EXPERIENCES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS USING INCLUSION MODELS TO SERVE GIFTED STUDENTS

by

Mandy Jordan Sears

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Gifted education has undergone recent changes because of the decrease in funding set aside for gifted students in the public school system. The use of inclusion to provide gifted education within the general education classroom is one option that is more cost-effective than the traditional resource, or pullout, programs that have been used in the state of Georgia. This phenomenological study investigated the perceived experiences of general elementary educators who were new to teaching gifted students and were required to use an inclusion model in the general education classroom. Participants included 13 teachers from 4 school districts in Northern Georgia. The number of teachers interviewed was determined once data saturation had been reached. Through interviews, focus groups and journaling the researcher explored the perceived experiences and analyzed data on the use of inclusion with gifted students. The central research question was: What are the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers during the first three years of using inclusion to instruct gifted students? Sub-questions included (a) How do the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers using an inclusion model with gifted students affect teacher self-efficacy? (b) What training and support have been received by general education teachers who are new to teaching gifted students? (c) What do general education classroom teachers perceive to be strengths and challenges of using inclusion models of instruction with gifted students? The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis process was used in analyzing the data and finding themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). The themes that emerged were (a) recognizing gifted students, (b) growing as an educator, (c) planning with gifted students in mind, (d) and needing time and resources.

Keywords: Elementary, gifted, inclusion, phenomenology, self-efficacy, transformative, learning.
Dedication

Above all, I dedicate this study to God. He led and I followed. God made this dream possible. I learned much more than teachers’ experiences with gifted inclusion. I grew closer to Him, learned more about faith and myself, and truly realized what is important in this life. It is my deepest desire that this work is pleasing to Him.

I also dedicate this work to my family. This study is a reflection of the love and support you gave me throughout the journey. I worked for my husband and our two children. In a world where the easy route is more appealing, I hope our children see this effort as proof that hard work is valuable, big goals are attainable, and success is sweet.
Acknowledgements

My amazing husband, Ryan, was my biggest supporter through this journey with a constant belief in my ability to finish. He made this dream his dream, too. Thank you for waking me up when I fell asleep on my computer and for the much needed “Daddy Weekends.” I wish all wives could be so fortunate to have someone take part ownership in their dreams. I thank Keeley, my daughter, for always reminding me, “You can do it, Mama.” My son, Luke, was born during my coursework and his hugs took all of the stress away. I gave my all in balancing work and the crazy life we lived during this time, but most of all I worked my hardest to make these three people proud. Enjoy the new puppy, kids!

I also want to thank my parents, in-laws, sisters, brothers-in-law, sister-in-law, nieces, and nephews. Without your love for my family I would not have been able to take on such a task. Thanks, Dad, for reminding me, “Just do it,” and for believing that I could do it!

I would like to also thank Dr. Fred Milacci for opening my eyes to qualitative research and Dr. James Swezey for giving me the confidence and foundation to begin my research. Thank you, Dr. Suzy Besson-Martilotta for helping me in every mile of the marathon. You never let me give up and “Kansas” is a beautiful place! Dr. Gina Thomason, your kind words meant more to me than you may know. A very special thank you goes to Dr. James Zabloski, my committee chair, for inspiring me. I accomplished so much more than I could imagine because of your guidance and encouragement. Thank you for deciding to take the journey!

This study would not have been a success without the wonderful participants. Thank you for your time, your honesty, and for your want to be heard. Your love for gifted students and gifted education was heartwarming. I became a better teacher by having the unique opportunity to sit with you and listen to the great work you achieve daily.
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List of Abbreviations

CLEAR Curriculum Model: Continual Formative Assessment, Clear Learning Goals, Data-Drive Learning Experiences, Authentic Products, Rich Curriculum

Early Intervention Program (EIP)

English Language Learner (ELL)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Individualized Educational Program (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Instructional Support Team (IST)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Need for Cognition (NFG)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Project CLUE: Clustering Learners Unlocks Equity

Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

School Enrichment Model (SEM)

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter provides an introduction of the study concerning educators using newly implemented gifted inclusion. Lived experiences of teachers using inclusion for three years or less were the focus of this phenomenological study. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journaling were the methods of data collection. The subsections within this chapter include the background for the study, situation-to-self explanations, problem and purpose statements, significance of this study, research questions, research plan, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

Background

Models of delivering gifted education are changing as deficiencies in government funding force local school systems to seek alternative models, including inclusion, in which to deliver gifted instruction (Brulles, Peters, & Saunders, 2012). Implementation of gifted inclusion models requires teachers to obtain new certification and implement inclusion strategies of gifted instruction in the general education classroom. General education, also referred to as regular education, is the education a child would receive without the need of special services (Lilly, 1988). Gifted inclusion strategies include cluster grouping, ability grouping, differentiation, and acceleration, implemented primarily by the general education classroom teacher. In terms of student experiences, research finds they have positive results in an inclusion classroom; however, there is a gap in the research describing the experiences, opinions, and self-perceived levels of preparedness among general education classroom teachers new to teaching gifted students (Brulles et al., 2012; Missett, Brunner, Callahan, Moon, & Azano, 2014; Vogl & Preckel, 2014).

In the past, elementary gifted education in the United States (US) has been delivered
through the pullout or resource model, in which students go to a resource room for instruction from a gifted education teacher. However, changes in funding have necessitated finding a less expensive model (Brulles & Winebrenner, 2011). In a resource model, gifted students leave the general education classroom during a certain block of time each day, usually 45 minutes to one hour, or students leave for the majority of one school day each week. Students receive instruction based on a gifted education curriculum from a resource teacher certified to teach gifted students. Students are grouped in resource classes with other gifted students, often with students of varying ages (Azano, Callahan, Missett, & Brunner, 2014).

In contrast to the pullout model is the inclusion model. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) described inclusive and heterogeneous classrooms as one in the same (2015a). Students are placed in a classroom with students of differing abilities under the instruction of the general education classroom teacher (NAGC, 2015a). The teacher is expected to differentiate instruction in order to meet the needs of each student. In Georgia, gifted inclusion often occurs when gifted students are clustered, or grouped together, in the same general education classroom for either one period or the entire school day. Federal funding is obtained with documentation of gifted students being instructed by a gifted certified teacher in a subject area. Clustering students ensures that a school will receive funding.

A variety of methods are used to instruct the clustered students. Inclusion methods of cluster grouping, full-time ability grouping, accelerated content, and the use of differentiated instruction mean that schools are beginning to require classroom teachers to serve gifted students within the general education classroom instead of using the traditional pullout model. Gifted resource teachers are not needed in order to serve gifted students, but schools require general education classroom teachers to obtain certification in gifted education in order to serve the
gifted. Students remain in a general education classroom for the entire school day. Cluster grouping and full-time ability grouping have been used to keep gifted students together in the same classrooms while including other high-achieving non-gifted students (Brulles et al., 2012; Missett et al., 2014; Vogl & Preckel, 2014). Acceleration, or compacting of general education classroom standards and curriculum, is another popular option for inclusion (Missett et al., 2014). Differentiation practices that cater to all students’ needs are commonplace, as well (VanTassel-Baska, 2010).

Prior to the inclusion movement of the 1990s, gifted resource models were prevalent and the nation’s competitiveness with worldwide innovativeness provided a motivation for gifted students to be separately educated in critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity (Feldhusen, 2001). Gifted-certified resource teachers were responsible for making sure gifted student needs were being addressed and that gifted education was taught. Currently, that responsibility is increasingly dispersed as many teachers are adding gifted certification through professional learning courses. General education classroom teachers are inheriting the responsibility of teaching the gifted and are not always required to have gifted certification, previous gifted education courses, or any prior experiences teaching gifted students.

The focus of this study was to explore teacher experiences due to implementing gifted inclusion models, because more research was needed to understand the need for professional development in gifted education (Seay, 2011). Expansion of research to other settings using inclusion models of instruction was suggested (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd., 2014). In-depth studies were needed to describe the training and support received by teachers of gifted students (Morris, 2013). More research was needed in the areas of understanding how inclusion models are used in different settings and in the examination of the support that teachers are receiving.
when required to teach gifted students (McLeskey et al., 2014; Morris, 2013; Seay, 2011). The perspectives of teachers teaching gifted students with inclusion models are largely unheard and necessary to understand the experiences of teachers in the trenches of a shifting gifted education field. Implications of knowing teachers’ experiences in the first three years of using inclusion could impact education of gifted students, professional support of gifted educators, implementation of inclusion models, and the decisions made concerning gifted education by administrations, school boards, and education policy makers (Gentry & Owen, 1999; McLeskey et al., 2014; Pierce et al., 2011).

Experiencing the world and wanting to know about it provides a foundation and a goal behind researching (van Manen, 1990). Focusing on the common lived experiences of teachers in this study required a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology provides opportunities in exploring the experiences of human beings. A phenomenological approach to research was purposefully chosen to provide revelations within pedagogy based on the lived experiences of participants (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutics, “the art and science of interpretation,” was used to interpret the common themes and findings of the research (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012, p. 1). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and their meaning. Including interviewees in the interpretation of meanings and finding of themes in research through review will aid in developing a clear picture of the actual experiences of the participants (Friesen et al., 2012).

**Situation to Self**

My experiences with implementing gifted inclusion have been my primary motivators in conducting this research. I am currently a fourth grade teacher serving gifted students with an inclusion model. I have also been a gifted resource teacher in an elementary school. Due to my
years of experience as a pull-out teacher of gifted students, my experience is different from most general education classroom teachers now being required to teach gifted students through inclusion. I know that backgrounds in experience and professional development differ, as well as administrative support across schools. Despite differences, these teachers new to gifted education through inclusion share a lived experience worthy of being explored.

My biases come from my personal experience of not having sufficient time to provide the extent of services in inclusion that I was able to deliver through a resource model. I have also experienced a lack of support from one administration and the opposite from another. I felt professionally isolated in one situation and supported in another. I also realize that my personal situations differ from others, mostly because I have an extensive background in teaching gifted students, but I am interested in the common experiences of others who are new to teaching the gifted with this model of inclusion. A constructivist paradigm shaped my interpretation of the research (Creswell, 2013). I know of the research backing the inclusion push, but I sought to hear the voices of teachers new to teaching gifted learners with inclusion models, learn common themes that emerged, and explore the support systems of these teachers in the implementation of the inclusion model, including their motivations and expectations in gifted education. Their self-efficacy and how it was affected by what they have learned and were implementing provided much needed insight to the inclusion movement in gifted education.

**Problem Statement**

With the growing interest and implementation of inclusion models, general education teachers are required to teach gifted students in their classrooms. The problem is that while research gives some elementary school teachers a voice, general education teachers using inclusion with gifted students are seldom heard. Current research is deficient in describing
general education teacher experiences and their use of gifted inclusion. Few qualitative studies have focused upon gifted teachers’ experiences using any of the models of gifted instruction and the existing studies are focused on resource teachers or have only one teacher as a participant (Azano et al., 2014; Coleman, 2014a, 2014b). More research was needed to explore the experiences of groups of teachers that are now required to teach gifted students with an inclusion model (Coleman, 2014b). An insider perspective is needed to show what is happening in inclusion classrooms (Prior, 2011). Misconceptions and lack of experience lead to inadequacies in teaching and inaccurate perceptions of gifted learners and their needs (Newman, Gregg, & Dantzler, 2009; Troxclair, 2013). Further research was needed to find teacher voice and a clear picture of gifted education within the general education classroom.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers who are new to teaching gifted students and using gifted inclusion models of instruction. The experiences of using inclusion models were generally defined as methods used in gifted instruction to serve gifted students within the general education classroom. The theories guiding this study are Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy and its application to teacher self-efficacy in classroom experiences and Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory and its use by teachers to alter attitudes, pedagogy, and teacher-student relationships.

**Significance of Study**

The trend in gifted education is to serve students within the general education classroom and decrease the use of traditional resource models of instruction (Brulles et al., 2012; Brulles & Winebrenner, 2011). Research has shown positive outcomes academically for the use of
inclusion (Brulles et al., 2012; Pierce et al., 2011; Kanevsky, 2011). Further research is lacking with teacher experiences using inclusion with gifted students when teachers are new to teaching gifted students.

The findings of this study contribute to the body of literature on gifted education. Studies in gifted education are largely quantitative (Dai, Swanson, & Cheng, 2011). Quantitative studies show positive academic results for the use of inclusion, but the fewer qualitative studies reveal the need for more research concerning classroom experiences. This study provides insight from experiences of teachers and helps to form a clearer picture of what inclusion entails.

The study contributed to the connection between Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy within gifted education. This study also explored the connection between Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory and teacher experiences within gifted education. Professional support needs surfaced in this study. This study impacts teachers, administrators, and school officials by providing insight into classroom teachers’ experiences.

With the switch from resource to inclusion, teachers now responsible for providing gifted services may find themselves in new territory and having to adjust teaching practices. Administrative decisions on how to implement inclusion, which may require teachers to obtain gifted certification, and the support that an administration may give its employees could be impacted by the findings of this research. The same could be true with school officials and departments of education that are ultimately in charge of the decisions behind the implementation and success of inclusion.

Advocacy for gifted students and gifted education may also be impacted by this study. With the inclusion movement, the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) of 2001 (2002), and loss of funding, gifted students are a more neglected population of students. Needs of gifted students
are of equal value to needs of at-risk, special education, minority, and English Language Learner (ELL) student populations. Ability should not determine the quality of education received (Haney, 2013). Gifted education provides necessary services to meet gifted student needs and research of gifted instruction could contribute greatly to the serving of gifted students.

**Research Questions**

Because the purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of teachers new to teaching gifted students in the general education classroom using inclusion models of instruction, the following questions addressed the experiences of the participants. The questions were designed to help reveal different aspects of the participants’ experiences based on research concerning teacher efficacy, teacher support (including collaboration and professional development), and teacher perceptions of the use of inclusion.

**Central Research Question**

What are the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers during the first three years of using inclusion to instruct gifted students? Few qualitative studies exist in current research that reveal the experiences among general education classroom teachers now responsible for teaching gifted students with inclusion (Dai et al., 2011). Insider perspectives are needed to give a clearer picture of classroom experiences, practices, and support (Coleman, 2014a; Prior, 2011).

**Sub-Questions**

1. How do the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers using an inclusion model with gifted students affect teacher self-efficacy?

   Bandura (1977) determined that self-efficacy influences the successes that people have with goals they wish to obtain. The theory has been significant with teachers and classroom
practices showing that teacher self-efficacy has an impact on student learning and achievement (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Guo, Connor, Yang, Roehrig, & Morrison, 2012; Swan, Wolf, & Cano, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Research has also shown that teachers with higher self-efficacy are more willing to use strategies that specifically benefit gifted students (Dixon et al., 2014; Rambo & McCoach, 2012; Siegel, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). Teachers new to teaching gifted students in an inclusion setting have a direct influence in the success of implementation, as well as success in student learning, based on their self-efficacy. Teacher efficacy in the first three years of teaching changes dramatically, deflating after the first year, but increasing later (Swan et al., 2011). The first three years of teaching gifted students with inclusion models may give insight into teacher efficacy and teacher needs in order to promote efficacy.

2. What training and support have been received by general education teachers who are new to teaching gifted students?

Further research is needed in understanding the effects of preservice and in-service training in gifted education (Hoong, Greene, & Hartzell, 2011; Seay, 2011). Educators in gifted education have reported needing more collaborative support and training (Azano et al., 2014; S. M. Wood, 2012). Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy stressed the importance of relatable models and that these models encourage higher efficacy. Quality professional development and collaboration with peers has proven to benefit teacher efficacy (Guo et al., 2012; Mintzes, Marcum, Messerschmidt-Yates, & Mark, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

3. What do general education classroom teachers perceive to be strengths and challenges of using inclusion models of instruction with gifted students?

Perceptions of teachers new to teaching gifted students have led to misconceptions of the
characteristics and needs of gifted students, as well as to the misidentification of gifted students (Carman, 2011; Seay, 2011; Troxclair, 2013). Also, little is known of the perceptions teachers have about inclusion models being used with gifted education. Perceptions of teachers using inclusion to serve special needs students are represented in research (McLeskey et al., 2014, Robbins, 2014). In one sample, rural teachers using mostly resource models of gifted instruction provided insight into their experiences within gifted education and revealed perceptions of effectiveness of gifted programs (Azano et al., 2014). Perceptions of those new to teaching gifted students with inclusion models bring valuable insight into the field of gifted education.

**Research Plan**

A qualitative research approach provided a better understanding of the experiences of teachers new to implementing inclusion models of instruction of elementary gifted students. Statistics may show correlations, but experiences of teachers show a clearer picture of what is happening in the classroom and the support system teachers have or need. A hermeneutic approach was used to interpret the experiences of the teachers. According to Creswell (2013), hermeneutical phenomenology requires the researcher to interpret lived experiences of serious interest and find meaning of the experiences.

The study utilized participants who taught in public elementary schools in Northern Georgia. The location was chosen because of the representation of rural, urban, and suburban schools in the area. The participants were chosen based on the criteria that they were practicing teachers, primarily responsible for teaching gifted students using an inclusion model, and new to using an inclusion model of gifted instruction within the general education classroom. Being *new to teaching gifted students* is defined as a teacher having less than three years’ experience teaching gifted students in the general education classroom using any inclusion model of
instruction, as well as having no experience teaching gifted students within a resource model. Participants may have had experience teaching gifted students in the general education classroom, but they must not have been the sole provider of services for the gifted as is the case with the new inclusion models in gifted education. Data collection was conducted through individual face-to-face interviews, focus group discussion, open-ended questionnaires, and journals. After the collection of data, analysis used Smith, Flowers, and Larkin’s (2012) hermeneutic method of analysis, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of this study were found with the selection of participants. In elementary schools the majority of teachers are female (T. D. Wood, 2012). Most of the participants in this study were female because only participants currently teaching in elementary schools were studied and the majority of elementary teachers are female. Participants had to be general education classroom teachers meaning that they taught a range of students in a particular grade. General education classroom teachers in the state of Georgia are expected to abide by the Georgia Standards of Excellence curriculum. These general education classroom teachers also must have been using an inclusion model of instruction, including differentiation, acceleration, and/or grouping strategies to serve gifted students. These teachers must have a gifted endorsement on their Georgia teaching certificate and be responsible for providing gifted students their gifted services for at least one segment each day. These delimitations are necessary to determine the experiences of general education elementary teachers using inclusion models to teach gifted students within three years of their training.

Limitations of the study concern location and interview responses. The geographical location was limited within a certain distance across Northern Georgia. Locations ranged in
socioeconomics. They included suburban and rural areas. Another limitation was with the participants’ responses to interview questions. Although teachers were interviewed in a comfortable environment, participants may have felt they had to project themselves favorably. Interview questions could have been answered dishonestly if a teacher wished to appear to be a more competent teacher of gifted students. Also, teachers may have had an inaccurate opinion of their teaching abilities and not represented their potential accurately.

**Summary**

Chapter One has provided an overview of this study and research ensuring the need for the study. The literature pertaining to this study and guiding the study has been incorporated into the chapter to make clear the need for researching experiences of teachers using inclusion to teach gifted students. The literature will be explored in depth in Chapter Two. Research questions, methods, and analysis have been mentioned, but will be further detailed in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the most current and relevant literature on gifted education. This study of the literature focused upon theory and related literature to the common experiences of teachers implementing gifted inclusion models. The study was grounded in Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy and its application to teacher self-efficacy. The other theory in the framework for this study was Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory and how teachers’ experiences lead them through transformation. The related literature explored this theoretical framework, the history of gifted education, definitions of giftedness, identification, theories, and school concept of giftedness. This literature review also included elementary models of instruction in gifted education, inclusion movement and models, gifted student perspectives, teacher research, and teacher training and support. Though literature pertaining to gifted education is plentiful, qualitative literature revealing the experiences of newly certified gifted educators using inclusion models within the general education classroom is limited.

Theoretical Framework

The proposed study is grounded in both Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy and Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory. The theory of self-efficacy is rooted in Bandura’s (2001) Social Cognitive Theory and is largely applied to the self-efficacy of teachers (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Guo, Connor, Yang, Roehrig, & Morrison, 2012; Swan, Wolf, & Cano, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Teacher self-efficacy could determine how successful and effective a teacher is within the classroom, and has significance in the general education classroom where teachers are now finding themselves teaching gifted
students. Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning is applied to adult learning and how experiences transform meaning and how people view the world. Teachers having gifted students in the general education classroom are being asked to learn new strategies and curriculum to meet the needs of the gifted students. Changes in perspectives may occur through the new experiences with gifted students and their education.

**Theory of Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1977) is given most credit for the theory of self-efficacy. The meaning of self-efficacy is the perception people possess of their ability to achieve a certain outcome. People with higher levels of self-efficacy perceive complex tasks as challenges that could be overcome with persistence and goals, while people with lower self-efficacy may avoid complex tasks because they do not perceive being successful (Mintzes, Marcum, Messerschmidt-Yates, & Mark, 2012). Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy depends on performance accomplishments that encourage people through their mastery, vicarious experience and seeing others modeling successful performances, verbal persuasion with suggestions that help people believe in accomplishments, and emotional arousal and coping with stressful situations.

**Encouraging teacher self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy of teachers pertains to the impact that teachers perceive they will have upon student achievement (Guo et al., 2012). The application of self-efficacy theory to teaching occurred in the 1970s with the RAND studies that focused on the effect of teachers’ self-efficacy upon the reading instruction and academic success of minority students showing the influence of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). The effect upon literacy was studied again more recently and different teacher self-efficacy beliefs were brought to light with race, gender, and number of years teaching having little effect upon self-efficacy. The study found that quality training, more abundant resources, and collaborations
with colleagues positively influencing teachers’ self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Similar factors affecting teacher self-efficacy were found in another more recent study with results indicating self-efficacy was directly related to higher student literacy achievement (Guo et al., 2012). The self-efficacy of teachers is an important component of successful teaching and the research supporting the encouragement of teacher self-efficacy is widespread.

Elementary teachers have shown higher self-efficacy than middle school teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Teachers who have higher self-efficacy provide more evaluative feedback, show more sensitivity to student needs, and have more student success in achievement (Guo et al., 2012). Teacher self-efficacy should be encouraged within gifted education, especially with more teachers being required to teach gifted students in the general education classroom. Quality professional development or other types of in-service training offer teachers necessary strategies and information, relatable role models, and collaboration opportunities that increase self-efficacy (Dixon et al., 2014). Bandura (1977) suggested that people are more confident when they have role models with which they can identify and relate. Collaborating with peers in professional learning communities regularly with professional development has increased self-efficacy and shown teachers positive impacts on students (Mintzes et al., 2012). Studies have revealed that teachers who collaborate with colleagues have higher self-efficacy (Guo et al., 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

**Teacher self-efficacy and gifted instruction.** Teachers who are responsible for teaching gifted students need to have high self-efficacy in order to carry out learning strategies and to promote student achievement. Current research suggests that teachers having higher levels of self-efficacy are more prone to identification of gifted and talented students and employ more strategies that benefit gifted students, such as differentiation and acceleration (Dixon et al., 2014;
Rambo & McCoach, 2012; Siegel, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). Teachers new to teaching gifted students must have higher self-efficacy in order to use newly learned strategies and curriculum additions effectively with gifted students. In a study of teacher self-efficacy from student teaching through the first three years of teaching, teachers’ self-efficacy levels dropped after the first year significantly indicating an inflated view of efficacy prior to teaching (Swan et al., 2011). Bandura (1977) also explained in his theory that efficacy is most affected in early learning. Within the first few years of implementing gifted instruction with an inclusion model in the general education classroom, teachers are using new training similar to training acquired in student teaching. Self-efficacy could factor into success of both teachers and students of a gifted inclusion classroom.

