately 80% Caucasian and 93% Caucasian among gifted students. The demographic numbers and culture of such a reality should not be overlooked, as many of the participants’ understanding of race and race relations was fairly limited to their surroundings. The concept of critical mass, and
lack thereof, will be further explored through Chapter Five. Although each claimed to be aware of their ethnic heritage or background through oral history, ethnic gatherings, or personal research, their understanding of their race in the context of society seemed elementary, as none of the participants recalled any true discussions among their friends or family regarding racial controversy, awareness, or self-efficacy.

The majority of their experiences and discussion related to race centered on dispelling stereotypes or addressing stereotypical attempts at humor. Commentary from peers on the stereotypical subjects of Asians as model minorities or Mexicans as illegal immigrants were the cited remarks made from elementary to high school. Student jokes at the expense of students of color were rarely confronted with any sincere effort from other Caucasian students, students of color themselves, or staff according to the participants. To be fair to the staff, the students suggested that they were unaware of the joking that occurred and none of the students recalled bringing it to any of their attention. Although issues of this nature were neither rampant nor commonplace among their friends, the racially loaded remarks still proved to be occurrences of annoyance which most often went unaddressed or simply overlooked. Many of the participants sought to suppress the role race played in their lives by being viewed solely by their merit, with the hope that friends and others “have seen beyond my race…to see that I am just a hard working person.”

In one instance, a student commented on the pressures of being one of only a few gifted students of color and compared it to a spotlight: “I feel like if I hadn’t been Hispanic and more like everyone else, no one would really have noticed me.” In some cases, with a number of participants, their race or ethnicity was burdening to them as if
they were representatives of their race and, therefore, required to be better, faster, or smarter than everyone else. Universally common for each of the participants was the high expectations placed on them if not from within, from their families, from their peers, or from society at large. A number of their peers were bold enough to express doubtfulness of their abilities or unwillingness to remain consistent and dedicated to education, which acted as a motivating and competitive factor in their attempt to proving their peers wrong. Although the participants did not go into a great deal of depth regarding race and the role it played on their lives or their relationships with others, the few memories they did share were discussed with a sense of negativity. This fact alone is an issue requiring further examination.

**Guiding Question #5: What support systems help gifted students of color?** The system of support that was deemed most helpful to students of color was family. Similar in response to the most influential external factor cited, family and the culture created at home was the primary system of support. One participant referred to the “cultures that teach their kids at a young age to always be respectful, and get good grades, and do their best” was the culture omnipresent in their home, which was a common sentiment among all participants. Throughout elementary school, each of the students made some reference to the oral or participatory engagement they had with family members in being taught about aspects of their cultural history and ethnic backgrounds. Because family provided a haven for cultural understanding in a larger society with slightly different cultural norms, all of the students expressed reliance on family for both academic and personal growth and development.
Guiding Question 6: What future aspirations do the students have? Each of the students interviewed was comfortable and confident of their future at the collegiate level. As each participant had the characteristic traits of competitiveness, perfectionism, and over achievement, they yearned for the moment to move on to the next level of their educational and personal development. Individually, they had a clear understanding of their strengths and areas of need along with the preferences they have in working environments. Each had been academically aggressive and dedicated to hard work throughout their education and they affectionately commented on the benefits of the gifted program. They reflected on how they now see things differently, more in-depth, in context compared with other things, and “outside of the box.” The perspectives they gained throughout their education, they credited to their participation in the gifted program.

Catherine has a goal of attending Georgia Tech to pursue a career in Sports Medicine. She would also like to be fluent in multiple languages, as she intends to pursue Spanish throughout college. She has two more years at the high school level.

Although Shirley does not have a particular school in mind, she would like to explore leaving high school early to pursue college immediately, as she is anxious to further test herself both academically and personally. Regardless of her immediate decision, a competitive college is a priority, as she maintains her number one rank within her junior class. She would like to study either Math or Science once she attends school and has admitted a particularly keen interest in Biology. Ultimately, she would like to have her own private practice and be called upon to speak at national conferences or conventions.
Sue has always had intentions of attending Louisiana State University, as she wears her LSU necklace and proudly carries her LSU keychain. She would like to pursue a career in music as she is fluent in five instruments and heavily involved in the marching band. Sue has one more year at the high school level and is finding her junior year to be a welcomed challenge.

