Strategies and Practices used by Veteran Educational Leaders to Identify African American Students for Gifted Education in Rural Georgia Middle Schools.

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family and friends. Thank you for all the love and support each one of you all have given me throughout this journey.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Since the end of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Department of Education has made efforts to provide services for the nation's most academically advanced students (Colangelo et al., 1999). In the 1930s, the U.S. federal government stopped pushing educational advances to challenge academically advanced students because of the financial strain of the Great Depression (Colangelo et al., 1999). However, during World War II, there was a shortage of educated men in the country, which worked to the advantage of high ability students because universities offered early entrance programs for academically advanced students. These programs continued to the Korean War (Colangelo et al., 1999). Thus, when the former Soviet Union launched the satellite Sputnik in 1957, the United States realized it needed to do more to challenge and educate America's most capable and brilliant youth (VanTassel-Baska, 2018) and tried to identify and educate the country's brightest students (Colangelo et al., 1999). Since its implementation, educators have met gifted education with great enthusiasm and criticism (Ford, 2011).

During the 1960s, gifted programs were deemed discriminatory and failed to provide services to students of color (Colangelo et al., 1999). According to Ford (2011), minorities, especially African Americans, are underrepresented in gifted programs. In 2018, 7.7 million African American students were in public schools nationwide, and only an estimated 8% were in gifted education programs (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018).

Georgia reported that African American students made up about 18% of the total gifted population compared to White students accounting for almost 60% (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018).

Gifted students in rural communities have unique needs and circumstances often ignored by educational policymakers in larger cities (Floyd et al., 2011). In 2016, 19% of public-school districts in the U.S. were located in rural areas, and 27% of students in Georgia attended a school in a rural area (NCES, 2017). Goglin and Miller (n.d.) asserted that rural school districts have restricted access to various programs and professional resources due to geographic barriers, time, and financial constraints. African American children living in low-income urban and rural communities were often at a disadvantage because they usually attend school districts facing budget constraints, lack of resources, qualified teachers, advanced placement courses, or an enhanced curriculum (Kellogg, 2016). As a result, these students may be overlooked and not challenged to their potential (Kellogg, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

African American students are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs nationwide (CRDC, 2018). African American students in rural schools are less likely to be identified and placed in gifted education programs served by certified gifted teachers than other racial groups. They are also more likely to face challenges such as lack of qualified teachers, fewer opportunities to be a part of enrichment opportunities due to geographic barriers, and financial constraints (Davis et al., 2020). Goglin and Miller (n.d.) posit that rural school districts often have a small number of gifted students in their

schools because of their size. Thus, they allocate fewer resources and less time to these students and programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a middle school gifted program.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the career and life experiences of veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 2: What strategies did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 3: What practices did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

Significance of the Study

Recent findings confirm that many gifted students, particularly African Americans, are underserved in rural gifted programs (Davis et al., 2020). Their chances of being identified and placed in a gifted program, along with having gifted certified teachers and access to resources, are limited. Findings from this study may help create

plausible solutions and recommendations for administrators and teachers to recruit and retain African American students in the gifted program. This research may potentially help determine if these same barriers exist in other rural school districts across the state of Georgia. Additionally, state and local educational leaders may gain knowledge that could help them review and revise district and state policies, thus creating professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders within their communities. Furthermore, teacher preparation program administrators may gain knowledge and insight that could help direct their future educational decisions, policies and courses taught within their programs and include a more culturally responsive curriculum for potential teacher candidates. The findings from this study may contribute to the growing body of literature to help explore practical strategies and practices possibly used to identify and retain African American students in rural middle school gifted programs and provide ways to encourage parental involvement of these students.

Conceptual Framework

Personal Interest

This study reflected an interest that began because I was one of seven African American students in a class of 30 in middle school. Out of the seven African American students for that grade level, only two were classified as gifted and received gifted services. The rest were not considered gifted and did not receive gifted services, but we were in advanced content classes and often worked with our gifted peers. I graduated from high school and college with honors. My own experiences of being teased by my childhood African American peers, family members, and friends because of how I talked and acted, were often discouraging and upsetting. My negative experiences led me to

believe that I was not “Black” enough and to fit in, I must hang around certain people, talk, and carry myself a certain way.

Over my eleven years as a middle school educator, I have observed students’ demographics in my classes and how the advanced content/gifted classes lacked more diversity than non-gifted classes. I have taught students with disabilities, non-gifted, and gifted students. My interest in African American students in the gifted program increased as I observed the overrepresentation of White students in gifted classes. I observed that my classes were primarily composed of African American students while the gifted/advanced content classes were predominantly White students. Additionally, I have often witnessed my students not being considered for academic opportunities like the gifted students and participating in different academic clubs or programs such as the National Junior Honors Society or Math Competition Teams. As a middle school teacher, I encouraged and held high expectations for my students to do their best, including my African American students. Each year, I evaluated the academic success of my students. I encouraged my administrators and fellow teachers to give them a chance to participate in advanced content classes. My passion for increasing African American student enrollments in the gifted program was when I realized some teachers regarded African American students as unable to handle gifted and advanced learning with their peers in addition to hearing various comments expressing microaggressions about gifted and advanced content African American students.

I chose to study the underrepresentation of African American students in the gifted program to understand the potential barriers African American students face when being recruited for the gifted program. I explored current strategies and practices used by

veteran educational leaders to identify African American students for the gifted program. Additionally, I explored possible solutions to help state and district education leaders increase representation of gifted African American students and help motivate and encourage the students' families to be successful in the gifted program.

Existing Literature

Requirements for students to participate in gifted education programs vary from state to state and are often dependent on funding, accessibility, and testing (Rinn et al., 2020). I used Gardner's multiple intelligences and critical race theories to understand teachers' strategies and practices to identify African American students for the gifted program.

Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence relates to an individual's unique ability to demonstrate their intellectual skills in various ways. Gardner (1999) identified several ways people show their intelligence. He argued that students could demonstrate intelligence through verbal-linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial-visual intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalist intelligence, and existential intelligence (Gardner, 1983, 1999). Multiple intelligence theory allows researchers to extend the notion through gifted programming, especially when reviewing the criteria, recommendation procedure, and testing of African American students for admission into gifted programs.

I also used a critical race lens to understand how the life and career experiences of the veteran educational leaders could affect their selection of African American students into the middle school gifted education programs. Ladson-Billings (1999) recommended

using critical race theory as a tool to deconstruct oppressive structures, reconstruct human agency, and construct fair and socially just relations of power.

Summary of Methodology

I used a phenomenological research design to examine strategies and practices veteran educational leaders implemented at Clearlake Middle School and Clearland County Middle School. This research design allowed me to explore the experiences of my research participants in their natural environment. I purposefully recruited seven veteran educational leaders from Clearlake Middle School and Clearland County Middle School to participate in this study. I used the following selection criteria to ensure participants provided rich data: more than three years of teaching experience, held a valid Georgia teaching certificate in any subject area, gifted endorsement, and varied in gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, life experiences, and educational training. Due to COVID-19 and strict government disease control regulations, I met with participants virtually using Google Meet. I utilized Seidman's (2013) three-series interview protocol to capture the participants' stories about their experiences. I augmented interview data with documentation gathered from the district, school, and state along with my research memos. I used coding and constant comparative analysis to analyze my data. Study credibility and dependability were reinforced with rich data, triangulation, and member checking while monitoring bias and assumptions through self-memos.

Limitations

There were several limitations to conducting this qualitative research. The study is limited because it focuses on the experiences of seven veteran educational leaders who

agreed to participate, making the research results not generalizable to other veteran educational leaders. According to Maxwell (2013), some possible threats to validity include researcher bias, the lack of rich data, and distorted responses (Patton, 2002). I acted as the primary instrument of research. Being a primary research instrument made me prone to biases and assumptions that may have skewed my data. Researcher bias is a threat to qualitative data because the researcher could select data that fits goals, existing theories, and preconceptions about the data collected in the study (Maxwell, 2013). I kept possible bias in check by recording memos throughout the interviews. I also gathered rich, detailed notes from the interviews and audio recordings for transcribing and respondent validation because rich data requires the researcher to record interviews, observations and transcribe them verbatim (Maxwell, 2013). Virtual interviews and documentation due to strict government regulation and COVID- 19 at the study time may have compromised the quality of data and the final research results. I did not conduct non-participant observations as initially planned due to the restrictive guidelines for the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and subsequent school closures. As Maxwell (2013) posits, respondent validation is one of the most fundamental ways to rule out misinterpretation of the participants' meaning. Documents gathered from primary and secondary sources can also have limitations (Patton, 2002). Due to COVID-19, sudden school and government shutdowns, and no standardized testing and other records, including demographics of students in the gifted program, data gathered from these sources might not reflect the most recent school year's population.

Finally, I cannot rule out the limitations of distorted responses (Patton, 2002) of self-reported data. It is plausible that respondents may have distorted responses due to

working relationships from previously working in this school district or lack of awareness due to the nature of this study. Therefore, these interactions could have impeded some of the participants' responses.

Chapter Summary

Using a phenomenological approach, I explored the experiences of seven Clearland County School District veteran educational leaders regarding practices and strategies they used to identify and place African American students in the gifted program. Findings from this study may help create possible recommendations and solutions that may help recruit and retain African American students in the middle school gifted program. Additional results may help other district educational leaders, colleges and universities, and state teacher certification programs such as the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) develop and create more support, courses, and potential to educate teachers about cultural diversity and awareness.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide clarity of the terms used in this study.

Classcraft: based firmly on the self-determination theory, it helps players exercise control, develop competence, and experience relatedness. It helps students see meaning in school (Classcraft, 2021).

Economically disadvantaged: a student eligible for the free or reduced-priced meal program (GOSA, 2017).

GaTAPP (Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy): the GaTAPP program is a teacher preparation program for people who already possess a bachelor's degree in other fields and wish to become a certified educator in the State of Georgia (Middle Georgia RESA, 2018).

Gifted Education: services provided to students who demonstrate a high degree of intellectual and/or creative abilities. These services provide special opportunities and instructions to help individual students achieve at their ability level (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

Google Classroom: is a suite of online tools that allows teachers to set assignments, have work submitted by students, mark, and return graded papers (Edwards, 2021a).

IXL Learning: a personalized digital learning space that covers the K-12 curriculum and is tailored to students' age by specific subject and topics (Edwards, 2021b).

Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA): agencies established to serve local districts with many services such as school improvement, gifted endorsements, and teacher preparedness programs (i.e., GaTAPP).

Remind: a website and app that acts as a communication platform for teachers to send messages to multiple recipients at once (Edwards, 2021c).

Rural: any population, housing, or territory not in an urban area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Socioeconomic Status: the social standing or class of an individual or group of people. It often measures a combination of occupation, education, and income (American Psychology Association, n.d.).

Teacher preparation programs: program where prospective teachers gain the foundations and knowledge about pedagogy and subject matter and early exposure to practical classroom experience (Feuer et al., 2013).

Search terms used in electronic databases included, but were not limited to, African American, gifted African American, gifted education, gifted program, rural schools, rural gifted students, rural gifted programs, and Black. Multiple databases including ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Google, and ERIC were used to retrieve articles, dissertations, and books related to African American students in gifted programs.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

African American students make up approximately 18% of the total gifted population for Georgia and 8% of the nation's total gifted population (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018). The purpose of this study was to identify practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program that a certified gifted teacher serves.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the career and life experiences of veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 2: What strategies did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 3*:* What practices did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

Upon reviewing existing literature on this topic, when gifted African American students were supported by teachers with high expectations and when teachers were aware of their students' culture, students were more successful academically (Ford & Harris, 1999; Howard, 2010). Past studies have shown that using various testing methods, positive support for students and teachers, and utilizing a multicultural educational curriculum increased academic success for gifted African American students in the classroom (Ford & Harris, 1999; Gay, 2010).

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence

Each state has a set of criteria for prospective students entering the gifted and talented programs. These mandates and requirements were often based on various ideologies, one of which was Gardner's multiple intelligence theory. The application of this theory has grown in the last few decades (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2014). Gardner (1983) proposed that all humans have intellectual potential. Hernandez-Torrano et al. (2014) asserted each individual has specific strengths and weaknesses that can be conceptualized as either multiple abilities or intelligence.

Furthermore, human intellectual competence must involve sets of problem-solving skills which enable individuals to resolve genuine problems or difficulties they encounter. He added that when an effective product was created and possessed the potential for finding or creating new problems, it laid the groundwork for attaining new knowledge. The theory of multiple intelligence has inspired diverse practices, featuring balancing programs, matching instruction to students' learning styles, and differentiation (Perry, 1997). This theory proposed that individuals have several different ways to express intelligence (Fleetham, 2006); however, Perry (1997) claimed the theory was too broad to

be useful for planning curriculum and it presented a fixed view of student competence. Thus, it was not considered a quick fix for gifted education (Helding, 2009). Instead, it offered an enriched way of expanding others' viewpoints about human success (Fleetham, 2006).

Gardner (1983) stressed intelligence tests only measured two intellectual domains: linguistic/verbal and spatial/mathematical reasoning. Even when these tests were appropriately used, IQ scores varied to the extent concerning racial and ethnic groups, lessening the chances of minorities being identified for gifted education (Kornhaber, 1999). Intelligence was not always shown on a psychometric test (Fleetham, 2006). Gardner posited the theory of multiple intelligence to dispute the idea that human problem-solving was driven by a single, general intelligence (Kornhaber, 1999).

Kornhaber (1999) explained three arguments highlighted by Gardner's critique of intelligence not being adequately accessed by an IQ test:

- Intelligence tests draw a range too narrow to depict intellectual abilities accurately.
- Tests typically require individuals to translate their problem-solving skills into linguistic or notational forms.
- IQ tests do not reflect human problem-solving skills that typically occur within domains.

Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligence involves seven intelligences that are a part of the original theory: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence. In addition to the original seven intelligences, he proposed three new intelligences: naturalist, spiritual, and

existential intelligence. Gardner (1999) anticipated the theory would account for human cognition in its fullness, and that each person would have a unique blend of intelligence. He asserted each person had the choice to either ignore, strive to minimize or revel in their intelligence.

According to Gardner (1983), linguistic intelligence involves a person's sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn a language, and using language to its total capacity to help accomplish specific goals. For example, a poet struggled over the wording of a line or stanza in a poem or retaining information such as lengthy verbal lists. Both were considered forms of linguistic intelligence. Logical-mathematical intelligence encompassed the ability to analyze problems logically or carry out mathematical operations and investigate issues scientifically (Blue, 2015; Gardner, 1999). This intelligence would draw heavily on science and mathematics in solving problems and investigating various situations' why's and how's. For example, Blue (2015) explained how exploring a song's rhythm, note value, and musical form can engage music students and help them think logically and understand musical relationships.

In addition to the previous intelligence, musical intelligence necessitated skills required for performances, compositions, and appreciation of musical patterns (Blue, 2015; Gardner, 1999). Musical intelligence was intertwined with other intelligence, but it was not solely dependent upon the physical world to express itself (Helding, 2009). Blue (2015) posited for students to express their musical intelligence, teachers should make an effort to challenge their music students to think like a performer and critique the work of themselves and their peers.

Gardner (1999) regarded spatial intelligence as solving problems efficiently, apart from linguistic ability. He explained that intelligence required the ability to recognize the identity of an object when seen from different angles, imagine movement or internal displacement among parts of a configuration, and apply spatial relations to the problem. Gardner (1983) explained that bodily-kinesthetic intelligence encompassed the whole body or parts of the body to solve problems or fashion various products. Sir Frederic Bartlett (as cited in Gardner, 1999, p. 41) analyzed how all skilled performances included a well-honed sense of timing, where each piece of sequence fits into the stream in an exquisitely placed and elegant way.

Gardner (1999) next proposed two additional types of intelligence, interpersonal and intrapersonal. He showed how knowledge and skill relied upon the ability to apply lessons learned from the observations of others while obtaining knowledge drawn from the internal discrimination an individual routinely made. Interpersonal intelligence signified a person's capacity to understand other people's intentions, motivations, and desires to work effectively with others. In contrast, intrapersonal intelligence involves the capacity to understand oneself, have an effective working model, and use such information effectively to regulate one's own life.

Later in his study, Gardner (1999) proposed three additional intelligences: naturalist, spiritual, and existentialist. Naturalist intelligence demonstrated a person's expertise in recognizing and classifying various species, flora, and fauna, of his or her environment, such as a taxonomist. He further described how cultures might honor individuals who recognize valuable or notably dangerous flora and fauna and categorize

them. This intelligence was rooted in other intelligences, having the core capacities to recognize and distinguish members of various species.

Spiritual intelligence reflected a desire to know about experiences and cosmic entities that were not readily available in a material sense, but nonetheless, seemed necessary to humans (Gardner, 1999). In understanding spiritual intelligence, he explained two forms of knowing. In the first sense, spiritual intelligence outlined the realms of experiences or domains of existence people sought to understand. The second sense of spiritual intelligence altered one's consciousness.

Existentialist intelligence involves one's concern with "ultimate" issues (Gardner, 1999). A person could locate oneself concerning the furthest reaches of the cosmos, the infinite and infinitesimal, and could also experience the related capacity to locate oneself with respect to such existential features such as the meaning of life and death. With Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, the existence of groups was believed to be either high or low in no one specific intelligence (Perry, 1997). Gardner referred to a few people he classified as "geniuses," such as Yehudi Menuhin, who displayed exceptional musical intelligence; Babe Ruth demonstrated bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and Barbara McClintock expressed logical-mathematical intelligence. Perry (1997) brought attention to the fact each of these candidates did not appear to correspond with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences because Gardner failed to show how they excelled throughout each domain. Instead, they excel in minor activities within the domains (Perry, 1997).

Gifted Identification Tests

Gifted identification tests should not be limited to an IQ test (Gardner, 1983). Instead, they should rely on a differentiated profile of the student's intelligence that

covers specific areas to showcase students' strengths and weaknesses (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2014). Using more authentic assessments and placement practices to help identify minority students for gifted programs could help eliminate potential bias and arguments about human cognition (Romanoff et al., 2009). A study conducted by Kornhaber (1999) described and analyzed three approaches for identifying elementary-aged minority gifted students. Gifted students possessed different characteristics that set them apart from other students. For example, they were quick learners, with excellent memory, complex thinking skills, abstract, logical, and profound, intense feelings and emotions (Rinn et al., 2020).