**Theory of Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning occurs when a person experiences something new or different that eventually, through a series of phases, changes his or her perspective. Mezirow (2009), a scholar in adult education, started to develop his theory in 1978 during a grounded theory study of women returning to higher education. Transformative learning has roots in constructivism, humanism, and critical social theory (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Constructivism says that people find meaning through their experiences and develop perceptions, and also includes how people view the world around them. Humanism focuses on the freedom and autonomy of people. Critical social theory explains how people critique and change society. The three components of transformative learning theory are apparent in the phases that people encounter during transformative learning. First, people experience and question the meaning of what they have experienced. Then, they choose to make a change in their thinking and critically reflect and move toward change. In the end, people form a new perspective, or create a new meaning and
incorporate it into their lives (Mezirow, 2009).

**Frames of reference.** Frames of reference are defined as “structures of culture and language through which we construe meaning by attributing coherence and significance to our experiences” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92). They are the results of the ways an experience is interpreted. Mezirow (2000) believed that people had two frames of reference: Habits of Mind and point of view. Habits of Mind are sets of assumptions that help to uncover meaning. They can be sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, psychological, or aesthetic (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Habits of Mind are expressed as points of view, which “comprises clusters of meaning schemes – sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments – that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 83). These meanings occur outside of awareness. Self-awareness and values are closely associated with frames of reference, further cementing them. Frames of reference are difficult to change, but the experiences that cause their disruption are necessary in the beginning of transformative learning.

**Phases of learning.** Taylor and Cranton (2012) explained the 10 phases that people travel through during transformative learning. First, a person experiences a disorienting dilemma that contradicts a meaning or beliefs. Then, self-examination occurs associated with fear, guilt, shame, or anger. The third phase is a critical assessment of previous assumptions followed by the recognition that one should share his or her discontent with others. Next, the exploration of options of some form of action and the planning of the course of action will happen. Then, in the seventh phase, a person will seek knowledge and skills in order to implement plans. A person will try new roles and eventually build confidence in the new roles. In the final phase, a person will reintegrate the new perspective into one’s life. Not every person experiences phases in the
same way or at the same pace, but they are present in the transformative learning process. Arguably, the most important phase involves reflection and being able to critically think about the change in perspective. Without reflection transformation is less significant or is absent completely (Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

**Reflective discourse.** Transformative learning does not happen with every experience because critical reflection is a necessary component. Reflective discourse is the critical assessment of assumption, or the finding of one’s voice (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). This part of transformative learning requires what Goleman (2000) referred to as emotional intelligence, which is the awareness, empathy, and control that one possesses with emotional maturity. To completely participate in discourse participants must have accurate information, openness to other points of view, empathy, an ability to be objective in arguments, to reflect upon ideas and assumptions critically, to practice various roles of discourse, and to be willing to accept best judgments (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Some experiences do not trigger learning or a shift in thinking. People do not always recognize a learning opportunity or when a trigger might occur. If a person is unwilling to reflect and accept other points of view, one will not experience a transformation in thinking.

**Teacher transformation.** Much research has been completed using Mezirow’s theory (1978) in the field of adult education. The goal of this study was to use his theory to understand the experiences of teachers in an inclusive classroom and to see if those teachers change their thinking as a result of implementing gifted inclusion. Other teachers have had transformative learning opportunities when they began their first year of teaching (Cuddapah, 2005). New teachers experienced phenomena that may not have matched up with what they learned in preservice training, eventually changing their perspective on curriculum, strategies, or classroom
management. Teachers had different triggers, or experiences, that began the process of learning, and they learned at different paces through Mezirow’s theory (Cuddapah, 2005).

In another study, teachers described their experiences teaching English language learners (ELLs) with Mezirow’s theory (Langley-Weber, 2012). Disorienting dilemmas happened when teachers felt vulnerable and were able to relate more to their students. Discourse led teachers to extend time to ELLs and increased their efforts to work with parents and co-teachers. Teacher empowerment resulted in the transformations the teachers experienced with ELLs in their classrooms and led teachers to believe that they could transfer that empowerment to their students. ELLs and gifted students are similar in that they receive special instruction because of either their identification of English being a second language or their high ability (Castellano & Frazier, 2011). ELLs and gifted students are both also taught in resource and/or inclusive models. The inclusion movement has placed more emphasis on teaching both of the groups within the general education classrooms and has been beneficial to those students identified as both ELL and gifted (Castellano & Frazier, 2011). Teachers of gifted students might have similar experiences that adjust their perspectives and alter their pedagogy and interactions with students.

Related Literature

Since the use of inclusion models in gifted instruction is increasing in popularity (Brulles, Peters, & Saunders, 2012; Brulles & Winebrenner, 2011), research relevant to this subject includes the history of gifted education, identification of giftedness, theories significant to gifted learners, models of gifted instruction, studies of current types of inclusion being used, perceptions and experiences of teachers in gifted education, and the professional support of educators of gifted students. A majority of the research is quantitative (Dai, Swanson, & Cheng,
Researchers have studied the effects of inclusion models upon academic achievement and surveyed participants to find perceptions from a statistical standpoint (Brulles et al., 2012; Brulles, Saunders, & Cohn, 2010; Kanevsky, 2011). Important quantitative findings are included in this review, but the focus of this literature review targets qualitative studies in hopes of developing a clearer picture of the current experiences within the field of gifted education.

**History of Gifted Education**

Gifts and talents have long been recognized, celebrated, or ignored throughout history. Gifted individuals stood out in the crowd and either were great successes or social outcasts. Plato’s specialized school for those with abnormal and high intellectual ability is arguably the first school focused on meeting the needs of gifted students (Tannenbaum, 2000). Plato realized that educating the gifted would prove beneficial in the Athenian democracy by encouraging them to become future leaders. During the Renaissance, Europeans focused upon domains of excellence that later remained in modern Western society (DeHaan & Havighurst, 1957). The domains that remained were intellectual ability, creative thinking, scientific ability, social leadership, mechanical skills, and talents. These domains eventually resurfaced in the United States in the 1900s.

**The first study.** Galton is often given credit for being the first to scientifically research high intellectual ability and achievement with his 1869 *Hereditary Genius* (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). In his research he was able to bring forth the idea that giftedness was actually hereditary. Galton, influenced by his cousin, Charles Darwin, theorized that more strategic matches should be made in marriages to encourage giftedness to be passed down through generations. “Galton made the observation that we lost a unique possibility of inherited ability during the Middle Ages when gifted males were recruited into the clergy, thus losing valuable contributions from
potential children of these brilliant men” (VanTassel-Baska, 2010, p. 19).

The first measure. In the twentieth century, Binet developed a measure of intelligence. His efforts were geared toward identifying special needs of students. The test compared the intelligences of people and placed them in a hierarchy. “He stressed the limitations of the scale he developed, and stated that intelligence is not fixed, is not solely genetic and is influenced by the environment” (Arnold, Riches, & Stancliffe, 2011). The test was used for much more than the simple measure that Binet intended, once it was implemented in the United States. In 1910, Henry H. Goddard classified intellectual ability with the IQ test and labeled people as morons, imbeciles, and idiots according to IQ measures (Arnold et al., 2011). On the opposite end, IQ testing became the primary component of giftedness when used to measure extremely high scores. Although Binet did not intend these uses, the intelligence test he created became the primary method in identifying gifted students and comparing the intelligence of people.

Historical research on gifted education in the United States. Research in the United States in gifted education began with Lewis M. Terman’s publications in 1916 and 1925 on intelligence tests and the study of a child genius (Feldhusen, 2001). Terman’s research found that giftedness did not mean that one possessed freakish abilities that were obtained by accident. His studies normalized giftedness (Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2015). He also found that giftedness revealed itself in childhood and needed to be encouraged and nurtured early through adulthood. Terman’s findings provided the research needed to have special programs in schools for gifted students (Tannenbaum, 2000). Gifted education was highlighted by Hollingworth in 1926 and 1942 as the focus on nature and nurture was at the forefront of research (Feldhusen, 2001). This was the first longitudinal research on program effectiveness (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). The work of Hollingworth identified the needs concerning
educational environment and social and emotional welfare of gifted students (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). Both Terman and Hollingworth pioneered early research and advocacy for the gifted, based on high IQ scores, while later research began to expand upon broader definitions and measures of giftedness (Feldhusen, 2001).

**Beyond IQ.** Many researchers focused on divergent thinking rather than the IQ-driven convergent thinking of those like Terman and Hollingworth. Creativity and divergent thinking were introduced as a dimension of giftedness by psychologist J. P. Guilford in the 1950s. Getzels and Jackson (1958) claimed that highly creative individuals possessed lower IQ, and individuals with higher IQ possessed low amounts of creativity. Getzels and Jackson also initiated creativity measures to identify talent that was allegedly overlooked in IQ testing (Tannenbaum, 2000). Paul Torrance (2011) created a measurement, the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), for divergent thinking and what he referred to as creative potential (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). The TTCT is still a commonly used assessment in gifted identification and scores have been shown to be more predictive of creative accomplishments later in life than can IQ scores of children (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). Convergent or divergent thinking, otherwise known as intelligence or creativity, remained separately studied concepts of giftedness.

Another shift in focus on gifted research happened with the introduction of more domain-specific abilities rather than general intelligence. In the 1970s Julian Stanley researched children with advanced abilities in mathematics and found that domain-specific abilities held significance (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). Gifted students were showing varying abilities in mathematical and verbal reasoning, revealing that even students in the top 1% of ability were showing differences that were related to levels of achievement in their adulthood (Olszewski-
Kubilius et al., 2015). Studies also focused on opportunities and their influence upon the success for the gifted. In terms of identifying gifted students, many more options were available than just IQ testing. Definitions were emerging as well, while more diverse students were being accepted as gifted.

**Advocacy for the gifted.** Two peaks of interest and advocacy for the gifted and talented occurred in the United States, first in the 1950s and later in the 1970s (Tannenbaum, 2000). In 1957, the launch of Russian spacecraft, *Sputnik*, led the United States to value giftedness and realize the impact gifted people have on a country through science and technology. Prior to *Sputnik*, the United States felt superior with such inventions as the atomic bomb. Seeing that Russia was able to achieve faster and better than the United States in the space race, funding and support for special classes, programs, and services to meet gifted students’ needs became readily available. *The Great Talent Hunt* occurred making every possible effort at the federal, state, and local levels to identify gifted individuals and educate them properly (Tannenbaum, 2000). This first peak of gifted interest and advocacy gave way to the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

The other peak of support for the gifted came with the Marland Report of 1972. This report “defined giftedness, specified its major types, and called for explicit education efforts to nurture the abilities of gifted youth” (Feldhusen, 2001, p. 165). Although the focus of the report was not solely upon gifted education, six distinct areas (general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability) were defined and the need for specialized programs related to these areas in schools was recognized (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). The Marland Report not only broadened the definition of giftedness, but reported on the state of education at that time. By the
1970s schools had deteriorated due to lack of funding, and supporting the gifted was thought to enhance education in the public schools (Tannenbaum, 2000). In 1973 fewer than 4% of gifted students were receiving services (Tannenbaum, 2000). Supporting the gifted was the solution to generating success in public schools because gifted children could help lower-achieving students and bring academic accomplishments to the schools. Realizing the need for the United States to encourage gifted learners in order to remain competitive worldwide, the federal government provided funding for programs for the gifted, but funding and focus were short-lived.

**Gifted education and politics.** The Reagan administration eliminated much of the funding for schools, just short of putting an end to the Department of Education, in the 1980s with the goal of giving states more responsibility in education (Jolly, 2015). Offices within the Department of Education were cut, the first one being the Office of Gifted and Talented Education (Jolly, 2015). *A Nation at Risk*, a presentation of the state of education in the format of a letter to the American public, caused the government to reverse funding decisions (United States Department of Education, 1983). In the research for the report, six different hearings were held by the commission responsible for the research. One of the hearings concerned the education of gifted and talented students and was attended by the greatest scholars and advocates for gifted, including James Gallagher, Joseph Renzulli, John Feldhusen, Julian Stanley, and Abraham Tannenbaum (Jolly, 2015). Gifted education was mentioned throughout the report, but support for gifted education came slowly. Later in 1988, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act was passed and “still provides funding for demonstration grants, implementation of original strategies, and monies for the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented” (Jolly, 2015, p. 127). Later reports, including *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* and *A Nation Deceived*, were intended to help the case for gifted
education, but inadvertently created a focus on standardized testing and increasing rigor in schools for all students (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Jolly, 2015; United States Department of Education, 1993). *A Nation at Risk* also spurred the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1988 and eventually led to its revision, the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) in 2002 (United States Department of Education, 1983).

The NCLB (2002) has largely ignored gifted students in efforts to improve the academic successes of lower-achieving students. Under the NCLB giftedness is defined, but each state also created its own definition of giftedness and determines services for gifted students (Jolly & Makel, 2010). Teachers in general education classrooms were more focused on struggling students, and special programs were also geared toward those students (Jolly & Makel, 2010). The argument of equity versus excellence ensued, due to the lack of support gifted individuals were given in the public school setting. Gallagher (2015) explained that the United States has the two different values of equity and excellence concerning education. When equity is valued the goal for education is in providing equality in treatment of students without any favoritism. Excellence is supported by those who seek to further society and compete globally. Equity is a short term goal while excellence is a long-term goal, and in a democracy, short-term goals receive priority and funding (Gallagher, 2015).

**Theorists in Gifted Education**

Two prevalent contributors of theories used in gifted education that are found in literature include Francoys Gagné (1985) and Joseph Renzulli (1978). Gagné introduced *The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* demonstrating the distinct differences between giftedness and talent. Giftedness is defined as aptitude, or natural abilities, while talent expresses the developed skills that have been superiorly mastered (Miller, 2012). Five aptitude
domains exist: intellectual, creative, socioaffective, sensorimotor, and others. Children would be
ranked in the top 10% of age peers in either giftedness or talent to achieve the distinctions. The
notion of the top 10% is found in identification requirements when students are initially tested
for giftedness in schools. Procedures for testing and requirements vary from state to state. An
e例 of the top 10% being identified as gifted is evidenced in the Georgia multi-criteria
identification process (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). Four areas of giftedness are
measured and qualification in three of the four areas of aptitude, achievement, motivation, and
creativity identifies a student as gifted. In the areas of achievement, motivation, and creativity
students are required to score 90% or higher on the assessments.

Renzulli’s (1978) three-ring model of giftedness is widely used in gifted education. His
model defined giftedness as being an interaction between three attributes that include above-
average ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 1978). The three attributes are often
presented in interconnecting circles with giftedness being found in the center (Miller, 2012). A
student must possess all three attributes to achieve giftedness, but giftedness is not guaranteed.
Above average ability and task commitment are necessary, as well (Miller, 2012).

A large number of other theorists have also contributed to the study of giftedness.
Sternberg’s (2000) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence defines giftedness as analytic, creative, or
practical intelligences. Unlike Renzulli (1978), this theory states that one, two, or three
intelligences can be possessed for giftedness to emerge (Miller, 2012). Analytic intelligence
centered on analyzing, judging, evaluating, comparing and contrasting. Creative intelligence was
made up of creating, inventing, discovering, imagining, supposing, and hypothesizing. Practical
intelligence involved applying, putting into practice, and implementing (Miller, 2012). Strength
or weakness could exist with any of the three types of intelligences. “If students are matched
with their strengths, according to their pattern of giftedness, their educational experience has the potential to be advanced” (Miller, 2012, p. 95).

In 1983, Howard Gardner introduced his theory of more than one intelligence. He identified seven different intelligences, and more recently confirmed the possibility of more (Gardner, 2006). The intelligences include musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Later the list was extended with naturalistic intelligence and the mention of a search for existential intelligence, bringing the number up to eight and a half (Gardner, 2006). Gardner’s work has led teachers to alter instruction and has also contributed to changes in identification of the gifted (Gardner, 2006; Kuo, Maker, Su, & Hu, 2010). Having more than one definition of intelligence contributes to the research of the differing characteristics and needs among gifted individuals.

Tannenbaum (1986) defined giftedness with five components that had to all be present in order to “transform early potential into creative productivity in adulthood” (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015, p. 145). The Tannenbaum model of talent development needed general ability, special or domain-specific abilities, non-cognitive factors, environmental supports, and chance in order to achieve full potential (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). These five components made up the Star Model and could be arranged in a star pattern with each of the components placed in a point of the star (Miller, 2012). The model reached beyond cognitive abilities and included the importance of environmental influences and the nurturing of giftedness. These theories have played significant roles in the identification and implementation of instruction of gifted students (Miller, 2012).

**Gifted Individuals in the School Environment**

Meeting the needs of all students in schools requires clear definitions for certain groups
that may need specialized instruction. Gifted students have been recognized by the government based on accepted intelligence and creativity theories. Federal and state definitions seek to identify these students, and schools administer tests that assess the different abilities described by the definitions.

**School concept of giftedness.** Cross, Coleman, and Terhaar-Yonkers (2014) explored giftedness within the context of the school environment. Their definition of giftedness is associated with changing abilities with advancing age in school (Cross et al., 2014). Younger students would display giftedness in general ability or with specific skills, later manifesting in a specific area of study, then in either cognitive ability or creative ability, and finally in abstract thinking (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Giftedness is an age-specific term that refers to the potential of young persons who are judged to have demonstrated rapid learning compared with their peers (Cross & Coleman, 2014, p. 96). Domains of giftedness recognized and taught in schools are closely related to the subjects of math, reading, writing, music, and art and are considered foundational domains (Cross & Coleman, 2014). Performance domains are based on achievement and performance while foundational domains are determined by a test of ability or achievement (Cross & Coleman, 2014). The whole child model that is common in schools does not sufficiently promote the domains, instead remediating holes and deficiencies in development rather than advancement of development (Cross & Coleman, 2014). This improper focus on development leads to mixed practices and policies within schools (Cross & Coleman, 2014).

**Identifying the gifted student.** Identification of gifted students first relied upon IQ testing, but evolved throughout United States history to now include multiple categories of giftedness. The United States Department of Education currently recognizes and defines giftedness through the NCLB (2002). Also, each state defines giftedness and determines the
allocation of gifted services for students who are identified and eligible (National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), 2015d).

**Definitions of giftedness.** The United States Department of Education defined the gifted student as follows:

The term “gifted and talented,” when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002)

Discrepancies among states exist in more specific definitions of giftedness and how students are identified to receive gifted education services. The common area of giftedness in definitions across the states was found to be intelligence (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013). Other areas considered in the identification of gifted students were creativity, ability in the arts, leadership, and specific academic aptitude, with fewer states focusing on high performance (Callahan et al., 2013). In the state of Georgia, where this study took place, a gifted student is defined as one who demonstrates a high degree of intellectual ability, creativity, and/or motivation, excels in specific academic areas, or requires special services in order to achieve at his or her level of ability (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). In this study, the federal and Georgia definitions were used when defining giftedness and in determining the presence of gifted students in classrooms.

**Student eligibility.** Identifying the gifted student is clearly outlined in the Georgia Gifted Resource Manual (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). Students are identified as gifted when they meet the eligibility requirements. Eligibility is mastered in two different ways in the
state of Georgia. Either a student is eligible with the combination of high mental ability (IQ) and academic achievement or a student meets eligibility requirements in three of four areas of giftedness. The four areas of giftedness include mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation, and are known as the areas of multi-criteria eligibility. A mental ability score is derived from a nationally age-normed mental ability test, either in a composite or a component score in the 96th percentile or higher (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). Achievement scores are similarly taken from a nationally normed achievement test in Reading, Math, or Complete Battery with scores reaching into the 90th percentile or higher (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). An achievement score or 90 or higher on a scale of 1 to 100 could also be obtained from a product or performance and evaluated by a panel (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a).

Creativity could also be measured by a nationally normed test or superior product or performance. Students’ creativity could be measured with rating scales, as well. All three measurements must be scored in the 90th percentile or higher for eligibility (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). Motivation does not have a nationally normed component or option in eligibility. A two-year average GPA of 3.5 and higher in core academic subjects, 90th percentile or higher in ratings scales, or a superior product or performance judged by a panel would deem a student eligible in the area of motivation. Any combination of three of these four categories would grant a student gifted services in any public school in Georgia. The services the student would receive vary across the various districts in the state, but the districts chosen in this study all use inclusion models of instruction to serve their gifted students.

**Identification issues.** Minority students are commonly underrepresented in public school gifted programs. African-American, Hispanic, and Native-Americans are far less likely to be in
gifted programs in the United States than Caucasian and Asian-American students (Warne, Anderson, & Johnson, 2013). Psychosocial factors, such as upbringing and peer influences, negative school experiences, and teacher bias in referral for gifted testing have contributed to the smaller number of African-American students being admitted into gifted programs (Hargrove & Seay, 2011). Hispanic students are also underrepresented in gifted programs, calling for sociolinguistic and cultural characteristics to be noted in the identification of gifted students (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012). Students of lower socioeconomic status are also underrepresented in the nation’s gifted programs (Warne et al., 2013). Culturally biased testing and the heavy emphasis upon using standardized testing may contribute to the lack of placement of individuals who are truly gifted and require services, but fail to achieve the necessary test scores. A call for more diversity in gifted testing has been made, and new tests designed not to discriminate are emerging (Mandelman, Barbot, Tan, & Grigorenko, 2013).

Identification is also compounded by states having different definitions and testing procedures because they are not mandated by the federal government to provide gifted services (Jordan, Bain, McCallum, & Bell, 2012). Gifted education is mandated in Georgia as well as in three other states. Reciprocity from other states is not accepted in the state of Georgia, meaning that a student identified as gifted in another state may not be automatically identified as such in Georgia.

**Characteristics of gifted students.** The variety of characteristics of gifted individuals creates differing needs in education. There is no model of the perfect gifted student, as they all have different strengths and weaknesses, and different combinations of gifts and talents. Dimensions other than analytic and verbal types of abilities should be considered in giftedness, such as cognitive modifiability, personality, emotional, and behavioral factors (Tzuriel, Bengio,
Gifted students are likely to use divergent and flexible strategies to solve problems, use original methods for learning and applying information, and can remember what they have learned exactly (Davidson, 2012). Gifted students also develop unevenly intellectually, physically, and socially with emotional maturity and behavioral control lagging behind cognitive abilities and interests (Davidson, 2012). “The greater the degree of giftedness, the greater is the asynchrony” (Davidson, 2012, p. 255).

Myths. Teachers, parents, administrators, students, and society in general believe different myths about the gifted. The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) (2015c) recognized and repelled common myths about gifted students on its website. The NAGC (2015c) defended the myth of gifted programs being elitist. The purpose of gifted programs is to teach and help high-ability learners who are found in all ethnicities, backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. Unfortunately, the lack of federal funding leads programs to need local funding and areas with higher incomes are more able to provide services. A common belief is that gifted students do not require any extra services and will be fine on their own in the regular education classroom (NAGC, 2015c). Gifted students are seen as high achievers who do not require help or special attention. Contrary to that myth is that gifted students have different needs and learning styles that should be given attention. A lack of support and encouragement leads to gifted students not reaching their potential (Davidson, 2012; Zabloski, 2010).

Another myth the NAGC (2015c) recognized is that teachers challenge all students in the general education classroom and must be challenging the gifted as well. On the contrary, 58% of teachers were untrained with regards to gifted students and 73% of teachers agreed that the brightest students were bored and under-challenged (Farkas & Duffet, 2008). An additional myth is that gifted students are good role models and challenge the rest of their classmates
Struggling students do not look to gifted students as role models, and gifted students perform well with similar high-achieving peers. Other myths include thoughts that all children are gifted in some way; students who underachieve cannot be gifted; gifted students are popular and well-adjusted; and disabled students cannot be gifted (NAGC, 2015c).

In 2009, *The Gifted Child Quarterly*, updated a 1982 attempt to demythologize gifted education (Treffinger, 2009). The original publication defended gifted individuals and programming against 15 myths that arose after the Marland Report of 1972. In the more current issue scholars of gifted research, education, and advocacy demythologized 19 of the myths surrounding gifted education. Reis and Renzulli (2009) argued against the myth of the gifted being a homogenous group. With so many characteristics, various abilities, and the combinations of each of these components, gifted students are very much a heterogeneous group. Giftedness is not a state of mind, nor does it encompass a lifetime, but does require “appropriate levels of support, time, effort, and personal investments and choices” (Reis & Renzulli, 2009, p. 235).