Sandy is currently a freshman at a private university just outside of Atlanta. She is attending the university on a full scholarship and has enjoyed her first semester thus far. She is pursuing a career in business, an area of interest that has played a significant role throughout her high school career as she was a member of the Future Business Leaders of America club.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This case study was conducted with four gifted students of color who currently attend or attended the same high school in a Northwest Georgia suburb. The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs, perceptions, history, and support systems utilized by gifted students of color in an effort to assist future gifted students of color, parents, and the school system as they work with and support this minority population within an already minority population.

Overview

Continued issues of underrepresentation and retention within the gifted community among students of color have been examined, criticized, and debated for years (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Marland, 1972; National Excellence, 1993; Borland, 2003). Underrepresentation for students of color within gifted programs has been a major point of contention as aspects of test bias and educational discrimination persist in the limitation of their entry and qualification (Baez, 2004; Lewis et al., 2007; McBee, 2006; Warne, 2009). With the projection of demographic shifting expected to occur in the United States, students of color are disproportionately represented within the gifted and talented population. According to Wong (2008), the minority population of the United States will reach slightly less than 50% by the year 2050. At the moment, less than 25% of the gifted population consists of students of color with no racial group accounting for more than 10% (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The need to address the issue of underrepresentation is ongoing and a necessary step in addressing disproportionality with regard to race.
The underrepresentation of gifted students of color had an immediate impact on this study as less than 7% of the gifted population at Marshall High School fell under the category of students of color. With a focus on understanding the perspectives gifted students of color have regarding their educational careers, the goal of establishing patterns and themes for their success was necessary in establishing a foundational roadmap for future gifted students of color within the Rogers School District, and potentially beyond. The alternative to a successful experience and the reality of underachievement or issues of retention are concerns all stakeholders in education must be alerted to. Henfield (2009) explains that students of color who have been categorized as gifted indicated a lack of perceived support, expectations, motivation, and social or cultural connection to the gifted programs they belong. The intent of this study was to examine the perceptions four gifted students of color had regarding their educational experiences in order to address, confront, or combat the very issues support, motivation, and connection.

According to Dydra (2009), “based on negative attitude to themselves, characterized by an unfavorable self-image, negative self-esteem and a low level of the sense of self-worth” (p. 133), gifted students of color are more vulnerable, especially as they are a minority population within an already minority group. Students of color within education have historically experienced less success than their Caucasian peers at all levels. The implication that race and ethnicity play a role in a student’s socialization, identification, and success within education has been addressed by a number of researchers (Berlin, 2009; Cross, 1991; Henfield et al., 2008; Kozol, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Whiting, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). The opportunity to learn and understand the
issues of race, education, and achievement from the perspectives of the top students of color can be invaluable to providing an environment which is socially aware, diverse, and academically inspiring for all.

**Guiding Questions**

In an effort to address student perspectives on education, giftedness, and race, a set of guiding questions was designed to focus their attention and gain their perception on issues of support, motivation, and program connection. The following guiding questions were used:

1. How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?
2. What internal factors have influenced their perspective on education?
3. What external factors have influenced their perspective on education?
4. How has race impacted their relationship with peer groups?
5. What support systems help gifted students of color?
6. What future aspirations do gifted students of color have?

**Guiding Question #1. How do gifted students of color describe their overall educational experiences at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?** This question sought to encapsulate the participants’ overall experiences and perceptions. This question helped address issues of support, motivation, and connectedness from their elementary school years to their high school years. It also helped establish patterns of behavior and issues of consistency within their lives. Immediately upon dissection of their responses, a number of patterns and themes surfaced through the data analysis process. Although each of the participants experienced and perceived their education
slightly differently, they shared in their understanding of what it meant to be labeled as 
smart; relating with friends; strength of family; few minorities; rigor; status; and culture 
at home. Although each of these themes was present in some form through Guiding 
Question #1, many were also specifically addressed in the subsequent guiding questions.