Three tests, Discovering Intellectual Skills and Capabilities while providing Opportunities for Varied Ethnic Responses (DISCOVER), Problem Solving Assessment (PSA), and The Gifted Model Program, were used in the study. Each one is aligned with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence. The DISCOVER (Discovering Intellectual Skills and Capabilities while providing Opportunities for Varied Ethnic Responses) was developed at the University of Arizona. It was administered to fourth and fifth graders in two schools on the Navajo Indian Reservation in northern Arizona (Kornhaber, 1999). Using traditional methods of identification was not successful in identifying gifted Navajo students. This test consisted of five different activities. Kornhaber (1999) described how each task progressed from closed-type questions, where the solution is clear and known, to more open-ended questions, where individuals could give an acceptable solution to the immediate or mathematical problem. Students also had to write an original story but were encouraged to focus more on the story's content rather than spelling (Kornhaber, 1999). On the second day of testing, students were placed into

groups of four to six individuals, along with an assessment team member. The students were given various tasks, ranging from constructing shapes to storytelling. By using DISCOVER as an identification approach, the identification of gifted Navajo students rose to 10% in one school and 30% in the other school (Kornhaber, 1999).

Problem Solving Assessment (PSA) is another gifted identification method developed by educators working in public schools in Charlotte-Mecklenberg, North Carolina (Kornhaber, 1999). PSA was used to identify gifted African American second graders. This assessment has two phases: pre-assessment and the actual assessment. In the pre-assessment phase, teachers of the gifted students provided three pre-assessment lessons focusing on linguistic, spatial, and logical-mathematical intelligence to whole classrooms of students' weeks before the actual PSA was given (Kornhaber, 1999). In the second phase, the assessment evaluated linguistic, spatial, and logical-mathematical skills, using nine activities, such as story writing and a map task. The gifted teacher also administered the Matrix Analogies Test (MAT), assessing their figural reasoning problems. Using PSA increased identifying African American students for the gifted program from 8%-12% to 18% (Kornhaber, 1999).

The Gifted Model Program was developed by public school educators in Montgomery County, Maryland. This assessment claimed to have increased gifted identification from three target populations: ESL (English as a Second Language), LD/GT (students both with a learning disability and gifted), and poor, minority youth (Kornhaber, 1999). The Gifted Model Program did not devise a separate identification method for standardized achievement tests or intelligence tests. Instead, it relied on various objective measures such as parent nominations, the Raven's Progressive Matrices

and Test of Cognitive Skills, and Renzulli/Hartman Teacher Checklist. Unlike the other two assessments, PSA and DISCOVER, the Gifted Model Program incorporates domain-based activities like project-based curriculum and classroom performance activities. It was more closely aligned to the theory of multiple intelligence (Kornhaber, 1999). The identification committee consisted of diverse staff members, and they reviewed each child's information according to county guidelines. The use of these tests helped identify students that are culturally and linguistically diverse.

A similar study conducted by Romanoff et al. (2009) compared the performance of elementary school children from two groups using the Problem-Solving Assessment (PSA). Some students were identified as gifted by allowing these students to draw on a range of media and materials instead of only written language and mathematical notation (Romanoff et al., 2009). By using the Problem-Solving Assessment, identifying more minority students became possible. The findings from this study indicated that students selected and placed in the gifted program due to the PSA scored significantly higher in reading and mathematics on the end-of-grade state assessment. The results of this study indicated that minority students were identified at a higher frequency as gifted using this alternative assessment and met the high expectations of teachers in the gifted program (Romanoff et al., 2009).

Sarouphim (2004) conducted a study to examine the validity and effectiveness of grades 6-8 of DISCOVER performance-based assessment in identifying culturally diverse students. All observers completed a two-day training, learned all of the concepts, and shadowed an expert observer (Sarouphim, 2004). DISCOVER revealed compatibility between this assessment and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences through Chinese

Tangrams, Pablo, storytelling, story writing, and math. The percentage of students identified using DISCOVER (12.4%) was more significant than traditional assessments previously used to identify students for gifted education. Before using such tests, there was a lack of gender and ethnic differences in identification (Sarouphim, 2004). The use of more authentic assessments such as PSA or DISCOVER helped eliminate bias and identified more African Americans and other minorities into gifted programs instead of using traditional assessments, which resulted in the over-identification of White students (Sak & Maker, 2004).

A more recent study conducted by Hernandez-Torrano et al., (2014) provided a framework to implement the theory of multiple intelligences in identifying high-ability secondary education students. This study also analyzed the internal structure of three recently developed scales used to assess these students based on students, teachers, and parents' ratings. The Screening Scales for the Evaluation of Multiple Intelligences or SSEMI was used to assess the multiple intelligence perceptions of teachers, students, and parents, and the Differential Aptitude Test Level I was utilized to assess the students' verbal, numerical, abstract, mechanical, and spatial reasoning (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2014). Three rating scales were used to express the characteristics and behavior of students on a four-point scale in terms of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. These tests allowed informants to assess seven areas of multiple intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, naturalist, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and social intelligence which includes interpersonal and intrapersonal. The tests were conducted over a series of phases. Phase I invited secondary school teachers to participate in the identification process for high-ability students. Phase II asked teachers to rate the

students' multiple intelligences in addition to their social and emotional variables. Phase II also asked parents to evaluate the students, and the students rated themselves. Phase III invited students to complete two performance tests to assess their intellectual aptitude and divergent thinking (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2014). This study showed that teachers rated students' academic ability higher than parents and students did. However, the aptitude test results were minimal and only assessed the students' cognitive abilities. This study showed that the components of these scales could be used to identify strengths and talents in academic areas. It also was used to identify high-ability students who did not excel in academic areas. Collecting information from other perspectives would enhance the identification process for the gifted program (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2014).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory is a theoretical and interpretive model focusing on retelling stories, examining race and racism across dominant cultures (Brizee et al., 2015). Critical race theory began as critical legal studies in the 1970s because the Civil Rights Movement was losing steam (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). A group of lawyers who attended the National Critical Legal Studies Conference began to question the objective rationalist nature of the law and its processes (Lynn & Parker, 2006). They criticized the way the law served the privileged and wealthy but ignored the rights of the poor in U.S. courts. For decades, the basis of critical race theory (CRT) attracted activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado et al., 2001). Critical race theorists believe racism is a social construct that only changes if it converges to the dominant culture’s interests (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Thus, it argued that the marginalization of race and racism is interwoven into the

historical conscious and ideology framework (Howard, 2010). Manning (as cited in McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 10) described how Whiteness could be used to barter for various forms of property and capital—using Whiteness as barter was an example of interest convergence (Delgado et al., 2001). Thus, racism could advance the interest of both White elites (materially) and the working-class people (physically); large portions of White society seemed to have little or no incentive to remove it.

Ladson-Billings (1999) acknowledged the importance of using CRT as a tool to deconstruct oppressive structures, reconstruct human agencies, and construct equitable and socially just relations of power. In education, CRT might be used to understand the hierarchy and school discipline issues, tracking of test scores and grades, controversies with curriculum, and the uses of IQ and achievement testing (Delgado et al., 2001). It could also disrupt structural barriers and obstacles to students' achievement (Amoit et al., 2020). Additionally, CRT connects law to education by examining inequities and addressing those issues (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

One recurring theme in education mentioned by Ladson-Billings (1999) was having an equal opportunity for everyone, especially African American students. *Brown vs. Board of Education* was made possible because it converged foreign policy interests with the interest of people of color to achieve racial integration and equal educational opportunity for all (Zamudio et al., 2011). Fifty years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, African Americans, Native Americans, and Latino students continued to lag in every measure, from high suspension rates to special education placement (Zamudio et al., 2011). Individuals already in positions of power were not adversely affected by the inequalities resulting from racism and other forms of oppression (McCoy & Rodricks,

2015). An example of this was the integration of school systems in the southern United States. *Brown v. Board of Education* passed in 1954, ordering integration at the swiftest pace. McCoy and Rodricks (2015) explained that many White southerners opposed the idea of integration and deliberately moved slowly toward implementing changes. Many school systems in the South did not integrate until the 1970-1971 school year. Thus, the lack of historical or social perspectives was one of the many mechanisms through which color blindness supports inequity (Dixson & Anderson, 2018).

CRT theorists have distinguished between the lack of diversity in school curriculums, in addition to the rigor, distortions, omissions, and stereotypes that need to be readdressed better to educate African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1999). However, little attention has been given to the effect of the myth of Black inferiority on the perceptions of teachers and students (Wallace & Brand, 2012). Examination of CRT scholarship revealed how poverty and low socioeconomic status were routinely racialized with African Americans. Thus, African Americans in the United States could make significant social, political, and economic progress only when their interests aligned with those in power and the interest benefited both groups (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

The analysis of CRT offered a critique of practices that were often ignored or may have demonized race and racial dialogue. It also outlined specific ways some educators, namely African American women, employed critical perspectives on schooling and inequalities (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Many educators expressed the frustration of excluding non-gifted students from academic activities and programs. Students in urban and rural areas were often overlooked or excluded from those same opportunities (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Zamudio et al. (2011) posited that standardized testing was one-way

students of color are excluded or overlooked from various academic opportunities. Scores from standardized tests could be used to track students, determine the curriculum used to educate them, and ultimately could be used to determine who went to college.

The concept of colorblindness in teaching failed to consider the ways race matters in education and failed to incorporate it in the curriculum (Sleeter, 2017). Gotanda (as cited in Dixson & Anderson, 2018, p. 125) explained how colorblind ideals in the law maintained racial subordination and secured the privilege of Whiteness (Zamudio et al., 2011). Critics of CRT suggest this theory depicts children of color as victims of a racist society (Zorn, 2018). With this in mind, considering CRT prevents others from considering an individual's ability level, motivation, character, family, support, and community culture as possible explanations to maintain racial subordination. Zorn (2018) suggested that when considering other ethnic groups, like Asian Americans, CRT supporters insinuated Asian Americans were imitators of White culture. Whites only allowed such success if it furthered their interests. Furthermore, if CRT were efficient, all racial groups would not have experienced as much success. Zorn (2018) argued that CRT only prompted students with poor academic skills to make no priority in improving themselves.

Henfield et al. (2008) conducted a study that identified emergent themes that corresponded with critical race theory. This study aimed to provide a voice for gifted African American students participating in gifted education programs. In addition to providing valuable information to teachers, parents, principals, and school counselors' ways to help with recruitment and retention of this demographic group (Henfield et al., 2008). This study consisted of 12 participants (seven females and five males), 14-15

years of age. The researchers who applied critical race theory implied this theory would make explicit concerns for marginalized groups and create a deep desire to expose, advocate, and confront injustices concerning these groups. Through interviews and biological questionnaires, Henfield et al. (2008) found three emerging themes: a) critical issues facing African American gifted students were peer influences, deficit ideology, gender, acting Black, and acting White, b) ways the students navigate the perils of gifted education such as academic disengagement and gifted identity distancing, and c) the benefits of being in the gifted program include academic rigor, equally skilled peers, highly skilled teachers, and future preparedness.

Findings from the Henfield et al. study (2008) revealed both positive (academic rigor, highly skilled teachers) and negative perceptions (acting White, deficit ideology). Recommendations were made such as teachers proactively working with gifted students; if other teachers, principals, parents, and school counselors would inform gifted African Americans of the benefits of being in the gifted program, then that could help recruit and retain African American students (Henfield et al., 2008).

Gifted Education Programs

The purpose of gifted education is to provide high-ability children an appropriate education for their unique needs (Cross, 2013). Although initially limited, gifted education practices have existed since the 19th century (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). Upon the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in 1957, the American people began to embrace the idea of identifying and challenging its most capable students (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). Giftedness was commonly associated with intellectual power or a high IQ (Brown & Wishney, 2017). Traditional definitions of giftedness have been primarily

operationalized in two ways: having an IQ score of 130 or higher or scoring at or above the 92nd percentile on achievement tests (Ford & King, 2014). Gifted education prides itself on rigor and excellence and seeks to provide students with the highest quality of education possible (Ford, 2006). These classes should be different to meet the needs of gifted students but not better than regular academic classes (Cross, 2013).

Nevertheless, as the field evolved, a sense of elitism and limited access to programming and resources became associated with giftedness and these programs became perceived as granting admittance into the "intellectual club" based on students' performance on the Stanford-Binet or Wechsler Scale (Brown & Wishney, 2017). Furthermore, the overrepresentation of White students and Asian students in the U.S. has been a source of concern to many in the field of gifted education (Cross, 2013). Perceptions of gifted education, both positive and negative about racial backgrounds, have influenced the program's definitions, policies, and practices (Ford & Grantham, 2003). In 1993, the United States Department of Education revamped the previous definition of 1988 and made it more inclusive of all cultural and socioeconomic groups and populations. Colangelo et al. (1999, p. 92) explained this national definition in this passage from their report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*:

> Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high-performance capability in intellectual, creative, or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents

> are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.

Gifted students in the state of Georgia are defined, according to the National Association for Gifted Children (2015a), as

> student[s] who [demonstrate] a high degree of intellectual and/or creative abilit[ies], exhibits an exceptionally high degree of motivation, and/or excels in specific academic fields, and who needs special instruction and/or special ancillary services to achieve at levels commensurate with his or her abilities. (National Association of Gifted, para 10)

Along with all 50 states, the federal government created and implemented legislation about gifted education by 1990. However, as of 2017, a national policy for gifted education did not exist (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). In terms of education, gifted programs are unique because they are not federally mandated like special education (Milligan et al., 2012). The National Association of Gifted Children (2015b) explained how gifted programs vary from state to state, even from one school district to the next. There is no consistency amongst states from funding, mandates, and testing (NAGC, 2015b). For instance, in the most recent *State of the States in Gifted Education*, out of 49 reporting states and Washington D.C., all except South Dakota reported that gifted and talented services are being delivered (Rinn et al., 2020). Out of 46 states responding, 23 states provide funding to the local education agencies, while the other 23 states reported no funding to their local education agencies (Rinn et al., 2020). Identification of students for the gifted program is mandated in 13 states, including Georgia (Rinn et al., 2020. Since 2015, states have been collaborating and using various strategies to close the gap

among the underserved population in the gifted program. For instance, Georgia collaborates with other institutions, such as local universities, to provide professional development to teachers, administrators, and specialists to identify the underserved population. Four states, not including Georgia, use universal screening to help identify students (Rinn et al., 2020).

Gifted education is one of 19 categories of instruction funded through the state's FTE (full-time equivalent) money (Rinn et al., 2020). Georgia will not accept gifted eligibility from other states unless the student is a dependent of military personnel (GaDOE, 2021a). Georgia disperses funds yearly through a formulated allocation for weighted funding, fluctuating because there is no cap (Rinn et al., 2020). Activities are funded through the Curriculum Department and Title IV-A but are not given to local educational agencies (Rinn et al., 2020). The current funding ratio for gifted classes is 12 unless it a part of an approved Charter System or Strategic Waiver System (GaDOE, 2021a). Thus, the maximum class size for a middle school gifted program is 21 students.

Gifted Education in Rural Communities

Researchers have determined that gifted students in rural communities have unique needs and educational policymakers often ignore circumstances in larger cities (Floyd et al., 2011). The wide range of variances in rural school districts across the country made it difficult to generalize the best practices for those districts' gifted education programs (Lewis & Boswell, 2020). Georgia ranked number 16 out of 50 for having students who lived in rural settings attending public schools (Showalter et al., 2019). According to the most recent report, *Why Rural Matters,* Georgia was ranked seventh in priority ranking because of the wide academic poverty gap and low NAEP

performance (Showalter et al., 2019). Rural areas are often affected by a lack of funding (Lewis & Boswell, 2020), which can affect resources, various academic programs, and opportunities for students in gifted programs. The most disturbing reality of students living in poverty were the limitations resulting from low income and few resources (Milner, 2013). Cuts in funding for challenging public-school districts affected staffing and programs, especially non-mandated funding like gifted education (Azano et al., 2017). Georgia instructional spending is $5,681 per pupil, below the national average of $6,367 (Showalter et al., 2019). Schools in rural communities tend to have fewer specialists needed for gifted education services, in addition to limited resources, options, field trips, and programs (Azano et al., 2017; Floyd et al., 2011). They are also typically geographically isolated from towns and cities (Floyd et al., 2011); therefore, even implementing a magnet school in rural areas can be very difficult because of the distance it takes to get to school (Azano et al., 2017).

As part of a curriculum study called "What Works in Gifted Education?" Azano et al. (2017) examined CLEAR or Challenged Leading to Engagement, Achievement, and Results curriculum models that served as a framework designed to help gifted teachers and specialists incorporate the best practices in gifted education. The CLEAR curriculum model included two language arts units in poetry and research for 3rd-grade students. Lessons from the CLEAR curriculum model were designed for 45 minutes of class time and included continual formative assessments to guide teachers and challenged gifted learners. Findings from this study revealed some unique factors that affected rural educators in rural schools. Reported barriers included limited resources (staffing, professional support, and student opportunities), time constraints (amount of time to work

with gifted students, lack of instructional meeting time), and gifted programming (time and number of days to teach gifted students) which made it difficult for teachers to implement the CLEAR curriculum with fidelity (Azano et al., 2017).

In addition to lack of funding and time constraints, high poverty rural districts were usually more racially and ethnically diverse than urban and suburban schools (Kettler et al., 2016). For instance, the official poverty rate for the United States in 2020 was 11.4% (Shrider et al., 2021). African Americans (19.5%) and Hispanics (17%) were more likely than Whites to live in poverty (Ford & Stambaugh, 2015; Shrider et al., 2021). The poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites was 8.3% compared to an estimated 27% for African Americans living in poverty, and children under 18 made up 14% of the poverty population (Haider, 2021; Shrider et al., 2021). National issues related to the growing gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged in society have focused on how students living in poverty were doing in the nation's schools (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). As a result, low socioeconomic status students have had fewer educational opportunities than middle and high socioeconomic status (Ford, 2011). Morgan (2020) posited that by failing to place low-income, high-ability students in a program that did not match their academic needs and abilities causes more harm. Students who were not given adequate resources were less likely to have the opportunity to develop their talents (Siegle, 2013). Furthermore, poverty should not be viewed as failing to educate all children to their maximum potential (Bryne, 1998).