Hertberg-Davis (2009) explained that differentiation in the general education classroom is not sufficient when it comes to educating gifted students, nor is it equivalent to gifted education programs. In a perfect world, every classroom would be differentiated and all students’ needs would be met. In reality the curriculum is based on standardized testing and teachers view differentiation as time-consuming and lack necessary training in how to implement differentiation (Hertberg-Davis, 2009). Sisk (2009) furthered the needs for appropriate training for teachers in differentiating the curriculum, dispelling the belief that general education classroom educators can teach the gifted alone, without any outside support. Kaplan (2009) pointed out that there is no single curriculum for gifted children. The differentiated curriculum
must be individualized to create a “single curriculum for a gifted student” (Kaplan, 2009, p. 258). Cooper (2009) addressed the concept of fairness and how it is actually unfair to teach every student in the same way. Gifted students need to be taught how to critically and creatively think, a component lacking from a curriculum focused on tests and not on real-world problems (Cooper, 2009). Some of the myths from the 2009 issue of The Gifted Child Quarterly coincide with the NAGC’s myths, but the myths explained in this section were applicable to the education of gifted students through the inclusion model of instruction. All of the myths can apply to meeting the needs of gifted students in the general education classroom.

**Elementary Models of Gifted Instruction**

**Gifted resource rooms in elementary schools.** Instructional models used in elementary schools exist largely within two descriptions: resource, or pullout, models and inclusion models. Resource, or pullout, models have traditionally been used and still remain as the popular model throughout the United States (Callahan et al., 2013). Students leave the general education classroom to receive instruction tailored to gifted students by a gifted resource teacher. Classroom teachers have no responsibility in providing gifted services to students and are not required to obtain special certification or endorsements to teach gifted students in their general education classrooms. The only times general education teachers would bear a responsibility in providing gifted services would be in a case of collaborating with the resource teacher, or in a co-teaching situation, but the resource teacher is principally responsible for administering and providing gifted instruction.

Mixed opinions and conflicting research are associated with the resource model. Cross and Coleman (2014) highlighted a concern in their explanation of the concept of giftedness in schools, in that high performance does not get students into special programs. “In effect, this
practice denies appropriate instruction for low-performing gifted children and high-performing children. Neither is being taught at their instructional level. Inappropriate instruction benefits no one unless you count being excused from general education class a benefit” (Cross & Coleman, 2014, p. 97).

Student perceptions of peer relations revealed that gifted students hide academic ability in certain heterogeneous grouping, but had favorable attitudes about school when placed in an all-day ability group of gifted students (Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, McCormick, & Rogers, 2012). Resource models provide gifted students the opportunities of working with like-minded peers and relish in their mental and social similarities. Alternately, leaving the general education classroom is viewed as a privilege instead of a necessity or service provided for students in need. Nongifted students, either high-achievers or students who did not demonstrate their abilities during gifted testing, who could benefit from the gifted instruction are also denied the opportunity to receive gifted instruction.

**Inclusion in elementary schools.** The inclusion movement of the 1990s was caused by legislation for special education students that would enable them to learn in the least restrictive environment (Feldhusen, 2001; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). The NCLB of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Acts of 1997 and 2004 increased the emphasis being placed on improving education for students with special needs in the general education classroom (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). Students were given opportunities to not be isolated for much of the day in special education classrooms receiving instruction from a teacher certified in special education. Collaboration and co-teaching are methods used when appropriate by the combination of general educators and special educators in an effort to keep children with special needs in the general education classroom with general education peers (Solis et al., 2012). The
goal of using inclusion is to include children with special needs into the mainstream rather than isolating them from their peers.

Educating students within the general education classroom signifies that these students are not only members within the classroom and school community, but also are valued members within that community. (Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012, p. 487)

A study was carried out at a highly effective inclusive elementary school in order to reveal the best practices that were being used for all students within inclusion classrooms (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). The school under study had implemented an inclusion model for special education students. Results indicated that adequate support and encouragement from administration, high quality professional development, shared decision making, supply of resources and materials, coordinated instruction, and high expectations were the causes behind highly effective instruction for all learners (McLeskey et al., 2014).

Peer effects have proven to be beneficial for special education students. Preschoolers’ language skills improved more significantly when placed in a classroom with other children with better language skills, being consistent with Bandura’s (1971) social-learning theory (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014). In the social-learning theory there is importance placed on learning alongside others and benefiting from observing skills that others have mastered in order to obtain them. Children with intellectual disabilities made improvements in an inclusive environment compared to progress that would have been made in a special school setting (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012). Furthermore, 4.5 to 6.5 hours of support each week was comparable to receiving services in a special school setting (Dessemontet et al., 2012). Students with autism have benefited from sufficient support and teachers having models that provide a
variety of strategies to use with autistic students (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012).

For two decades efforts to use inclusion with special education have been advocated and applied in public school across the United States. Studies conducted in the 1990s revealed that general education teachers who were then responsible for teaching students who would have been in special education classes were also incapable of meeting the needs of gifted students (Feldhusen, 2001). Teachers were receiving inadequate training in preservice programs through coursework, had very little experience with special education in the general education classroom environment, and were not prepared to meet the needs of special education students once they became general education teachers (Kearney & Durand, 1992; Reed & Monda-Amaya, 1995). More recently it seems efforts have improved as teachers responded that field experiences and opportunities within inclusive classrooms were most beneficial in preservice training (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010). Teachers also indicated that courses focusing on co-teaching were not consistently offered at institutions, but that coursework focusing on special education were present across the disciplines (Harvey et al., 2010). On the other hand, less than seven hours of college course credits in teacher education programs were devoted to preparing teachers to work with students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, & Hudson, 2013). Although inclusion in special education is not a new concept, there is room for plenty of research to improve the implementation of inclusive practices. Studies have shown that the general education teacher is primarily responsible for much of the instruction in inclusive classroom despite the push for co-teaching opportunities (Solis et al., 2012). Few studies have focused on the successful implementation of co-teaching and the studies that have shown student outcomes with minimal gains if co-teaching were carried out correctly (Solis et al., 2012). The most desired support of general education classroom teachers is that from special education
specialists and psychologists.

The inclusion movement has given special needs students the opportunity to interact with the general population of students. Students with special needs are able to receive support within the walls of the general education classroom from assistants and special educators. General education classroom teachers have opportunities for support in terms of extra hands in the classroom, additional help in planning lessons and designing curriculum, and professional development opportunities. All of these factors make for a successful transition from special school settings to inclusive, mainstream education.

**Inclusion models and gifted instruction.** The inclusion movement’s growth has impacted funding since the 1990s, rendering gifted programs as elitist and causing program elimination and leaving gifted youth “to their own devices in regular classrooms” (Feldhusen, 2001, p. 165). However, as noted previously, it is a more cost-effective way of serving gifted students. Instead of having specialized gifted resource teachers, general education classroom teachers are able to obtain gifted certifications and teach gifted students within the general education classroom in the state of Georgia. If gifted students are grouped and taught in a general education classroom by a gifted certified teacher, they are considered to be receiving gifted instruction. Being served in the general education classroom in this manner is equivalent to receiving instruction for the same amount of time in a resource setting by a gifted education teacher, and funding is allocated to the school system accordingly. With inclusion models a gifted resource teacher is no longer needed as classroom teachers are able to teach gifted standards and curriculum within the general education classroom. Students do not have to leave the classroom in order to receive gifted services. Time spent receiving gifted instruction is determined locally, but no minimum or maximum amount of time is mandated universally.
According to a recent national survey (Callahan et al., 2013), the most common models being used in the United States are Tomlinson’s Differentiated Instruction Model (Tomlinson, 2001) and Renzulli’s Enrichment Clusters Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1985). Both of these models focus on the strategies being utilized in gifted inclusion models of instruction, primarily the use of differentiation strategies and cluster grouping. This research seems contradictory since the same survey revealed that students are still largely being pulled out of the general education classroom and taught in a resource model. It is important to know the context in which the question was posed and if the question was asked with both resource and inclusion in mind. One question on the survey (Callahan et al., 2013) listed different models for participants to choose and had no reference toward whether the question was referring to resource or inclusion models of instruction as described in this literature review.

From location to location, the needs of gifted students vary. One model could work exceptionally well in one school and not in another. Educators must be able to adapt curriculum and practices, whether using inclusion models or pull-out programs, in order to best meet gifted students’ needs (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). Practices of gifted inclusion in elementary schools are typically differentiation, full-time ability grouping, cluster grouping, and acceleration.

**Differentiation.** In the general education classroom differentiation is used as a strategy with the goal of reaching all learners. The NAGC (2015b) defined differentiation as “modifying curriculum and instruction according to content, pacing, and/or product to meet unique student needs in the classroom” (para. 21). Tomlinson’s Differentiated Instruction Model uses three elements of the curriculum that should be modified: content, process and products. The goal behind differentiated instruction is that teachers will maximize the potential for all learners and
meet individual needs (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012). Gifted students complete work that requires more rigor or a higher level of thinking while other students are assigned work on their academic levels.

Bellamy (2005) studied the experiences of gifted girls after their teacher used differentiation to teach about *Macbeth*. The need for teachers to personalize lessons for gifted learners was apparent in the students’ positive response to lessons. Students preferred the personalization of differentiation especially when tied to their favorite subjects (Kanevsky, 2011). Teachers are more likely to use differentiation strategies when given professional development opportunities (Dixon et al., 2014).

**Full-time ability grouping.** Another way of teaching students in the general education classroom is grouping the students in the same class for the entire school day. Ability grouping is defined as “when students of a similar ability or achievement level are placed in a class or group based on observed behavior or performance. Ability grouping is not the same as tracking” (NAGC, 2015b). Ability grouping has caused heated debates during the 1980s and 1990s and is commonly confused with tracking. Ability grouping, interchanged with the term “flexible ability grouping” (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992), is a preferred practice in gifted education giving students opportunities to move in and out of groups based on ability (Matthews, Ritchotte, & McBee, 2013). Tracking happens when students are permanently placed in a group. With all gifted students in one classroom, gifted instruction is woven in and out of the curriculum by the classroom teacher. Students with Need for Cognition (NFC) had more intrinsic motivation than other students to participate in higher level gifted classes that were separate from their general education classrooms (Meier, Vogl, & Preckel, 2014). Students have also shown more interest in school, had better relationships with teachers, and had a higher self-concept when ability-
Cluster grouping. Similar to ability grouping in that students are grouped by academic ability, cluster grouping is used for a particular subject area. Cluster groups consist of gifted students or gifted students and high achieving students. The NAGC (2015b) describes cluster grouping as five or six gifted students being placed in a heterogeneous classroom allowing the teacher to effectively differentiate for a group of students instead of just one or two. The general education teacher is primarily responsible for providing gifted instruction in the subject area chosen based on administrative requirements and/or the needs and strengths of the students. Math instruction has been taught effectively using this strategy for both gifted and non-gifted students in the classroom (Brulles, Peters, & Saunders, 2012). Project CLUE (Clustering Learners Unlocks Equity) was effective for gifted math students in an urban school after the proper training of teachers (Pierce, et al., 2011).

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) was introduced by Renzulli and Reis (1997) as a way of serving gifted students. SEM originated as an enrichment model used schoolwide to engage learners (Renzulli & Reis, 1997). All learners participated in the model and high-ability students benefitted from the goals of the model to develop talents, offer advanced enrichment, and have opportunities for follow up through interests for all students. Renzulli and Reis are cited in many different research articles pertaining to the instruction of gifted students.

The use of cluster grouping was also encouraged by Winebrenner and Brulles (2008). Cluster grouping is another method of meeting gifted students’ needs within the general education classroom where students are grouped by ability, usually gifted students and high achieving students in a certain subject area. Winebrenner and Brulles have published articles about gifted inclusion and are cited in numerous research articles on cluster models and their
effects on gifted students and other non-gifted students in the general education classroom (Brulles, 2005; Brulles et al., 2010; Brulles & Winebrenner, 2011; Winebrenner, 2003; Winebrenner & Devlin, 2001).

Common themes arose when a study was conducted in a highly effective elementary school that used cluster grouping with students identified with disabilities (McLeskey et al., 2014). Themes that emerged included focusing on the needs of all of the students; the higher quality of instruction that teachers used in general education classrooms; an efficient use of resources; teachers having flexibility when meeting students’ needs; and using data to monitor the students’ progress (McLeskey et al., 2014). Inclusion models for special education students have a different goal and were initiated because of federal ruling. Inclusion models for gifted education have different goals and were initiated due to lack of funding.

**Acceleration.** The least implemented and less desirable model for gifted inclusion is acceleration (Siegel, Wilson, & Little, 2013). This practice involves introducing topics and skills at a younger age and learning at a faster pace than would be considered typical. Acceleration includes grade-skipping, starting kindergarten early, and curriculum compacting in elementary schools. Myths contributed to acceleration being viewed as detrimental to a gifted student’s social and emotional well-being (Siegel et al., 2013). Siegel et al. (2013) studied 12 reasons for not using acceleration presented in the 2004 publication, *A Nation Deceived.* The researchers found that teachers are actually more responsive and open to using acceleration, but teachers and administrators seem to believe that each other are not receptive to the practice. The practice of acceleration leads to more academic gains than other types of inclusion (Davidson, 2012). More communication between educators and administrators along with more professional learning concerning acceleration could encourage more use of the model (Siegel et al., 2013).
Resource Versus Inclusion

A current debate in gifted education surrounds the pull-out, or resource model, versus the push-in, or inclusion models of gifted instruction. Studies have been conducted using both types of models. Gubbels, Segers, and Verhoeven (2014) found that using a pull-out triarchic enrichment program was a valuable experience in upper elementary grades. The study used a control group design and found positive results with the students in the pull-out program. Teachers nominated children whom they considered were gifted for the enrichment program that was held one morning a week. Practical intelligence scores increased due to a focus on triarchic teaching. More results indicated that children in the control group experienced a decrease in motivation, but the students in the enrichment group did not. An increase in self-concept may have resulted from participation in homogeneous cooperative learning situations within the enrichment program. Children’s attitudes toward science, which was the primary focus of the enrichment program, were noticeably different between the groups as the experimental group were more interested and viewed science as more valuable. The differences between the group that was pulled out of the general education classroom to receive gifted instruction in science and the group that was not pulled out were significant, as the experimental group had more quality learning experiences than the control group.

Callahan, Moon, Oh, Azano, & Hailey (2014) used the CLEAR model from three influential models of instruction to gather data from a large number of pullout and self-contained gifted classrooms. Two language arts units were used over three years and achievement was compared between the experimental groups and control groups that conducted business as usual. The results indicated that students responded well to the developed curriculum and standard achievement scores reflected the benefit of the pullout program,
Brulles et al. (2010) conducted a case study and examined gifted students who were receiving instruction through an inclusive model. Students were cluster grouped into a class with other gifted students. Research prior to the study had shown that homogeneous grouping encouraged gifted students to perform at higher levels (Brulles et al., 2010). The students in the gifted cluster class received gifted instruction while a control group did not. The teacher of the cluster group also was trained in gifted instruction. Students experienced growth in achievement despite any demographic differences among students, further indicating that a beneficial inclusive practice is to group students with likeminded peers to receive instruction from a teacher trained in gifted education (Brulles et al, 2010). In this case, students received gifted instruction within a general education classroom setting. They also received instruction from a trained teacher and experienced homogeneous grouping as they would have in a gifted resource classroom.

In a similar study, Matthews et al. (2013) studied gifted students and nongifted students in years of using an inclusive cluster grouping model and the absence of the model. Gifted instruction was delivered by general education classroom teachers and no gifted resource teacher was present in the school. Students were homogeneously grouped according to ability determined by test scores in reading and mathematics. Students showed gains only in mathematics and after the first year of implementation of inclusive practices, while nongifted students showed similar gains, but at lower levels of ability (Matthews et al., 2013). The research findings compared with other research that inclusive grouping practices in mathematics are more beneficial to students than when used in reading (Matthews et al., 2013). This study also brought to light that inclusive practices are more beneficial over time and not during the first year of implementation. Future research is also recommended to study professional development
and its effect on the implementation of inclusive practices, such as cluster grouping (Matthews et al., 2013). Teachers who are properly trained and supported may be successful in the implementation of inclusion practices with gifted students.

The support and training of teachers is a critical practice in using inclusion models of gifted instruction. Gifted pullout programs use teachers specifically trained and certified to teach gifted students. Inclusion models rely heavily on general education classroom educators for implementation. A gifted resource teacher is not needed if gifted students are taught within the confines of the general education classroom. In the studies featured above, gifted students benefited when homogenously grouped, whether in pullout or push-in (inclusive) classrooms. Teachers were more successful in implementation of inclusive practices when properly trained and supported.

**Gifted Student Perspectives**

A small area of research exists exploring the perceptions that gifted students have concerning how they are instructed. In inclusion models the students, both gifted and nongifted, preferred different methods of differentiation (Kanevsky, 2011). No single method was unanimously chosen over others as the most desired method. Students also preferred choices in learning and projects, individual feedback, less focus on grading and minimal limits placed on work, and having their creative efforts recognized (Olterhouse, 2012). On the opposite end of the research, students were frustrated with the lack of strategies used by teachers to support gifted learner needs in the general education classroom (Morris, 2013). They also showed frustration with the slow pace in the one-size-fits-all model that was more geared toward bringing lower students up (Morris, 2013).
General Education and Gifted Students

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development reported only four states mandating and fully funding gifted education, while nine states were not mandating or funding (Young & Balli, 2014). Other states fall somewhere in between by partially mandating and funding programs. Gifted students can potentially be in any classroom. Giftedness occurs in every race, gender, socioeconomic category, and geographic location. The fact that gifted programming is not universally mandated means that gifted students may only receive instruction via the general education classroom whether or not inclusive gifted instructional practices are being used in that classroom.

In national studies it has been found that little differentiation is occurring in general education classrooms and the needs of gifted students are being ignored (Gubbins, Callahan, & Renzulli, 2014). For the small number of teachers who did provide targeted instruction for the gifted, teachers “eliminated the material students mastered, provided more advanced work, offered gifted students input into allocation of classroom time, and exposed gifted students to higher level thinking skills” (Gubbins et al., 2014, p. 429). In classrooms where differentiation was occurring, the teachers were the instigators of curriculum change when they had advanced training and professional support. Best practices in teaching include meeting the needs of all learners. Differentiation has been a push for all educators under the NCLB, but the needs of lower achieving students have had the most attention and support. Gifted students have been absent from the NCLB focus, and teachers often lack the proper training and support to properly educate them in the general education classroom (Gentry & Owen, 1999; McLeskey et al., 2014; Pierce et al., 2011). Advocating for excellence is necessary to ensure that gifted students are being fairly treated and educated properly in schools (Roberts & Inman, 2010).
Teachers of the Gifted

The least amount of research in gifted education has been published showing teacher perspectives, especially with the use of inclusion models of instruction. Research focused on best practices in gifted instruction. Teachers are essential in the delivery of gifted education, whether using pull-out or push-in models of instruction. Their perspectives could be a beneficial addition to the body of research focused on gifted education. Current research that does impact gifted inclusive practices is that of teacher training, professional support, perceptions that educators have of gifted students, and effective characteristics of teachers of gifted students.

Teacher training. In pull-out programs that have been most commonly used until recently, gifted program teachers who solely teach gifted students are more experienced and have more training in gifted instruction than general education teachers (Hoong, Greene, & Hartzell, 2011). General education teachers lack the extensive training and experience that resource teachers have, especially within the first three years of using the inclusion model (Gentry & Owen, 1999; McLeskey et al., 2014; Pierce et al., 2011). A lack of quality training attributes to lower self-efficacy which may, in turn, negatively affect the instruction and achievement of gifted students. In the NAGC’s 2014-2015 State of the Nation in Gifted Education report, only three states require general education teachers to have some type of gifted education training, and 19 out of the 29 responding states required an educator of gifted and talented students to possess a gifted education endorsement (NAGC, 2015d).

Research has also focused on the lack of professional training that preservice teachers receive during their undergraduate preparation courses. Lack of preservice teachers’ education could have contributed to their misconceptions of gifted students (Troxclair, 2013). Preservice teachers were unsupportive of the needs of gifted learners in the classroom while being
supportive of gifted education (Troxclair, 2013). Preservice teachers have also been found to have more misconceptions and stereotypes of gifted students than practicing teachers (Carman, 2011). Misconceptions about gifted students cause a decrease in the identification of the gifted and a misunderstanding of strategies and instruction that are required in gifted education (Seay, 2011). The more experience teaching gifted students that teachers have decreases the amount of stereotypes educators hold in regards to gifted students (Carman, 2011).

A lack of modeling in teacher education could also contribute to teachers not using differentiation practices (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012). Teachers in higher education are still using traditional models of instruction even when teaching about differentiation. Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) found that teacher educators are creating positive learning environments and a variety of strategies in content, process, and product, but they are not valuing learner profiles, varying grouping formats, paying attention to student readiness or using varied assessments. Other studies have shown how modeling can encourage use of other models of instruction, including cooperative learning and co-teaching, but not for differentiation (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012). These results could hold true in preservice courses, certification courses, or professional learning courses. Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory applies to the findings that educators need modeling of strategies in order to properly carry out instructional practices.

The questioning of teacher credentials and teachers’ abilities in teaching gifted students emerge in some research literature surrounding the topic of inclusion. Chan (2011), in a qualitative study, focused on the characteristics and competencies that gifted students respond well to in education. Educators were rated on a scale to determine the most important traits of teachers that students valued. Relationship between teacher and student, student confidence in teacher ability and cost versus quality of teaching emerged as the themes necessary for student
success. With the growing interest and implementation of inclusion models, general education teachers in Georgia are required to earn a certification in gifted education in order to provide gifted inclusion to the gifted students in their classrooms. In a qualitative study of a highly effective inclusion model being used in an elementary school with special education students, teachers expressed confidence in the use of the model after three years of implementation (McLeskey et al., 2014).

**Professional support.** Educators receive professional support through collaboration with other teachers, and instructional support and resources provided by administration. Educators of gifted students in rural areas using both inclusion and resource models of instruction requested more collaborative support and training (Azano, Callahan, Missett, & Brunner, 2014). These educators complained of being professionally isolated because of the limited amount of teachers qualified to teach gifted students (Azano et al., 2014). Collaboration between school counselors and teachers of gifted students was desired by both groups in order to effectively meet the needs of gifted students in schools (S. M. Wood, 2012). In the highly effective inclusion model with special education students, teachers felt support because of their support from administration, collaboration with peers, and ample amount of training with professional development opportunities (McLeskey et al., 2014; Robbins, 2014).

**Effective teachers of gifted students.** Questions surrounding who is the most qualified to teach gifted students have led to research on the effectiveness of teachers of the gifted. Four themes emerged in a study geared toward finding student-identified characteristics of effective gifted education teachers. The themes were teachers taking a personal interest in students, setting high expectations for themselves and students, making content and learning meaningful and relevant, and having a clear passion for students, teaching, and their content (Gentry,
Steenbergen-Hu, & Choi, 2011). In retrospect, gifted dropouts wanted teachers who cared and who were not monotone; pedagogy that was less boring; more challenging curriculum; and mentors that invested in gifted students (Zabloski, 2010). Teachers’ influence upon students is inevitable and having good teachers teaching gifted students is desirable, but not always achievable. “Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning” (Proverbs 9:9).

Need for More Research

Research about gifted models of instruction is largely quantitative. More qualitative research is necessary to bring forth the perceived experiences of the teachers implementing gifted inclusion, especially in the first three years. In studies collecting data about instruction used with inclusion, teaching strategies cannot be easily analyzed because some strategies are not necessarily found in the teacher’s lesson plans (Bellamy, 2005). The tacit knowledge of a teacher of gifted students needs to be explored (Coleman, 2014a). The insider perspective, or firsthand account, of what is happening in inclusion classrooms is also needed (Prior, 2011). More research is needed to understand the effect of teachers having preservice and in-service training in gifted education (Hoong et al., 2011; Seay, 2011). More in-depth studies are needed to describe the support schools are giving gifted students and the training and support received by teachers of gifted students (Morris, 2013). Expansion of research used in special education inclusion classrooms to other settings using inclusion models of instruction is also suggested (McLeskey et al., 2014).