Overall, each of the participants described their experiences and perceptions with 
the gifted program as overwhelmingly positive. The validation of their intelligence via 
their test results, and inevitably their participation in the gifted program, was universal 
and arguably the genesis of their self-confidence and motivation for success. The 
confirmation of being labeled as smart, a term each participant specifically used, 
catapulted their drive and aligned not only their perspective, but that of their family as 
well, to seek high achievement, consistent work, and the establishment for a successful 
future. This belief and self-perception was magnified once they reached their middle 
school years, as they independently came to the realization that their skills and abilities 
must be honed and further advanced in light of the competitiveness of high school and 
college.

As a result, each of the participants had already envisioned life beyond high 
school and each began their own journey of preparation and anticipation for the future. 
Their high school careers have been largely groomed, through the selection of classes and 
rigor level, to meet the needs of acceptance into competitive colleges. Although they all 
believe that the course work within the gifted program was heavier and more rigorous, 
they also recognized that their abilities required more as they all complained at one point 
or another about the content or pace they were frustrated with in regular classes. They 
independently fed off of the competition among their classmates and sought perfection
within themselves, both common signs of giftedness. Among each of the students, there is no doubt about their perceived abilities and there is no lack of confidence within their perspectives. Each spoke highly of what they believed their participation within the gifted program has offered them: the ability to handle rigor, the ability to think beyond the curriculum, the competitiveness to achieve, and the self-confidence to succeed.

Guiding Question #2. What internal factors have influenced their perspective on education? This question sought to ascertain the motivational or attitudinal drive within each participant. The general characteristic traits found among most gifted students were similarly present among the four gifted students of color studied in this research. Each of the participants noted that the internal factors for their own motivation came from their competitiveness and perfectionist qualities. Research reveals that the defining characteristics of competitiveness and perfectionism are not only common among gifted students, but also a means to their success (Clark, 1988; Horowitz & O’Brien, 1985; Strip, 2000). From the moment each participant began their educational career within the gifted program, each was internally driven to be the best they could be and to achieve more than their peers. Common among each of them was the belief that the pressure they placed upon themselves was far greater than any outside pressure that existed.

Guiding Question #3. What external factors have influenced the student’s perspective on education? This question sought to understand the social and cultural environment that helped shape and frame the perspectives and beliefs influencing the students’ achievements. Although the participants all felt that their drive for success was self-generated, the impact, influence, and support of their respective families was critical
to their overall development as a student and as a young adult. A large body of research has suggested that family intervention, input, and socioeconomic status often play an instrumental role in a student’s ability to succeed academically (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Boger, 2005; Greene & Winters, 2005). In each case, the pattern of personal investment, care, and support the respective family members provided to their student was consistent and appropriate based on the participant’s recollections and perceptions. For each student, their family provided firm expectations and a culture which prioritized education based on work ethic, consistency, and achievement. This culture was consistent from each grade level and, according to the students, became more supportive with less pressure as they came to the high school level. This speaks to the maturity level and independence each of the students achieved as they reached high school, requiring less organization and pressure to succeed to more family support and encouragement.

A concern raised from previous works studying family impact on gifted students was the family’s ability to address their child’s particularities and innate abilities as a gifted student (Peterson et al., 2009). Participants indicated that the culture of their home was based on respect for parents and had work, primarily through education, as a top priority. They recognized that at times the rules within their home were different from their peers, but accepted those rules with little argument. Ultimately, the participants related back to the support provided to them from their parents and the pride their family shared through the achievements they acquired.