Ford (2006) posited that African American and Latino students had the least access to advanced placement classes and gifted education classes. African American children living in low-income urban and rural communities were often at a disadvantage

because they usually attended schools in districts with budget constraints and lacked resources, such as qualified teachers, advanced placement courses, or enhanced curriculum to which could serve as part of their gifted programs (Kellogg, 2016). Mattingly and Schaefer (2015) noted that rural adolescents were more likely to drop out of school, and academically qualified students left rural areas to seek jobs and better educational opportunities. Students living in poverty were more likely to be considered homeless, suffer physical, psychological and/or emotional abuse, and attend fewer school days (Milner, 2013).

The Civil Rights Data Collection (2016) reported 7% of African American students attended schools where more than 20% of teachers were first-year teachers compared to 3% of White students. Consequently, the lack of funding has hindered districts from finding qualified content area teachers (Kettler et al., 2016). Many teachers were paid lower salaries while being required to teach outside of their certified fields (Floyd et al., 2011). When teachers lacked credentials and were inadequately prepared, it was difficult to challenge students (Ford, 2006). Teachers in rural schools needed support in developing positive attitudes and providing quality instruction for diverse rural school populations (Floyd et al., 2011). Educators having a deficit mindset made it challenging to identify rural students with gifts and talents.

Ford and Stambaugh (2015) emphasized gifted students' successes were less optimal when their economic, cultural, socioemotional, affective, and developmental needs were ignored, trivialized, or poorly addressed. High-ability students from low-income families frequently required support to help overcome low self-esteem, inadequate self-efficacy, and low self-concept (Floyd et al., 2011). Educators in rural

areas must be advocates and talent scouts while actively and proactively updating their beliefs about gifts and talents found in rural students. Thus, the importance of developing a broad perspective was needed when meeting the needs of gifted children living in these areas (Floyd et al., 2011). Lewis (1999) posited that teachers who were well-informed about the characteristics of gifted learners and assessment procedures tended to perceive students at their best. According to Floyd et al. (2011), barriers for gifted learners in rural areas such as the lack of programs with a challenging curriculum, few or no positive role models or mentors in specific fields, or lack of awareness about gifted learners' needs have presented problems in their quest for academic success. To improve the educational quality, school personnel must focus on maximizing strengths within the community, promoting parental involvement, utilizing technological innovations, and incorporating systematic staff development. Other ways gifted students could be challenged were through curriculum differentiation, content acceleration, individual learning plans, and grouping practices (Floyd et al., 2011).

Anazo et al. (2017) explained how PLACE (Place, Literacy, Achievement, Community, and Engagement) was used in some rural schools to help mitigate some of the challenges for gifted education programs. This federally-funded grant aimed to increase the number of students identified for the gifted program in these rural areas. It was hoped that the grant would positively impact outcomes, such as increasing student engagement in learning, increasing academic self-efficacy, decreasing the stereotype threat, increasing the growth mindset, and impacting identified students' language arts achievement. Promoting PLACE helped identify students using multiple real-world examples relevant to their community and helped change some of the educators who

were a part of the identification process (Anazo et al., 2017). Sullivan (2017) recommended utilizing universal screening, multidimensional testing, education, and professional development focused more on gifted education and multicultural responsive teaching. Also, using multidimensional testing, professional development, and universal screening could increase equity and inclusion because it prepares current and future educators for the diversity of their students.

Potential Barriers for African American Students in Gifted Education

One of the biggest criticisms of the gifted program was the lack of diverse representation among the student body (Ford, 2011; Frye & Vogt, 2010). After the ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, which stated schools deprived African American children of equal educational opportunities and violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights, schools were forced to integrate (Ford, 2011; Howard, 2010). Resistance to desegregation was centered on the belief that non-White students were cognitively inferior, less human, and unworthy of being educated in the same schools as White students (Howard, 2010; Morris, 2002). Beliefs of inferiority appeared as low expectations for minority students, exclusion from enriched academic programs, and inequitable funding for schools heavily attended by students of color (Howard, 2010). Hodges and Gentry (2021) posited the school's district-identified gifted population should represent the demographics of the district's general population. Representation of culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse students continues to be a critical issue with gifted education (Hodges & Gentry, 2021).

Howard (2010) described culture as “a complex constellation of values, mores, norms, customs, ways of beings, knowing and traditions that provides a general design

for living, is passed from generation to generation and serves as a pattern for interpreting reality" (p. 51). However, students of color were frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted (Howard, 2010). For decades, educators, policymakers, and legal personnel have failed to recruit and retain an equitable percentage of African American students in gifted education and advanced courses (Ford & King, 2014). In addition to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education, African American students are overrepresented in special education. African American students represented approximately 17% of all students with disabilities (NCES, 2021). Perceived deficits were not often believed to be the responsibility of the teacher, school, or the learning environment; instead, they were thought to be the student's fault or due to the student's family, culture, or life circumstances (Sullivan, 2017). Educators who had negative perceptions were least likely to refer diverse students to gifted education for screening and placements (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

McBee (2006) explained how Georgia follows a multiple criteria assessment procedure for gifted student nominations. Data were collected in four areas: *mental ability* was determined by psychometric assessment; standardized test scores determined *achievement; creativity* was determined by Torrance Test of Creative Thinking; and *motivation* was determined by student's grades (McBee, 2006). To be identified as gifted, students must provide superior ability in three of the four categories. According to this study conducted by McBee (2006), teacher nominations for African Americans were less accurate (1.69% nominated with 50.6 % accuracy) than for White students (2.57% nominated with 77.2% accuracy). The low rate of teacher nominations could indicate racism, classism, or cultural ignorance on the part of the teachers (McBee, 2006).

Sometimes teachers did everything right. Students could have encouraging parents, but the students themselves self-sabotaged their chances of being identified for gifted or staying in the gifted program (Kunjufu, 2012). Some African American students believed if they adopted "White" attitudes, behaviors (good grades and study habits), and communication styles (speaking English with no African American vernacular), it was a one-way assimilation or abandonment of their Black identity. Thus, it could lead to potential social sanctions (Ogbu, 2004). In a comparative study, Ogbu and Simmons (1998) have found African American students wanted to make good grades but rejected behaviors and “White” attitudes conducive to making good grades. In addition to oppositional behaviors, African American students experienced peer pressure from other African American students, discouraging them from adopting such “White” attitudes and behaviors (Ogbu, 2004). Some purposely underachieved academically or acted as "class clowns" to prevent negative social sanctions from peers. These mixed feelings and behaviors led to reduced efforts that manifested themselves as failure to pay attention in class, lessened the chance of homework completion, claims of class or schoolwork being boring, and failure to keep up with school assignments (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

Strategies for Recruitment and Retention

The underrepresentation of African American students in the gifted program could be attributed to recruitment tests and inattention to retaining African American students (Ford & Whiting, 2010). To help recruit and retain African American students in gifted education programs, policies such as universal screening, multidimensional assessments, education, and professional development should focus more on gifted education and multicultural/culturally responsive teaching (Sullivan, 2017). The use of

universal screening could reduce the bias associated with the referral-based system because it was based on testing all students rather than relying on teachers' or parents' recommendations (Morgan, 2020). Kunjufu (2012) also suggested a few of the following recommendations to help ensure proper and fair placement of African American students in gifted programs:

- Multidimensional identification and assessment practices.
- Identification instruments must be valid, reliable, and culturally sensitive.
- Educators must adopt contemporary definitions and theories of giftedness.
- Gifted African American students must be identified and served early.
- Teachers should be trained in both gifted education and multicultural education to increase the effectiveness of identifying and serving gifted African American students.
- Family involvement is critical in the recruitment and retention of gifted African American students. Members must be involved early and consistently.

Morgan (2020) suggested one advantage was that it promoted the use of set local school district criteria to gather data on all students. If school districts want to improve the diversity and equity of their gifted programs, utilizing various screening methods and identification needs to be emphasized (Yaluma & Tyner, 2021). Employing several strategies could help African American students succeed academically. These could include having various acceleration opportunities such as the early entrance to kindergarten and/or early exit from elementary, middle school, and high school, advancement by one grade level, or content acceleration (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). State

laws and policies vary greatly in acceleration opportunities for gifted and talented students. Georgia does not permit early entrance into kindergarten but has an acceleration policy left to local educational agencies to determine their requirements and procedure (NAGC, 2015b).

Moore et al. (2005) posited educators should not only be concerned with challenging gifted students academically and cognitively but should also take into consideration their sense of belonging, safety, identity, and friends. Academically successful African American students complained about receiving negative peer pressure due to having high grades, participation in the gifted program, and speaking standard English from African American students outside of the gifted program (Ford & Whiting, 2010). One of the most effective ways to help gifted students of color cope with negative peer pressure was by allowing them the opportunity to learn, interact, and develop meaningful relationships with other students who were on the same academic level as themselves (Moore et al., 2005). Furthermore, gifted African American students could benefit from multicultural counseling (Ford & Whiting, 2010). By having multicultural counseling, they could share concerns with other students who have had similar experiences (Ford & Whiting, 2010). Outcomes from counseling might include lower barriers for academic achievement, positive racial identity, and improved coping skills (Ford & Whiting, 2010).

Ford et al. (2011) highlighted that family involvement was critical to the recruitment and retention of African American students and recognizing institutional barriers that could prevent diverse learners from obtaining an equal education. Critical behaviors for African American students' active and proactive family involvement,

respect, understanding, and effective communication were key (Ford et al., 2011). When school personnel and teachers of gifted African American students make family involvement part of their teaching philosophy, families increase their interactions with their children, feel more positive about their abilities to help their child, and rate teachers more positively (Ford et al., 2011).

Teacher Preparation Programs

The U.S. Department of Education published data from the U.S. Census for Civil Rights, found culturally diverse students encompassed 32% of public schools in 1989, 47% in 2011 and 75% of the student body in 2018 (NCES, 2021); therefore, U.S. public schools were more racially and linguistically diverse today than they were a few decades ago, and this trend is expected to grow (Ford, 2014). Despite these findings, cultural and racial demographics amongst educators have not changed, with White educators being the majority (Ford, 2014). This statistic reflected those educators and legislators have potentially failed to recruit and retain an equitable percentage of culturally diverse groups of teachers in gifted education programs (Ford, 2014). Having a majority White faculty affected how the curriculum was designed, what was taught, and how and which students were recruited and selected for the gifted program (Sleeter, 2017).

Morgan (2019) argued that untrained White teachers were likely to have misconceptions about gifted students of color and these misconceptions prevented them from identifying them as gifted. Teachers of the same race as their students were more likely to identify those students for the gifted program, more than a teacher from a different race (Morgan, 2019). However, the prevalence of White educators is not the

problem. Instead, the issue might be having educators who are not culturally aware or prepared to manage diversity in their classrooms.

Most universities and colleges have graduated students with a monocultural or ethnocentric curriculum that failed to prepare them to work with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Teaching diverse classrooms should be integrated into teacher preparedness programs and courses in colleges and universities. The changing demographics within U.S. schools created an immediate need for teacher preparation programs to better prepare all teachers for the diversity within U.S. schools (Waddell, 2011). The failure to prepare teachers effectively would ultimately lead to the failure to prepare children (Bryne, 1998). To prepare undergraduate teacher candidates to teach in 21st-century classrooms, a paradigm shift must occur in school systems and collaboration among personnel (Patrick & Reinhartz, 1999).

In the past, few teacher programs offered courses that required future educators to take more than one course in educational, cultural diversity, and social injustice (Ford et al., 2005; Sleeter, 2017). A study conducted by King and Butler (2015) showed approximately 71% of states' colleges of education required students to take less than one-fourth of their classes on diversity/multiculturalism. Consequently, many teacher candidates often completed their education programs by taking only one or no classes in diversity (ERG, 2014). Wallace and Brand (2012) emphasized that having multicultural education courses could positively impact future teacher candidates; they do not automatically lead to the kind of awareness that supports the constructive management of socio-cultural factors influencing daily classroom interactions. As Sullivan (2017) noted,

one or two classes in diversity would not suffice as adequate preparations of future teachers for the students they will teach soon.

Frye and Vogt (2010) emphasized teachers cannot “learn” culturally responsive pedagogy. Cultural responsiveness is dispositional, attitudinal, and political. Students who graduated from various universities and colleges have misunderstood cultural differences among diverse students relative to learning, communication, and behavioral styles (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Teachers who are not prepared to work with gifted students might have retained some stereotypes and misconceptions of diverse learners, which could undermine their ability to recognize strengths in students who behaved differently than those of others, as well as not being able to provide high-quality gifted education services to those who need it (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Sometimes, White teachers would interpret differences in life experiences, cultural frames of reference, race, class, and gender as a deficit on the part of the student. To become more culturally competent, educators must be taught to engage in critical self-examination, acquire accurate information about different cultural groups, utilize multicultural education in the curriculum, and learn various ways to advocate and negotiate for students of color. Having a classroom teacher who promoted and practiced cultural competence allowed students to draw strength from their multicultural identities (Castellano, 2011).

Stein and Stein (2016) also posited that the teaching profession was not for everyone. Potential teacher candidates scored below the national average on SAT and ACT tests. Thus, colleges and universities needed to be more selective in accepting teacher candidates (Stein & Stein, 2016). They claimed these candidates should rank among the top students in their graduating class because teacher candidates frequently

choose the field of education as a “secondary choice”. Thus, some teacher candidates are not the “cream of the crop” (Stein & Stein, 2016). If teachers were better prepared and qualified, it would result in lower attrition and improve students’ quality of education (Stein & Stein, 2016).

Ford and Grantham (2003) have argued that the lack of preparation, understanding of students’ social and emotional needs, and sensitivity to the characteristics of gifted students would all hinder the teachers’ abilities to make the appropriate and equitable referrals. Teachers working with gifted students should have preparation focused on testing and assessment, instructional strategies, social-emotional needs and development, underachievement, cultural diversity, and working with diverse families (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Recommendations for teacher candidates should emphasize spending more time practicing teaching rather than in theory. At the start of their freshman year, candidates should be immersed in the realities of the school, from being involved in the front office to helping in the classroom (Stein & Stein, 2016).

In addition to having properly prepared teachers, having effective leadership increased the chances of support from local stakeholders and improved the unity of advocates for gifted programs (Milligan et al., 2012). University professionals and mentors must provide enriching experiences engaging future leaders in authentic learning, assessment and performance-based tasks. Milligan et al. (2012) proposed a few of the following recommendations to help ensure effective leaders for gifted education programs:

- Quality programs require a comprehensive mentorship program.

- Graduate programs and professional development must be grounded in practice and include field-based experiences.
- Internship programs must guide future administrators in practice to help prepare them for advocacy campaigns.
- Cohort models are useful in helping future administrators in shared decision making, problem solving and teamwork.
- Providing stipends to the students in the program to help with retention.

Properly preparing administrators and teachers in multicultural education, diversity, mentorship, collaboration, and professional development would help ensure a more effective gifted program conducive to all students regardless of their economic status or racial background.

Multicultural Education

Ford and Harris (1999) defined culture as values, beliefs, norms, and attitudes unique to people united by race, location, gender, religion, or social class. Often the minority cultures were left out of the curriculum, and the rules in education were often a reflection of the culture in power (Delpit, 2006). For example, African American and Latino students represented 42% of enrollments in the nation's schools, but only 28% were enrolled in gifted and talented education (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016). Having educators and administrators who were aware and properly trained in culturally responsive teaching should be required. Teachers must understand relationships and distinctions between ethnic identity and cultural socialization to avoid compromising students' individuality. The less cultural congruence between students' homes and

schools, the more difficult the cultural transitions would be, and the students would have a more negative outcome in school (Ford & Harris, 1999).

Multicultural education is predicated on the belief that all people have intrinsic worth. Ford and Harris (1999) emphasized multicultural education sought to affirm the differences amongst individuals by eliminating prejudices, biases, and stereotypes. There are eight goals of multicultural education:

- equal opportunity
- the school operates from a pleuritic philosophy
- increased self-awareness and understanding
- education equity
- student empowerment
- improved social relations
- increased knowledge about diversity
- cultural pluralism

Each point could help create positive cultural attitudes among faculty, staff, and policymakers (Ford & Harris, 1999).

Culturally responsive teaching challenges many simple assumptions about the quality of given instructions for diverse students (ERG, 2014). It is a pedagogical theory based on the idea that culture is the underlying aspect of education, encompassing everything from curriculum and assessment, to learning and using multiple teaching strategies in conjunction with methods of administration and supervision (ERG, 2014). With the increasing diversity of students who will be in American classrooms, there is a need to change many school practices, not only in terms of increasing African Americans

and other students of color in gifted classes, but also effectively meeting their academic needs of these diverse students who are gifted (Ford et al., 2005).

Good intentions and awareness are not enough to change various educational programs (Gay, 2010). For example, for African American female students to be successful in any class, especially gifted education classes, teachers should understand what may be interfering with students' performance, so the proper interventions are given, and possible obstacles can be removed (Gay, 2010). Using scores on standardized tests and grades received on classroom assignments does not explain why African American students are under performing. Ford et al. (2005) asserted the more gifted African American students could relate to the curriculum, the more likely they would appreciate the course content and engage with peers and their teacher. Ultimately, all students greatly benefited from learning about different racial and cultural groups (Ford et al., 2005).

Multiculturalism in gifted education presents various opportunities for African American students to become critical thinkers and responsible citizens. School personnel must understand students of any age could benefit from multicultural education in their school (Ford et al., 2005). Teachers will need to be culturally competent and aware in addition to being self-aware and self-understanding. They must be socially responsive and responsible in using appropriate teaching techniques and strategies best suited for a diverse class (Ford et al., 2005). Multicultural education empowers all students, especially diverse students, by giving them mirrors to see themselves reflected in gifted education. For this curriculum to be successfully utilized in gifted education, educators

will need commitment, time, and formal preparation. They must also be proactive and seek ongoing preparation in multicultural education (Ford et al., 2005).