There is a clear need for more qualitative research concerning the use of inclusion models with gifted students and the teachers who are now teaching those students. The lack of research on newly trained gifted teacher perspectives of teaching under implemented inclusion models
causes a gap in the understanding of how the model is actually being carried out and what professional support teachers may need to enhance teacher self-efficacy. Best practices and findings of academic growth have a significant place in gifted education research, but qualitative research and firsthand accounts are still needed to find what teachers may need to appropriately meet the needs of this often neglected group of students.

**Summary**

The research of Chapter Two encompassed the relevant literature for this study. A history and synopsis of historical trends is important in understanding how gifted education has evolved and why the state of gifted education today is significant. Definitions of giftedness and how students are identified clearly describe what is referred to as a gifted student in this study. Important theorists behind gifted education and the models that are used in schools are also informational in understanding the task that educators have in implementing models of instruction. Perspectives of both students and teachers were presented in the least amount of research, but clear needs and wants were expressed in those studies.

Gifted education has undergone many changes since its beginning in the United States. Current practices are influenced by the inclusion model of instruction used with special education students, lack of funding and resources, and government focus geared toward lower achieving students. The elitist view of gifted programming does not encourage the support of gifted learners, and the nation has long forgotten the quest of being competitive with other nations after the launch of *Sputnik*. The needs of gifted learners remain, and this student population requires services in order to achieve their full potential. Much research exists in terms of best practices, but the educators responsible for implementing new inclusion models and ultimately serving gifted students are not being heard or represented in research. Advocacy for
gifted students is needed in terms of supporting the educators serving these high potential students. The gap in literature that remains and the focus of this study are the teacher experiences in using inclusion with gifted students. The next chapter presents the methodology of this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

In this chapter the research design and research questions are discussed. In addition, the setting, participants and procedures are addressed. The researcher’s role is clearly explained. The methods of data collection and data analysis are defined, followed by trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

The research design for this study was qualitative to best understand teachers’ experiences. This type of design allowed teachers to reflect and respond accurately to questions pertaining to their experiences within the classroom. Qualitative research focuses on inquiry and the study of participants in their natural setting, establishing patterns and themes (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach was taken because the focus of the study is on the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving gifted students. Creswell (2013) explained that phenomenology is concerned with the common lived experiences of participants. Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen to best represent the lived experiences and interpretation of the common experience of implementing gifted inclusion among the participants. Moustakas (1994) described hermeneutic science as finding meaning so that it is fully understood. A full understanding of the experiences of teachers was essential in uncovering their perspectives. Hermeneutic phenomenology “takes the concrete minutiae of pedagogy and classroom interaction seriously” (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012, p. 121). Educators recognize hermeneutic research because it relies on the tacit knowledge of teachers, which is not often the focus of research (Friesen et al., 2012).

The research design largely relied on the approach of Interpretive Phenomenological
Analysis (IPA) developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012). The underpinnings of the approach are that researchers need to understand parts by looking at the whole and understand the whole by looking at the parts (Smith et al., 2012). Largely influenced by Edmund Husserl, IPA explores participants’ experiences in their own terms and relies upon phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2012). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. It is argued that the IPA researcher is involved in a double hermeneutic study, since the researcher is trying to make sense of the research while the participants are also trying to make sense of what is happening to them (Smith et al., 2012). Idiography is the focus on the particular, specifically the detail or depth of analysis and the understanding of how a phenomenon is viewed and experienced by people (Smith et al., 2012). The approach is largely focused on in-depth interviews, but focus groups, questionnaires, and journaling may be used in data collection, as well.

**Research Questions**

There was one central research question that covered the focus of this study. The central research question was: What are the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers during the first three years of using inclusion to instruct gifted students? In order to interpret the lived experiences of the participants in this study, three sub-questions were created.

A. How do the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers using an inclusion model with gifted students affect teacher self-efficacy?

B. What training and support have been received by general education teachers who are new to teaching gifted students?

C. What do general education classroom teachers perceive to be strengths and challenges of using inclusion models of instruction with gifted students?
Setting

The research was conducted with teachers from public elementary schools across more than one school district in northern Georgia. Teachers from seven schools in four different school districts participated. The districts were located in counties north of the Atlanta metropolitan area. The pseudonyms that were used in this study for four districts are Flannigan County Schools, Bryant County Schools, Chevy County Schools, and Owen County Schools.

Flannigan County Schools is a larger school district in Georgia with 42,701 students enrolled (Georgia Department of Education, 2015b). The population of Flannigan County is 195,405. Of the district’s student population, 68% is white, 13% are Asian, 13% are Hispanic, 3% are black, and 3% are multi-racial. Almost 20% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced meals. According to the district’s website the population of students qualified for gifted services is almost 20%. Nearly 18% of students were reported as being enrolled in gifted programs in the 2013-2014 school year (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2015). In 2015 there were 20 elementary schools in this district. Teachers in this district are highly qualified and most have more than five years of teaching experience. There has been a recent desire to certify teachers in gifted education by offering and encouraging more teachers to enroll in state gifted endorsement courses. The number of resource gifted education teachers has been reduced, and certified teachers are mostly using acceleration and cluster grouping to serve gifted students in the general education classroom.

Bryant County Schools is largely rural and located farther from the Atlanta metropolitan than Flannigan County Schools. It is a smaller school system with 13,482 students enrolled and eight elementary schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2015b). Of the student population, 59.7% is considered economically disadvantaged. Just over 62% are white, 15.3% are Hispanic,
12.6% are black, 4.6% are Asian, and 4.7% are multi-racial. Nearly 9% of the students in the school district were enrolled in gifted programs in the 2013-2014 school year (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2015). According to the school district’s website 11.3% of students are gifted and enrolled for the current school year. In 2015 Bryant County Schools also reported on their website that 111 teachers had gifted certification. Like Flannigan County, certified teachers were using inclusion to serve the gifted student population. The schools made the shift from solely using resource and collaboration models of gifted instruction to including some inclusion models in 2013.

Chevy County Schools is located west of Flannigan County Schools and similar in size and demographics. It is a large system with 42,682 students enrolled. Thirty-one percent of the student population qualifies for Free and Reduced Lunch. Seventy-two percent of students are Caucasian, 16% Hispanic, 7% African American, 3% Multiracial, and 2% Asian (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2015). Like the other counties, certified teachers are using inclusion to serve their gifted population.

Owen County Schools is located to the east of Bryant County Schools. The demographics of Owen County Schools are different from those of Bryant County Schools, although the counties neighbor each other. It is a small district with 7,266 students enrolled (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2015). There are 22% of the student population that qualify for free and reduced lunch. Eighty-one percent of the students are Caucasian, 7% are Hispanic, 4% are African American, 3% are Multiracial, and 5% are Asian. Owen County Schools also implemented inclusion models to teach gifted students.

The setting was chosen based on the proximity to the researcher and the representation of different demographic areas. The demographics of the study gave the study potential of
representing more than one type of community, being suburban and rural, as well as more than one socioeconomic makeup of the different schools. The schools that were a part of this study had to be schools that were implementing or had already implemented inclusion models specifically for teaching and serving gifted students within the general education classroom environment. An inclusion model needed to be implemented in at least one grade level and have more than one teacher implementing the instruction model for the sake of forming focus groups. Schools may have had a gifted resource teacher on staff and that teacher may have provided services, but the general education classroom teacher must have been responsible for providing gifted services within an inclusion model for the purposes of this study.

**Participants**

The sampling for this phenomenological study was criterion and convenience sampling. Once the initial participants had been selected, snowball sampling was used if needed. The participants in the study must have had a gifted endorsement and been currently teaching in a public elementary school in northern Georgia. Furthermore, the participants must have been using a model of inclusion within the general education classroom in order to instruct gifted students. The participants were on record for providing gifted services with inclusion models. Since research has shown that teachers’ comfort in teaching special education students with inclusion models increases after three years, the participants must have had less than three years of experience teaching gifted students (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014).

Teachers with previous experience teaching gifted students using the resource model were not chosen for the purposes of this study. Participants did not have experience teaching gifted students in a resource setting. Previous gifted education resource teachers were not included in the study, because they had unique experiences with gifted students that differ from
the experiences of general education classroom teachers. Participants may have had experiences teaching gifted students within a general education classroom prior to the study, but less than three years using the inclusion model where they were on record as a provider of gifted services. The participants were responsible for serving the gifted students within the general education classroom, meaning that a resource teacher was not primarily responsible for ensuring that gifted services, or instruction, were provided in a certain area of the curriculum.

Smith et al. (2012) stated that IPA studies should have relatively small sample sizes and a reasonably homogeneous sample. The purpose of a small homogenous sample gives the research more ability to examine convergence and divergence with detail (Smith et al., 2012). Another phenomenological study used 15 and 17 participants in two different years of research (Newman, Gregg, & Dantzler, 2009). Based on the research the number of participants could reach between 12 and 15 (Creswell, 2013). Thirteen participants took part in this study. Participants were added until the point of thematic saturation. Participant demographics can be found in Table 1, with each participant identified by an assigned pseudonym.

**Procedures**

First, the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposed research study before any data collection began (see Appendix A). Invitations were sent by email or in person to teachers until thematic saturation of the data was achieved. The email sent to participants stated the purposes of the study and expectations of participants. Teachers willing to participate had to validate that they met the criteria for the study, meaning that they must have currently been teaching gifted students using an inclusion model of instruction. The participants at each school further determined that the teachers volunteering for the study were responsible for providing gifted services and had been doing so for less than three years.
### Table 1

**Participant Information**

*(N=13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Year Teaching Gifted Inclusion</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Teaching Experience is reported in number of years.

Teachers were also asked about their teaching experience to verify that teachers did not have prior experience as gifted resource teachers.

Participant consent forms were provided for all participants before initial interviews took place (see Appendix B). Data collection commenced once signed consent forms were obtained. Then, the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journaling were conducted. All
interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, reviewed by participants, and revised if needed. Journaling prompts were to be answered by each participant and sent to the researcher via email.

**Researcher’s Role**

The researcher was the human instrument in this study who collected and analyzed all data. I was interested in uncovering common themes from the experiences of the teachers that are new to implementing gifted inclusion models of instruction. There was potential of bringing personal bias and assumptions to this study. At the time of the study, I was teaching fourth grade gifted students and I have provided gifted instruction in an inclusion setting as well. The setting for this study included the school system in which I work and three other school systems in the northern metro-Atlanta area. I was once an employee of one of the other three northern metro-school systems used in this study. The participants in this study did not work directly with me at my school where I currently teach. I did not include my own place of work in this study in order to avoid bias and maintain confidentiality of the participants and schools chosen for the study. I did not supervise any teachers who participated and did not allow anyone to participate whom I might have supervised in the past in a student or intern role.

My experience also differs from the participants in my study. Six of my teaching years have been spent teaching gifted students in the resource setting. I was able to separate my experiences from other teachers’ because of this difference. In order to avoid my own personal bias and assumptions, I used empirical research to guide interview questions and the creation of my questionnaire. According to Smith et al. (2012), researchers should bracket personal experiences in order to set ideas or any bias aside to fully engage in participant experiences. I bracketed my personal experiences and concerns before interacting with participants in order to
fully understand and take on the participants’ experiences. I also bracketed my experiences and concerns and to alleviate bias or assumptions I may have had, because my background as a resource teacher made my experience different. See Appendix C for an example of the bracketing I recorded. I was interested in the experiences of others who possessed backgrounds different from mine and were new to teaching gifted students in the general education classroom setting.

Data Collection

The data for this research study was collected using three different methods including individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journaling. The three different types of data helped in achieving triangulation of data to establish credibility (Creswell, 2013). Participants had several opportunities to describe their experiences because of the number of methods used in this study.

Individual Interviews

One method of data collection used in this study was individual interviews with each of the participants. Teachers were interviewed at a meeting place of choice, all choosing either their classrooms or a local library, using semi-structured interview questions (Smith et al., 2012). Interviews were voice-recorded with a digital recorder and a tape recorder, then later transcribed by the researcher. A sample of these transcripts is provided in Appendix D. The transcriptions from interviews underwent member checks. Two pilot interviews were used to refine questions prior to collecting data (Smith et al., 2012). The pilot interviews were given to upper elementary general education classroom teachers who fit the participant criteria. Interviews occurred after school hours and in a location where teachers felt most comfortable and least distracted. Interview questions were adapted according to responses of the individual.
Teaching background.

1. When did you decide to teach? How long have you been teaching?
2. When did you begin teaching gifted students? How much experience do you have with gifted students other than with the current inclusion model?
3. What type of certification or professional development in gifted education have you received?

Current teaching.

4. To what extent do you serve gifted students? What time period, subject, and number of students?
5. What is your current teaching position?

Teacher perceptions.

6. How would you describe your experience of teaching gifted students using inclusion in the general education classroom?
7. What, if anything, have you learned from having gifted students in your classroom?
8. What types of inclusion strategies do you use and feel are best in teaching gifted students? Do you see any benefits in teaching gifted students with the inclusion model?
9. Do you see any challenges in teaching gifted students with the inclusion model? If not, what kind of challenges might teachers face using the inclusion model with gifted students?

Meaning of experiences.

10. What does it mean to be a teacher of gifted students?
11. Would you say your thinking has changed about gifted students and/or gifted instruction
since implementing gifted inclusion?

12. Has teaching with gifted inclusion caused you to transform as a teacher or a person?

   Would you say that the experience was a disorienting dilemma, causing you to rethink
   the meaning of teaching or teaching gifted students?

13. To what extent, if any, do you use reflection in your teaching?

14. Bandura describes self-efficacy as the perception people possess of their ability to
   achieve a certain outcome. How would you describe your efficacy in teaching gifted
   students in the regular classroom?

   **Professional support.**

15. How do you feel your preparation (certification or professional development) has served
   you in teaching gifted students?

16. What type of supports do you have in implementing inclusion?

17. What role does collaboration play in your teaching of gifted students?

18. What role does administrative support play in your teaching of gifted students?

19. What else do you need or would want to be successful in teaching gifted students with
   inclusion?

   **Conclusion.**

20. How should people advocate for gifted education?

21. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss concerning teacher experiences using
   inclusion in gifted education?

Questions one, two, and three were created to investigate the backgrounds of the
educators in this study. The questions also asked teachers of their motivation to teach and their
specific history with gifted education. More research was needed to investigate the experiences
that teachers have had, both during preservice and in-service training, with gifted students and gifted education (Hoong, Greene, & Hartzell, 2011; Seay, 2011).

The purpose of questions four and five was to ensure that participants met the specific qualities of the desired participants in this study. This study was seeking general education teachers who had three or less years’ experience with teaching gifted students using an inclusion model of instruction. The questions were asked to ensure that teachers were able to participate in this study.

Teacher perceptions of and experiences with gifted inclusion were the focus of the study, and questions six through nine helped to gather these accounts. Teachers were given the chance to discuss what was actually happening in the classroom with gifted inclusion. The tacit knowledge of educators was needed as a voice in research (Coleman, 2014a). Not all of this knowledge could be found within lesson plans (Bellamy, 2005). An insider perspective was needed to give more understanding of what teachers are experiencing with gifted inclusion (Prior, 2011).

Questions 10 through 14 focused on teachers making meaning of their experiences. The theories of Mezirow (2000) and Bandura (1977) were used to generate the questions. Question 10 asked teachers to discuss what it meant to be a gifted teacher, giving the researcher an opportunity to understand the experiences. With question 11, educators were able to discuss any changes in how they perceived gifted students after experiencing teaching students with the gifted inclusion model. Research has shown that preservice educators change in their views of gifted students with experience teaching gifted students (Carman, 2011). Teachers new to using gifted inclusion may have changed their views, as well. Questions 12 and 13 gave participants a chance to describe their new experiences in terms of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory.
If educators felt that an experience was a disorienting dilemma or used reflection and reflective discourse, these questions would prompt educators to discuss that aspect of their experience. Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy was the focus of question 14. Explaining their self-efficacy in terms of teaching gifted students with a new model of instruction would coincide with the theory that people’s self efficacy affects their success.

Understanding professional support that educators receive and how they feel supported were the goals in creating questions 15 through 19. The questions focused on the preparation, administrative and coworker support, and the needs and wants of educators using gifted inclusion. These were areas revealed in the literature where support had been desired (Azano et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014; S. M. Wood, 2012). Questions 20 and 21 were designed to encourage teachers to discuss any other experiences that may have contributed to the goals of this study.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups were held in a classroom in Bryant County Schools and a classroom in Flannigan County Schools with those willing to participate in the study. It was anticipated that around three teachers would participate from two schools, which should have provided for a sufficient focus group size (Smith et al., 2012). Two teachers participated in Flannigan County Schools and three teachers participated in the group interview held in Bryant County Schools. Although IPA is more geared toward individual interviews, it can be used with focus groups if it is felt that participants will answer truthfully and fully in a group with other participants (Smith et al., 2012). In this particular study, the focus group was used to gain information about the teachers’ experiences with collaboration. Participants stressed the need and want for collaboration among peers, as seen in previous studies (Missett, Brunner, Callahan, Moon, &
Azano, 2014). An opportunity for teachers to specifically discuss their collaboration efforts together provided a more accurate representation of this type of support at the participants’ schools.

Focus group questions were guided by the responses from individual interviews. The intention for focus group interviews is to provide educators the opportunity to discuss collaboration efforts and experiences together. Also, group discussions gave insight into the dynamic of the support system the teachers experienced day to day. The researcher’s role was to facilitate the discussion with the focus group questions, monitor discussion, and maintain a reasonable and ethical environment (Smith et al., 2012). The focus group interviews were voice recorded on both a digital recorder and a cassette recorder, then later transcribed.

**Focus group open-ended questions.**

1. What types of support do you give each other concerning the teaching of gifted students in the regular classroom?
2. Do you collaborate in the planning of lessons? If so, how?
3. If you collaborate, how do you feel that impacts the teaching of gifted students? If you don’t collaborate, would you like to? Do you think it would benefit the students or not?
4. Do you feel supported by administration or any other personnel?

Questions one through four were designed to prompt teachers in discussing their professional support in the presence of other educators. Teachers were questioned at the same time to provide for richer data. In research teachers have desired more collaboration with peers (Azano et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014). It was the researcher’s intention that more information would be given when more than one educator was able to answer each question.
Journaling

Participants were asked to journal their experiences in teaching gifted students through inclusion for one month. See Appendix E for journaling prompts. Teachers were asked to reflect upon their teaching experience with gifted students in the general education classroom. They were also asked to share their thoughts, objections, and perspectives of using inclusion with gifted students. Each week the researcher emailed prompts to the participants with the goal of having them reflect upon their teaching. Participants responded with answers to these prompts via email.

Journaling was chosen to obtain more accurate data regarding the experience of teachers. Journaling provided teachers an opportunity to discuss practices, student needs, and daily experiences with internal dialogue and reflection. Journaling has been previously used with IPA for data (Smith et al., 2012). In this study, journaling provided teachers with an alternative way of voicing their experiences with teaching gifted students in the general education classroom. Instead of relying on observation data from one gifted instruction block of time, the journaling, too, provided teachers with an outlet to describe experiences of teaching gifted students during the school day. This contributed to the teacher perspectives sought in this research study.

Data Analysis

The goal of the analysis was to find common themes that would emerge from the common lived experiences of the teachers being studied. The data was collected and organized well, keeping each participant’s data together in individual files. All interviews were transcribed and electronically filed on a computer that is password protected. Journaling and interview responses were also electronically filed in the same manner. Bracketing and memoing were practiced in the collection and analysis of the data (Creswell, 2013). Examples of memoing are
provided in Appendix F.

The IPA provided for reliable coding of the data and revelation of themes and subthemes (Smith et al., 2012). The steps in the process would ensure that research was properly analyzed according to the principles underlying hermeneutic phenomenology in education. Delving into the meanings behind first-hand accounts, and writing to achieve such meaning are all methods of hermeneutic phenomenology (Friesen et al., 2012). The following steps were used according to the IPA research model to analyze data (Smith et al., 2012).

The immersion of one’s self in the original data ensures that the participant becomes the focus of the analysis (Smith et al., 2012). The first step of IPA involved listening to the interviews of each participant repeatedly and reading over transcripts to determine the tone of the interviews. Before the initial reading, the researcher used bracketing to set aside bias or assumptions from the interview in order to focus more on the participant. The researcher then read and reread transcripts at least two times to better understand the data. At first, the recording was played with the initial reading to imagine the participant’s voice with other readings for a more complete analysis (Smith et al., 2012). During the readings the researcher began writing notes about meanings and making commentary through Atlas.ti software.

The researcher noted themes within a transcript and identified ways in which the participant talked about, understood, and thought about issues (Smith et al., 2012). This second step in the analysis process required note-taking and commenting upon the participant transcripts. Linguistic, conceptual, and descriptive comments were used in this step (Smith et al., 2012). The researcher analyzed with initial comments before the researcher made comments beyond what was expected and superficial. Descriptive comments are “very much about taking things at face value, about highlighting the objects which structure the participant’s thoughts and
experiences” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 85). Linguistic comments focused on language use, such as “pronoun use, pauses, laughter, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, degree of fluency (articulate or hesitant)” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 86). Metaphors were noted. Conceptual comments interpret the data in sometimes in question form.

These interrogative comments led the researcher to question and seek answers and open up more interpretation of meanings. Comments were written in the left margin of a manuscript, leaving room for the next step of developing emergent themes. Using memos from the previous steps, emergent themes were identified (Smith et al., 2012). The qualitative data analysis program, Atlas.ti was used in coding the data and in finding emergent themes (see Appendices G, H, and I). The themes that emerged in the last step were then connected by the researcher.

Each participant’s data was analyzed separately. This fifth IPA step involved moving on to the next participant’s set of data and repeating the process (Smith et al., 2012). Each participant’s data was closely examined according to the previous steps. The final step in IPA was to examine all of the themes from all cases, physically laid out and search for patterns (Smith et al., 2012). Finding themes and comparing them across all data collected was an important step in finding commonalities among multiple teachers’ experiences. This particular step was significant to this study and to existing research in that much of the previous qualitative research had focused on a single participant (Coleman, 2014a; Coleman, 2014b). In studying the newer implementations of inclusion models with gifted students, multiple teachers in a school were required to teach using this new instructional model. Out of the seven schools represented in this study, four schools were represented by multiple teachers within a school. Three schools were represented by one participant each. Those three participants all taught inclusion alongside other teachers who did not qualify or volunteer for the study.
**Trustworthiness**

Multiple strategies were used in this study to establish trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is the qualitative version of validation found in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2013). The trustworthiness of this study is detailed in the following four sections: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Credibility is determined by how well a researcher depicts what is actually happening in the field. In order to achieve credibility, this research study used triangulation of data sources (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation increases the validity of the findings as evidence was used from multiple sources to highlight a theme (Creswell, 2013). Member checks also helped to ensure the validity as participants were able to view transcripts to ensure that the experiences and analysis represented their true experiences and feelings (Creswell, 2013). They had the opportunity delete any part of the transcription that they felt was not accurate. No participants chose to do so.

**Dependability**

Dependability relied on the data being subject to change and instability (Creswell, 2013). The dependability of this study was assured by having peer teachers and professors involved in checking over transcriptions of interviews and the analysis of data (Creswell, 2013). Also, bracketing was important because it removed biases from the actual information being observed (Creswell, 2013). A deliberate effort was be made to set aside personal beliefs that could potentially cloud the study (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing was completed verbally on a voice recorder.
Transferability

Transferability is determined by how well findings can be used in other settings or in other circumstances. According to Creswell (2013), thick descriptions of data are necessary in assuring that findings are transferrable. Through the thorough description of the setting and context of this study dependability was assured.

Confirmability

Confirmability occurs with credibility, dependability, and transferability in an effort to ensure objectivity in the analysis of data (Creswell, 2013). The perspectives and meanings of experiences of participants were understood based on research and theory related to the study. A written audit trail was maintained and could be replicated by future researchers (see Appendix J). Conclusions were derived from the data collected from the study.