One participant noted the impact her teachers had on influencing her to continue working hard and achieving. Sandy had a difficult time in her junior year when she dealt with a self-described bout of depression as she pondered her academic future in light of
her inability to acquire scholarships based on her immigration status. She credits the assistance of her senior year teachers as instrumental in aligning her focus and assisting her in obtaining the proper guidance and information for scholarships, financial aid, and college debt management. Despite Sandy’s recollection of her teachers as an external factor of influence, the other participants had less or nothing to say about their involvement or impact.

Guiding Question #4. How has race impacted the student’s relationship with peer groups? The issue of race is complex and this question sought to understand the impact race has had on the participants’ relationships. Marshall High School has a majority 80% Caucasian population, with 93% Caucasian within the gifted community. The lack of critical mass among ethnic minorities within the community, particularly within the gifted population, had clearly limited the exchanges of conversation related to the understanding and impact of race. With each participant, the vast majority of their friendships existed with other gifted students. As described by the participants, stereotypical commentary or jokes encapsulated their experiences with race or racism; however, these jokes were hardly the norm among their friendships and occurred only a handful of times throughout their schooling. Despite the lack of frequency, a number of the participants were cognizant of the negativity that was rooted in these remarks. However, these occurrences related to race did not seem to impact the overall relationships the participants had with their peers, as they all spoke favorably about the friendships they had throughout their educational career.

Given the lack of critical mass with other ethnic groups within the gifted and general community at large, the participants’ understanding of their own ethnic or racial
identity may have been stifled based on concepts of racial identity development (Tatum, 1997). Helms (1990) stated that racial identity development “refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). Although each claimed to be aware of their ethnic heritage or background, their understanding of race in the context of society seemed elementary. The process of racial understanding for people of color within the context of society is a transformational progression resulting in one’s awareness of his or her race within the framework of societal norms (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Each of the participants’ own identity development may have been influenced based on their surroundings, which was mostly Caucasian, along with a lack of critical mass among ethnicities similar to their own.

According to Tatum (1997), students of color grow to emulate and accept the norms and values associated with the dominant culture or community, known as the pre-encounter stage. In most cases, this evolves from the elementary level, as evidenced from the participants’ remarks suggesting that the concept of race was neither discussed nor experienced in elementary school. As students reach the middle school and the typical adolescent struggles for identity, so too is the added identity of race for students of color. As noted by Hansen and Toso (2007), “the interaction of race with any other variable affects a student’s vulnerability” (p.31). It was the middle school level at which the participants in this study commented on their first encounter to statements or questions from their peers about their own racial identity.

Each of the participants made some comment regarding the stereotypical statements or jokes their peers made, typically starting at the middle school level. These
early stages of adolescent awareness, recognized as the encounter stage in racial identity development, begin the transition for racial identity among students of color as they seek to understand the “events that force the young person to acknowledge the personal impact of racism” (Tatum, 1997, p. 55). Cross (1971, 1991) suggests that the stage of racial identity development reached after the encounter stage, often met during the adolescence years, is immersion. Immersion is typically illustrated with a desire to “actively seek out opportunities to learn about one’s own history and culture with the support of same-race peers” (Tatum, 1997, p. 76). Unfortunately, given the lack of number of same-race peers the participants had at Marshall High School, this level of understanding for racial development was unattained and must wait until critical mass is achieved at the collegiate level or the maturation for further racial comprehension is desired. It appeared to me that none of the participants were able to address issues of race based on an understanding achieved through immersion.

**Guiding Question #5. What support systems help gifted students of color?** This question sought to explore the systems that existed to assist gifted students of color through their educational experiences. The support system the participants commented on the most was that of their family. This is evidenced with consistency through the external influences discussed in Guiding Question #3. This highlights the glaring omission of the school or the gifted program itself as a system of support for gifted students of color. As gifted students of color are a minority within an already minority population, greater awareness of their differences or needs is a point addressed by a number of researchers (Aberson et al., 2004; Alexander et al., 2005; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Harris, 2008; Henfield & Moore, 2008; Herr, 1999; Rogers, 2008; Sias et al.,
2008). The simple fact that four gifted students of color neglected to comment on the schools or the gifted programs as a system of support is a point for further research and an opportunity for institutional reflection.