Chapter Summary

Despite these findings, more research is needed to understand possible strategies and practices veteran teachers use in recruiting and retaining gifted African American students in rural communities. Studying Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence (1999) relates to a person's unique ability to demonstrate her or his intellectual abilities in many ways other than IQ tests. Critical race theory transforms the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado et al., 2001). By examining these theories, and how teachers and administrators are prepared in undergraduate and graduate programs, school districts and leaders can develop appropriate state curriculum and resources for gifted education. Furthermore, plausible solutions can establish, and help educators recruit and retain gifted African American students and help support families of these gifted students of color achieve academically and socially.

Chapter III

Methodology

African American students are significantly underrepresented in gifted and talented programs nationwide. School districts in rural or low-income areas of the state are typically met with budget constraints, lack of resources, or lack of qualified teachers (Kellogg, 2016), in addition to geographic isolation, uneven access to the internet, and virtual experiences (Azano et al., 2020). When the same demographic group of students lives in rural areas such as South Georgia, they are met with even more significant challenges. The purpose of this study was to identify strategies and practices used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural school district who were familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher.

The findings from this study provide possible solutions and recommendations that school systems could use to recruit and retain African American students in the gifted program. In addition, I hope these results will give some insight to state and local educational leaders and teacher preparation programs that could help shape their future educational decisions, programs, and curriculum. In this chapter, I discuss the purpose of the study, research questions, and study design. I also discuss information about participants and setting selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter three clarifies my role as a researcher, discusses possible bias, and different measures used to

monitor threats to validity. I also cover the ethical considerations, validity, and credibility aspects of the research in this chapter.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the career and life experiences of rural South Georgia school district veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 2: What strategies did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 3: What practices did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

Research Design

Research was needed to gain and advance current knowledge of various practices and strategies that were used to help identify African American students for a middle school gifted program. Phenomenology focuses on the experiences of an individual and how their experiences can transform into consciousness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I deemed phenomenological research the most appropriate because it helped me to explore the participants' point of view through their lived experiences (Qutoshi, 2018). Thus, allowing me to critically reflect and become more attentive in understanding their practices used (Qutoshi, 2018). The phenomenological research design is a well-

established research methodology in the field of education. Empirical studies have been conducted using a phenomenological research methodology with the gifted and talented students, including African American students, and/or from perspectives of teachers in gifted education. For instance, Zabloski and Milacci (2012) investigated the lived experiences of a gifted population who dropped out of high school in a rural community. Tabron and Chambers (2019) used the phenomenological research design to better understand the lived experiences of African Americans. I explored the lived and career experiences of seven educational leaders in South Georgia to understand how their experiences help them to successfully recruit, identify, and retain African American students in the gifted program. I explored the life and career experiences of seven veteran educational leaders and how their experiences helped them to identify, place, and retain African American students in a middle school gifted program. More specifically, I identified practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in the selected rural South Georgia school district.

Setting

I conducted this study at two middle schools in rural South Georgia. The sites for the study were originally going to be the participants' natural work sites in either their classroom or the school's conference room. However, due to Covid-19 and strict government regulations, I virtually interview participants in their homes. The home locations were contrary to Portigal's (2013) assertion that it is more beneficial to interview participants in their natural environment because the experiences that the researcher is interested in are rooted in that environment. I managed to gather the best data given the prevailing limitations.

Clearland County is considered a micropolitan area with a poverty rate of 26.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). According to The Governor's Office of Student Achievement [GOSA], 2018), 49% of the student body are economically disadvantaged. Kettler et al. (2016) posited that rural school districts in high poverty areas tend to be more racially and ethnically diverse than suburban and urban school districts.

Clearlake Middle School's total student population was 659 students (GOSA, 2018). Their gifted population made up roughly 14% of the student body. Student demographics for the Clearlake Middle School consisted of the following: 44% African American, 42% White, 7% Hispanic, 4% multi-racial, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. Clearlake Middle School's gifted program consisted of 25% African American students, 61% White, 2% Hispanic, 6% multi-racial, and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander. The student body of Clearlake Middle School was 49% economically disadvantaged according to the most recent report (GOSA, 2018). Clearland County Middle School's total student population was 871 and the gifted population made up 18% of the student population (GOSA, 2018). Clearland County Middle School was composed of 26% African American students, 63% who were White, 7% Hispanic, 3% multi-racial students, and 45% of their student body was economically disadvantaged (GOSA, 2018). Clearland County Middle School's gifted program consisted of the following student demographic groups: 12% African American, 79% White, 5% Hispanic, 3% multi-racial, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. I selected these schools because of their similarities in student demographics, experiences, the longevity of administrators, proximity to the researcher, and most importantly, their low enrollment numbers of African American students in the gifted programs.

Role of Researcher

My primary task as the researcher was to present the participants' experiences in sufficient depth and detail so that any reader could connect and understand the issues reflected in this study (Seidman, 2013). Following the suggestions Creswell (1998) recommended, I received authorization from Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district to conduct my research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that before and during data collection, I should examine various dimensions of their own experiences to be aware of personal prejudices, assumptions, and viewpoints. As a veteran educational leader, it was my goal to address the academic needs of my students. My experience as an educator and one of a few African American students in an advanced/gifted program helped fuel my interest in the under-representation of African American students in middle school gifted programs. As a classroom teacher, I taught inclusive (regular education and special education) middle school classes in multiple content areas. Most of my classes consisted of more African American students than other subgroups (Whites, Latinxs, Asians, or multi-racial). In contrast, the advanced/ gifted classes were predominantly White. Although I grew up in this same community, I did not attend the middle schools affiliated with this study. During the investigation, no power relationship existed with any of my participants.

Participants

Seven veteran educational leaders in the Clearland County School District volunteered to participate in this study. Following Creswell's (1998) advice, I had to explain the purpose and potential benefits of the research to the participants to gain their trust and commitment. I also ensured integrity, respect, and confidence throughout the

study by providing copies of the transcript, ensuring anonymity of names, locations, and conducting member checks throughout the interview process.

Following Seidman (2013), I ensured that the range of participants represented various populations sufficiently where others outside the study area might have a chance to connect to those same experiences in the study. Carrillo and Flores (2018) posited that issues such as degree of expertise, length of service, and commitment to developing professional responsibilities are key when conceptualizing veteran teachers. I used the following selection criteria to recruit the most appropriate participants for the study:

- Teachers or school administrators with three or more years of experience in teaching or school administration.
- Valid Georgia teaching certificate for middle grades (4-8); any subject area.
- Valid Georgia administrator certification.
- Valid gifted endorsement certificate.
- Teachers or school administrators may vary in ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, life experiences, and educational training.

I contacted participants by email and phone to set up interviews for the study. Due to school closures and strict government regulations, the researcher could not visit potential participants in person but instead I contacted them through emails before the interview. By taking the time to make contact and introduce myself, I built mutual respect between the participants and myself, which was necessary for the interview process to take place and be successful (Seidman, 2013). I made the first contact soon after obtaining VSU IRB, the school district, and site approvals to conduct research. A copy of

the Valdosta State University IRB permission form and district consent forms appear in Appendix A. Participants were not compensated for their time and input.

Data Collection

Data collection included open-ended, in-depth phenomenological interviews with audio recordings obtained with participants' permission. The use of adequate recording procedures helped me gather rich data for transcribing and analyzing. I also analyzed public documents, such as gifted criteria and policy, and student population and demographics of each middle school's gifted education program to help increase the reliability of the study.

Interviews and Documentation

The interviews were conducted virtually due to the Covid-19 and strict government regulations. I used Seidman's three-interview series to understand the perception of gifted education from school administrators' and teachers' points of view (Seidman, 2013). The interviews consisted of three separate sessions, 80-90 minutes each, spread over eight weeks. I used an interview guide to ensure the fundamental structuring of questions and allow the flexibility to use follow-up questions (Patton, 2002). The first interview gathered information about the participant's early educational experiences up to the present time, focusing on the topics of cultural awareness and academic training. The second interview focused on participants' strategies to successfully identify and place African American students in the gifted program. It was based on the details of the participants' present career experiences regarding the facilitation of gifted education policies and educational practices in their respective schools and grade level (Seidman, 2013). In the third interview, the participants reflected

on the meaning of their educational and career experiences by addressing the emotional and intellectual connections between the participants' life and career (Seidman, 2013). I responsibly presented the questions with clarity (Patton, 2002). Follow-up questions were used to explore details and meanings in the participants' responses.

I virtually piloted questions from all three-interview series with two co-workers not affiliated with Clearland County Schools. The participants in the pilot met the same set of requirements as the participants in the study. Testing the interview guide before conducting the actual research helped me fine-tune questions before the actual interview (Maxwell, 2013). I designed in-depth interview questions to allow participants to share their stories freely. According to Seidman (2013), it was vital to explore the participants' experiences in depth rather than probe them during the interviews. I created and maintained a comfortable and safe climate where participants felt secure sharing their stories (Moustakas, 1994). Following Seidman (2013) recommendation, I created profiles to capture participants' lived experiences before moving to the thematic analysis of the collected data.

In addition to employing Seidman's three-interview series, I also used documents to augment interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documents included Clearland County School District identification and retention policies. Information from records filled gaps from interviews (Patton, 2002). I utilized the school district's website and the Clearland County School District's gifted coordinator to obtain records. In addition to examining the district's policies and requirements, I also examined Clearlake Middle School and Clearland County Middle School's gifted education policies regarding identification, testing, placement, and student retention requirements. The schools'

policies aligned with the district's policies. The district's gatekeepers graciously gave me critical information, including the gifted program's student demographics, the number of years students had spent in the gifted program, and the teachers' experience teaching gifted students.

Instrumentation

I used a variety of research instruments to gather data. Using interview guides ensured that each participant followed the same level of inquiry (Patton, 2002). With questions predetermined based on the literature, I was free to build a conversation with particular subject areas and build a conversation in a specific subject area (Patton, 2002). The interview questions appear in Appendix B of this study.

I used a digital audio recorder to capture interview conversations. Interview audios were electronically transcribed and stored in secure files for analysis.

Data Analysis

Creswell (1998) asserted that phenomenological data analysis proceeds through methodological data reduction, analysis of specific statements, and themes. The goal of data analysis should be to reveal fresh insights from observation and discovery (Saldaña, 2011). Data analysis for this study consisted of reading, memoing, transcribing, coding interview notes, and listening to audio recordings of the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Seidman (2013) suggested that I analyze my data with an open attitude to find emerging information of interest from the text (Seidman, 2013). One primary method of creating text from virtual interviews was by recording the interviews and transcribing them. By having audio recordings of the interviews, I reviewed the source (Seidman, 2013). Also, by using memos throughout the data collection process, the researcher could reflect on

the study's goals, stimulate analytic insights, and facilitate the researcher's thinking (Gibbs, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). I used memos to analyze my notes and check with participants to see if the information marked was collected accurately (Seidman, 2013). I wrote memos throughout the process of analysis.

The process of reading, memoing, transcribing, and coding was an ongoing process to help maintain the data's validity and integrity. I also used In Vivo coding to examine the similarities throughout the data (Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo coding allowed me to select words or phrases that seemed to stand out as significant to what was being said (Saldaña, 2011). Using In Vivo coding provided me with imagery, metaphors, and symbols for concept development and themes. In addition to using In Vivo coding, I also used descriptive coding to categorize the data and index the primary contents for further analytic work (Saldaña, 2011). Samples of codes that emerged from the data and were used to categorize data included: *lack of diversity, attended a predominately White school, being raised in the surrounding area, attended a school close to home, lack of diversity classes and activities in college.*

Document Data Analysis

I obtained data from various authentic records regarding the school's overall demographic and economically-disadvantaged populations which were obtained from secondary sources like the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement and the Georgia Department of Education. Documents retrieved from secondary sources could help report the phenomenon of interest by individuals who could not directly experience the phenomenon themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Primary sources are portrayed firsthand by the originator and are based on the phenomenon of interest (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). Primary sources came from each middle school by way of the gatekeeper. I developed themes by analyzing primary sources such as the schools' documents of gifted education demographics, policies for testing, and student retention records.

I kept an open mind while analyzing these documents to minimize bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Possible limitations with using documents were determining authenticity, accuracy, and incomplete reports due to sudden pandemic-related school closure. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited that documents were produced not for research purposes but might be in a form not beneficial for the researcher or difficult to interpret. Using the most up-to-date records with editor or author names was helpful with this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Validity and Credibility

As a result of not teaching gifted African American students personally, I remained mindful. I also maintained fidelity towards the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence. Maxwell (2013) stated comparison analysis allowed the researcher to compare the stories of others to previously studied literature. Respondent validation rules out the possibility of misinterpreting any meanings of what the participants are saying and doing, which will show their perspective taken as evidence (Maxwell, 2013). When the researcher completed an interview, it was essential to interpret participants' responses for what was said and not what the researcher assumed was being said.

Lastly, I triangulated interviews and documented data to mitigate inconsistencies in the data. Patton (2002) explained that it did not necessarily increase validity just because a researcher used triangulation. Triangulation collects information from many

different individuals and sources (Maxwell, 2013). It does not prove data sources yield the same results, but instead, helps the researcher understand the inconsistencies in findings across different types of data (Patton, 2002). By utilizing triangulation, I could check multiple participants' perspectives through interviews, data collection, and memos, in addition to checking district and state documents. It also possibly reduced the risk of chance association and systematic bias due to a specific method (Maxwell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report presented what members of its committee considered ethical in research involving humans. The report stated that researchers must respect humans, beneficence, and justice for human research (Seidman, 2013). I received the approval of Valdosta State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants for this study were middle school administrators or gifted teachers in Clearland County School District and who participated voluntarily, for no compensation. Their identities and place of employment were protected and replaced with pseudonyms.

After IRB approval, the school district's superintendent allowed me access to the school to conduct my study. I explained the study’s purpose and goals and understood the rights and protections for the participants involved. Once the school district approved the study, I sought and received building approval through the principals at both local middle schools in the Clearland County School District. The participants were informed of the purpose and goals and understood their rights and protections during the study. All participants were asked to provide written and verbal consent before engaging in the study and were assured that they were not required to provide any information that could jeopardize their current employment.

I was the sole researcher who collected, assessed, and secured all data to protect participants' confidential information. The audio recordings and transcription and coding of the interview notes were password protected and kept in a secure area. At the end of the study, I erased all data to comply with the VSU's IRB approval.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher. The study intended to bring insight and possible solutions to the parents of gifted African American students and teachers, school administrators, and district, state, and federal leaders to increase the number of gifted African American students participating in gifted programs. Other potential findings may help colleges and universities, in addition to state teacher certification programs such as the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP), to develop more support and education for teacher candidates about cultural diversity and awareness. For this study, seven veteran educational leaders in the Clearland County School District voluntarily participated. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory and critical race theory served as a conceptual framework in this phenomenological study. Seidman's three-interview series were used to understand the perception of gifted education from school administrators' and teachers' points of view (Seidman, 2013).

Chapter IV

Profiles

African American students are underrepresented in Georgia schools' gifted programs (CRDC, 2018). African American students are less likely to be identified and placed in gifted education programs served by certified gifted teachers than other racial groups (Ford, 2012). This phenomenological study addresses strategies and practices utilized by veteran educational leaders in rural South Georgia middle schools who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in their school's gifted program. Participants described several strategies and practices that may have contributed to the successful retention of African American students in the gifted program and reported current changes in identifying students for the middle school gifted program.

Participants

Seven participants shared their life and career experiences. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Race	Gender	Highest educational attainment	Years in Education	Current Position
Charlotte	White	Female	Master's degree	12	6th/7th grade gifted ELA
Evelyn	White	Female	Master's degree	13	8th grade gifted/non-gifted Math
Kim	White	Female	Specialist degree	26	Assistant Principal
Daniel	White	Male	Specialist degree	15	Gifted Coordinator/ non-gifted ELA
Olivia	White	Female	Bachelor's degree	15	8th grade gifted ELA/9th grade Literature
William	AA	Male	Master's degree	18	Assistant Principal
Catherine	White	Female	Doctoral degree	27	Gifted Coordinator/ 6th grade gifted Science

Participants were purposely selected veteran gifted teachers and administrators from Clearland County district's middle schools for this study. My research data comprised of interview transcripts and review of school district gifted education documents. I used pseudonyms to ensure participants anonymity and confidentiality.

Charlotte

Charlotte is a White female 6th and 7th grade gifted ELA teacher at Clearlake Middle School. She has been teaching for 12 years and has taught gifted education for five years, all in the same school. Charlotte was raised in Clearland County by both parents, 40 years of age at her birth. She stated, "It was interesting having older parents and a sister who is 16 years older than me." She recalls her mother being a stay-at-home parent until she was in the 5th grade when her mother decided to go back to work. Charlotte's mother began working as a babysitter, but the job did not pay as much and was not financially beneficial. Her mother eventually decided to work at a local store in the cosmetic department. Charlotte continued to describe her parents. Her mother dropped out of high school her senior year because "She got ticked off with math." Her father joined the Navy after high school. After being discharged, he attended college and realized it was not for him. He dropped out after a semester. Despite the fact her parents did not obtain a degree, she was burdened with being a first-generation college graduate. They repeatedly stated, "You're going to get a degree. You're going to college." She explained she knew it was not an option not to obtain some sort of degree.

Charlotte grew up in a predominantly White community with very little interaction with a minority population. There were very few, if any, African American students who attended her school. She recalled the time when African American students attended her school for the first time. She was in the 5th grade. She shared how the school zones changed while in the fifth grade because of the consolidated/redistricted Clearlake City Schools and Clearland County Schools. She was remorseful of the racial segregation that prevailed at that time. Charlotte describes her early experience with

diversity in elementary school. She admitted, “Our schools changed up in the fifth grade, and it was interesting because I remember that was the first year that we had Black students at our school. Which, when you think about it, is wild in the nineties, you would think that would have happened sooner.” The following anecdote neatly captures Charlotte’s awareness of racism still evident in her. Charlotte recalled when the elementary school principal approached her about a swearing-in even at their school. “She [the principal] came up to me and asked me to choose a Black student to swear in, but I need[ed] to make sure that they sp[oke] clearly.” Charlotte realized that her principal would not have said this if the student was White.