Ethical Considerations

Approval from the IRB of Liberty University was obtained prior to any data collection. Permission was obtained from various gatekeepers, mainly school administration and superintendents, to conduct research if interviews were to be held in classrooms. To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms for all participants, schools, and school systems were used. Also, information pertaining to particular classrooms was kept confidential. The researcher had no supervisory or authority over any of the participants of this study. The participants in this study were not teachers working directly with or interacting with the researcher on a daily basis. The security of the data was a priority. Passwords were used to protect data saved on electronic files. Any paper documents were locked away.

Summary

In Chapter Three the methods of data collecting and analysis have been detailed. The
participants and setting have been defined. The role of the researcher has been clearly discussed and trustworthiness and ethical considerations have been provided. In this phenomenological study teachers were interviewed, questioned, and asked to keep journals in order for the researcher to fully interpret their experiences teaching gifted students with inclusion in the general education classroom. The results of the data analysis will be presented in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter consists of findings resulting from the data analysis of the study. It begins with restating the purpose and research questions that guided the research. Rich, thick descriptions of each participant are included. Themes were developed with the use of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012) and the findings were reported. The participants’ voices were used from interviews and journaling responses in the presentation of themes. The research questions are then answered and a summary of the chapter is provided.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers who were new to teaching gifted students and using gifted inclusion models of instruction. One central research question comprised the focus of this study: What are the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers during the first three years of using inclusion to instruct gifted students? It was supported by three sub-questions: (a) How do the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers using an inclusion model with gifted students affect teacher self-efficacy?; (b) What training and support have been received by general education teachers who are new to teaching gifted students?; and (c) What do general education classroom teachers perceive to be strengths and challenges of using inclusion models of instruction with gifted students?

Participants

In total, 13 participants were involved in this study. All of the participants were teachers who had completed necessary courses and earned a gifted endorsement. Earning a gifted endorsement certifies a teacher to provide, or serve, gifted students with gifted instruction. All
participants had a minimum of eight years of teaching experience in elementary schools. None of the participants had taught in a gifted resource setting or was employed as a gifted resource teacher prior to implementing inclusion. Each participant was on record for serving gifted students in a gifted inclusion model. Teachers used an accelerated, full-time ability grouping, or cluster grouping model of inclusion, and in some cases more than one of the models.

Most of the participants were teaching in Flannigan County Schools and Bryant County Schools. Four participants were teaching in neighboring school systems, Chevy County Schools and Owen County Schools. Teachers from four school districts and seven elementary schools participated in this study. Each participant was interviewed individually either in a classroom or at a public library. Five teachers participated in one of two focus group interviews held at a school in Flannigan County Schools and Bryant County Schools. For a month after the individual interviews, the researcher emailed journaling prompts to the participants, and 11 teachers responded to at least one of those prompts. Background information about each participant is summarized below using pseudonyms.

**Blythe**

Blythe waited patiently to be interviewed immediately after another participant who worked in the same Flannigan County school, but did not allow the later meeting to affect the time that she took to describe her experiences. In one of the longest interviews in the study, Blythe, although nervous at first, openly shared information and details with determination and a desire to fully explain her situation. She loved school so much as a young child that she decided to become a teacher. Her love for school still remained as she discussed staying late to finish researching and preparing for the next day.

Even though she was a 10-year veteran in teaching and having gifted students in her
regular classroom, she was only teaching with gifted inclusion for the second year. Blythe had a more complicated way of instructing gifted students than other participants. She served 15 gifted students in a classroom of 33 students in the subject areas of English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies in a period lasting one hour and 25 minutes. After that period of instruction, gifted students left her classroom and had an extension period with a gifted resource teacher, leaving Blythe to continue teaching those who were not in the gifted program.

**Christine**

When she observed kindergarten classrooms as part of a college course, Christine marveled at how her own schooling experience in the 1960s and 1970s differed from the schooling she observed. It was then that she chose teaching as her career. Christine taught in a public elementary school for 22 years, home-schooled her own children for five years, and taught in a private school for four years.

Christine graciously interviewed in her classroom on a Friday afternoon before Spring Break in her Flannigan County Schools classroom. In her third year of teaching fifth grade with an accelerated content model in Math, she taught 13 gifted students in an advanced Math class and 12 high achieving students. She remembered always having gifted students in her general education classroom, but those experiences did not positively affect her confidence in teaching gifted students with inclusion. She quickly gave recognition to the teacher across the hall who helped her implement and sustain the gifted inclusion model.

**Cindy**

Cindy was eager to participate in the interview held after school in her Bryant County Schools classroom. Cindy was bright and had a positive air about her. She recounted playing school when she attended daycare and had a desire to teach since those days. Most of her
responses seemed to be a stream of consciousness, being uninhibited in the sharing of her feelings and thoughts. Obviously she was a friendly and popular coworker because a few different teachers interrupted the interview at various times. She was one of the younger and least experienced participants, having eight years of teaching experience. At the most she had gifted students for two years prior to implementing inclusion.

Cindy began serving gifted students with an inclusion model almost two years ago. At her school the gifted students were full-time ability grouped. The resource model also was still being used with gifted students leaving for an instructional period each day. Two resource teachers served students in Science and Social Studies, while Cindy was responsible for Math and English Language Arts instruction.

Jenna

Jenna spoke confidently about her teaching abilities and high self-efficacy. She chose teaching as a second career after working in the corporate world. Teaching gifted students was her passion. She not only verbalized that teaching gifted students was her passion, but she also discussed the latest research on the benefits of gifted students being homogeneously grouped. A fan of inclusion because of the opportunity of more homogeneous groupings, Jenna animatedly explained how she focuses on the independent learning and problem solving within her gifted inclusion class.

While Blythe taught five different subjects using gifted inclusion, Jenna taught a math accelerated content course in the same Flannigan County School. Jenna was in her 11th year of teaching and stated that she had been teaching gifted students in heterogeneously grouped classes “since day one.” This was her third year of teaching an advanced content, also known as accelerated content, fifth grade Math class. Twenty-four of the 33 students in her somewhat
homogeneously grouped math class were labeled gifted while the remaining students were high-achieving, much to Jenna’s preference.

**Kathryn**

Kathryn chose to meet at the public library for her interview, and she gave a bright, warm smile despite admitting she was slightly nervous. She was soft-spoken and reserved, but opened up more readily toward the end of the interview. While in her second year of college, her sister helped her realize that she was more suited to work with children. Kathryn decided to switch majors to become a teacher. At the time of the interview she taught fourth grade in Chevy County Schools. A veteran teacher with 28 years of teaching experience, Kathryn revealed later in journaling that she would be retiring after the school year ended.

Kathryn had gifted students in her class when she departmentalized, where teachers teach different classes of students one or two subjects as opposed to teaching all core subjects to one class of students. She began teaching with gifted inclusion almost two years prior to her interview, which was the cause of her no longer being able to departmentalize. Six gifted students were full-time ability grouped and served by Kathryn in Reading/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies, but also were pulled out for all-day resource instruction every Monday. Departmentalization was something Kathryn missed as she would steer conversation back to it, or the lack of it, throughout her interview.

**Linda**

Linda decided to teach as a third grader. She taught in the same school as Kathryn and was once one of the teachers who practiced departmentalization. Another veteran teacher of 28 years, she had no intention of retiring. After the interview she shared that she might become a gifted resource teacher for the next school year. A change in her thinking toward this new
position was clear when she discussed issues concerning initial identification and qualification of
gifted students. This was a discussion other participants did not have, nor did they find the gifted
endorsement courses on the topic necessary in their teaching of gifted students with inclusion.

This was also Linda’s second year teaching with the inclusion model, and she taught
alongside Kathryn in fourth grade. Although teaching on the same grade level, Linda and
Kathryn taught different groups of gifted students with a full-time ability grouping. Linda taught
seven gifted students in her general education classroom four days each week, and on the fifth
day the gifted students went to a gifted resource teacher to receive gifted instruction.

Lindy

A former coworker of Cindy’s, Lindy had recently begun teaching in Owen County
Schools. She was a younger participant who took a deep breath before the interview began and
sometimes struggled with educational terminology. Similar to Cindy, she had eight years of
teaching experience, but Lindy had always taught gifted students in her general education
classroom. While in college, Lindy decided to begin teaching, once she had worked with
children in a school. At one point in the interview, she asked if she was not giving enough
information in her answers, making it seem as though Lindy did not hold back opinions,
thoughts, or feelings.

Six of her teaching years included having gifted students in her classroom and she began
serving gifted students with inclusion last school year. In Lindy’s school gifted inclusion
consisted of the general education teacher having a group of nine students who were full-time
ability grouped. The school also provided gifted services through a resource model where
students were taught by two gifted resource teachers for an extension period and a small amount
of time each day in Math, Science, and Social Studies.
Mary

Forthcoming with information and having a willingness to share her wisdom of teaching, Mary was a fifth grade teacher with 27 years of teaching experience and taught in Bryant County Schools. She began teaching gifted students her second year of teaching and had seen a variety of resource models used to serve gifted students, which she recounted in her interview. Mary also had a daughter who was in the gifted program, and Mary used her daughter’s experiences in the general education classroom to guide her teaching of gifted students with inclusion. There were no doubts that she was comfortable with teaching gifted students with her professional and personal experiences prior to implementing inclusion. After difficulty finding a time to interview between conferences with parents, she was called out in the middle of our interview to take a phone call, but immediately jumped back into the conversation once she returned.

Mary had a number of years of experience with groups of gifted students being placed in her classroom, but it was not officially cluster grouping as Mary only became gifted certified the previous year. Since completing her gifted endorsement, Mary had been responsible for serving gifted students with instruction in Math and Social Studies. Her school used an acceleration model in Math and cluster grouping in Social Studies. Mary taught 21 students in Math and a cluster of 11 gifted students in Social Studies. The fifth graders were instructed in English Language Arts by a gifted resource teacher. Mary seemed to have a positive working relationship with the gifted resource teacher. She credited the resource teacher with helping her to successfully meet the gifted students’ needs in her classroom and implement new teaching strategies and tools.

Natalie

She was another participant who chose teaching as a second career. She previously
worked in marketing, resisting the influence of a large number of educators in her family. After working with children as part of her job in marketing, she could not resist the calling to education. Natalie’s interview was arranged face-to-face on the way to meet another participant. She sought the researcher out to arrange the meeting, which is a testament to her outgoing personality and welcoming spirit. During her interview in her Flannigan County Schools classroom, she proudly showed off her literature circles materials and gratefully gave credit to a curriculum specialist at her school for the effective strategies she uses with gifted students.

This was Natalie’s tenth year of teaching and first year of using gifted inclusion. She had gifted students in her classes prior to serving them through inclusion. Natalie taught two class periods of English Language Arts. She shared:

So, I teach them every day for 45 minutes during that RTI block. I know different schools do it differently, but we do it during that 45 minutes RTI block. And, then, in both of my blocks I have gifted kids, but one of my blocks is advanced, so about half of them are gifted, and then in my other block I only have like three or four that are gifted. The RTI block is an acronym for Response to Intervention. It is a period of time set aside daily for teaching to specific needs of students in flexible groups. The RTI block is used system-wide, but individual schools choose how to organize groups.

**Rayna**

Rayna taught down the hall from Natalie in Flannigan County Schools. She was in her 11th year of teaching with experience in both Georgia and a neighboring state. Her fourth grade teacher inspired her to be a teacher because of her fun teaching style and obvious love for her students. Rayna was genuine in her interview by opening up about both successes and failures with teaching. She was also open to new ideas, stating that a new teacher on her grade-level had
brought new ideas that were more current and useful.

At the time of the interview she was in her third year of using inclusion. Rayna served students in a cluster group while other teachers used accelerated content. On Rayna’s side of the hallway teachers primarily focused on teaching Math and Science to fourth graders, while the teachers on the other side focused on other core subjects. She had two periods of math instruction. There were five gifted students in each period among other high achieving students. She taught all subjects except for English Language Arts, but only served gifted students through math instruction.

Sylvia

With a noticeable Spanish accent, Sylvia was not originally from the Northern Georgia area. She spoke loudly and was not timid like other participants had been in the local library a few miles away from her Chevy County School. Her opinions were made clear, her dislikes were discussed without hesitation, and her answers were concise. She, like Kathryn and Linda, taught in the same elementary school, but taught third grade. Sylvia had 16 years of teaching experience, including 13 years teaching in an elementary school and three years of teaching college courses.

Sylvia began teaching gifted students when she implemented gifted inclusion in her general education classroom last school year. Sylvia’s school uses the full-time ability grouping model to serve gifted students in the general education classroom. Sylvia teaches students all subjects every day. She is responsible for providing gifted instruction to three gifted students and commented that more students were to be added to her classroom. A gifted resource teacher teaches students for an entire day in a resource classroom one day each week.
Tabitha

Tabitha seemed unsure of herself at times during the interview, but obviously had the experience and support to keep her well informed about teaching gifted students. Tabitha was also a tenured educator with 17 years of teaching experience who decided to teach when she was in high school. Having been a gifted student in school, Tabitha could relate to her gifted students in a way that other participants could not. Tabitha was well-spoken and forthcoming with her thoughts and feelings about teaching during our interview after school in her Bryant County Schools classroom.

Gifted students were in her general education classroom for a total of six years over the course of her career. Tabitha was in her second year of gifted inclusion. One other teacher on her grade level had gifted students in her classroom, but she was not certified and did not serve gifted students with inclusion. She referred to this teacher as her neighbor and worked with her and the gifted resource teachers to plan for the students in her inclusion classroom. The gifted inclusion model used in her school required her to serve second graders in Math and Language Arts, while gifted resource teachers served them in Science and Social Studies every afternoon. Tabitha taught in the same school as Cindy.

Tanya

Tanya was so soft-spoken that it was difficult to imagine her commanding the attention of a large group of fifth graders. Upon entering her Flannigan County Schools classroom for the interview, the researcher noted the projects displayed on her walls and hanging from her ceiling were enthralling. Tanya was the only participant who spoke of attending a workshop concerning gifted students. She explained that the focus of the workshop would apply to the teaching of gifted students, but it was not a workshop completely devoted to gifted education. Two other
teachers on her grade level also used gifted inclusion and Tanya felt well-supported in the planning and preparation of lessons.

Tanya had been teaching for 19 years. She began teaching gifted students when she implemented inclusion and was in her third year of gifted inclusion at the time of the interview. Tanya had a group of seven gifted students who were cluster grouped in her classroom for English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science. The gifted students were ability grouped for Math and received math instruction from another fifth grade teacher. Other gifted students in fifth grade were cluster grouped in two other classrooms.

Results

Analysis of the data began after all of the interviews were transcribed and journaling prompt responses were received. The pieces of data were collected in the Atlas.ti program for coding. After coding, the researcher examined and analyzed the results, and four common themes emerged. These themes were (a) Recognizing gifted students, (b) Growing as an educator, (c) Planning with gifted students in mind, and (d) Needing time and resources.

Recognizing Gifted Students

The theme of recognizing the true characteristics of gifted students resonated throughout the data. Every participant discussed characteristics of gifted children that they observed, planned for, or found challenging. This theme encompassed several parts: challenging myths, observing commonalities, comparing gifted students with other students, and advocating for gifted students.

Myths. One key point for recognizing gifted students is to recognize what is not accurate about them. Participants identified a few myths that research has also shown (Davidson, 2012; NAGC, 2015c; Treffinger, 2009). They discovered these were not true based on their
experiences with different gifted students and were quick to point out the myths. Cindy pointed out that “they can be overlooked in the classroom because, up, they get it, I don’t need to work as much with them.” Jenna responded, “…people have the misconception that gifted students don’t need help. That’s not true, they do need help. Uh, they need all of the same things that regular ed students need, they just need it in a different way.” Tabitha admitted:

I used to think that these students really could do anything, and I find that they have their own struggles, they have difficulty in some areas, so I think it’s changed my mind that they’re just like any other kid in this classroom.

Discovering the truth behind myths helped Sylvia to recognize underlying needs:

… Number one I need to teach them what’s on grade level because I think it’s a big misconception that they think kids who are you know gifted they come into a grade level, they already know that. Well, they don’t. You know? You need to, they need to be just taught at a higher level.

Tabitha stated:

I have learned that people’s perception of what gifted is, is not really the truth of the, what it is. Um, they are just, they struggle in as many areas as your regular students do, only they become 90 times more frustrated than they do. So, yeah, I think people think that it’s all sunshine and roses and they’re very good at everything and that’s not what I found.

Jenna brought up the point that the misconception of being “smart and fine” also leads people to think, “Your feeling level is not really there as much because it’s easy for you, maybe, but really they have a heightened sense, like almost an adult…” Understanding true characteristics of gifted students and disregarding myths helps educators to effectively teach gifted students.
Observations. Another key point of recognizing gifted students was common
observations. Participants felt that the most beneficial part of their gifted endorsement courses
was learning about the different characteristics of gifted students. Jenna, Kathryn, Mary, Natalie,
and Tabitha all gave credit to their gifted coursework in learning about the characteristics. Some
participants described what they have seen in the gifted students in their classrooms. Kathryn
responded:

The articles we read in our first gifted class opened my eyes so much, and I even saw my
daughter in it. The things that I didn’t understand, how they push themselves, and um,
kinds of make life difficult for themselves just because they have…they think a lot of
times everything has to be perfect. So, I’ve gotten to be a lot more understanding of the
little quirks and things I see from the kids.

The characteristics discussed were placed in three different categories during coding: ability,
behavior, and knowledge.

Ability. The first characteristic noteworthy about gifted students is their ability.
Teachers were surprised by how much more advanced gifted students were than students who
were not gifted. Sylvia commented that gifted students “…are so much more advanced than
your regular, for me regular third grade.” Lindy was “…flabbergasted at how far I could push
them to points where I had to stop the lesson and say we’ll continue tomorrow, because I didn’t
know how to push any further.” A reaction from participants was to stay ahead of students’
abilities or open up to different ways of thinking. Natalie advised, “…you’ve got to be 50 steps
ahead of them because they’re so quick and fast and bright.” Christine talked of how students
“open you up to seeing…that there are different possibilities,” and realizing, “…they’re always
going to think of something that I haven’t thought of because they’re gifted.”
While gifted students possess high levels of ability, participants recognized that these students usually excel in a few areas rather than in multiple areas. Teachers quickly pointed out that students had strengths and weaknesses similar to their nongifted classmates. Before taking the endorsement courses Linda just gave gifted students enrichment work, but she realized “…there are different ways that kids are gifted, so they may not always need enrichment in every single subject. It may be that they’re gifted in one area.” Kathryn, Linda, Rayna, Sylvia, and Tanya all pointed out that students are gifted in different ways. Tanya stated:

Yea, I mean, originally before I took my gifted certification class, I just thought that gifted kids were just, they got everything done, they, you know, had great minds, which they do, but I learned that um gifted kids are not always your most organized, they’re not always your um most creative, they have different little pockets of giftedness that I’m seeing. And, I originally, I just thought oh, they’re really smart all the way around, whereas some have more strengths than others in different things.

**Behavior.** Another characteristic of gifted students is their behavior. Some behaviors of gifted students surprised educators. Teachers were surprised at how deeply students could feel. Linda was surprised, saying, “I have learned that they have, they have emotional, high level of emotional, um, qualities also that sometimes you don’t think they would have,” because of their high intelligence. On the contrary, Jenna explained:

Um, I guess one of the biggest things that I’ve learned is you sometimes forget they’re 10 or they’re 11, you know? Because they’re gifted and they’re independent learners and they know, you know, they come in already knowing a lot of what the standards are and so, but you know when it comes to emotionally, they’re still a 10 year old little kid. You know? And so, sometimes their social-emotional doesn’t necessarily match their
intelligence level.

Other behaviors participants noticed were inquisitiveness, perfectionism, very high or low motivation, being observant, and attention seeking. Participants also discussed gifted students’ unique personalities and how they have become tolerant of some of the idiosyncrasies of gifted students. Kathryn explained,

The things I didn’t understand, how they push themselves, and um, kind of make life difficult for themselves just because they have…they think a lot of times everything has to be perfect. So, I’ve gotten to be a lot more understanding of the little quirks and things I see from the kids.

Christine also referred to their “quirky ways.” Mary focused on validating the gifted student and his or her need to ask questions and to want to learn more:

You know, but I’ve learned I have to stop and validate what they’re saying, and okay, give them some feedback, and then I’ll say, “Okay, what we’re going to actually work on that tomorrow. You made such a great connection.” Instead of like, you know, because it’s really easy and I hear teachers do this a lot, “Stop it! We’re not there yet.” You know, uh, with my own child because that was the reaction that she often got, so I’ve learned a lot of that.

**Knowledge.** The third noteworthy characteristic mentioned by several participants was knowledge. Teachers were amazed at just how much knowledge gifted students had for certain subjects and topics. Sylvia responded that it “blows my mind” how much her third graders know so many facts about history. Others found that students were motivated to absorb more knowledge, or as Tanya added, “…they just soak up knowledge.” Christine recommended,

…and if they’re interested in something just roll with it, you know, because they’re, that’s
who they are. They are very interested in learning, especially something that has piqued their interest, or something that they’ve heard. So, I don’t want to stifle that.

Blythe enjoyed “…that they thirst for knowledge and so that makes me thirst for knowledge, so then it’s more powerful and you feel like you have more of a connection with your students…”

Mary was told to “back off” when giving her gifted students optional assignments after her class completed state-mandated testing. She explained in her journaling:

Well, I am frustrated because I had several teachers tell me to back off the teaching and just let them have fun since the test is over. To this remarkable group of students, learning is fun. I am grateful that the students [emphasis Mary] want to work regardless of what other teachers might say.

The participants in this study viewed the previous knowledge and quest for knowledge of gifted students as positive characteristics.

**Comparisons.** Yet another key point in recognizing gifted students was in comparing them with other students. The mention of other groups of students and how they compared to the collective group of gifted students appeared throughout interviews and journaling responses.

Other groups that were mentioned were children with special needs, or special education students, at-risk students in Early Intervention Programs (EIP), and lower achieving students, often referred to as strugglers. Teachers were quick to associate gifted students with having a special need. Cindy thought, “…there’s a lot of emphasis put on kids with disabilities or with special needs. And, they are all the time talking about that, but these kids also they have special needs as well.” Linda responded in her journaling:

I think as teachers we need to remember that gifted students are a type of special education and that not all have perfection and interests in all areas of the curriculum. While playing
to their strengths, they may also have moments of frustrations when they are truly challenged.

When Christine kept hearing and discussing the term inclusion she thought of special education students, because that term is more closely associated with those students. She teaches special education students with an inclusion model that includes special education support staff during another class period. She told me, “And, I tend to think when I think of inclusion, that’s what I tend to think of, you know, so, but those are the kinds of things that I try to differentiate with my gifted kids.” Kathryn, too, compared gifted students to special education students who have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and students in EIP by saying:

I think it made me more understanding because before that I taught the low kids, EIP, everybody that had an IEP. I had and I loved that group because I saw a lot of growth. But, with these kids you can see growth, too. You just have to work a little harder for it. And, um, so, it’s made me work a little bit harder, too, just to get to things that they can do.

**Advocacy.** A final key point in recognizing gifted students is the need for advocacy. Educators of these students were consistently vocal about the need for programming. They desired for gifted students to be given the same funding, resources, materials, and attention as those students in special education or at-risk programs. Participants also wanted the population of students to have what they referred to as a voice. Thus key points in advocacy were programs, focus, and voice.

**Programs.** When asked how people should advocate for gifted students, participants argued the need for having a gifted program in a school. Cindy showed concern that gifted students can get “overlooked” in the regular classroom. Jenna explained:
And, um, a lot of times when gifted students are intermixed in the heterogeneous classroom they are kind of left to their own devices and they’re given a packet or is given more work, um, which is not really what they need. They need to be challenged, they need go deeper to go above to go beyond.

Reiterating a common myth that may influence stakeholders that gifted programming is not of importance, Tabitha concluded, “But, yeah, I think they’re probably out of the subgroups, they’re the one that gets left behind or not remembered because I think everyone assumes that they’re just going to naturally do well.”