**Guiding Question #6. What future aspirations do the students have?** This question sought to explore the participants’ involvement in the gifted program relative to their future aspirations. Clearly, as indicated in response to Guiding Question #1, these participants thoroughly enjoyed their academic experiences within the gifted program and have attributed many of their developed skills to the program itself. Their future aspirations to further their educational careers are evident, as each has made preparations through their self-development, maturity, academic record, and test scores to attend competitive universities. At least two participants have interests in studying medicine, while one is currently studying business. Each has the skill level to move forward and each has the self-confidence to manage, from their perspective, anything that comes their way.

**Limitations**

Race, education, and giftedness present a myriad of experiences and perspectives. Through a qualitative case study design, an in-depth accounting of views, attitudes, and perspectives related to issues of race, giftedness, and education was accomplished with four female gifted students of color. However, the limited number of participants, coupled with the multitude of variables within their respective lives, reduces the generalizability of the participants’ perspectives from being applicable to all other gifted students of color.
As this case study was conducted with only four gifted students of color, limitations to the generalizability exist. In this case, a more diversified sample group of males and females, along with other ethnic or racial groups would increase the generality of the study. A larger sample size would also assist in providing greater generalizability. As the researcher in qualitative studies is keenly instrumental in the collection and analysis of data, multiple researchers on this study may have provided greater opportunities for cross referencing. The geographic location, the socioeconomic status of the community, and the overall percentage of students of color (critical mass) were also limitations to this study.

The Role of the Researcher

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the nature of qualitative studies is dependent on the researcher. As such, it was imperative that I invoke the most consistent and trustworthy standards available, which included, but were not limited to, the following: absolute confidentiality; digital audio and video recordings for supported accuracy; transcriptions of interviews along with participant feedback; two-column memoing; two levels of peer review; and adherence to both the Liberty IRB requirements, along with the RSD Request for Permission to Conduct Data form.

As the researcher, I am an administrator from a different school and zone not associated with any of the schools in the Marshall High School zone (elementary and middle schools). My purpose and role was to establish a relationship with the participants in order to gain insight and a comprehensive understanding of who the participant was. Through purposive sampling I selected students who were classified as gifted students of color. I also acquired the necessary consent forms to complete this
study through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University (Appendix E) and the Rogers School District “Request for Permission to Conduct Data Collection Activities within the System” form (Appendix D). All students selected had no prior interaction with me. It should be noted that I am a Filipino American male who has never been involved in gifted or talented programs at the participating school.

Implications

The data from this study can further assist educators, as well as institutions that provide gifted programming, in understanding the potential impact of race among gifted students of color. Additionally, gifted students of color and their families may glean information that will be helpful for their development within gifted programs, transitions at each level of schooling, social interactions, racial identity development, and academic motivation. The following suggestions were made as a result of this study: greater parental involvement, underrepresentation, and social monitoring of peer groups.

Participants of this study have indicated a greater need for gifted programs to include parental involvement, particularly with parents with cultural or linguistic backgrounds different from the mainstream school. Given the reliance gifted students of color have with their family’s support, information and involvement from parents of gifted students of color is a necessity. Another participant, recognizing the limited racial make-up of their gifted peers, suggested that race play less of a role in limiting one’s admittance into the gifted program. Another suggested that schools need to better monitor the social interactions that exist within the small gifted community, as students of color may at times feel out of place or even isolated.
Future Research

The need to further examine the perceptions and attitudes of gifted students of color is vital given the growing demographic changes that will occur in our public school systems in the coming years. The replication of this study in a different geographic location, both socioeconomically and demographically, could provide information addressing the issues of critical mass found in this study. The issue of critical mass and racial identity are expressed limitations. This study included four female students who were aggressively academic with strong desires to continue education beyond high school. Future research might attempt to explore the perceptions and attitudes of students who come from a predominantly minority population rather than the majority Caucasian population of this study. To better understand how a student’s self-awareness and self-perception influence their view and perspectives on giftedness and academics could further assist in learning more about how to support gifted students of color. A study which includes an even mix of gender would also be worthy of exploring, as gender roles at the high school level may play a significant part in their perceptions of education, race, and giftedness.