Even as a young child, Charlotte was aware of the privileges associated with the gifted program. While she was in elementary school, she was tested and placed in the gifted program. Charlotte shared, “In elementary school, I loved [the gifted program]. We had a really fun teacher Mrs. [R].” She described these moments as her favorite times in school. She remembers completing projects based on the students’ interests and having the freedom to move around the class. All of this changed when she went to middle school. She explained the following:

> In middle school, it was no longer based on our interests. It was: “Here is some extra work for you to do.” Like it was higher level. It was hard, almost to the point where … I get challenging us, but it was like high school level stuff. And I remember we were just expected to do more, we were expected to sit down and be quiet and not talk at all.

When she started high school, she disliked the gifted program even more. Charlotte expressed the gifted program consisted of her academic classes. At one point, she felt like

the extra work and projects she completed were “punishment” for being smart. She tried to get herself removed from the gifted program. “I talked to the gifted lady in charge ... She was like ‘No. You are way too smart.” Charlotte replied to her, “I hate it.” Although she disliked being in the gifted program in high school, she described one teacher who reinforced her love for literature and influenced her to become a teacher. She recalled:

> When I was in high school, … I really wanted to be a nuclear pharmacist, and then, I took my ELA literature class, and I loved it. I realized I really loved literature, and I wanted to have kids. I wanted to make kids ... love it as much as I did. I decided I wanted to be an educator because of my literature teacher.

Charlotte unexpectedly lost her mother at the tender age of 16. She was consumed by deep grief over the loss of her mother and even considered giving up school, but decided to pursue her college degree in honor of her mother. Her father always reminded her of what her mother would want and encouraged her to finish. After graduating high school, she attended the local community college in Clearland County for two years. Charlotte explained that she had to choose this school because her father would not let her attend school anywhere else, and it was affordable. While she attended the community college, she stayed home and worked at a tanning bed salon. After obtaining her associate’s degree in education, she decided to attend a university in northern Georgia. She noted while obtaining her undergraduate degree, she did not participate in any on-campus organizations. “I guess I was burned out from high school, from all the organizations and stuff, so I’m just like … no, I’m good.” Instead, she worked at a local call center and pursued various other jobs to cover her living expenses.

Her world fell apart at the age of 21 when her father died unexpectedly. Suddenly she had lost her anchor and was forced to survive on her own. She shared, “When Dad died, it was tough because I didn’t have anyone. I mean I had my sister, but our relationship was not good.” That semester she struggled with school, and for the first time she received an F in a class. She ended up taking a semester off from school.

Later she picked herself up and obtained her bachelor’s degree in English Literature. She chose not to pursue an education degree, even though she wanted to teach. She explained, “I didn’t want an education degree, [be]cause I wanted to know my subject better. I did not want to learn about how to set up my classroom [be]cause at that time that’s just not what I was interested in.” Besides her required courses for her English Literature degree, she explained her cultural diversity classes were classes she picked. “I was interested in multicultural literature, so I took African American Literature. I [also] took Hispanic Lit and that was the most multicultural that it got at college.”

After graduation, she moved home and applied for a high school position at Clearland County High School and an ELA position at Clearlake Middle School. She was offered the job as a 7th grade ELA teacher at Clearlake Middle School. “When I got my job, that was the last year that they were hiring people [who] did not have an actual teacher’s degree.” Furthermore, to become a certified teacher and keep her job, she decided to go through Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GA TAPP) or obtain her master’s in Secondary Education. “I wanted to get the extra pay at the time that came with the Master’s degree instead of doing the [GA] TAPP,” she declared. She worked as a teacher for two years and obtained her master's degree from a university within 70 miles of her home. The program was offered as a cohort that she had

to attend a couple of nights a week. Charlotte enjoyed the classes because they focused on reading and literacy. She was presented with multiple opportunities to learn many strategies that she could use in her classroom. “I had to learn how to lesson plan and how to manage my class...I would say it definitely helped me think about how [and] what changes I can make in my class. Where I was weak and what I needed to do to improve.” For eight years, she taught in a co-teaching setting with a special education teacher for ELA. Charlotte describes:

> When I first started, my whole career up until I got moved to gifted, I was with a co-teacher. Always had a co-teacher. Always taught sped students [and] regular education students. What always got me was I always pushed them really hard. I always challenge them because I believe they can do it. I remember planning with them [teachers]. They’re like, “I don’t think my students can do that.” And I was like, well, are you going to try? That’s one of the biggest things that I do remember is a lot of teachers don’t want to push regular ed and sped students.

Charlotte never actively intended to be a gifted teacher but became one by default. She stated, “I did not want to teach gifted students.” The following year, the principal told her she would teach two gifted classes the next school year. Which meant she had to become certified to teach gifted students. She obtained her gifted endorsement through Deerdell Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). She described her experience with the gifted endorsement program as “not very beneficial.” For one year, Charlotte felt like most of her classes were giving her “busy work.” One class was proven beneficial to her because it taught her how to challenge gifted students and presented various strategies that she could use in her classroom. Once she started teaching gifted classes, Charlotte

noticed that there was not a lot of diversity in her classroom. She also observed how many of the gifted African American students felt about being in gifted classes. “I've had a lot of kids tell [me] that before. They did not want to be in the gifted class.” Charlotte continues:

> They [African American gifted students] feel like they don’t fit in and not in the gifted class. They feel like they don’t fit in when they go outside the gifted class. I’ve had a lot of kids tell me before that they did not want to be in the gifted class. African American students have said “I get made fun of because I’m in here. Why can’t I just go to regular [classes]? Can I just be in co-teaching?” because of how they are perceived by their peers.

Now that Charlotte is teaching gifted students, she stated she would love to overhaul the gifted program to fit all gifted students’ needs and become a gifted curriculum specialist. She said that much has not changed in the gifted program since she was in Clearland County. She expressed how a lot of the curriculum and gifted policies need to be reviewed and possibly changed. She hopes to be able to express those concerns about those policies and make needed changes.

Evelyn

Evelyn is a White female 8th grade gifted and non-gifted math teacher at Clearlake Middle School. She has been teaching for 13 years and has taught gifted for seven years. Evelyn grew up in a middle-class family with an older half-sister. She was raised by both of her parents in Clearland County for most of her life. Her mother accepted a job at a neighboring school district. Her family moved and lived in that county for six years. Evelyn’s mother worked in that district for one year before returning to

Clearland County. She enjoyed a great childhood. Her mother was an educator and was home during the summer, holidays, and afternoons with her and her sister. Her father worked for the railroad and also ran a photography business on the side. She described her father's business as "kind of his hobby/business." Evelyn shared, "He would do weddings and a lot of different stuff."

Both of Evelyn's parents obtained high school diplomas. Her mother received her bachelor's degree in education, and her father earned an associate's degree. Growing up, Evelyn's parents pushed for her and her sister to go to college, but ironically, her mother discouraged her and her sister from pursuing a career in education. Evelyn recalled:

> I remember being little, and because my mom was a teacher, I [would] teach my class … but mom was always, to my sister and I both, don't be a teacher … you can do something else. It was getting bad … and getting more challenging and more stressful and not the same as when she started. So she begged us to go to college, but not to be teachers.

Evelyn attended elementary school in her predominantly White school district Clearland County School District. She had very little interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds. She asserted, "I went through Clearland County Schools, and at the time, Clearland County and Clearlake were separate school systems. Clearland County was predominantly… when I say predominantly, I mean hugely White. There were "maybe one or two Black kids in [my elementary] class." In high school, she recalls less than "ten Black kids in a class of over 200 [students]."

She attended the same elementary school where her mother was employed. "She was an elementary school teacher, and so I went to school with her." Evelyn described

her educational experiences as “good,” “easy,” and “never a struggle.” She stated, “I always made A’s and occasional B’s. I liked my teachers.” Evelyn was not tested as a child for the gifted program. Evelyn shared, “I remember one of my friends getting tested, and she failed the test on purpose. I remember being so upset that I hadn’t been asked. But, in adulthood, I realized that I’m not gifted. Not like that.” As she transitioned into junior high, she remembers her science teacher who fostered her love of science. Evelyn described her as “fun” and “crazy.” Her class activities were “real hands-on” and “engaging”. After graduating high school, she decided to attend a college in northern Georgia. Her decision to attend this university did not pertain to her major, but more so following her older sister's footsteps and for the school’s reputation. She shared:

> I went to [college] and my sister went [to the same school]. Following her footsteps. I thought that would be the best school. To get a job that they would look at a transcript and would be impressed. So I chose it basically on reputation and I knew it was tough. But it had nothing to do with my major because if it had, then I would have gone to [college close to home] [be]cause they had a much better program prepping for athletic training.

While attending this university, she majored in Exercise and Sports Science. She exclaimed:

> I loved it. It was science. It was fascinating. I'm there with all these pre-med kids for the sciences, biology, human anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and physics. I was sitting [in] pre-med [classes]. It kicked my butt.

Despite Evelyn’s early educational success, college had proven that she was not as ready as she thought. She explained:

> I didn't have a clue when I went and I struggled, I didn't know how to study … I [previously] wasn't pushed hard enough … I [had] never not struggled and once I got to college … It was hard.

After her first year at college, she lost her HOPE scholarship, and her parents made her move back home to attend the local community college in Clearland County.

> Mom and Dad made me come home my sophomore year to get my brains. I stayed home and went to the local community college that year … they let me go back to college in Northern Georgia that following year.

Once she returned, she stayed on track and graduated with a degree in Exercise and Sports Science. She did not participate in any of the college's organizations; however, Evelyn worked with the university's clinic working with medical records. After college, she gained employment with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) as an Activity Therapist. Evelyn described her new role:

> We hosted softball and basketball tournaments. We were responsible for the kids that were on lock down for behavior consequences. We had to take a handout of exercises that they could do in their room because they only got out of the room for an hour a day.

She worked with the DJJ for 18 months; nevertheless, Evelyn was exposed to more culturally diverse people at the level five facility. She learned how to build positive rapport and set boundaries.

> There, it was draw a line in the sand. If they crossed it, they got written up and it usually took two weeks and then they would come back and they would be good.

> They would never cross me again. To set boundaries and hold them to it. It was a very positive experience. It taught me to see people for who they are.

For a while, Evelyn worked various jobs from a fitness director to a local pre-K teacher. She did not plan to become an educator; she defaulted to teaching by coincidence. She recalls the event:

> One day I was at [a restaurant] and I was approached by my first cousin who was also a principal at Clearlake Middle School. He asked me if I needed a job. I replied, "Eh, I don't think so."

She eventually applied for the position. She was hired as a math co-teacher before she started any teacher prep program. Once hired, she began her certification process through the Georgia TAPP program. However, she only had to complete one year of supervised practicum with RESA to become a certified teacher. Evelyn described the certification program as easy with "a whole lot of evaluation on my teaching." There were a few required classes, but not a lot. In addition to becoming certified, she pursued her master's degree through a university cohort in Postsecondary Education. Her experience with the master's program was not very beneficial to her. "It was more about jumping through hoops...I didn't learn much...I put the work in and I made A's."

After five years of teaching in a co-taught setting, she enjoyed teaching math inclusion (special education and regular education) classrooms. Still, she realized that all co-teachers do not exhibit the same kind of work ethic as her. She stated:

> Some people, when you pick up the slack, they expect you to continue to pick up the slack. And … it just got hard. I was doing my job and part of their job. So that's really why I wanted out of inclusion.

At the time, there was a position available in 6th grade to teach gifted science. A new principal just accepted the position at Clearlake Middle School, and she was moved to 6th-grade gifted science. Furthermore, she had to become gifted certified and went through the Deerdell RESA gifted endorsement program. She described her experience in the gifted endorsement program. “Honestly, it reminded me of my master’s. It was more of jumping through hoops and completing assignments.” After teaching five years of gifted science, she knew her strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. Evelyn determined her strength was in teaching math. “I looked at the school and the kids that struggle with math and I know that my strengths in teaching lie in teaching math, not science. I felt I could do a better job teaching math.” The administrators first moved her to 6th-grade gifted math. Eventually, she moved to 8th-grade gifted math. While teaching, she learned how her students perceived her and other teachers and subconsciously made her aware of biases that the students notice from their teachers.

> It was one of my first years teaching, [student A] was like “So and so is racist!” And I stopped and looked at him. I said, “Do you think I’m racist?” He’s like, “No, no no, Ms. E! Not you! You’re not racist.” One, I don’t want to be perceived that way and two, I’ve wondered where do I fall in that spectrum in their opinion, [be]cause their opinions [are] the one that matter. It’s kind of like a litmus test for me. I want to hear the honest answer because if everyone thinks that I am, then I need to get to the bottom of why they think that so that I can correct it.

Evelyn describes the students’ current situation in the gifted program: “For some of the gifted students, once they reach middle school, some are removed from the program due to grades and work ethic. They can be placed back in the program with a written note

from parents. But most parents do not follow through with the note." While she is teaching gifted students, she "wants to continue to find ways to challenge her students and encourage other teachers to challenge their students, not just give them more work to complete." Her vision for her school's gifted program is to find and reinstate previous "gifted students" back into the program.

Kim

Kim is a White female assistant principal at Clearlake Middle School. During her 26-year teaching career, she has taught math, gifted and regular, in both high school and middle school and served as department head in two school systems. Her parents raised her in a rural community in Silverlea County with a younger brother. Kim's mother was a bookkeeper for a local company, and her father was a construction worker. Her mother graduated high school but could not afford to go to college. Her father only had a 7th-grade education. He had to stop going to school so that he could help on the family farm. Kim's parents expected Kim and her brother to go to school and finish. She and her brother both have their master's degrees.

Growing up, she always loved school and was a teacher's pet. Teachers liked [her]. They gave [her] lots of positive affirmation. When she was in the 1st grade, her family moved to South Florida because her father was looking for work. While in South Florida, she was exposed to various cultures at school for two years. She recalls going to her cousin's house and playing with many children because their area was a more populated area than living in Silverlea County. In the middle of her 3rd-grade year, her family moved back to Silverlea County. There, she attended a small community school.

While she was in elementary school, she was tested and placed in the gifted program. Kim recalls:

> In elementary, it was a pull-out program. One day a week. I remember it being lots of project-based activities that were just fun, and we had to do different things out of the norm, which I enjoyed.

When she reached junior high, gifted education was no longer a pullout class but considered their gifted academic classes. She took classes with the same students for most of her middle and high school career. In high school, she explained how they had a separate gifted class that was not content-specific. She recalls one teacher being "cool" and "eclectic" and he taught random things such as Latin prefixes and strategies to help on the SAT. She was also a part of the Governor's Honors Program. She explained, "I was exposed to more people. I had never been around Asians in Silverlea County and the program was fun and different."

Kim quickly realized her strength was in math. She credited her outstanding math teachers, and her love for school propelled her to pursue her math teaching career. During her senior year, she became pregnant, but she still graduated as a valedictorian. Motherhood forced her to enroll at a local community college close to her family.

While attending college, she juggled work, school, and parenting. After graduating, she commuted with a friend to classes every day at a university close to home. "I could not work at all just because of the time I would have to go. As far as being involved, I was involved in church. It was family and school." She graduated with a degree in secondary education with a concentration in applied math. She soon applied for a job in Rosemoor County teaching math. While working, a university offered to host a

cohort at her school for a master's degree. Kim said, "sign me up." She stated that she would have loved to have a master's degree in math, but it required her to have a four-year degree in math, and she could not afford to commute to the university every day, and online courses were not prevalent. While working on her master's, she decided to do an add-on for a gifted endorsement. She "wanted to work with the gifted… would be only the second teacher at [her] school. It was a small school, so we needed me to have that. It would help in scheduling." The program required her to take a few classes at Deerdell RESA, which helped her understand gifted students and their creativity level, but not with strategies to use in the classroom. She eventually moved to Clearland County, and she described her decision to obtain her specialist degree:

> I had moved to Clearland County. They only gave me one prep and I was kind of bored because I was used to doing a whole lot more. I heard of a program at the local community college and I signed up.

After completing her specialist in educational leadership, she pursued a principal assistant position at Clearlake Middle School. There she worked with the gifted coordinator and scheduled gifted students for their classes. She recalls, "When students come to us from elementary school, they are labeled gifted or not gifted at the beginning of middle school. Because we are middle school, sixth, seventh, and eighth, most… 98% of the kids are identified before they get to us. We have had the rare occasion; I can think of two times in my eight years (as assistant principal) where there was a student who we felt should be gifted that was not tested previously."

Kim believes the gifted program's current situation is doing well, but there is always room for improvement. She believes teachers need continuous reminders and

training to increase rigor in the gifted program. Some teachers get into the habit of doing the same things and sometimes need a catalyst to seek change. Kim's long-term goal is to continue to work in education as long as it is fun. Her vision for gifted education is for gifted educators to continue growing, learning, and pushing students to their full potential.

Daniel

Daniel is a White male 6th-grade non-gifted ELA teacher and gifted coordinator at Clearland County Middle School. He has taught for 15 years in three different grade levels in the same school district. His parents raised Daniel in a middle-class family with a younger sister until they divorced when he was in the 8th grade. His parents finished high school but did not attend college. Daniel's mother worked as a secretary, and his father worked with the railroad until he was injured when Daniel was in the second grade. Daniel explained that his father was put on disability from the railroad. From there, "he worked some jobs because his injury crushed his foot...he was unable to work a job where he was required to be on his feet so much." Daniel did not attend pre-K school but stayed with his grandmother during the day while his parents were at work. His earliest educational experience was in kindergarten when he attended one of Clearlake City's schools. His first encounter with race was in kindergarten with an African American teacher and an African American paraprofessional. The following vignette neatly captures this encounter:

> She left an indelible mark on my life. To this day, some of my favorite memories involving my kindergarten teacher included the only time that I was spanked at

> school. They (kindergarten teacher and paraprofessional) did not make it awkward. They loved us all.