**Focus.** Another key point for advocacy is focusing on the needs of gifted students. Some participants pointed out that the focus of need is given to other student populations, particularly special education and the support of at-risk students. Blythe described it as:

> I feel like so many times I feel like we focus on the strugglers. You know, like IST, you know, and I know you have to do special ed and the ones that really struggle, but I feel like sometimes we, like how I have reflected back on the past like some of those gifted kids need just as much, you know, as the strugglers because sometimes they’re just sitting there, you know, and they already know the content, and you’ve really got to give them a preassessment or whatever so that they master it, and give them something else to do so they’re not just sitting there bored. So, I think that a lot of times they get, they get pushed to the side.

Blythe went on to explain how the focus has shifted at her school, but a balance for meeting everyone’s needs is what should be the focus:

> …we used to focus on the gifted and then the other kids got left behind. And then, now I feel like we focus on the other kids and the gifted kids are getting left behind. So, you’ve
got to be able to find a balance and reach all of them and I think a lot of people think that gifted people will just get it. Well, that’s not the case. They need to be challenged, they need to know, that if they’re sitting in a classroom everyday doing everything the same, they’re not growing. And, I think that getting that out there to everybody and having them understand that you have to reach all students, not just the gifted and not just lower ones, you have to reach every one of them, and I think that’s the problem, is they don’t understand it. I’ll be honest, I don’t understand everything there is about special education because I’ve never really taught special education, but I know that those students need a lot of help, but my gifted students, they need it too. So we have to find a balance.

Other participants felt that gifted students deserved more focus or an equal amount of focus that is given to other groups of students. Tabitha remarked, “I mean, I think they need to make people aware that these students deserve as much time and thought and money as students that are struggling in school or students that have special needs.” Christine’s opinion was, “It definitely needs to be just as important as any other area of education, because these kids need, they need to have experiences to, um, increase they’re learning and their way of thinking, too.” Sylvia, in frustration, responded in her journaling about this topic:

Truthfully, I feel the county makes no effort on supporting gifted students. Special education students have so many professionals at their disposal. If a sped student needs a service we have it, and if they need a technology they have it. If gifted and Special Ed programs are under one umbrella then gifted students are not receiving the services, nor have the materials needed in order for a teacher to teach them. From my observations, gifted students thrive on technology and project based learning, but we just do not have
the materials or support to make that happen as often as we should.

**Voice.** One of the goals in this study was to provide an opportunity for teachers to have more voice about gifted inclusion in gifted education research. The participants felt similarly about being an advocating voice for gifted students. Kathryn felt that parents of gifted students need to speak up more like parents of special education students who “…had to fight so hard to get what they want,” or else the program could be cut. Cindy desired more voice for gifted students by stating:

> It might not be like a special ed situation where they have a learning disability, but they need somebody to talk for them as well, so I would think being a voice, somebody that just constantly talking and saying that they need this as well as everybody else.

Jenna added that even teachers need to be informed of the latest research and best practices for gifted students. She advocated for being the voice within one’s own school and:

> …if you teach gifted, you should advocate for the gifted student by helping teachers who might not be gifted endorsed and might not understand the difference between the needs of a gifted student um and, and, help them to understand that it’s not just more work, it’s not just you know you finished this so here’s the next one.

**Growing as an Educator**

In addition to recognizing gifted students, growth as an educator was a theme which emerged from among the data. Participants were asked if implementing gifted inclusion caused them to change as a teacher or a person. Eleven of the participants agreed, while two did not attribute their changes solely to teaching gifted students. This theme did not simply emerge from the answering of the question. It was evident when teachers discussed planning for gifted inclusion, the meaning of being a teacher of gifted students, and discussing what they had
learned from having gifted students in their classrooms. This theme is divided into two parts: changes and improvement.

**Changes.** One aspect of professional growth was change. The way in which the participants taught changed as a result of earning a gifted endorsement and teaching with the gifted inclusion model. Blythe reasoned, “… it has actually helped change my teaching style not ev…because I don’t just teach gifted. I teach an EIP class also.” Blythe continued to say, “Sometimes I’ll pull in strategies that I use with my gifted students…” She added:

…I think everybody, if they knew how much effort goes into teaching gifted, but that same amount of effort goes into teaching the EIP kids, and a lot of times it overlaps because you have to do, sometimes you have to make things simpler, and sometimes you have to make things harder, and you have to just know the balance, and really it’s just about knowing your kids.

Lindy said that she transformed as a teacher after implementing inclusion, stating:

…I raised my expectations for myself. And, uh, made me realize that I have to continue to educate myself in order to reach them in ways that, you know, I never thought I could reach students. Or, I, you know, I thought teaching was A, B, C, and you add those together and you get D and that was it and it was just a simple formula, but now it makes me think in different ways and it makes me realize that they think in different ways and they need um a variety of strategies.

Linda said, “I have to offer many different options, you know, for them to show what they’ve learned.” Mary enjoyed “going deeper” with her advanced content class in a way she could not if the gifted students were in a cluster group or even pulled out for resource. Natalie learned how to use questioning to encourage deeper thinking in her literacy class. Blythe and
Tanya spoke of facilitating or guiding instruction and projects instead of teaching content directly.

**Improvement.** Teachers attributed teaching gifted students to helping them become better educators. A majority of participants viewed teaching inclusion as a positive experience. Lindy said, “I think it was good for my teaching career,” when asked whether the experience was a disorienting dilemma. She changed how she spends her summers and figuring out ways to help gifted students. She viewed it has a positive change in her teaching. Christine thought about her self-efficacy and responded, “It definitely pushes me to be a better teacher, because I don’t consider myself a gifted thinker.” Tanya described herself as an evolving teacher and how she is learning about and meeting gifted students’ needs. Natalie felt really confident in her teaching some days, while others were difficult. Rayna felt more confident in her teaching of gifted students and that she was getting better.

**Planning with Gifted Students in Mind**

The third theme of planning with gifted in mind emerged across many code families during analysis. Teachers planned with the gifted in mind, felt they needed to be prepared for students’ questions, and had specific goals in mind for the gifted students. Participants also shared different strategies they felt were successful in the gifted inclusion classroom. Challenges were also verbalized. Key points within this theme were priority, preparedness, goals and strategies.

**Priority.** One of the common changes teachers discussed in this study was that they changed how they think about the planning of lessons. Gifted students became a focus for them when planning lessons and designing activities. Rayna talked about how she viewed gifted students prior to using inclusion. “…they were kind of almost in the background of my
classroom versus being a part of the class, because they got their services from other teachers.”

Christine shared how her thinking has changed:

I know when I was in, like a regular classroom when the gifted students were pulled out…um, sometimes it seems like because I was trying to, my instruction was mainly geared for the status quo or the kids, and especially on the days they were out of the classroom, uh, and to me they’re, like, on the forefront of my thinking now on what to do instead of on the backburner. Not that, that sounds bad, but, but, um, because, like I said, I have that group of kids and I try to really think hard about what can I do with my instruction.

Being on the back burner resulted in gifted students receiving extra work packets or being used as peer tutors instead of receiving instruction targeted at their advanced levels. Jenna revealed:

…a lot of times when gifted students are intermixed in the heterogeneous classroom they are kind of left to their own devices and they’re given a packet or is given more work, um, which is not really what they need. They need to be challenged, they need go deeper to go above to go beyond.

Mary commented on how her daughter was used as a peer tutor in the heterogeneous classroom and often came home having not learned anything new that day. Mary responded:

I don’t think that’s fair to the gifted students. I think they need to be working at the gifted level or at the level of, you know, where they are, not being used as little, you know, tutors, or teacher helpers.

Preparedness. Another notable point in the theme of planning with gifted students was preparedness. Participants often referred to the many questions that gifted students ask in their
inclusion settings. They also connected being prepared in advance to be able to answer those questions or having the humility to admit not knowing and looking up the answers. Cindy reflected:

I’ve learned that you never know what to expect or what kind of questions are going to come out, especially of gifted students because you might be talking about one particular subject and you’re just hitting the highlights of it, but they may ask a more in depth question that I might not know the answer to so I have to go look it up. So, I sometimes have to have to challenge myself and find different answers with it as well.

Linda gave this advice:

You’ve got to be ready to accept questions and why’s and you’ve got to say, you know, “That’s an interesting concept, let’s look that up.” Because you’re not going to know everything, you know, because sometimes they have, you know, whatever their interest is, they know everything about that topic and you don’t. You have to be very open to questioning and being inquisitive. I think with them.

Rayna shared an example of questioning that caused her to look up reflex angles in fourth grade. She concluded with:

So, just that their brains are always, I feel like they’re just always thinking what’s the next step. Where, where, where am I going next? They’re almost there with me on the next step. So, um, it’s definitely challenged me as a teacher because I can’t just kind of be at the basic because they’re going to ask some other questions and I better be prepared for.

Natalie also made the comment, “it keeps me on my toes,” and “…it’s totally made me see I’ve really got to be on top of it and, and try to go ahead and think about the questions that they’re
going to ask me…” When Blythe was asked what she has learned from having gifted students in her classroom, she replied:

Um, I have to study more, I have to be honest. They ask some of the craziest questions, and I’m just like I have no idea. Um, and I throw it back on them a lot. Um, so, I feel like it has helped me grow as a teacher because I have to know the content a lot better. Not that I didn’t know it before, but I have to go deeper. Um, I can’t just say, ‘Okay well, here’s the standard and let’s move on.’ I have to dig into that standard and find things and, you know, for them, because just giving them the basic standard they’re like really? That’s all we have to do? And, a lot of them say that, so I mean, that’s one of the things I’ve really learned.

Goals. Yet another key point for planning with gifted students is the use of goals. The main goal of the participants was to provide challenge for the gifted students in their classrooms. Challenging the students meant making them think beyond what they already knew, or requiring creative thought and different ways to solve problems. Jenna was asked what it meant to be a gifted teacher and she replied, “…it means pushing them or challenging them to their greatest potential.” Natalie’s goal was to “…really push them out of their comfort zone,” and have students achieve their potential, as well. Mary wrote in response to a journal prompt:

What I hope to accomplish through gifted inclusion is true differentiation. My hope is that my gifted students do not “waste their time.” I want them to be learning all day…not just practicing things that they already know how to do or listening to lessons that they already understand. I want them to learn new information and skills. I also want them to be able to ask the questions/discuss topics that other students might not understand or even care about.
Tanya wanted similar outcomes and would achieve them by “…just trying to meet and balance.” Blythe focused on the outcome of her teaching and felt, “…whatever I have to do to help them be successful, that’s what I’m going to do. And, sometimes that’s long hours of doing research or whatever, but that, comes with the job.” Rayna expressed through journaling, “My dreams in regards to gifted students is an accomplishment in my personal mission statement as a teacher – *lifelong learning* [emphasis Rayna].”

**Strategies.** An additional point key to planning with gifted students focused on strategies. Teachers achieved their goals for educating students in a variety of ways. Grouping was varied within classrooms and from classroom to classroom. Teachers used whole group, small groups, and individualized learning. Many participants used the strategy of Project-Based Learning.

**Grouping.** Blythe, Jenna, Mary, Natalie, and Tabitha shared how they use a variety of grouping strategies, such as whole group, small group, and literature circle groups. Jenna and Mary allowed students to collaborate with each other on projects and within groups. Working together on projects also led to presenting information learned to other students in the class. Cindy, Lindy, and Tabitha often use flexible grouping and share responsibility for teaching students based upon the students’ needs in a particular unit. In their focus group interview Cindy said:

I think, too, when you collaborate with another teacher you get another, you get other ideas and especially if you’re collaborating and moving kids around, they don’t have to hear you say the same thing 12,000 times, they get it from somebody else. Maybe it will sink in with somebody else.

Tabitha responded that she and another teacher next door do that “all the time. And, I was like,
well if I didn’t say it the right way, so that they understood it, maybe she going to have the right
words to say.”

**Project-based learning.** A number of participants discussed using project-based learning
as a strategy that drives their instruction. Boss and Krauss (2014) defined the strategy as
learning by doing when students use real-world projects to learn curriculum standards. It is
considered to be a nontraditional method of teaching that has gained much popularity in recent
years. This strategy is common among teachers of gifted students because it allows students
more freedom to explore the curriculum beyond the limitations of grade-level standards.
Christine, Jenna, and Sylvia specifically used the phrase *project based learning*, while Blythe,
Cindy, Linda, Lindy, Mary, Rayna, and Tanya discussed using projects with students. Christine
said, “Well, sometimes they need more project-based learning, um, where they can have, and
sometimes they need to have like ownership of things, so give them more choice in things.”
When Jenna was asked about strategies she answered:

…do a lot of project-based learning when I can, um, it’s a little harder in math to do
project-based learning than it is in some of the other subjects, but the kids love it and they
really tend to put their own creativity and their own, they, they can kind of take it to their
own level.

**Challenges.** The participants encountered challenges when planning for their gifted
students. When participants were asked about any challenges they may have with gifted
inclusion, they consistently responded with an aspect of planning or preparing for teaching gifted
students. A few teachers commented on negative behaviors, such as lack of motivation or the
students feeling overwhelmed as a result of perfectionism. The common challenges were finding
materials and activities that are appropriate for gifted students, differentiating for all students,
and having standards and curriculum that stifle gifted learners. These challenges left Linda feeling overwhelmed and, as Lindy described, “…because they are on so many different levels, um, in different subject areas, so it’s hard to…I feel like I’m, I’m spread out more thin that way.” Cindy also commented, “I think sometimes it’s more stressful sometimes, because you have to plan different things for them.”

**Finding materials and activities.** One of the challenges that came up was materials and activities that are age appropriate and rigorous enough for gifted students have proven to be difficult to locate and create. Sylvia commented, “And my struggle now is just keeping them enriched and coming up with the activities.” Tabitha also expressed her frustration with finding materials when she said, “I have tried and tried to find things that are appropriate for a second grader that gets them thinking. They’re just not easy to come up with.” Blythe, who teaches advanced content literacy to fifth graders, complained of her school not spending the money on challenging reading materials for her students. She explained:

> Well, I have 14 students that are level Z. Well, I have no materials for them to use with them. So, trying to find materials that are appropriate for them is very difficult. And so, I’ve talked to, you know, administration and I’ve talked to other people in the school and was like, I need, I need materials for these students. And, um, well, they’re like, read and see what you can find. I’m like, I don’t have time to read novel after novel to find a novel that I can use with my class. But, I mean, our books stop at Z and I have kids that are, we’re way past Z and I have nothing to use with them. And, I mean, but that has to do with money and that has to do with, you know, finding stuff. But, I mean, I’m the, the minority, because I’m the only one in the entire school that has that problem. Because I’m the only one that has 14 plus students that are out of the new Journey’s stuff we just
got, or, you know, everything. They’re like, oh, we got all this great material, and I’m like, yeah, great, but that doesn’t apply to half of my class. So, that’s, materials would be nice to have for them.

**Differentiating for all.** Differentiating instruction was important to participants. Christine summed up the reason by saying:

> Because I, I feel like it’s important that their needs get met too, because a lot of times it’s not being met in the general population classrooms. Um, just because, you know, over-worked teachers, too many students, you know, you’re trying to, you’re teaching’s right to the most kids who need it the most.

She went on to explain that she loves having gifted students all in the inclusion classroom with higher achieving students because it is easier to differentiate and meet the individual needs of those students. Other participants looked on inclusion positively because they were able to have less student learning levels to address. This occurred in classrooms using the acceleration (or advanced content) models of inclusion. In Blythe’s classroom she continued to use inclusion-type activities with her remaining students while the gifted students left her classroom.

> And, then, with the students that are in here with me, even though they’re not gifted, we’re doing the projects and stuff, just not the same ones, necessarily same ones that the gifted teacher’s doing, but I’m still doing the enrichment and using the gifted certification on those kids that don’t have the label of being gifted.

Cluster grouping and full-time ability grouping models allowed for all other learners to be present. Some teachers had special education students, students in EIP, and lower achieving students in addition to gifted students. Those teachers had more challenges with differentiating for their students. Sylvia is one of those teachers and shared:
So it’s very difficult to plan for four different levels. And, and it’s, it’s difficult to maintain um the attention you know of those (gifted) or high level, high kids. So, that’s what I’m experiencing right now. It’s, it’s making sure that I’m, you know, enriching the high kids and the (gifted) kids and then I’m providing assistance to those low kids who need extra help.

**Standards and curriculum.** When gifted students are taught with the inclusion model, general education teachers are responsible for following the grade curriculum, teaching the grade-level standards, and teaching gifted students at their levels. Participants felt grade-level standards challenged their teaching of gifted students in two ways, either in holding students back or in a lack of focus on standards causing gaps in learning. Lindy felt:

> I mean, I feel like a lot of the curriculum squish their ability to grow and to expand.

> Whereas sometimes, I mean, you know, the standards and that kind of thing that holds me back. It holds them back because we don’t have the time to expound on something that could be bigger.

Two teachers, Rayna and Tabitha, discussed whether or not to teach students the standards of the next grade level. Rayna felt comfortable letting her fourth graders try fifth grade standards in math, while Tabitha thought it better not to teach her second graders what they would need to learn in third grade.

Other teachers felt the students were not focusing upon or mastering standards appropriately, causing teachers to take more time with standards versus using other strategies and tools. Sylvia explained that gifted students do not always already know the curriculum and need to be taught important grade-level skills. She shared:

> Because I’ve noticed with other teachers who have a situation like mine, you know they
give them things to work on that’s not in our standards, completely off, you know, from our standards. So, I like to stay within the standard and then, just take it up to a different level.

Mary uses pretesting and discussions with students to understand any misconceptions or gaps they may have before pursuing units of instruction.

**Needing Time and Resources**

**Time.** A need that appeared over and over was the need for more time. Teachers wanted more time to work with students and more time for planning. They felt gifted students deserved more instruction and they needed more time to prepare to teach the students.

**Working with students.** One of the positives teachers noted about using inclusion is working with gifted students in the general education classroom more since they do not leave for resource gifted instruction. For Lindy:

> I feel like I can’t interact with them and I don’t know them well enough until the very end of the year and so I can’t reach them in the way I want to until I really know them well enough.

Rayna thought, “…any teacher would want more time,” and how she’d like more than an hour to teach math. Linda felt that she spent more time with struggling students when gifted students needed her time and attention, as well. Rayna also wanted more time “…to include technology into whether they are making a project or sharing it with me or with their classmates.” Blythe also felt pressed for time. She had one hour and 25 minutes to teach different subjects to her gifted students each day before they left her classroom to receive gifted instruction from a gifted resource teacher. She explained:

> And, um, they come to me from, I have them for an hour and 25 minutes and I have to
teach five subjects. That’s all I have then. Now, I have the rest of my class in here for the rest of the time, but I do, I do all of my teaching and lessons and whatever for an hour and, in an hour and 25 minutes every day.

**More time for planning.** Teachers also requested more time devoted to planning, preparing, and researching prior to teaching gifted students. Rayna suggested having more time to research before doing projects with technology. Sylvia noted that planning enrichment activities for students requires more time. In her journaling, Mary shared this:

I have a student who is *extremely* bright in math. I provide him with higher level activities and problem solving packets. These packets take me at least one hour to put together. He emailed me on Saturday telling me that he has finished the latest one. I am so proud of him, but at the same time making another packet has to be added to my endless list of things to do. Teachers need more planning time (not planning time to be used for meetings) and teachers who have inclusion students should earn an additional planning period each day.

Linda, Mary, and Sylvia all would love more time to plan with other teachers. They have gifted resource teachers or other teachers using inclusion in their schools, but no time to sit down, meet, and share ideas with each other.

**Resources.** In addition to teachers needing time, another popular request was for resources in terms of professional development and teacher and student materials.

**Professional development.** The majority of teachers discussed a need for more hands-on experiences and materials in the gifted endorsement courses. Ten participants spoke of needing more experience. The participants spoke of needing more support after the endorsement, as well. Mary wanted more peer observations where she could watch other teachers use inclusion
practices and strategies. Sylvia wished for more support after getting the endorsement during the “meat and potatoes” part of actually teaching gifted students.

All of the participants received their gifted endorsements prior to implementing inclusion except for Blythe. She took the course during her first year of using inclusion even though her school did not technically receive funding for her serving of gifted students. She reflected upon the experience and said, “…I personally had the hands-on that a lot of people wouldn’t have had since I was teaching a gifted class, so I got to implement things that I’d read about, but not everyone had that opportunity.” Cindy commented on how she would have liked more experience with students instead of hypothetically planning assignments for the courses. Christine, Lindy, and Tabitha all wanted more experience with their training in the gifted endorsement courses, as well. Christine stated, “…I think there’s no better teacher than experience…” Mary, whose daughter is pursuing a teaching degree, expressed her surprise that a local major university does not allow undergraduate students to earn a gifted endorsement. She explained that her daughter was told, “You can do the others, you can do the ESOL, you can do your special education, but you cannot do your gifted endorsement.” The researcher asked her if it was like that at every university. She responded that her daughter’s friend was told the same thing at another university located in Georgia, leaving a question of why students are not allowed to pursue the endorsement.

**Teacher and student materials.** Teachers were in need of materials for themselves and students, but a lack of funding and/or focus resulted in the absence of such materials. Tabitha wanted teacher guides, books, and activities. Lindy longed for a place, such as a website, where teachers and students could access resources and not have to “pull from 500 different areas.” Mary suggested having a budget set aside for teachers to buy materials they need for teaching
gifted students. She responded to a journal prompt by writing, “One frustration…I have gifted certification and gifted students, but no money for resources for instruction. I am spending way too much time and money finding and purchasing appropriate materials.”

**Research Questions**

The central question for the purpose of this study was: What are the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers during the first three years of using inclusion to instruct gifted students? This section answers the question by reporting findings of each of three sub-questions.

**Sub-Question One: How do the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers using an inclusion model with gifted students affect teacher self-efficacy?**

Self-efficacy is the perception of one’s ability to obtain a certain outcome. Teacher efficacy has emerged from Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Teacher efficacy has had impacts on student learning and achievement, and high self-efficacy has benefited gifted students (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Guo, Connor, Yang, Roehrig, & Morrison, 2012; Rambo & McCoach, 2012; Siegel, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010; Swan, Wolf, & Cano, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). In this study two teachers reported having high self-efficacy with implementing gifted inclusion. Both teachers were clearly passionate about teaching gifted students. Jenna stated that gifted students were her passion, while Mary spoke of teaching as her hobby and her daughter’s experiences reinforcing her beliefs about effective teaching of gifted students. Jenna was in her third year of teaching with an inclusion model and had also researched beneficial grouping of gifted students. Jenna was confident about her use of individualized learning and projects to effectively teach gifted students.

Mary, although in her second year of implementing inclusion, had many years of
experience with teaching groups of gifted students in her general education classroom. Other participants had experience with gifted students prior to using inclusion, but discussed what they had learned about gifted students through the endorsement courses and now being responsible for providing gifted instruction. Mary revealed that she had been instructing gifted students with inclusion strategies before taking the gifted endorsement courses and that the assignments in the courses were not different than lessons and activities she had already used with her students.

In a previous study exploring the efficacy of general educators using inclusion with special education students, participants reported high self-efficacy as a result of teaching with inclusion (Robbins, 2014). Focusing more on the first three years of using inclusion, participants in a previous study reported having higher self-efficacy as they gained experience with using inclusion (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). All of the participants in this study spoke of growing and learning while using inclusion. The two participants who reported high self-efficacy still reported the need for researching and learning ways to best serve gifted students. The theme of Growing and Changing as an Educator is representative of the teacher efficacy of the majority of participants in this study. Teachers used the descriptors of growing, changing, evolving, learning, improving, and getting better when speaking of their efficacy.