There continues to be a need for education to not only meet the requirements of high-ability learners, but to also acknowledge, understand, and support the complexities inherent for students of color with regard to race, education, and giftedness. Underrepresentation and retention of gifted students of color continues to be an issue impacting the gifted programs. According to Yoon & Gentry (2009), “race and ethnicity is one of the major issues facing gifted education in pursuit of a more equal representation of students” (p. 121). Throughout history, the fragile link between race
and education has produced both advancement and regression for students of color. Relative to the world, the United States is dependent on all of its citizens for productivity and contribution; however, the gifted students of color continue to be both the victims of neglect and attention. As this study provided an understanding of perspective from the gifted student of color, future studies should further the research in order to give voice to a continued minority within a minority population.
References


Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006). *Demography as destiny: How America can build a better future.* Washington, D.C.


United States’ Office of Education. Marland Definition of 1972 PL 91-230, Section 806


2009, from


Appendix A

INITIAL PHONE INTERVIEW

Thank you for taking the time to complete the consent form. As you read, this study will seek to explore your perspective, attitude, and beliefs about giftedness, race, and education. You were selected because of your racial or ethnic background along with your participation in the gifted program. All of the information you disclose will be kept confidential. At any point, you may terminate your involvement in this study if you are uncomfortable with the questions or feel distress due to the subject matter. Are there any questions...

1. What is your full name?
2. What grade are you currently in?
3. What is your current grade point average?
4. What are/is your favorite subject(s)?
5. How many Advanced Placement courses do you plan to complete by your graduation date?
6. What do you enjoy doing most in your spare time?
7. What is your racial, ethnic, or cultural background?
8. What is the racial, ethnic, or cultural background of your parents?
9. In what year of school were you first initiated into the gifted program?
10. Were your parents or any other sibling part of a gifted program during their schooling?
11. Do you consider yourself to be extroversive or introversive and why?
12. What type of working environment do you prefer and why?

13. Do you consider yourself knowledgeable about your race or ethnicity relative to the greater society? Explain.

14. In what ways did the gifted program help you:
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Personally
Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you again for your participation with this study. I will be asking a series of questions specifically designed to focus on your recollections, perspectives, and attitudes at each level of your schooling from elementary, middle, and high school. Please frame your responses to each of the questions based on your memories and experiences at each particular level. All of the information you disclose will be kept confidential. If at any point you are uncomfortable with the question, are distressed, or wish to terminate your involvement in this study, simply let me know. Are there any questions...

We will begin with your elementary school years.

1. Describe your earliest recollection of your experiences in the gifted program
   - Social
   - Academic
   - Personal
2. What early indications did you display that were signs to your participation in the gifted program?
3. What do you recall your family’s reaction was to your admittance to the gifted program?
4. Throughout elementary school, what did you enjoy most about the gifted program?
5. Throughout elementary school, what did you enjoy least about the gifted program?
6. Throughout elementary school, how many other students of color participated in the gifted program with you?
   - What was your relationship with that student(s)
7. What role, if any, did race play in your participation in the gifted program at the elementary level?
   - Do you recall noticing race or ethnicity as a factor at this age
8. Describe your circle of friends at the elementary level
   - Were any of them gifted
   - Were any of them of color
   - What influences did they have on your attitude and/or perspectives
9. Describe your family’s conversations and/or expectations regarding your participation in the gifted program at the elementary level
10. How did your experience with the gifted program shape your perspective on education going into middle school?