In first and second grade, he recalls his teachers being White, and in third grade, his teacher was African American. “They [teachers] treated everybody equally, and it was a good experience.” When Daniel was in the 3rd grade, his family moved 15 miles outside of Clearlake into a smaller rural community. Daniel enrolled into one of Clearland County Schools located less than two miles from his house. He recalls the school not being as diverse because of the “location in the country.” Eventually, the elementary school was converted into a K-12 school when the Clearland County Schools and Clearlake City schools consolidated. At that point, it became a little more diverse within the student body population.

While in school, Daniel was not in the gifted program, although he performed well academically. However, because of the small schools he attended and the multiple teachers who impacted his life, including his kindergarten teacher, he knew that he wanted to become an educator when he graduated high school. Daniel shared:

> My experiences with African American teachers had a huge impact on how I handle things. Oftentimes I think about how certain ones of those teachers handled situations and that plays into how I handle things. Just overall life advice and how to treat students. How to accept students for who they are and not, you know, not base it on their race or their gender.

After high school, Daniel attended a local community college in Clearland County for two years while working at a department store. His job at the department store exposed him to different people from all walks of life and “gave [him] experience working with

the public." After receiving his associate's degree in Early Childhood Education, he gained employment with the Clearland County School District as a paraprofessional. Also, he attended night classes from a university that offered undergraduate classes. The classes were presented at a satellite campus near his house. While working as a paraprofessional, it "gave me opportunities." He served in several leadership capacities and chaired a couple of school committees. It also "gave opportunities to interact with students and parents who were of different cultures, and I worked very closely with [them]. It let me see a lot of how different cultures react to situations." After he started teaching, he began to work on his master's degree and specialist degree. Although the faculty of both programs were diverse, the cohort's students were predominantly White. Daniel described his graduate experiences as "uneventful" because he was working full-time as a teacher.

After completing his master's and during his second year of teaching, he got an opportunity to become certified as a gifted teacher. Daniel thought, "well that [is] something I can do and … further my career and work with a different group of students." So, he decided to pursue gifted endorsement and attend classes at Deerdell RESA. He recalls the program being "sporadic" and did not adequately prepare him to teach gifted education. He shared:

> They can give you all the data and you know what the experts say all day long. But until you get into a classroom with actual students, it's a whole different ball game. And I think that with any education course you know … with students, hands-on experience is what gives you a higher level of learning and you don't

> really get that hands-on experience until you get in the classroom with those students.

Olivia

Olivia is a White female 8th-grade gifted ELA and 9th-grade Literature teacher at Clearland County Middle School. She has taught for 15 years in high school and middle school and was gifted for seven years. Olivia's parents raised her in a working lower-middle-class family in Silverlea County. Her mother worked as a secretary for her aunt's business and her father was an auto mechanic. Olivia was raised in a "very strict, religious Christian Baptist. "My mama had us in church every time the doors were open. We were at every vacation bible school." Her mother and father were married for 34 years before they divorced, raising her and her younger sister. She recalls her family relying on government assistance and second-hand clothes from "yard sales." Olivia admitted to being picked on while growing up because her pants were too short or "high waters." Both of her parents graduated high school but did not attend college; they encouraged her and her sister to pursue a higher degree.

Going to school, Olivia shared she was not completely literate until the 4th grade. She stated:

> I was in what you would call, like an RTI class … really low-level, barely reading. It was my 4th-grade teacher [who] saw something in me and pulled me to the side. She realized I was phonics deaf … so she went through and just taught me sight words. We just drill and kill sight words, and by the end of my 4th-grade year, I went from barely able to read to being placed in what we would call like an honors class.

She was also tested for the gifted program but did not qualify. Throughout her early educational career, the schools in Silverlea County were predominantly White. Olivia grew up in a home where race was rarely discussed and had to be Christian. Her father voiced his thoughts about who he believed she could be friends with or date. He stated she "can be friends with people who are Black or brown or whatever, but they're not going to come over to my house. They're not going to eat at our table." It was not until her 11th-grade year that Olivia befriended an African American girl and became best friends. Olivia shared:

> I stood up to my daddy and he wasn't real happy about it, to begin with. She started coming over to the house. He was never ugly towards her or anything but I know that he wasn't happy with me. But she kind of broke through that shell and he started to change his mind. He learned to love her as much as all of us did.

When she graduated high school, she attended the local community college in Clearland County because it was affordable and close to home. She shared, "I didn't know that you could put in for scholarships … so my parents just said you're going to stay the first two years."

While attending college, she volunteered at a domestic abuse shelter for women. This experience was a turning point in her life. She stated:

> As a volunteer … What affected me most was seeing the kids that came in the shelter. I made my decision that I wanted to try to see if I could help the kids and teaching just seemed to be the most natural next decision.

After graduating with an associate's degree in Sociology, she attended a local university to stay close to her family. She shared, "I was just afraid of going too far from

home. My mom specifically kept me very sheltered, and so reaching out just really scared me." While attending school, she worked with student service support, helping students with visual impairments go to class or take notes. This job inspired her to pursue a degree in Special Education, but she loved English and Literature. Olivia also worked as a resident's assistant for a year. In addition to working, she became affiliated with several on-campus organizations. She was a member of the Baptist Student Union and the Gay-Straight Alliance. She described her experience with the Gay-Straight Alliance:

> One day, when we were on campus, … they [talked] about the different groups and I got talking with one of the girls and yeah, come on in. My little Southern Baptist Christian scared girl going, 'Oh my God!' … but I absolutely loved it. Definitely opened up my eyes to a lot of things.

Olivia attended various diversified literature classes. She shared, "I took an African American Literature studies class because I wanted to expand my background. I noticed everything I was taking … the Whiteness of history … it didn't sit right with me." She studied Southern Literature and Feminist Literature. After two years, she graduated with a bachelor's in Secondary Education with a concentration in English.

Her first teaching job was a co-taught classroom at Silverlea County High School. She recalled that year as a "shock" and "a little frustrating." She continues,

> I think one of the biggest shocks as a first-year teacher is you go in there all dewy-eyed, glowy-eyed and I'm going to change the world. My first year was at Silverlea County High School and it was really the first year that co-teaching was coming in really strong in Georgia. I was a new teacher, and I adamantly argue against this every year because I see it … In school systems now … they usually

> put in co-teaching classes … either your brand-new teachers or your teachers who are new to the system and they're not going to be strong enough for those kids. I tried my best, but what frustrated me was the disparity between who taught co-teaching classes and I can walk into a gifted class or even a regular class and the racial makeup was very different.

After a few years of commuting, she applied to the only middle school ELA position open in Clearland County. As part of the job at Clearland County Middle School, the principal required teachers to be gifted certified. "I did receive my gifted certification when I became a middle school teacher. I was not gifted certified until I hit middle school." She was not in Clearland County long enough to go through Deerdell RESA; she had to obtain her gifted endorsement through an online program. She stated the classes were not bad, although she did not feel that the classes served her needs as an experienced yet a first-year gifted teacher.

Olivia stated that gifted education is on a learning curve at this particular moment because of the pandemic and the need for digital teaching. She is not convinced that the academic challenge level is where it needs to be yet. Her long-term goals are to continue supporting and challenging her students academically. Still, she would like to help expand the gifted program to be more inclusive and reflect her school system's demographics. Furthermore, she would like to see the gifted program in middle school as a stepping stone for students taking Advanced Placement and college courses in high school.

William

William is an African American assistant principal at Clearland County Middle School. During his 18-year career, he served as an administrator, dean, classroom teacher, head football coach, and athletic director in Georgia and Florida. William grew up in a low-income southern Florida area with 14 siblings and was raised by his mother and father. He describes, "When I was growing up, there were 16 of us living in the two-bedroom project apartment with one bathroom. It was difficult, but we found a way to make do." His mother had about a 6th-grade education, and his father had about a 3rd or 4th-grade education. Education was not a primary focus. William shared:

> My parents pushed us to get an education, but it's kind of hard to push us to get [an] education when they're not home … and they really couldn't help us with anything. Like I said, my mom had about a 6th grade education. It's hard once your kids get to junior high. It's hard to help them with lessons and work … At that point it was like she felt embarrassed.

He continued, "They always told us, 'Hey, we want you to be better than us,' but when we couldn't do it, they didn't say a lot. If we failed a class, there was no discipline." His parents often worked 12-16 hours at their jobs. Therefore, his older sister took care of everyone. "When my parents went to work, she would kind of do the mom thing in trying to take care of everybody and try to watch us and prepare dinner."

William recalls his earliest educational experiences as unique and very diverse. From the time he started school until 3rd grade, he went to a predominately Black school with a few Hispanics. The children at this school all lived within walking distance. There was very little interaction with Whites at his school. Most of his teachers were Black or

Hispanic, and maybe four were White teachers. Then the school district went through racial balancing and distributed children to various schools throughout the district. William had a "rough" 4th grade school year navigating new relationships with peers from different neighborhoods. He stated:

> That first year… they tried to bus the White kids that lived across the tracks to the elementary school. Then they took half of the school at that elementary school and bused us to other schools. That didn't work out well because the school was near the projects. A lot of the White parents didn't want their kids coming to that school because it was so close to the projects. In an unsavory area.

Although the transition was difficult, he had fond memories of his 4th grade White teacher. He reminisced:

> The first time that I ever had a White teacher and I got lucky. She was really nurturing. She was great. It's pretty much to come from [an] all Black school, to come to a new school that's majority White. To most of the people when you walked in the door, looked at us like, 'Ew! Why are they here?' She was really nurturing and accepting.

His fortune changed in 5th grade when he was taught by a male teacher who "made sure that we understood that we did not belong at the school." This teacher always intimidated him and made William hate school. He lamented: "I felt like school didn't provide me with any hope coming up, and most of the teachers didn't want to see me in their class." By the time he was in junior high, the district had decided to racially balance all of the district's schools. However, William's schooling experience did not get any better. When he reached the 8th-grade, he had two teachers that had taught everybody in his family.

Those teachers made him feel like he "belonged" and "could do it." Once he reached high school, he described himself as "rough." William explained:

> I had been kicked out of school. I [had been] sent to alternative school several times. I had been to the detention center. So by the time I got to high school, I already had that label on me. So pretty much the whole time I was in high school, I was watched.

Fortunately, the two teachers he encountered in 8th grade transferred to his high schools and helped him and a group of students who lived in the same area as him through high school. William and that group of students were all a part of a class that met once a month to help students considered "at-risk."

At the age of 16, William was devastated by the loss of his mother. He lost interest in school and turned to a life on the streets. He stated:

> I felt like I lost everything that meant anything to me. I went off the deep end. [I] quit going to school. Missed over 40 or more days and hit the streets even harder than before.

The murder of his best friend shook him so severely that he sought help from his football coach, who helped bring him back from the brink of self-destruction. He reflected: "That's how I got back in, but I [had] an unbelievable behavior contract when I came back." By his junior/senior year, he started to turn things around. "I was playing sports and I had coaches that got involved in my life. So it began to get a lot better for me those last two years."

When William graduated high school, he had been to four different elementary schools, two junior high schools, and two different high schools due to racial balancing.

After graduation, he had two football scholarship offers and chose an HBCU closer to home because his father was ill.

Once William started college, majoring in education was not his first choice. He majored in Culinary Arts. But after the school changed the program and combined Culinary Arts with business, he decided to go to his advisor. The advisor knew a little information about William's area and had some college friends who worked at William's community center. The advisor and his friends encouraged William when he was home during the summer to pursue education. So, he changed his major to education. During his time at college, he completed many community service projects, worked at a restaurant downtown, and was a student-athlete. William graduated with a bachelor's degree in History with a concentration in African American Civil Rights Law.

When he started teaching, people in the education profession would speak with him about pursuing leadership. William shared, "people [would] always talk to me about...working in leadership. I always worked [well] with all troubled kids. I've worked at several alternative schools and the Boys' Ranch." Nonetheless, he pursued a master's in Athletic Administration.

William's current view of the gifted education program at his school is:

> I think that gifted education has become one-sided for upper-class students and/or White students. I see it as a new way to segregate students in school. I believe that the system needs a major reform with the program and testing.

He described his long-term goal to finish his Educational Specialist and then his doctorate. William hopes to get as much training as possible and to support his principal

as much as possible. He wants to continue building his team in the 6th grade hall to be the best and strive to be the best school and team leader he needs to be for his team.

To start revamping Clearland County Middle School gifted program, he is asking his teachers to do the following:

> I am asking my teachers to look for students that might have [fallen] through the cracks and examine all data closely. Behavior isn't to be a factor in these decisions until afterward and if a student's scores show high-level performance, then we are to test that student regardless of the gifted program.

Catherine

Catherine is a White female 6th-grade science teacher and gifted coordinator at Clearlake Middle School. She has 27 years of teaching experience, 18 years of which have been teaching gifted science. Catherine grew up in rural Silverlea County with two older sisters and a younger brother in a lower-middle-class family and was raised by both parents. She stated, "When I was younger, we actually had a farm." Both of her parents graduated high school. After her mother graduated high school, she started working as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), and her father worked various jobs ranging from a farmer, contractor, and horse jockey. Her siblings did attend the local community college but did not graduate with an associate's degree.

Catherine grew up in a small town where everyone went to the same school. She recalls attending a private kindergarten because, at that time, kindergarten was not offered in the public elementary school. After kindergarten, she attended one school up to the 4th grade and then went to another elementary school until she was in middle school. The middle school and high school were in the same building. She recalled the lack of

diversity during her pre-college experience. She describes one situation that occurred as a child:

> I was going to [X] Street School and my siblings were at [Y] Street School. There were two mean White boys that picked on me. I rode the bus from my own school to theirs and was just mercilessly picked on. I would ask my mom, "Mom, why do I have to ride this bus?" "I'm just going from one school to the other?" "Why can't I ride the bus with my best friend?" She was Black, and my parents refused to let me ride on the "Black" bus.

Throughout her school career, her science teachers inspired her to become a science teacher. She shared, "Some of my favorite teachers [in] elementary...were my Black science teachers." Throughout her pre-college education, her science teachers stood out the most. She did not recall a gifted program at her school, but she was always grouped based on performance with other higher-level students in her class. She admitted:

> I enjoyed being in that group because I think I was challenged more and was allowed to be around kids like me. So you didn't go through the whole being made fun of because you were in class with the other smart kids. I enjoyed being around people that wanted to learn and that made it fun.

While in her senior year, Catherine transferred from Silverlea High School to Clearland County High School. Her business teachers inspired her to consider studying for a business degree when she graduated high school. She confirmed: "In high school, because I had teachers that I took business classes from … I enjoyed it. It was fun for me. Some of those accounts, tables receivable, all that jazz."

Upon graduation from high school, she enrolled in a business degree program at a local community college in Clearland County for convenience. She stated: “I started out at this college simply because it was close to home, it was easy. I didn’t have to travel.” Catherine began pursuing a degree in business:

> I thought I wanted to be a CPA. I lacked one class. I had this math class, business calculus. I have never in my life failed a class. And I realized that I don’t want to stick my nose in books for the rest of my life.

After she made the realization, she changed her major and graduated with an associate in education. From community college, she was admitted into a local 4-year university to study science. She shared:

> When I went to [college], you took a little bit of this and a little bit of that, a little bit of everything. I enjoyed science the best. When you have that educator that is on fire about whatever they teach, it made me enjoy it and made me want to learn more.

Catherine became involved in the science club on campus but remained very introverted. She also worked at a local toy store. Within two years, she graduated with her bachelor’s in Middle-Grade Education.

She soon applied for a teaching position with Clearlake City Schools and worked at a junior high school teaching Home Economics. During those first couple of years of teaching, she and some friends decided to pursue their master’s degree. Catherine would ride with them to a university nearby for their graduate studies. Her decision to pursue her master’s, specialist, and doctorate were primarily to make more money. Still, she wanted to finish all of her education when she decided to start a family. She stated:

> I would see some of my friends back when I was working on my masters...and a lot of my friends I rode to school with were already mommas. I was like, 'Wow! How are you doing all of this with kids at home?' I'm struggling with just me. I'm watching my friends... I [decided] I am going to get as educated as I can before I have children.

By the mid-1990s, Clearlake City Schools and Clearland County School Districts consolidated, she moved to Clearlake Middle School. She taught 8th-grade science (Earth Science in the 1990s). Catherine recalls how gifted students were served in the gifted program. She explains, "Back then, kids were pulled for gifted like they still are in elementary school. We didn't change to the advanced content model until around 2000 or so. I started teaching gifted in 2002." She quickly obtained a gifted endorsement to qualify to teach gifted education. The gifted education program availed her opportunities to work with gifted students and collaborate with other teachers. She described her experience:

> My first year of teaching gifted, we went to classes at night. During the summer, we did the thing called *Okay Summer*. It was like a summer program that you bring in kids that are gifted... We work to get all these activities together and time is wonderful.

Throughout her career, she has worked with special education, regular and gifted students Catherine describes the current situation of her school's gifted program. She explained:

> I think our current policies and procedures are beneficial for our gifted students. We recently changed from putting students on probation at the nine weeks to checking at the [end of the] semester. This gives 6th graders a period to adjust to

> middle school and students going through a difficult time with some grace. I have seen some kids turn it around when given a little more time if they have gone through some personal issues and their grades have suffered.

Her long-term goal is to serve as many students as possible, but mostly seek out minorities. She also thinks that the school needs to find ways to tap into the students' learning styles and serve them in the areas we see that interest them. Catherine's vision for her school's gifted program allows gifted students to have more ownership and decision-making about their education.

Chapter Summary

This chapter, I provided insights into the participants' experiences with diversity and circumstances that eventually led them to become gifted education teachers. I will describe the major themes that emerged from the data and findings in Chapter 5.

Chapter V

Findings

Purpose

African American students in rural middle schools are less likely to be identified and placed in gifted education programs served by a certified gifted teacher than other racial groups (Hodges & Gentry, 2021). The purpose of this study was to identify practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural school district who were familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a middle school gifted program.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the career and life experiences of veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 2: What strategies did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 3: What practices did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

Significance

Recent findings confirm that many gifted students, particularly African Americans, are underserved in rural gifted programs (Davis et al., 2020). Their chances of being identified and placed in a gifted program and having gifted certified teachers and access to resources are limited. I investigated the practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher. This study's findings may help create possible solutions and recommendations that could help recruit, identify, and retain African American students in the gifted program. Additionally, state and local educational leaders and teacher preparation programs may gain knowledge and insight to help direct their future educational decisions and curriculum.