Rayna compared her second year of inclusion to her first year. She felt more confident at the time of the interview while reflecting upon her previous year (which was her second year of inclusion, but first year in Georgia and teaching fourth grade). During her previous year of inclusion she was learning the curriculum of fourth grade Math and she had not taught the gifted students as well as she could have. She defined the experience as they were all “swimming.” Natalie, in her first year of implementing inclusion, reflected upon her time teaching gifted students prior to implementing inclusion and felt that the students probably felt like running out
of her room. Natalie and Christine both relied upon a colleague with more experience in teaching gifted students to guide them through their first year of inclusion. Teachers were comfortable with knowing they needed to improve and needing more time to develop as teachers of gifted students despite whether they were in their first, second, or third year of implementing inclusion.

Sub-Question Two: What training and support have been received by general education teachers who are new to teaching gifted students?

Two participants commented in their interviews on other training outside of the gifted endorsement that aided their teaching of gifted students. Tanya had attended a training workshop on a resource that could be used with gifted students, but gifted instruction was not the focus of the workshop. Christine noted that she had earned her Math endorsement and that it helped in her teaching of advanced content Math. All other participants had received only their gifted endorsement as training or professional development in gifted education. All but one participant received their gifted endorsements through a college program or a local RESA (Regional Educational Service Agency) in the state of Georgia. Mary mentioned gifted education being discussed briefly at faculty meetings.

The findings of this study were similar to those of other studies exposing a need for more professional development and teacher training in gifted education (Carmen, 2011; Seay, 2011; Troxclair, 2013). Cindy wanted more professional development courses offered concentrating on gifted learners. Having experiences with gifted students was also considered a need among participants. After three years of special education inclusion experience participants’ self-efficacy was higher (McLeskey et al., 2014). Five participants verbalized the need for more experience and hands-on learning with the endorsement courses. Two participants attributed
experience being the best teacher or the best way of learning.

Participants more readily discussed the support they received from coworkers. In a focus group interview Tabitha, who described herself as being the only one teaching gifted inclusion on her grade level, had another teacher next door to help her plan and teach students. In another focus group interview Blythe and Jenna discussed how they cannot collaborate in lesson planning because they did not teach the same subjects in their gifted inclusion classes, although they teach some of the same students. They did collaborate, however, when discussing the progress of particular students or if they came across ideas lending to each other’s subjects. Sylvia stated that she had no support and wished for more time to meet with colleagues for planning. Teachers in previous studies also wanted more collaborative support (Azano et al., 2014). Other participants had support of other teachers using inclusion, grade-level meetings and planning, or teachers that were not using inclusion, but gifted certified to share ideas and plan for gifted instruction. Natalie and Christine were heavily dependent upon veteran teachers of gifted. In a focus group interview Cindy described the gifted resource teachers at her school as being “a wealth of knowledge” because their focus was upon gifted students.

When asked about administrative support, participants spoke of minimal support or quiet support. Six teachers claimed no support from administrators. Those participants who felt supported by administrators thought that administrators would supply them with resources or materials if asked, or administrators occasionally asked if anything was needed. One participant has had data team meetings with administrators focusing specifically on the needs of gifted students. Another teacher had a meeting about gifted education with the gifted coordinator for her county. Overall, administration is quietly or not supporting most of the teachers who participated in this study.
Sub-Question Three: What do general education classroom teachers perceive to be strengths and challenges of using inclusion models of instruction with gifted students?

Specific questions were asked about the strengths and challenges of using inclusion models. Both were discussed throughout questioning by all participants. Strengths were found in the theme of Recognition of True Gifted Characteristics. Myths were dispelled and needs were addressed in the interviews and journaling. Teachers also described their experiences as positive. These results were similar to those of another study of special education inclusion, where general education teachers viewed inclusion positively, but reported higher self-efficacy than this study’s participants (Robbins, 2014). Eight participants said they enjoyed teaching gifted students in the general education classroom. Two preferred inclusion over resource and others reported having positive perceptions of having gifted students in the room more often. Participants made comments on knowing their students better and how gifted students had a positive impact on nongifted students and vice versa.

Challenges of using inclusion manifested under the theme of Planning with the Gifted in Mind. Few challenges were spoken of concerning the behavior of gifted students. The majority of challenges centered on planning lessons. Teachers wanted more collaboration if they did not have it already. If they had people to collaborate with, they needed more time to do it. Teachers were lacking materials and resources that they needed to plan and carry out lessons and projects. These findings coincided with findings from other studies reflecting upon the needs of gifted educators (Azano et al., 2014; S. M. Wood, 2012). They also found challenges when trying to find new ideas, activities, or lessons to do with their gifted students.

Summary

The findings of this study were presented in this chapter. Each participant was
introduced with pseudonyms and rich, thick descriptions. The results were from an analysis using IPA (Smith et al., 2012). The IPA analysis involved a process of steps that eventually led to emergent themes from the data. The first step involved the transcription and collection of all data followed by the reading and re-reading of each participant’s data. In the second step of IPA, three types of coding occurred. Three types of comments were made in coding: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Descriptive coding focused on what the participant said and what was focused upon in the interview. The researcher simply described what the participant discussed and took “things at face value” (Smith et al., 2012). With linguistic codes the researcher focused upon the participant’s spoken words. The researcher noted any uses of language, phrases, or words that were interesting or held meaning. Conceptual codes were then used to further code the data by questioning and attempting to interpret what each participant has shared.

After coding, the third step was to search for themes within each participant’s collection of data. In methodically moving from participant to participant, themes emerged quickly. The next step involved finding emergent themes across all data. In this step, the four themes explained in this chapter were evident. Participants commonly recognized true gifted characteristics, voiced needs for both educators and students, began planning geared toward gifted, and started advocating for gifted students and programming.

Research questions were also answered in this chapter. Self-efficacy was largely described in terms of growth. Participants were comfortable with having more to learn about teaching gifted students and willing to work toward a goal of meeting their needs successfully. The majority of participants only received training through the gifted endorsement courses. They expressed a want for more hands-on experiences and professional development after completion of the endorsement. Support for educators came from coworkers who were gifted resource
teachers, curriculum specialists, gifted endorsement instructors, and fellow teachers who taught
gifted inclusion or did not use inclusion. Administrative support for participants was either
nonexistent or quiet. One participant reported working with administration to assess data on
gifted students. Participants identified both strengths and challenges of using gifted inclusion.
Strengths were recognizing characteristics and needs, enjoyment of teaching gifted students, and
positive outcomes for both gifted and nongifted students involved in inclusion. Challenges
mostly stemmed from planning for instruction. Teachers struggled to find time to collaborate,
plan lessons, and find materials and resources they needed.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers who are new to teaching gifted students and using gifted inclusion models of instruction. The goal of the researcher was to give teachers of gifted inclusion a voice in gifted education research by allowing teachers new to teaching gifted inclusion an opportunity to answer questions concerning their experiences. The chapter consists of a summary of findings, discussion of the findings, implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to complete analysis of the data collected from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal responses from 13 participants. Four themes emerged from coding the data collected. They are (a) Recognition of true gifted characteristics, (b) Growing and changing as an educator, (c) Planning with gifted students in mind, and (d) Needs for educators and students.

Theme One: Recognition of True Gifted Characteristics

The first theme evolved from teachers making common observations of gifted students. Myths were dispelled that teachers believed to be true prior to completing gifted endorsement courses. The most impactful learning experience during the endorsement courses for most participants was discovering the characteristics that gifted students possess. Teachers also experienced the different personalities of gifted students. Teachers noticed three main groups of characteristics: knowledge, behavior, and ability. First, students were extremely knowledgeable about topics of interest and usually more than the teacher. Second, certain behaviors were
documented, such as perfectionism, high or low motivation, being inquisitive and observant, and other little “quirks.” Finally, student ability also resonated with some participants. Students were capable of much more than teachers expected of them.

In recognition of gifted students’ unique characteristics, participants often compared them to other groups of children with special needs, or to students considered to be at-risk. Gifted students were commonly said to have a special need of high intelligence. The participants revealed their passions for gifted students and insisted that this population have programming available and receive equal amounts of attention and funding that other groups of students receive. They wanted the word spread to parents and other teachers about the needs of the gifted and to dispel myths that many people still believe.

**Theme Two: Growing and Changing as an Educator**

The second theme was growing and changing as an educator. Most of the participants experienced some change in teaching style. Teachers became more of a facilitator and guide, were able to meet the needs of different learners and differentiate instruction, explored skills and concepts in more depth, began to offer more choices, and overall thought differently about the planning of lessons. Participants affirmed teaching gifted students with inclusion made them better teachers because of the changes that occurred.

**Theme Three: Planning with Gifted Students in Mind**

Planning with the gifted in mind was the third theme. Gifted students left the “background” of the classroom or “backburner” of the teacher’s mind and became more of a focus during planning for instruction. Teachers felt they needed to be more prepared to answer the questions of gifted students by researching and studying content more than they had before teaching with inclusion. New goals for planning instruction, such as challenging gifted student
thinking, differentiating for all learners, learning more than the gifted students already know, being successful, and becoming lifelong learners derived from teaching gifted students with inclusion. Participants shared new strategies and tools they used for gifted instruction. Teachers used a variety of grouping methods, literature circles, project-based learning, and individualized learning.

Most challenges these teachers encountered centered on planning. Participants struggled to find appropriate materials and activities to use in their instruction. Some participants who were using cluster grouping models had a small number of gifted students to serve along with other groups of children, such as special needs students and at-risk children. Those teachers found differentiation to be overwhelming and wished for more time to focus on the gifted students. Curriculum standards posed a problem by stifling the ability of a teacher to push students past what they already knew for some participants. One teacher explained misconceptions happen when gifted students learn about content on their own causing the teacher to step back and focus on the grade-level standards instead of pushing beyond the standards. Other participants felt curriculum standards were not properly taught because teachers believed the myth that gifted students already knew the content. The believing of the myth led to gifted students having holes or gaps in their learning.

**Theme Four: Needs for Educators and Students**

Needs of teachers and students emerged as a fourth theme. The three most prominent needs of these participants were professional development, time, and resources. Professional development opportunities were nonexistent beyond the courses required for the gifted endorsement. Teachers wanted professional development opportunities to learn more about teaching the gifted population. They wanted extra time to work with gifted students, whether
they needed time because of the stress of differentiation for many levels, or they needed time for instruction and completing lessons. Additional time for planning and researching was a desire. The significance of planning for instruction was revealed in the third theme and participants spoke of the greater amount of time required to plan for gifted students. Resources were not abundantly available for the educators in this study. Funding was used for the majority of students in need and not usually for the small population of gifted students in a school. Materials, activities, projects, and ideas for lessons were difficult for participants to find, leaving them wanting more teacher and student resources.

**Research Questions**

The one central research question and focus of this study was: What are the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers during the first three years of using inclusion to instruct gifted students? Three sub-questions were used to answer the central question.

**Sub-question one: How do the perceived experiences of general education classroom teachers using an inclusion model with gifted students affect teacher self-efficacy?** In this study participants described their self-efficacy as growing, getting better, improving, evolving, and changing. The participants that used these descriptions were comfortable with the mindset of not being perfect and still having much to learn about teaching gifted students. Two of the participants reported having high self-efficacy. These two participants still comfortably discussed their growth and change, but did not attribute growth and change to the teaching of gifted students. Participants had little experience teaching gifted students, were not focusing on gifted students in their classrooms, and did not realize the characteristics and needs of this student population prior to earning their endorsements and teaching with inclusion. The two
participants with high efficacy had a passion for this population before teaching inclusion. One teacher had been focusing on the teaching of gifted students in her classroom prior to earning her gifted endorsement and felt confident in teaching them.

**Sub-question two: What training and support have been received by general education teachers who are new to teaching gifted students?** The most support teachers discussed was that given by coworkers. Teachers collaborated with other teachers who were using inclusion, teachers who were gifted certified, or teachers who were not gifted certified. Curriculum specialists and gifted resource teachers were also supportive. Participants used their support to plan and come up with ideas for using with gifted students. Administrative support was more prominent with one participant. Other participants admitted to having no administrative support or quiet support that required inquiring about materials or resources.

**Sub-question three: What do general education classroom teachers perceive to be strengths and challenges of using inclusion models of instruction with gifted students?**

Strengths were the positive outcomes for both teachers and students involved with gifted inclusion. Teachers felt confident in identifying needs and had growing confidence in the planning and teaching of gifted students. Participants insisted that gifted students and nongifted students were having positive effects on each other in the inclusion setting. Teachers expressed enjoyment in teaching with inclusion. Challenges mostly resided with planning for instruction, the lack of support from administration, or need for more collaboration. The need of time and resources posed challenges for teachers to successfully teach gifted students.

All individual interviews and focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher in order to better comply with the guidelines of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). The researcher sought to interpret the life experiences of the participants without making
assumptions or arguing what may be best for elementary gifted students. The goal of the study was to give elementary teachers new to using gifted inclusion in the general education classroom a voice in gifted education research. This was their opportunity to speak openly about what they have experienced and share their successes, challenges, views, and opinions with those seeking to understand their experiences.

Discussion

The findings from this study reveal the experiences of a group of teachers who have begun using a specific model to teach gifted students in the general education classroom. The phenomenon that is the focus of the study is the collective lived experiences of the teachers. The findings of this study align with the findings of previous studies and present new insight into the implementation of gifted inclusion at the classroom level.

Overall, the teachers revealed a positive mindset about implementing gifted inclusion. Many specifically said they enjoyed their experiences despite any challenges they may have faced. Some even preferred it over having students pulled out of the classroom in resource models, because they valued the time spent with the gifted students. Advocacy for teachers and the gifted population was influenced by their experiences. The teachers realized the importance of educating and accommodating gifted needs and felt administrators, parents, and other stakeholders should recognize the importance, as well.

Theoretical Findings

This study was grounded in Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy and Mezirow’s (2009) theory of transformative learning. Findings for each of the theories were evident. Participants described self-efficacy and conclusions could be made about how their levels of self-efficacy affected their teaching of gifted students. Findings for transformative learning were
less conclusive as participants did not experience disorienting dilemmas or use reflective
discourse, but felt as though they did experience transformation.

**Self-efficacy.** Teacher efficacy has shown to affect the gifted population in current
research. Teachers who possess high self-efficacy are more likely to identify gifted students and
use more strategies benefiting the gifted (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Rambo &
McCoach, 2012; Siegel, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). In this study, Jenna and Mary claimed
to have high self-efficacy. Those teachers also had passion for teaching students and confidence
in using strategies that benefited their gifted students. Their efficacy and experiences with gifted
students coincided with the current research concerning higher teacher efficacy and their
willingness to identify and use effective strategies with gifted students.

What was revealed in this study is that most of the participants were growing in their
efficacy. Also, those teachers were largely unaware of gifted characteristics and needs prior to
gifted endorsement courses and the implementation of gifted inclusion. Research has previously
shown that efficacy may have been inflated prior to the first year of teaching since efficacy levels
dropped after the first year was completed (Swan, Wolf, & Cano, 2011). Participants of this
study rated their efficacy as growing and changing despite being in their first, second, or third
year of using gifted inclusion. There were no definite conclusions of whether teachers’ efficacy
levels increased each year like they did in a study of special education inclusion models used in a
highly effective elementary school (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). Research has shown
that training, resources, and collaboration produce higher teacher efficacy levels (Dixon et al.,
2014, Mintzes, Marcum, Messerschmidt-Yates, & Mark, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson,
2011). Ten participants in this study vocalized the use and need for more hands-on training and
resources. All participants either requested more collaboration or viewed collaboration as an
important need. Christine and Natalie expressed the dependency upon collaboration in the first year of using gifted inclusion. Participants were very comfortable with describing their growing levels of efficacy indicating teachers expect to not have high self-efficacy when implementing gifted inclusion and view their growing efficacy as a positive attribute.

**Transformative learning.** Mezirow’s (2009) theory of transformative learning has specific phases that adults pass through in their learning, ultimately resulting in a significant change in thinking. People will begin progression through the phases with frames of reference, and, in this case, teachers’ ideas and thoughts of gifted students prior to implementing inclusion. These frames of reference may hold common myths about gifted students (NAGC, 2015c; Treffinger, 2009). Teachers expressed having assumptions about gifted students, such as not needing help or knowing grade level content before it is taught, prior to taking gifted endorsement courses and teaching gifted students. In Mezirow’s theory, that frame of reference is difficult to change unless experience causes a disruption in thinking.

The first phase of the theory occurs when people have a disorienting dilemma, causing them to rethink what was previously believed. No participant in this study described the experience of teaching with gifted inclusion as a disorienting dilemma. In the interview question the definition of a disorienting dilemma was clearly explained because it may have been new terminology for participants. Rayna commented on the negative connotation of the term and described her experience as positive. Participants pondered the question before responding, but whether the term altered their response was unclear. Further questions prodded participants to think about if they transformed as a teacher or a person and how they used reflection. By using the term transform, participants were more willing to apply it to their changes in viewing students and teaching. Participants agreed to transforming in the way that they view gifted
students and in how they approached the teaching with gifted inclusion. Their experiences of transformation were similar to those found in previous research of first year teachers and teachers of ELL students (Cuddapah, 2005; Langley-Weber, 2012).

When asked about reflection, all teachers used it, but only Mary used it in written form. All teachers considered themselves to be in a constant state of reflection, especially during and after teaching lessons. They focused on how to improve lessons and the successes and failures. Three teachers described reflection outside of school, with Lindy and Mary explaining how reflecting keeps them up at night or prevails in dreams. Reflective discourse is a vital part of Mezirow’s (2009) theory and requires critical assessment of finding one’s voice (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The only participant who used journaling and reflected critically did not agree that implementing inclusion transformed her as a teacher or a person. Although participants practiced reflection, the needed critical reflection was not evident in this study. Teachers were comfortable with transforming and welcoming of change, but there was not enough evidence to claim that teachers progressed through the phases of Mezirow’s theory or had enough reflective discourse to experience a transformation in thinking because of using gifted inclusion.

**Empirical Findings**

The goal of the researcher was to add more teacher voice to gifted education research. Research in gifted education is largely quantitative. Qualitative research allows for experiences, observations, relationships, and emotions to be revealed and helps in the understanding of gifted education. The interpretation of the participants’ experiences in this study brings teacher voice to light and gives the tacit knowledge and insider perspective that was needed in gifted education, specifically concerning gifted inclusion (Coleman, 2014a; Prior, 2011). Much of the empirical research relating to this study was further supported by the participants’ experiences.
with using gifted inclusion. Needs for further research found through other studies were achieved and insight can be given to those areas of gifted education.

**Recognition of gifted learners.** Teachers were quick to point out what they had learned about gifted characteristics and dispelled myths they may have believed before implementing inclusion. They identified behaviors, strategies, abilities, and personalities that have been shared in current research. Focus upon other areas of giftedness, the use of divergent and flexible strategies, uneven development that may lag behind cognitive abilities and interests were all described by the participants in this study (Davidson, 2012; Tzuriel, Bengio, & Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2011). Teachers affirmed that myths do cause a lack of the challenge and opportunity gifted students need to reach their potential (Davidson, 2012). Students do not need help or support; the gifted are fine on their own; gifted students already know content before teachers share it; underachieving students cannot be gifted; and disabled students cannot be gifted were all myths found in research that participants dispelled in interviews (NAGC, 2015c).

Some myths still remained. Jenna felt that all students were gifted in some way, in order to focus on the strengths of all students, and the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) (2015c) reported that way of thinking as false. Christine felt that gifted students would get the basics regardless of having direct instruction, while Sylvia and Mary argued that ignoring basic content would lead to gaps or misconceptions in learning. The fact that myths remain among those teachers trained to teach gifted students with inclusion may indicate the need for further professional development specifically for gifted education.

**Advocacy.** Teachers were passionate about gifted needs and felt others should be, too. Advocacy is needed to ensure the fair treatment of gifted students (Roberts & Inman, 2010). When asked how people should advocate for gifted students 12 of the 13 participants shared
hopes for acknowledgement of gifted students and their needs. Sylvia did not suggest ways to advocate for gifted students because she felt people did not understand gifted education. The participants that did suggest ways of advocating felt this population of students were overlooked and underappreciated, or that knowledge of gifted students and gifted education was lacking.

In other studies there is similar sentiment in that more insider knowledge is needed concerning gifted education (Coleman, 2014a; Prior, 2011). More emphasis was placed on special education and at-risk students when it came to funding and support staff. Mary revealed through journaling that she was ridiculed for giving her gifted students more work opportunities after state-mandated testing was completed. Blythe, Jenna, Lindy, and Mary wanted teachers to be informed of what gifted students really need and not believe the myths. The care and concern for these students was evident through their positive perceptions, as well as their challenges. All except two of these educators did not have gifted students in the forefront of their minds until they taught with inclusion. In the short time that they have used inclusion, they have adjusted their teaching and mindsets and were already some of gifted students’ vocal advocates.

**Professional support.** Participants in this study realized the importance of support and wanted support from other teachers. Administrative support was considered little or none. More research was recommended in this area to further describe the support schools are giving students (Morris, 2013). In other research, educators sought the same type of support. In a highly effective special education inclusion model, teachers felt supported by administrators and peers (McLeskey et al., 2014). Teachers requested more collaboration and support in another study (Azano et al., 2014). Sylvia and Tabitha, who did not collaborate with peers, would have liked more support, and Mary specifically said she needed more time to collaborate with other teachers. Teachers who did collaborate with others found it necessary in successfully planning
and carrying out instruction that was beneficial for gifted students, further illustrating that professional support plays a much needed role in the teaching of gifted students.

**Teacher training.** Future research was recommended in order to understand the effects of professional development and describe the training in gifted education received by teachers (Matthews, Ritchotte, & McBee, 2013; Morris, 2013). The results of this study showed that most of the participants did not receive any training or professional development outside of the gifted endorsement courses they were required to complete. Participants mostly gained knowledge of gifted characteristics from the courses, and some felt the lesson planning practice was beneficial. Christine and Tanya referred to having other professional development that did not concentrate on gifted education, but felt the content could be applied to the teaching of gifted students.

The participants identified more professional development as being a need. Mary, whose daughter is currently seeking a teaching degree, voiced her frustration with an opportunity to earn the gifted endorsement in a Bachelor’s program being denied. This lack of gifted education courses in preservice teacher’s training further supports the research of how misconceptions about gifted students lead to a decrease in identification and a misunderstanding of strategies (Carman, 2011; Seay, 2011). Ten participants felt that more experience was needed during the gifted endorsement or in a form of peer observations. Carman (2011) found that the more experience teachers have the fewer stereotypes of gifted students they have. Participants’ requests for more experience were also reflective of them needing to see and practice the use of inclusion models before using them. Christine explained that experience is the best teacher.

**Resource versus inclusion.** Whether one model is more beneficial for students and/or teachers was not the intention of this study. The researcher sought perspectives of models being
used for gifted inclusion, but participants compared the two and gave their preference.

Participants expressed positivity in regards to having gifted students in their classrooms more often due to the use of inclusion. Some schools still used resource models alongside gifted inclusion, but only one school pulled gifted students out of the classroom in a resource model for one entire school day. Others pulled students into the resource setting for an extension period or for one class period. The most common benefit expressed about the gifted resource model was having the support of the gifted resource teacher. In the focus group held in Bryant County Schools, resource teachers were viewed as experts in gifted education and a wealth of knowledge to participants who were able to collaborate with those teachers.

Acceleration, cluster grouping, and full-time ability grouping were the inclusion models used in each classroom. Differentiation was used in addition to inclusion models and never as the only form of inclusion. Teachers expressed the most difficulty with differentiation and cluster grouping. A study by Sisk (2009) urged for appropriate training in differentiation and emphasized that general education classroom educators could not teach gifted without support.

Needs of general educators. A theme that emerged was the needs of general classroom teachers using gifted inclusion. Participants requested more time to spend with gifted students and more time for planning, preparation, and research. There was also a need for resources and materials. Teachers struggled to find ideas and lessons that they could use in their teaching. They also lacked materials that were age appropriate and challenging enough for the higher academic needs of their inclusion classes. In a previous study, educators requested more collaboration and support as did participants in this study (Azano et al., 2014). The lack of needs led to a feeling of professional isolation (Azano et al., 2014). The needs reflected in this study also affected participant experiences in a negative way because they had to use their own money
and spent more time outside of school trying to offer effective gifted instruction. Also, they had to go without resources and materials that could directly impact student learning in a positive way.