11. What support systems were instrumental to your participation in the gifted program?
   - Internal (motivation, competitiveness, perfectionism)
   - External (family, teachers, neighbors, friends)

_We will now move forward into your middle school years. Please answer the next set of questions based on your memory and experiences from your middle school years only._

12. Describe your recollection of experiences as a gifted student in middle school
   - Social
   - Academic
   - Personal

13. What did you enjoy most about being part of the middle school gifted program?
14. What did you enjoy least about being part of the middle school gifted program?
15. What role, if any, did race play in your participation in the middle school gifted program?
   - Do you recall a change in perspective or attitude from elementary school to middle school because of your racial or ethnic background
   - Did you feel any additional pressure or attention because of your racial or ethnic background

16. Describe your circle of friends at the middle school level
   - Where any of them gifted
   - Were any of them of color
   - What influences did they have on your attitude and/or perspectives

17. How did your family’s expectations to your participation in the gifted program change, if at all, once you reached the middle school?
18. What support systems were instrumental to your participation in the middle school gifted program?
   - Did these systems change from elementary to middle school
     i. Internal (motivation, competitiveness, perfectionism)
     ii. External (family, teachers, neighbors, friends)

19. How did your experience with the gifted program shape your perspective on education going into high school?

_We will now move forward into your high school years. Please answer the next set of questions based on your memory and experiences from your high school years only._

20. Describe your recollection of experiences as a gifted student in high school
• Social
• Academic
• Personal
21. What did you enjoy most about being part of the high school gifted program?
22. What did you enjoy least about being part of the high school gifted program?
23. What role, if any, did race play in your participation in the high school gifted program?
   • Do you recall a change in perspective or attitude from middle school to high school because of your racial or ethnic background
   • Did you feel any additional pressure or attention because of your racial or ethnic background
24. Describe your circle of friends at the high school level
   • Where any of them gifted
   • Were any of them of color
   • What influences did they have on your attitude and/or perspectives
25. How did your family’s expectations to your participation in the gifted program change, if at all, once you reached the high school?
26. What support systems were instrumental to your participation in the middle school gifted program?
   • Did these systems change from middle to high school
     i. Internal (motivation, competitiveness, perfectionism)
     ii. External (family, teachers, neighbors, friends)
27. How did your experience with the gifted program shape your perspective on education, race, and giftedness?
28. What suggestions do you have for other students of color participating in gifted programs?
29. What suggestions do you have for school systems as they work with students of color in gifted programs?
30. How significant a role has race or ethnicity played in your perspective and attitude toward giftedness and education?
Appendix C

STUDENT/PARENT CONSENT FORM

THE IMPACT OF RACE AND EDUCATION ON GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR: A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR

Rouel C. Belleza, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University: School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study designed to explore attitudes and perceptions of race, education, and giftedness. You were selected as a possible participant because of your giftedness participation in the [ ] program (gifted program) and ethnic/racial identity. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Rouel C. Belleza, Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the influences and impact of race, education, and giftedness among gifted high school students of color. Recollections, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions gifted students of color have regarding education will require a detailed interview approach, which can be accomplished through a case study design. This study will examine and investigate the memories, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of gifted high school students of color from each level of their respective schooling experiences (elementary, middle, and high).

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, your participation will require one or two confidential interviews which should last a total of approximately one to two hours. The interviews will seek your thoughts and perceptions of giftedness and education.
With your consent, your responses throughout the interview will be recorded (video and audio) for accuracy and you will be given an opportunity to review your responses. The recording process is necessary to verify all statements and to allow the researcher to review and transcribe all interviews.

With your consent, the researcher will access your son/daughter’s cumulative file to review assessment and test scores relative to the gifted program, state-wide testing, and classroom achievement. The researcher will only view these files at the high school and will not take them from the school property or copy them at any point.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The risks involved in this study are no more than what any participant would encounter during a normal day. If chosen for an individual interview, you will not miss any class time as all interviews will be conducted outside of school hours. This can be accomplished through the coordination between you and the researcher.