Themes

Chapter 5 provides the themes that organically emerged from the data. I addressed findings and themes through the use of coding. I used phenomenological data analysis to systematically reduce data and develop specific statements and themes (Creswell, 1998). The data analysis process also involved the continuous review of the district's gifted policy documents, schools' gifted demographic information, and Georgia's Office of Student Achievement records. Due to COVID-19, participant interviews were conducted

virtually through Google Meet and later transcribed into electronic Word files. Data analysis involved coding and memoing. With the use of descriptive coding, I summarized pieces of data from transcripts. A preliminary list of codes included the following: *decision to become an educator, educational leaders' support throughout school, experience with diversity, the decision for obtaining a graduate degree, choice of college, the importance of the gifted program, and reasons why they want to change or keep the gifted program the same*.

I developed the preliminary codes to determine participants' similarities, differences, and patterns that depicted a relationship. Next, I consolidated the data into four themes:

- veteran educational leaders' cultural competency and awareness
- recommendation and testing
- student retention in the gifted program
- parental involvement and support

Participants shared their diverse experiences, which included pre-college, undergraduate, and career experiences in varied roles. Participants also shared the various procedures for recommending and testing of students in the gifted program and criteria used for advanced content and re-admittance into the gifted program. The third theme was student retention; participants explained how they helped, encouraged, and supported gifted African American students in the gifted program. Lastly, the theme of parental involvement and support described how participants supported gifted African American students' parents. Table 2 presents emerging themes with supporting evidence from the data.

Table 2

Veteran Educational Leaders Theme

Themes	Participants	Participant's Supporting Excerpt
Cultural Competence and Awareness	Charlotte	During the pandemic, I really made it a point to become more racially aware. I read Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped* and *How to Be an Anti-Racist.* I recently began Rachel Elizabeth Cargle's 30 Day #DotheWork Course to learn how to be a better ally for Black women. Once I complete that course, I want to delve into another one of Cargle's resources, *The Great Unlearn.*
	William	I have participated in numerous cultural diversity training. I have also participated in social-emotional training geared towards certain heterogeneous groups and ethnicities. Just trying socially to make myself culturally aware of what my students celebrate, worship, foods that they eat, and traditional things that they do at home. I believe that by doing this, [it] helps you to build relationships with your students and their families and allows the student to feel more capable in school.
	Daniel	Some of the ways I have worked to become more racially aware is by learning about different cultures through a cultural diversity class, asking questions of students and [my] colleagues and by listening to general conversations from my students.
	Olivia	I learn more about my students by talking with them as well as expanding and diversifying the list of authors I use in my classroom.
Identification and Testing	Evelyn	They [students] come to us from elementary school with gifted labels… the assistant principal placed them all gifted coming into 6th grade for all subjects.
	Catherine	Rarely will a child be [tested] into gifted once they reach middle school.
	Daniel	They have to be recommended and that recommendation can come from a teacher, from a

		parent, from administration. From there, the student is monitored on a Tier 3 Plan and we look at it like I said, look at their academic class grades and then determine whether they qualify to take the gifted assessment.
Student Retention	Daniel	I think the [African American] students that (who) we place in the gifted program. I think they do pretty well. They have a pretty high success rate once we get them in there (gifted program).
	Charlotte	The success rate of African-American students is very, very high at our school.
	Kim	We [the school] rarely, I can think of one who exited the program, but it was… he was very gifted, but he was very lazy, and the parental support was not enough. So he was dropped.
Encourage Parental Involvement	William	Trying to support the parents because a lot of our parents, especially parents of African-American students, they don't want their kids sometimes to go into advanced classes or gifted classes because they think their kids are going to be singled out or their kid being... going to be the only Black kid in there.
	Charlotte	They [parents] are very supportive and they push to make sure that their children succeed.
	Evelyn	We [the school] try to do like parent nights for gifted [families] so they come in and [are] given some tips and some pointers [to help their students].

Note. These were extracts of themes that emerged from the data.

These were the most powerful themes characterized by veteran educational leaders' experiences of teaching and identifying African American students for the gifted program. The underrepresentation of African American students and the lack of testing are issues for advocacy. All participants expressed that they felt they were advocating for African American students, who were misunderstood due to racial/cultural biases, to be

identified and tested for the gifted program or placed in advanced content classes. This misunderstanding led to the participants demanding changes from their peers and the school system. All participants had at least several instances where they thought they were culturally proficient enough to advocate for their students.

Theme I: Veteran Educational Leaders' Cultural Competence and Awareness

In this theme, veteran educational leaders' cultural competence and awareness, the participants discussed their personal experiences with diversity during pre-college and undergraduate studies. This theme also explained how those experiences helped culturally identify African American students for their school's gifted program. Participants portrayed the notion of cultural competency and awareness through the lived experiences, various literature read and classes taken, and how they advocated for the identification and placement of African American students in the gifted program. Most participants reported having little to no interaction with culturally diverse individuals during their pre-college years. Olivia's mother did not say much about race; her father regularly expressed his thoughts about race and often boasted about possessing a family member's Ku Klux Klan membership card. Evelyn and Charlotte shared their experiences with the lack of diversity during their pre-college years because they attended predominantly White schools and interacted with predominantly White people. Catherine also shared that her early educational experiences were not very diverse. She shared how her parents did not allow her to ride one particular bus because it was the "Black" bus.

Kim explained how she was raised primarily in Silverlea County, where the demographics of her small rural school were not diverse. When she was in the first grade, her family moved out of the state of Georgia for two years. While living in southern

Florida, she stated how "cultures that were there...different races...Blacks, Whites, [and] Hispanics. I saw more." One participant had a more diverse pre-college experience because he was not from a rural community in Georgia.

William described his experiences growing up in a culturally diverse city. He explains:

> Growing up (out of state), there are different cultures of people. [The] term Black… We're Black, but we're not the same people. We have a whole section of Jamaicans. We have a section that we call Little Haiti… a little section we call Little Havana, and these were Cuban, but they weren't Cuban in the sense that many people think. They were ... these were your Afrocentric Cuban. So these were people that were Black humans, but they spoke Spanish.

Nearly all of the participants attended a college close to their homes at some point during their lifetime. Some of them reported taking additional classes within their major to diversify their knowledge and background because of the lack of diversity they had experienced growing up. Olivia shared her reasoning why she wanted to take other literature courses in college:

> I took an African American literature studies class because I wanted to expand my background. I noticed everything I was taking...just the Whiteness of history, and it didn't sit right with me. So I was like, if I'm going to be a teacher, I need to see everything. I also took a feminist literature studies course [and] a Southern literature course.

Charlotte described how the lack of diversity in college and her interests helped her to enroll in various courses:

> One thing I noticed at college, there wasn't much cultural diversity at all. In my undergrad and my graduate [studies], there was no cultural diversity. My cultural diversity came from the classes that I picked. I was interested in multicultural literature, so I took African American Lit [and] Hispanic Lit.

Other participants shared that their work experiences and interaction with the public increased their awareness of culturally diverse people. Daniel described how working at a clothing store in the community gave him the "opportunity to work with lots of people from different cultures."

Evelyn expressed that although college exposed her to some diversity, "It wasn't until I work[ed] for the Department of Juvenile Justice that I really learned." She continued, "It taught me so much, and I saw...just for the people, the skin color never mattered. I was no longer scared [or] intimidated. It was just the whole seeing them for the people that they are."

When I asked participants if the lack of diversity during their formative years influences their gifted African American students, Catherine said that her experience with the lack of diversity in her formative years has influenced what she looked for in a gifted student. She acknowledged efforts to identify more students of color, and sometimes the characteristics she would look for in a White student may not be the same for students of other backgrounds. Some characteristics she might observe are if African American students are curious about why things work and not just accepting what is being told to them, if they enjoy hands-on/group projects, and if they express how they learn best to teachers. In Catherine's teaching experience, gifted African American students have asked her to do lab experiments over a concept they just learned, watch a video, or

include a topic picture. Charlotte believes the lack of diversity growing up influences her when trying to identify African American students for the gifted program because she "seeks diversity for my gifted classes since I did not have that in mine growing up." William expounds that the lack of diversity for some teachers does heavily influence the identification of students. He explains:

> A young student that is struggling will be subjected to the rigors of behavior management and possible testing for special education. I truly believe that this affects minority students. Once these students are labeled or even tracked… the chances of being accepted as gifted or higher academic students are unlikely.

Kim described the characteristics she used to identify culturally diverse students from individual traits to understanding that "Their giftedness can come in many different forms and when they aren't allowed to nourish their giftedness, the side effects can come out in a classroom very negatively."

Some participants explained that the lack of diversity during their formative years does not influence their recommendations and student identification for the gifted program. Daniel and Evelyn both shared that they can evaluate their students' academic abilities equally, regardless of race. Regardless of their upbringing, most participants recognized the growing diversity of their students. They realized that they needed to seek ways to become more racially aware. Catherine explained one of the ways she tries to be more racially aware of others:

> I talk to my students and try to learn about, show respect for, and be sensitive to cultural differences. I build relationships with my students so that we can discuss and share our cultural differences in a respectful manner, among other things.

Charlotte expressed what she is reading and how one particular writing program has caught her interest:

> I've been doing a lot of reading and research, especially during the last year on how to be a better ally and to become culturally competent. One program that has drawn my interest is The Write of Your Life, which is working to rewrite the school-to-prison pipeline and promotes healing through mentorship and the arts. This is something I'd like to see my school take part in.

William participated in numerous cultural diversity training and social-emotional training. He also tries to make himself more culturally aware of what his students celebrate, the foods they eat, and the traditional things they do at home. Daniel described how he encouraged and incorporated diversity in his classroom, "A big thing [is] letting them [African Americans] see that they can do anything that any other race can do. I tried to build my classroom library with a variety of books. Allowing them to see that broad spectrum." Other participants shared they have not done much to try to be more culturally competent.

Kim stated:

> To be honest, I haven't done a great job working to be more culturally competent. Throughout the years, I've googled and read articles about working with "Black males" which has been typically our challenge. I've read Ruby Payne's book. As a teacher, I believe that God has allowed me to have a heart for all students and an ability to look for the good, their giftedness and strengths, of all students. As an administrator, I've been able to see the discrepancy in the social situations of our minority students. I have worked hard to create relationships and to help teachers

understand, appreciate, and work with students whose cultural upbringing is different from their own.

Evelyn explained she hadn't done anything intentional to be more racially aware. She used open conversations with students when the circumstances allowed her to understand their concerns.

Theme II: Identification and Testing of African American Students for the Gifted Program

Theme II discussed how African American students were identified as qualified for the gifted program. It also focused on how various district policies and criteria were used to identify and test potential students for the gifted program. At Clearlake Middle and Clearland County Middle Schools, participants stated that the African American students' inclusion rate at their respective schools was low. Clearlake Middle School's gifted program consisted of 25% African American, 61% White, 2% Hispanic, 6% multiracial, and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander (GOSA, 2018). Clearland County Middle School's gifted program consisted of the following demographic groups: 12% African American, 79% White, 5% Hispanic, 3% multiracial, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander (GOSA, 2018). Participants explained that during their middle school teaching careers, all students, including African American students, were not frequently identified and tested for the gifted program in their middle school as often as they are in elementary school. Indeed, they might not be tested at all. Olivia recalled, "There've been one or two [students] that I've recommended to be tested… but again in the seven years I've been there [Clearland County Middle School], I know of one student that was tested during my

entire previous experience." Charlotte explained one situation about trying to test a former student for the middle school gifted program:

> It's been a really long time because the student will be a senior next year. We all noticed, multiple teachers noticed that she was very, very smart. Just blew everyone else out the water. She was not labeled gifted. She moved from [out of state]. So we wondered if maybe she was lost in the shuffle. So we requested that she be tested. She actually did not get tested until that spring and was not considered gifted.

All participants said students generally come from elementary schools already labeled as gifted and added to gifted academic classes in middle school. The elementary schools did not have academic-specific gifted classes but had a gifted resource class.

Participants shared a general understanding of the identification and students' requirements and the criteria for a student to remain in the program. Daniel, the gifted coordinator at Clearland County Middle School, explained how students who were not previously placed in the gifted program in elementary would follow the district's guidelines. He explained, "We use teacher, administrator, or parent recommendations. Then the student is monitored on a Tier 3 plan. We look at their academic class grades and then determine whether they qualify to take the gifted assessment." Kim, an administrator at Clearlake Middle School, stated:

> To identify, we used test scores and classroom observations to get them placed. We would go through the testing process. We have to have the achievement test, the creativity, the checklist… and certain percentiles. We do have a gifted manual, so I could research there if needed to.

Outside of the district's policy, participants shared their views of what characteristics they look for in a student they would like to identify for their school's gifted program. Evelyn states, "I look for higher-order thinking in student discussions." She also felt grades should not be factored in when determining if a student was gifted because not all students were motivated to do all the other work, but they should test above the average grade. Daniel believed gifted students need to be the whole package, meaning they should be highly skilled- academically and socially. Charlotte explained she was not just looking for a student who excelled in academic content areas but was also looking for students to be curious, enjoy learning new things, think outside the box, and are creative problem solvers.

Data were also used to justify a student's placement in the gifted program. The Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS), given to students in third to eighth grade, measures students' Lexiles scores and measures how well students mastered the state-adopted standards in mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts (GADOE, 2021b). Each participant explained how students needed to score at least a three, which is proficient, or a score of four, exceeding. Veteran educational leaders would also review data from system-wide tests and classroom grades, which should consistently average above a grade of 85 in their academic classes. William explained, "We're looking at grades. We looked at their I-Ready data that we use here, Star Reading data, and some diagnostic testing." Catherine stated similar comments in addition to teachers looking at a student's Lexile score.

According to Clearland County School District's Resource Manual for Gifted Education Services (2019), a student could be referred to the gifted program at any time

by teachers, counselors, parents, peers, administrators, self, or any responsible person who knows a student's intellectual ability. Clearland County School District's *Resource Manual for Gifted Education Services* (2019) stated that for determination of eligibility for the gifted program, students must have the following:

- Current hearing and vision (within one year of evaluation)
- Observational data
- A nationally normed test
- Information gleaned must meet criteria three out of four areas
- Product/performances used in one area may not be used in another area
- Students who have been evaluated in all four areas can then be placed under SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.38 (pg. 13)

Evaluation for the Clearland County Gifted Program based on the *Clearland County School District's Resource Manual for Gifted Education Services* (2019) must occur in the following areas:

- Mental ability
- Achievement
- Creativity
- Motivation

Kim and Catherine mentioned the rarity of gifted testing in middle school, and for that reason, they plan to reach out to their elementary counterparts to help test. Kim and Catherine explained that since testing a middle school student for the gifted program is rare, they partner with an elementary school gifted coordinator. While the chances of testing students for the gifted program in middle school are low, the participants will

identify and recommend students for advanced content classes with the flexibility to move those students from a regular education course to an advanced content course in a shorter amount of time.

Catherine stated:

> We have kids that aren't gifted, but we can enter them AC, you know Advanced Content. Either you have to be pulled out for those special class[es], or you don't go at all. We got at least, for them… let them be in advanced content classes and be taught the exact same way. They get the same challenges the kids that are gifted are getting.

Charlotte shares:

> A parent told them [regular education teacher] "my child belongs in gifted/advanced content." So, the regular education teacher will talk to me. We'll talk with [an administrator] and they'll look. Actually, I did get two kids moved over to my classroom from their classes this year. Based on the parents saying "hey my kids should be in AC," but they weren't labeled as gifted.

As a result, schools do not test students for the gifted program at the middle school level; instead, these educational leaders often recommend students for advanced content classes to support the students' academic needs in shorter time.

Theme III: Student Retention

This theme described the challenges participants have observed gifted African American students struggle with, and strategies used to help retain these gifted African American students in the gifted program at their respective schools. One common

challenge faced by most gifted African American students, the feeling of not belonging, was observed by most participants. Charlotte reported:

> One of the challenges is they [gifted African American students] feel like they don't fit in the gifted class. They feel like they don't fit in when they go outside the gifted class. African-American students have said "I get made fun of because I'm in here."

Kim, Catherine, and Evelyn also explained similar sentiments of gifted African American students at their school. Kim explained:

> There is a lower percentage of African American gifted students. Unfortunately, sometimes I've noticed it more in the African-American culture, it's not cool to be smart. For them to have the appearance that I study and I do well and make good grades… they get teased and made fun of.

Olivia shared that her gifted African American students have expressed how they view themselves in gifted classes and that "most of the students in the class don't look like them." William also expressed one of the biggest challenges he has noticed that his sixth-grade gifted African American students have faced was "feeling out of place." He continued, "I look back this year at one of our gifted classes; there were only five African American students in there." Although participants reported identification and testing of middle school students not previously considered gifted was rare, they were knowledgeable of the criteria for students to remain in the gifted program. Catherine, Clearlake Middle's gifted coordinator, clarified the requirements for gifted students to stay in the gifted program. She explains that if students did not meet the class average requirements, they were placed on academic probation for one semester. If grades do not

improve, then they are removed from the gifted class with the low average. Daniel, Clearland County Middle's gifted coordinator, expressed:

> Teachers take the responsibility to work with that student. To help them in the academic content areas, to try to bring up the grades. When they get that letter and see that they're on probation for the gifted program, I think that's a big intervention, letting them know that it's time to buckle up and do better, or you may face being removed from the gifted program.