**Implications**

The findings from this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. This section discusses those implications. This section also provides recommendations for those working with professional development, educators, and administrators.

**Theoretical**

This study was based upon two theories, Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy and Mezirow’s (2009) transformative learning theory. Teachers openly discussed their self-efficacy. They were comfortable with having efficacy that was improving or growing. Even the participants who claimed to have high self-efficacy still saw themselves as growing. A participant elaborated on how teaching involves constant learning and growth. Another participant wrote in response to journal prompting how if one feels he or she has “arrived” it may be time to leave the profession. An underlying mindset in this study is one of teaching not being static. Teachers are constantly encouraging the growth and change of their students. The essence of learning is to grow and change; therefore, teachers naturally feel the need to do so as well.

Teachers also used the mindset of growth and change in their view of transformation. Transform does mean to change, but in order to achieve Mezirow’s (2009) level of transformation one must have an experience worthy of a disorienting dilemma, go through multiple phases, and reflect critically upon the change in thinking that has occurred. Participants in this study did not undergo the extent of transformation that Mezirow describes. Comfort with
change and acceptance of growing self-efficacy may not foster transformation according to Mezirow’s theory. Furthermore, teachers did not experience a disorienting dilemma with the teaching of gifted students with inclusion. Teachers were not under the impression that using a new inclusion model would be an experience significant enough to disorient how they view teaching or students.

Empirical

The original purpose behind the use of gifted inclusion was mostly the decreased funding provided for gifted education. Another reason to implement inclusion was because of the success found with special education inclusion. In this study it was found that general education classroom teachers participating in the study feel mostly positive about the use of inclusion models to teach gifted students. This coincides with research about the positive use of inclusion with gifted and other groups of students (Bellamy, 2005; Brulles, 2005; Brulles, Cohn, & Sanders, 2010; Brulles, Peters, & Saunders, 2012; Brulles & Winebrenner, 2011; Kanevsky, 2011; McLeskey et al., 2014; Meier, Vogl, & Preckel, 2014; Pierce et al., 2011; Winebrenner, 2003; Winebrenner & Devlin, 2001). If inclusion models are well-received by teachers, and teachers find enjoyment in teaching gifted students, gifted inclusion practices should be more widespread. Not all school districts, or even all schools within a school district, in this study used inclusion models with gifted students.

The learning of gifted characteristics was valued by the participants of this study. They were able to identify myths and change their thinking about gifted students once they had knowledge of the true characteristics students possess. Research has stressed the need for educators to be more informed about gifted students and their needs (Troxclair, 2013). More teacher training and opportunities for professional development that focus upon the gifted learner
and gifted instruction should be available for educators, especially those teaching with gifted inclusion models.

The needs of the participants in this study also relate to the needs expressed in other studies. Participants valued support and requested more of it when they felt they did not have enough. The need for support of educators is evident in many previous studies (Azano et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014; Morris, 2013). Additional time was requested over and over in the course of interviews. The need for more time was two-fold. Teachers needed more time for instruction as well as more time preparing for instruction. One teacher even requested additional planning time during the day for those teachers using gifted inclusion models. Teachers also needed materials. Materials were suggested in the forms of leveled books that were both age-appropriate and challenging, teacher guides, logic-focused activities, websites or a central resource where teachers and students could access gifted materials, and ideas for teaching lessons or initiating projects. Teachers either had no budget to spend on materials or they were discouraged from purchasing materials for a small population of students. Participants were convinced that funds were spent on the larger majority or the students in need of special services or remediated instruction.

These empirical implications build on other research studies or originated within this study. The implications could be a guide for administrators and district-level supervisors seeking to support their teachers using inclusion or in the implementation of inclusion models. The participants advocated strongly for the increased focus upon gifted students. People in positions of authority in education should listen to those that spend each school day with these students. These teachers care deeply for this population of students and advocate that others should as well. They do not view gifted students as needing the most priority in a school system, but they
do insist on recognition and additional support.

**Practical**

The practical implications of this study are presented in the form of recommendations for various individuals who may have an impact on the use of gifted inclusion models. Those people are ones who oversee or deliver professional development, administrators and district-level supervisors, gifted resource teachers, and educators of gifted students.

**Recommendations for professional development.** The participants would like to see additional components for the gifted endorsement required courses. They also shared they would like additional support after an endorsement is received, in the form of additional professional learning opportunities. The following suggestions reflect their needs and are addressed to anyone in charge of professional development or teacher training:

- Add field experience or observation of the use of inclusion to the gifted endorsement courses.
- Include more focus in gifted endorsement courses on the effective strategies and lesson planning needs in gifted inclusion and less on the identification and testing of gifted students.
- Provide mentors for teachers implementing gifted inclusion after completing endorsement courses.
- Provide more resources (lesson plans, ideas, strategies, teacher guides) for teachers specifically for inclusion.
- Generate a website with resources for both teachers and students.
- Offer more professional development on gifted instruction.
- Allow undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue the gifted endorsement or
add more college level courses devoted to gifted education.

**Recommendations for administrators.** The following recommendations reflect the needs of the participants in relation to administrative or district-level support. The participants would like for the following to be considered by superintendents, curriculum directors, gifted specialists, principals, and assistant principals:

- Allow more time for collaboration among teachers.
- Streamline faculty meetings to allow teachers more time to plan and research.
- Help teachers find activities and resources by collecting materials in a central location.
- Allocate gifted inclusion classroom budgets for materials.
- Inform teachers of how gifted funding is being spent across the district and at individual schools.
- Ask teachers what they need, then listen, and provide for them.
- Arrange faculty meetings and workshops specifically for the education of gifted students.
- Spend time experiencing the gifted inclusion classroom. Speak to the gifted students. Ask what you can do to help support this population of teachers and students.

**Recommendations for gifted resource teachers.** Gifted resource teachers were viewed as a wealth of knowledge and support for participants in this study. They inspired the following recommendations:

- Share your knowledge with general education teachers using inclusion through meetings or emails.
• Keep updated on the latest gifted education research and teach others.
• Arrange mini-workshops for general education teachers.
• Teach about gifted characteristics at faculty meetings.
• Push in to inclusion classrooms to experience them.
• Talk to gifted students about what they need from inclusion and share with teachers.
• Ask general educators what they need from you.
• Share your teacher guides and resources.
• Collaborate with inclusion teachers in planning.

**Recommendations for educators.** The participants made the following recommendations specifically for educators who may be using gifted inclusion or have gifted students in their general education classrooms:

• Keep up with current gifted education research.
• Share your knowledge of gifted students with other teachers who may not have gifted students or a gifted endorsement.
• Work with other teachers who are using inclusion or teaching gifted students, even if they are on a different grade level.
• Seek out your gifted resource teacher and your school and ask to collaborate.
• Inform administration of your needs and your gifted students’ needs.
• Ask for resources.
• Seek parental support.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations of this study were found with the participants. The results of this study
cannot be generalized to a greater population of teachers and is representative of the participants of this study. All of the participants were female elementary school teachers. They taught second through fifth grades. Participants were also general education classroom teachers. For the purposes of this study, the participants had to be gifted certified in the state of Georgia and have taught using gifted inclusion for three years or less. The general education teachers also could not have any prior experience as gifted resource teachers.

Limitations of this study may impact the ability of the results to be generalized and applied to a larger population of educators beyond the study. Limitations include a limited transferability due to the location and sampling of teachers in four districts within a specific radius of the northern Georgia. Due to criterion and snowball sampling and the location of the study, schools represented suburban and rural areas, but differed in socioeconomic statuses. Participants were volunteers. Participants were all female and mostly Caucasian. One participant was African American and another Hispanic.

Participants were interviewed individually in their classrooms in Flannigan County Schools and Bryan County Schools. Participants in neighboring counties were interviewed at local libraries. The location of interviews could have limited participant responses if the participants were uncomfortable speaking in their locations. Participants could have also responded in a way that they deemed favorable, or not provided information in apprehension, further limiting the data collected.

Teaching experience varied among the participants, but all participants had at least eight years of teaching experience at the time of the study. The gifted endorsement was earned by completing courses in graduate school or through a local RESA in the state of Georgia. Most undergraduate teaching programs do not offer opportunities for students to earn gifted
endorsements. Therefore, teachers must take courses to earn the endorsement in graduate school or as continuing education courses. During the time required to take these courses, teachers are often accumulating teaching experience. Subsequently, participants had more experience than beginning teachers because they were required to complete four courses prior to being able to teach gifted students in their general education classrooms.

All participants participated in individual interviews, but few were able to participate in focus group interviews. Two teachers from Flannigan County Schools volunteered to meet in a classroom for one focus group. The other focus group was held in a classroom in Bryant County Schools. The latter group consisted of three teachers. Two teachers taught in Bryant County Schools and one teacher taught in nearby Owen County Schools. The participant from Owen County Schools taught in the same school as the other participants two years prior to the interview. Teachers from Chevy County Schools did not participate in the focus group interviews.

Journaling, too, was on a volunteer basis. All but two participants completed at least a week’s worth of journal prompts. Two participants did not respond to any prompts. One participant responded to all four weeks’ journal prompts.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study encourage the continued research of all aspects of using gifted inclusion models. Because there is still a need for more qualitative research in gifted education, more perspectives and experiences are needed to add to the existing quantitative research. The first area for future research is in professional development and its effect upon teachers of gifted students. The teachers in this study recognized it as an important need. More research could provide insight into how it affects self-efficacy, implementation of inclusion models, and teacher
preparedness.

The second recommendation for future research concerns administrative support. Teachers did not speak of much administrative support in this study. Research is needed to provide a clear picture of how much administrative support of gifted education is being provided in schools, as well as the effects of having active support or the lack of support.

A third recommendation concerns the support given to classroom teachers using gifted inclusion by gifted resource teachers. The majority of participants did not rely upon gifted resource teachers, nor refer to them as resources. Participants who did find gifted resource teachers helpful to their teaching viewed the resource teachers as a necessary resource having a significant impact upon the teaching of gifted students. More research is needed to explore the effect gifted resource teachers may have upon general education teachers and the use of gifted inclusion in the general education classroom setting.

Further research should be conducted on the myths of gifted students. Myths were dispelled in this study, but a few teachers still believed a couple even after teaching gifted students directly. Research is needed to show what other myths are still believed by educators and look for ways to dispel them.

A study similar to this one could be used to understand the experiences of teachers in rural areas new to using inclusion. One of the four school districts in this study was located in a rural area. Researching more perspectives of rural teachers using gifted inclusion could reveal more themes and would be significant in revealing similarities and differences between rural and suburban area teachers.

The final recommendation for research concerns degrees from colleges of education and their focus upon gifted education. The concern for a lack of preparedness for gifted instruction
by students earning Bachelor’s degrees was voiced in this study. Research should be conducted to learn of gifted education requirements in the earning of education degrees.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to interpret the lived experiences of general classroom teachers new to using gifted inclusion models of instruction. A hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative methodology was used to provide an opportunity for the participants to add voice to existing gifted education research. Their sharing of their experiences allows for others to gain insight into what is happening in gifted inclusion classrooms and how the teachers of gifted inclusion should be supported. Implications stood out among the rest and reinforced other research in gifted education.

A significant implication and finding was the direct needs specific to teachers of gifted inclusion, especially within the first years of implementing inclusion. The needs of the participants directly impacted their teaching of gifted students. Participants needed more time, resources and materials, and professional development. Those who did not have support needed the support of coworkers, gifted resource teachers, and administration. These needs impact gifted instruction and ultimately gifted students, because without them opportunities for challenge, enrichment, real-world application, and success are significantly hindered. Without time, research and planning are compromised. Few or no resources result in lesser qualities lessons and projects. An absence of professional development deprives teachers from understanding the needs of gifted students and compromises their effective instruction.

In giving teachers a platform where they were able to share their perspectives of what is actually happening in gifted inclusion classrooms, they were able to explain the strengths and challenges they have encountered. Participants used this platform to let needs be known that
could benefit both teacher and student. In just a short amount of time after learning about gifted students, these teachers have developed a deep concern for their well-being. This concern has even extended to other groups of students, making them better and more caring educators.
REFERENCES


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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.12.005


APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

November 10, 2015

Mandy J. Sears
IRB Approval 2341.1110:15: Experiences of Elementary Teachers Using Inclusion Models to Serve Gifted Students

Dear Mandy,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. 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. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michelle Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B

Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 11/10/15 to 11/9/16 Protocol # 2341.111015

CONSENT FORM

Experiences of Elementary Teachers Using Inclusion Models to Serve Gifted Students

Mandy Jordan Sears
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the experiences of general elementary educators using gifted inclusion models. You were selected as a possible participant because you may fit the criteria of participants in this study. Participants will hold a gifted endorsement with the state of Georgia. Each participant will also be presently using an inclusion model with gifted students and be on record for providing gifted education services to gifted students who are taught with the model. Participants will have three or less years of experience using gifted inclusion in this manner. I 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 Mandy Sears, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is understand the lived experiences of general education classroom teachers during their first three years of using inclusion models to teach gifted students.
Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. **Individual Interview:** I will ask you questions about your experiences with using inclusion to teach gifted students. The interviews will be audio recorded. Interviews should not take longer than one hour to complete.

2. **Focus Group Interview:** You will be invited to participate in a focus group interview with other participants in this study. Group questions will be asked and answered collectively. The interview will be audio and video recorded. The interview should not take longer than one hour to complete.

3. **Journaling:** I will send journal prompts each week for one month. I ask that you respond electronically, or you may type or hand write responses for me to pick up. The journal prompts will ask you to reflect upon your daily experiences teaching gifted students with inclusion model(s).

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks. The risks are no more than you would encounter in everyday life. You will be asked to share your perceptions and experiences of teaching with gifted inclusion models. The benefits to society include contributing to the body of research concerning gifted education, particularly the use of gifted inclusion. Your insight could be valued by teachers, administrators, and government officials and aid in the understanding of your teaching experiences. A direct benefit to the participant would be to receive information concerning teaching gifted students with inclusion during focus group interviews.

Compensation:

You will not receive payment or compensation for participating in this study.
Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Pseudonyms will be used and all data will be secured in locked file cabinets and lock boxes. Electronic data will be password protected. Recordings will also be securely stored and locked by key. Recordings of interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist or the researcher. Transcriptions will be securely stored with all other data. Confidentiality will be maintained. In focus group interviews confidentiality may or may not be maintained by other participants. I will not include any personally identifying information in my final dissertation. The study may eventually be published and presented at conferences.

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 Liberty University or with the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from this Study:
If you would like to withdraw from the study, contact the research personally, or by phone or email. Participant electronic or digital data will be deleted and all other data shredded upon notification.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Mandy Jordan Sears. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at (redacted) or
msears11@liberty.edu. The advisor for this study is Dr. James Zabloski, and he can be reached at (redacted), or jizabloski@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, 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. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ I agree to be audio recorded during interviews in this study.

☐ I agree to be video recorded during focus group interviews in this study.

Signature: _______________________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: _______________________________ Date: ________________
APPENDIX C

Bracketing Excerpt from Digital Recording

“…a friend of mine saw in me that I could be beneficial, um, in teaching those students and I had just received my gifted endorsement. And, I got that endorsement so that I could, um, better serve the gifted students who were in my classroom. It was an exciting thing for me because I had only really experienced teaching, um, EIP students who were lower and I was really focused on the struggling reader. And then, I noticed, you know, once I got into teaching that I should be focusing on these kids who were at the other end of the spectrum. And so, I took on my gifted endorsement when I was getting my specialist in Reading Education in an effort to better serve those students, and really to more so to explore the reading side, um, of serving a gifted student. And, it actually encouraged me to get my ESOL endorsement as well, um, just so that I could be a better teacher all around. So, I had my gifted endorsement, and so, my friend knew that I was qualified and she asked me if I would consider being a resource teacher alongside her and administration was in agreement. And, so that is where all of this began. And so, I learned from her, learned from research all about gifted students, and became a strong advocate for gifted education and for this population of students. Um, after six years of teaching resource I, um, went back into the classroom and I was asked to pilot the gifted inclusion model that was going to start in that county. And so, I went into a third grade classroom and I had all of the gifted students from that grade level. There were 17 of them and then I had, um, five students that were put into my class that were considered high-achievers based upon standardized testing, um, CogAT scores. And so, I was expected to serve them, I was on record for serving them their gifted services and it had to be for every subject. It was counted as five segments and, um, for, and it was every subject. I went through that year with a lot of trials and coming from the…”
APPENDIX D

Excerpt of Interview Transcription

Interview #3

Okay, so the first set of questions is about your background in teaching…

When did you decide to teach?

I think I decided probably around my sophomore year in high school.

How long have you been teaching?

This will be my seventeenth year of teaching.

When did you begin teaching gifted students?

Oh, I taught them on and off throughout my teaching career and then I started doing the inclusion class last year. (okay and…)

How much experience do you have with gifted students other than with the current inclusion model?

Um…well, I was in the gifted class when I was a child, so I had that experience. Then I have had probably five or six years where they were in my class from time to time. (okay).

What type of certification or professional development in gifted education have you received?

I got my gifted endorsement through RESA. (okay, alright.)

The next set will be about your current teaching. To what extent do you serve gifted students currently?

Currently I serve them in math, reading, writing, and language arts. And they’re pulled out for science and social studies. (ok, um, so what time period is that?) It is typically, I have them from 8:30 until lunch. And, then we have lunch, recess, and then they’re out from 1:15 to 2:15. (ok, so
Every day? Or just one day?) Every day. (Every single day, okay, um, and then what is your current teaching position?) Second grade teacher.

Okay, um the next set of questions is about your perceptions.

How would you describe your experience teaching gifted students using inclusion in the general education classroom?

I would describe it as being mostly positive. Um, they’re exhausting most days. They make me very, very tired because they, I don’t know, if I make a tiny mistake they always notice it, they can’t just go along with it. But, I think it’s been good for them and I’ve really enjoyed it. (okay).

What, if anything, have you learned from having gifted students in your classroom?

I have learned that people’s perception of what gifted is, is not really the truth of the, what it is. Um, they are just, they struggle in as many areas as your regular students do, only they become 90 times more frustrated than they do. So, yeah, I think people think that it’s all sunshine and roses and they’re very good at everything and that’s not what I found. (okay).

Um, What types of inclusion strategies do you use and feel are best in teaching gifted students?

I would say I do a lot of small groups, um, a lot of research and independent and small group activities to sort of differentiate. (Alright).

Um, Do you see any benefits with teaching students with the inclusion model? (I know you said it was mostly positive, do you see specific benefits?)

Um, I think the benefits are mostly for the children. I feel like a lot of times they feel like they don’t fit in in other classrooms, where as in here they fit in. They have other friends that are similar to them. (okay).
APPENDIX E

Journaling Prompts

Journaling Prompts:

1. What did you hope to accomplish through inclusion? How would this accomplishment help you to achieve any dreams you may have in regards to teaching gifted students?

2. Did you encounter any challenges in your teaching? If so, please explain. If not, do you foresee any challenges?

3. Reflect critically upon your experiences. Reveal any true feelings, thoughts, opinions, or perspective concerning your interactions, teaching, support, or efficacy.
APPENDIX F

Examples of Memoing and Theme Development

2. Need for experience while learning in gifted courses or certification. Hypothetical situations are necessary, more so for four teachers, as they may not be able to relate to or understand the students' needs.

3. Need to review and re-evaluate, need more written resources, more orientation to the students' needs, materials are not easy to locate, and need more time and space.

4. Improving students' learning: how can they learn in isolation, how can they learn to learn, and how can they learn to teach others?

5. Need for more time and support for the gifted education, for the "most and brightest" part of teaching, more collaboration with the gifted resource teacher.

6. Need for more time with gifted, spending too much time with lower students, more collaboration and sharing of ideas about units and activities.

7. Need for more time and support to teach gifted programs, need for more support for gifted programs, help with the gifted education, and need for a special needs group.

8. Need for external resources: need more time for planning, need more time for collaborating with teachers, time and money; student-directed gifted education in college education programs, need more opportunities to learn about spent too much time and money.

9. Need for more education about gifted learning abilities and personalities.

The two most dominant needs are of resources and time. A large recurring process throughout the intensive process is planning. Teachers requested: more materials, professional development, money for resources.

As for a special need, there is a need for development in the intensive process and planning. Teachers requested: more materials, professional development, money for resources.

Having a "special need" is important.

10. Different personalities, needs for gifted in different ways, characteristics of gifted teacher: recognized, identified, learned in classrooms, comparison to EP and sped kids, need voice, parents need to speak up more for gifted kids, need support, need for gifted programs.

11. Higher level of understanding, advanced level, gifted included in classes or expected to do more; more capable, perfectionistic, myth about not working hard for gifted to understand, respect, questioning at higher levels, feedback, teachers want to get gifted, need more support, need for special needs and disabilities.

12. People's perception of what gifted is; not really the truth of what gifted, "people think it's all sunshine and roses," this group has changed a lot, used to think students could do anything (myth) and now see that they have struggles in some areas; just the same thing, need more support for gifted students.

13. Ability to work together, need more support for gifted students, need more time and materials, need more appropriate materials, need more time to plan and prepare for these kids; they are different from children from gifted programs.

14. Need for more education about gifted learning abilities and personalities.

The two most dominant needs are of resources and time. A large recurring process throughout the intensive process is planning. Teachers requested: more materials, professional development, money for resources.

Having a "special need" is important.
APPENDIX G

Examples of Transcript Coded in Atlas.ti
APPENDIX H

Example of Development of Code Family
APPENDIX I

List of Code Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADV. Gifed Programming Model (1-14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADV. Money/Resources (2-7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADV. Voc/College (6-6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges Planning Activities (13-33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAB. Challenges (1-9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAB. People (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAB. Planning (1-6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAB. Sharing Students (5-4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept A: A diverse to gifted (1-4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept B: A diverse to gifted in the first year (1-3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept administrative gifted ed (2-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept all students are gifted in some way (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Am (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Behaviors (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Behaviors (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept collaboration with any teacher is beneficial for students (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept compare to other teachers (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept definition of support (1-3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept don’t consider myself a gifted thinker (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept don’t waste time relearning (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept ED leaders changing to fast, slow down and back (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Expectations (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Fairness (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept gifted resource benefits to teachers and students (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept gifted students want to work alone (2-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept give enrichment activities without prior foundation (1-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept grows closer to students (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept higher level of emotion (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept meaning instruction from someone else is beneficial (1-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX J

## Audit Trail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 16, 2015</td>
<td>Proposal Defense</td>
<td>A successful defense! My committee members gave me great feedback and I can’t wait to get started on my research. Approved to move forward with the IRB process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 10, 2015</td>
<td>Reception of IRB Approval</td>
<td>Two sets of revisions, but the approval only took a few weeks for the approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 11, 2015 -</td>
<td>Emailing of participants</td>
<td>I was able to find participants through colleagues and a gifted endorsement instructor. Other names were given to me in snowball sampling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 9, 2015 – April 1, 2016</td>
<td>Individual Interviews And Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td>I presented consent forms in person and received signatures before beginning each interview. Interviews in Flannigan and Bryant counties took place in schools, while</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interviews with teachers in other counties took place at local libraries.

Focus groups took place in Flannigan and Bryant counties. Two teachers participated in Flannigan County and three in Bryant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 11, 2016 – April 29, 2016</td>
<td>Journaling prompts emailed to participants weekly.</td>
<td>Emails began after each participant’s individual interview. I was able to discuss the journaling expectations with them in person before emailing them. I sent multiple reminders for those that didn’t respond. Two participants did not respond to my emails about journaling at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30, 2016 – June 7, 2016</td>
<td>Data Analysis and Chapters 4 and 5</td>
<td>The Atlas.ti program was perfect for me and I was able to analyze my data quicker than I would without it! It</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
allowed me to make multiple graphic representations of my data. I coded the data first into 355 codes! I was able to merge codes and create families. I ended up with 51 codes after merging and then four themes emerged through memoing. The IPA data analysis was an excellent guide in how to analyze data step by step.