The benefits of this study include the opportunity for your perspective to be heard regarding your thoughts about giftedness, race, and education in a North Georgia School District. This project has the potential to help assist the program in addressing any specific needs gifted students of color may have, now and in the future.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. The names of all students involved in the study will not be used. Fake names (pseudonyms) will be used in the summary of findings to protect the privacy of the students involved. No one will have access to the videos, transcripts, researcher notes, or drafts apart from the researcher and his dissertation Chairperson. Digital video and recordings are used primarily to validate the accuracy of what was said during the interview. All information will be secured in a vault for safekeeping under the supervision of the researcher. All data will be destroyed after three years. Upon completion of this study, the researcher will make available the results of this study if requested.
Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with the Cherokee County School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

Provided below are the names of the committee members overseeing this project:

Dr. Mark A. Angle, Committee Chair maangle2@liberty.edu
Assistant Professor, Liberty University

Dr. Jose A. Puga, Committee Member japuga@liberty.edu
Assistant Professor, Liberty University

Dr. Ashley Estapa, Committee Member
Teacher, Cherokee County School District

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information and consent to the following (please check):

- [ ] I consent to the interview process as outlined above
- [ ] I consent to the video recording of my child during the interview process
- [ ] I consent to the audio recording of my child during the interview process
- [ ] I consent to allowing the researcher to view the cumulative school records of my child for the purposes of this study
I understand that all data will be secured at all times by the researcher. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. A self-addressed stamped envelope is provided for the return of this consent form.

Student Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______

Signature of parent or guardian: _______________________ Date: ______

(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ______

THE IMPACT OF RACE AND EDUCATION ON GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR: A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS OF COLOR

Child/Minor Assent Form

I, ___________________________, understand that my parents have given me permission to participate in a study about my perspectives on race, giftedness, and education. I am participating because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at any time if I so desire. The researcher is Rouel C. Belleza who is currently a doctoral candidate with Liberty University.

_________________________________ _______________________
Student Signature Date

_________________________________ _______________________
Investigator’s Signature Date
Appendix D

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE SYSTEM

Name: Ruel C. Belleza

Employee: Yes √ No ☐ If NO, list employer: ________________________________

College/University Supervising Activities: Liberty University

Degree in Progress (Level/Area): Doctorate in Education

Locations for Data Collection: ☐ High School

Date of Request: May 18, 2011 Requested Date(s) for Data Collection: May 2011-September 2011

Professor’s Name: Dr. Mark A. Angle Phone #: Email: (304) 887-7569 / maangle2@liberty.edu

Include with this request:

➢ A letter from your supervising professor on college or university letterhead indicating support for your research and his/her confirmation of data collection validity.

➢ A brief summary of the issues being researched and the type of data collection you are requesting to conduct. (Page 2 of this form).

➢ Method of data collection assessment (Page 2 of this form); Number of respondents, etc.

➢ Copy of interview questions, surveys, etc. that will be used. If student data is used, a notarized “Release of Educational Records for Research Purposes Confidentiality Statement” will be required.

1. Ruel C. Belleza do hereby submit to not hold the ________________________ liable for any findings, or commentary involved in this research. I understand that without the express written permission of the ________________________ Board of Education, I am not authorized to conduct any data collection involving system employees or students and/or any other information that is protected by Federal or State Law. Furthermore, a copy of all findings and data collection instruments will be made available to the ________________________ Board of Education. All research is to be sent to the Office of Assessment upon completion of the project.

Signature ________________________ Date 5/20/11

Signature of Principal (if applicable) ________________________ Date 5/21/11

Send completed form to: Dr. ________________________, Director, Office of Assessment, ESA.

[Signature]

Staff Use Only

Permission given ☐ Permission denied ☐

Office of Assessment

Conditions of Permission: ________________________

Denied due to: ________________________

Revised 01/2009
Appendix E

IRB Approval 1116.071411: The Impact of Race and Education on Gifted Students of Color: A Case Study of High School Gifted Students of Color

IRB, IRB

Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2011 2:20 PM
To: Belleso, Rouel
Cc: Angle, Mark At IRB; IRB; Garzon, Fernando
Attachments: Annual Review Form.doc (34 KB); Change in Protocol.doc (32 KB)

Good Afternoon Rouel,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. Attached you will find the forms for those cases.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project. We will be glad to send you a written memo from the Liberty IRB, as needed, upon request.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor
Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

156