The Georgia *Gifted Resource Manual for Gifted Education Services* (2020) stated:

> The local board of education (LBOE) shall have a continuation policy for students identified as eligible for gifted services to continue to receive services. The local education agency (LEA) shall review each student's progress receiving gifted education services each year. Any student who receives gifted education services shall continue to receive such services provided the student demonstrates satisfactory performance in gifted education classes, as described in the LBOE continuation policy and stated in the continuation policy. (p. 8)

All participants stated gifted students must maintain an average of 85% in each of their gifted academic courses to stay in the gifted program. This statement followed Clearland County Schools *Resource Manual for Gifted Education Services* (2019, p. 22) which stated that "Students recommended for continuation must have satisfactory performance in the gifted classroom. In grades K-8, students must maintain an 85 average in gifted strength classes for each grading period." Students who did not maintain the average were placed on probation for a semester. Catherine suggested that gifted students were "a little lucky" compared to advanced content students if they were placed on probation:

> They would no longer be identified as gifted for a class if they didn't have that 85, but then they would go on the advanced content roster. They get more opportunities versus that advanced content kid. He would just be out and be put back in the regular classroom.

All participants agreed it was infrequent for gifted African American students to be removed from their respective school's gifted program. Participants from both middle schools suggested students were given ample opportunities to stay in their schools' gifted program.

Daniel reported:

> Of the 20 kids I had to put on probation for the first semester, I only had one African American student. So, I think the students that we place in the gifted program. I think they do pretty well. They have a pretty high success rate once we get them in there.

Catherine expressed the rarity of student dismissal from the gifted program:

> Rarely in these three years, they are in middle school do we have one that is just 100% cut out. Usually, they're still in at least one of our [gifted] classes headed to the high school. We try to personally pick that area that we see them shine in and explain to that teacher like listen this kid needs to pass your class. They enjoy this subject. We try to keep them [students] encouraged to stay there. If students are fully removed from their school's gifted program, there is an opportunity for them to be readmitted back into the program.

Kim explained:

> The handbook states, even per class and they just want to add that [class] back or if they have been dismissed, once they get those grades back up [and] if a parent writes a letter asking for re-admittance. We [will] look at that situation. They've got those grades back up we [will] readmit. Usually, that is something we from the school level so often check and see because we would rather get funded. Higher funding for gifted students, so we would want all of them identified. I would contact that parent and explain the situation and if they're interested in writing that letter.

Support for gifted African American students also came in other forms, such as positive relationships between teachers and students. Evelyn posited, "I think that it just boils down to teachers and building a rapport with them [students], talking to them and telling them what opportunities are available if they only try." Daniel expressed the importance of building relationships. He stated, "I think when you build relationships with them and show them that you know it's okay to be smart. That one-on-one encouragement is a big thing."

William reflected on his own childhood experience and shared:

> I had people to help me, and I think when I look into my situation, I try to be supportive that way to our kids. Like this new group of kids that we're going to try to push to this advanced level classes next year and gifted classes. I mean, almost set up a little mentor group over here with those kids and try to get those kids through. I think African American kids, we don't have enough of them in the gifted or advanced program. And the ones that are in there sometimes find themselves trying to get out, feel[ing] out of place and they struggle. But if we

> can get them to have some type of support… encourage those kids to get in and maybe talk with even some of the White kids, so that they realize they have more in common than what they think.

Kim described ways her school helped gifted African American students overcome potential barriers by providing tutoring before school, during lunch, or after school. Her school, at one point, provided a mentoring program for students. William explained his idea of starting a club for students who were in the gifted program. The idea was for them to get a chance to talk to one another and express their challenges and victories with other like-minded students.

Theme III shared the participants' knowledge of the gifted retention policy and their observations of challenges their gifted African American students face. Veteran educational leaders could retain their gifted African American students in their school's respective gifted programs by building positive relationships and supporting those students.

Theme IV: Encourage Parental Involvement

The fourth emergent theme examined how veteran educational leaders garnered parental participation for their gifted African American students. Participants at both schools reported various practices to help support gifted African American students and their parents. When asked how involved were the parents of gifted African American students, most of the participants expressed the parents of these students were very engaged with their child's education. Olivia, Kim, and Daniel all reiterated that parental involvement was key to these students' success. The veteran educational leaders knew these parents by name, and these parents were staying engaged in their child's education.

Charlotte, Olivia, and William shared similar views about the parents of gifted African American students involved in their child's education. Charlotte expressed, "[Gifted African American students] are very successful because their parents are on them. They don't play. They're so supportive." Olivia shared, "They work hard. [If] I need to make a phone call home to any of my kids, most of the time they're going to get them, and they're going to do their work." William described the living situation of a couple of his gifted African American students. He asserted:

> The five kids that I am thinking of right now that we had in 6th grade this year, four of them come from very bad situations. I mean, they live either with grandparents or they live in the projects. They live in bad situations, and they are successful. They don't really have as supportive of parents financially as some of the other kids, but their parents actually try to support them as much as school is concerned.

Although the parents of these gifted African American students supported their students, in some cases, there were African American students not wanting to participate in the gifted program. Some participants reported that even the parents of potential African American students who could be placed in advanced content classes have expressed not wanting to put their child in those types of classes. William explained the concerns of some of the African American parents he has had conversations with:

> Trying to support the parents because a lot of our parents, especially parents of African American students, they don't want their kids sometimes to go into advanced classes or gifted classes because they think their kids is going to be singled out or their kid being is going to be the only Black kid in there or they

> don't want them to end up sometimes around all White kids. Trying to change their mindset… trying to get them to understand the bigger picture.

All participants described ways they have supported parents of gifted African American students. Catherine mailed positive note cards and made phone calls to give parents updates on their students in her class. Olivia encouraged parental involvement by providing parents access to assignments and grades through the use of Google Classroom. She also used a video game-type program called Classcraft (Classcraft, 2021). It also encourages parental involvement because there was a component where the parents could give their child rewards for doing homework and turning in assignments. Charlotte utilized the Remind app, call-outs, and Google Classroom to keep parents informed. Evelyn explained before the pandemic, her school held parent nights to answer any parents' questions. Kim also remembered hosting parent nights for students so teachers could help parents navigate programs such as Google Classroom, IXL, Infinite Campus, and other programs. Daniel explains that communication was critical. "Keeping in constant communication with the parent builds that relationship, and that is the key to student success."

In this theme, veteran educational leaders expressed how support was equally essential for the parents and the child. All these educational leaders know that for gifted African American students to be successful in the program, parents need support and effective strategies to help their child be successful. A key means of support were the many types of communication they used, such as Infinite Campus, Google Classroom, and the Remind app.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, four themes were presented and emerged from the participants' experiences as educational leaders who have taught gifted classes in their schools. The themes emerged from the data by analyzing interview transcripts, memos, and documentation from state and school districts. The four final themes were: a) veteran educational leader cultural competency and awareness, b) identification and testing of African American students, c) student retention, and d) encouraging parental involvement.

Throughout the interviews, participants provided in-depth details of their experiences growing up in their communities and their experiences as educational leaders. Most of the participants reported growing up in or near the community where they are currently employed. Most of the participants reported attending schools where the students' demographics were predominantly White, thus not interacting with anyone outside their race. One participant described his upbringing in southern Florida as interacting with many culturally and linguistically diverse people. All participants explained why they all attended a school near their homes and families.

As the interviews progressed, participants explained their decisions to take more culturally diverse classes in college and how working with culturally diverse people changed their perspective as a person and as an educator. The interviews also allowed participants to expound upon their reasoning behind adding African American students to advanced content classes in addition to retaining gifted African American students in their school's gifted program and encouraging parental involvement of these students.

Each theme included representative quotes from the participants to help further confirm the relevance of the theme and provide evidence of their experience as an educator.

Chapter VI

Discussions and Conclusions

African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs nationwide (CRDC, 2018). The gifted education programs comprised 8% African American students compared to 60% White students (CRDC, 2018). Furthermore, African American students participating in gifted programs in rural schools face more significant challenges such as lack of qualified teachers, fewer enrichment opportunities due to geographic locations, and financial constraints (Davis et al., 2020). I conducted this qualitative study to understand the strategies and practices used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in the middle school gifted program. These strategies and practices might be used to identify, test, support, and retain African American students in the gifted program.

The underrepresentation of African American students in the gifted program is due to low teacher nominations, recruitment tests, students' self-sabotage, and little support to help retain these students (Ford & Whiting, 2010; Kunjufu, 2012; McBee, 2006). However, utilizing universal screening, better multicultural training in teacher preparation programs, and supporting the students and families of gifted African American students can diversify a school's gifted program.

I analyzed the experiences of the participants and identified four major themes from this study. My sources of data used were interviews and documentations. These research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the career and life experiences of veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 2: What strategies did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

RQ 3: What practices did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

I used purposeful sampling to identify the seven veteran educational leaders. Criteria used to select participants included: a minimum of three or more years of experience in teaching or school administration, a valid Georgia teaching certificate middle grades (4-8) in any subject area, and administrators had to have a valid Georgia certification in Educational Leadership, while teachers had to hold a gifted endorsed certificate, and were varied in ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, life experiences, and educational training.

I collected data using Seidman's (2013) three-series interviews. Data analysis for this study consisted of reading, memoing, transcribing, and coding interview notes, along with listening to audio recordings of the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). I also obtained and

analyzed primary and secondary source documents. I further categorized data into groups and potential themes. Four themes emerged from the data. These themes provided ways to answer this study's research questions. In this chapter, I discuss research findings, respond to the research questions, and explain the limitations of this study. Furthermore, I also discuss practices and strategies veteran educational leaders used to identify African American students for the gifted program, and recommendations for future studies.

Research Questions: Final Summary

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings and the emerged themes from the data in context of the current study's research questions.

RQ1: What are the career and life experiences of veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

The career and life experiences of the participants played a vital role in how school officials placed African American students in the gifted program. Most of the participants reported a lack of diversity growing up because of the community they were raised in and the schools they attended. Kim, Catherine, and Olivia grew up in Silverlea County. Olivia remembers her father "bragging" about having his grandfather's KKK membership card in his possession. Catherine shared a memory of how her parents did not allow her to ride the "Black" bus despite her pleas of wanting to ride the bus with her Black friend due to some older White students bullying her on her regular bus. Evelyn recalled that while she attended Clearland County Schools, there were "ten Black kids in a class of over 200 students." Charlotte recalled when the first African American students

started to attend her elementary school in the 5th grade. When she reflected on that time, she thought it was “wild” because it was in the nineties, and she would have thought schools would have diversified much sooner. Daniel shared his experience of how he attended a city district school in Clearland County. His teachers and many students were African American. When he moved to a county school, the student population was predominantly White. However, William's schooling experience was quite the opposite. He grew up in a very diverse neighborhood but had very little interaction with White people until his school district started racially balancing the schools when he was in the 4th grade.

Participants shared the qualities of the teachers they admired while in school. William recalled how his two influential teachers gave him “hope” when other teachers did not. Evelyn recalled her junior high school teacher being very “fun” and having “lots of hands-on assignments.”

During their pre-college years, Charlotte and Kim recalled being classified as gifted students and participating in their schools' gifted programs. Evelyn, Catherine, and Daniel were not considered gifted but were grouped with higher-ability students. Olivia stated she severely struggled with reading up until the 4th grade. A teacher began to work with her deliberately and helped her learn how to read. William explained he had the academic capability and possibly could have been considered gifted but had many behavioral issues that interfered. Once the participants graduated high school, many chose to attend colleges and universities close to their homes. William chose a school close to home because his father was ill. Kim had a husband and child at the time. Olivia,

Daniel, Kim, and Charlotte chose a college nearby because it was affordable, and they could save money to go to a university.

Most participants described the lack of diversity in their classes while attending their college or university. Ford and Grantham (2003) argued that many students have graduated from colleges and universities with a monocultural curriculum, which failed to prepare them to work with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. Due to this fact, Olivia, William, and Charlotte explained they took extra non-required diversity courses because they knew they wanted to expand their background knowledge. Multicultural educational courses can positively impact student outcomes. Still, they do not always lead to an awareness that supports the constructive management of socio-cultural factors and positively influences daily classroom interactions (Wallace & Brand, 2012). Olivia participated in a Southern Literature class and a Feminist Literature class. Charlotte participated in an African American literature class and a Hispanic literature class. Other participants only took the required diversity classes or did not major in education.

While attending college, all participants reported working various jobs, and some participated in different organizations. Catherine communicated that despite her being an introvert, she participated in the campus' science club. Olivia was a member of the Baptist Student Union and Gay-Straight Alliance organizations on campus. Some participants chose not to participate in other organizations because of their responsibilities with jobs or families. Charlotte worked for a call center to help pay for school while Kim commuted to school every day because of her family. Once they graduated college, most of the participants started teaching in communities close to their

families. On the other hand, Evelyn started a career through the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). Once the participants began teaching, they all reported similar sentiments about why they chose to pursue a higher degree. All of the participants stated their reason for seeking a higher degree was for higher pay.

All participants have taught more than ten years during their careers and have experience teaching non-gifted students, often in co-taught settings. Kim and Catherine have been teaching for 26 and 27 years, respectively. William, Daniel, Charlotte, Evelyn, and Olivia all have under 20 years of teaching experience. Nonetheless, they taught a range of diverse students throughout their careers.

RQ 2: What strategies did veteran educational leaders use in an identified rural South Georgia school district use who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

Three themes emerged from this study which helped to answer this question. At both Clearlake Middle and Clearland County Middle School, participants reported the rarity of students being tested and placed into the gifted program once they reach middle school. Olivia shared, “I have never in the seven years I’ve taught, I’ve never had a middle school student placed [in the gifted program].” Charlotte recalls one student who was tested but did not test into the program. As a result, both middle school gifted coordinators are not very comfortable testing students for the gifted program. Kim explained the rarity of a student being identified and tested and having a student test how they would partner up with an elementary teacher. Kim states:

> Our gifted coordinator does not test students often, and we partner with an elementary school teacher that does testing regularly. [We] had her [to] help because it was something she was certified to do, but [our gifted coordinator] did not feel comfortable [testing].

All participants expressed that students can be recommended for identification into the middle school gifted program. All of the participants demonstrated the importance of developing a broad perspective when meeting the needs of gifted students in their county. The lack of recommendation and testing in middle school led these participants to look at student data and grades to recommend high-ability African American students for advanced content classes. Evelyn voiced that a student can be placed in advanced content "so that they can be working with a gifted teacher and the gifted teacher can watch and try to determine if they are gifted." Catherine and Daniel, Clearlake Middle and Clearland County Middle Schools' gifted coordinator respectively, explained students would be recommended frequently for advanced content classes to help meet the academic needs of students much faster. A certified gifted teacher still serves these students. Ford (2011) asserted that identifying a potentially gifted student should assess their needs to place students into educational programs designed to develop their latent potential.

Kim explained, "When students come from their respective elementary schools, 98% of them are classified as gifted." Once enrolled at their respective middle schools, students were scheduled for all gifted academic courses. In addition to their gifted status, participants would examine student records to see trends and classroom grades consistently at or above 85% and a score of at least proficient (3) or exceeding (4) on the

Georgia Milestone Standardized Test. The number of African American students in the gifted program was low and was not representative of each school's demographics. Each school's district-identified gifted population should represent the district's general population (Hodges & Gentry, 2021). Representation of culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse students continues to be a critical issue with gifted education (Hodges & Gentry, 2021). Olivia was concerned about the demographics of her gifted/advanced class. She stated that out of her "eighth-grade class this year [had] 25 students. [Out of] those 25 [students], I think it was about 12 or 13 that were labeled [as] gifted. Of those [12 or 13], I had two African-American eighth-graders."

Daniel expressed:

> We need to be aware of, as middle school teachers, we do not typically see many students who are recommended for the gifted program once they reach middle school. If they are not already in the gifted program, we do not consider it, but I think that one thing needs to be done. We are encouraging teachers to recommend students for the gifted program who may not have qualified in elementary school. So encouraging teachers to recommend students is going to be a big push this year.

William expressed how he was also pushing teachers to examine their students to recommend for identification into the gifted program. He states, "We're asking our teachers to take steps to identify kids that might have [fallen] through the cracks as far as being gifted." Floyd et al. (2011) posited educators in rural areas must be advocates and talent scouts while actively and proactively updating their beliefs about gifts and talents found in rural students.

RQ 3: What practices did veteran educational leaders in an identified rural South Georgia school district use who are familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher?

Participants reported various methods of practice used to retain African American students for the gifted program but no methods for identifying students. As discussed in the narrative about research question 2, not many students, especially African Americans, were identified, tested, and placed in the gifted middle school program. All participants shared several ways they had used to help retain African American students in the gifted program. According to Clearland County District's gifted policy (2019), gifted students must maintain an 85 average in their gifted academic classes. Furthermore, all participants concurred with the district policy and explained that if students' grades average went below an 85 for the semester, they were placed on academic probation. Catherine described what would happen to students who did not meet the requirements for the gifted program:

> If they are not met, they are put on academic probation. They're given a letter for parents to sign explaining they have one semester to bring it [grade] up and be in clear standing. If it goes two semesters in a row with a grade below an 85, they would be removed from being considered gifted in that [academic] class.

Teachers must contact parents with an official letter stating which specific academic areas were below 85%. For students who are struggling academically, the participants shared ways they have helped gifted students. Kim and Evelyn explained how teachers at

their school give opportunities to gifted students to help them academically, such as after-school tutoring, working lunch, and tutoring before school.

All participants described how important it was to encourage and support African American students who are participating in the gifted program because of the negative peer pressure they face daily. Additionally, they believe it is important to also support their parents. All participants shared various challenges they have observed gifted African American students face. Evelyn conveyed:

> Some [gifted African American students] don't want to be seen as smart. They want to be seen as the best football player and the best runner or whatever their other talents are. But they don't always want to be seen as the smartest.

Charlotte explained how former gifted African American students, "feel like they don't fit in when they [participate] outside the gifted class." William also shared similar comments about gifted African American students feeling "out of place" while participating in the gifted program. Kim expressed that some African American students in the gifted program did not want to be portrayed as "smart" and feared teasing. Catherine described similar sentiments about peers making fun of African American students because they are "smart." Despite gifted African American students facing challenges and being heavily underrepresented in the gifted program, most participants reported success among those students. Daniel said, "Of the 20 kids I had to put on probation for the first semester, [I] only had one African-American student." William shared that out of the five gifted African American students in 6th grade, "the kids we have are successful." Evelyn posited the uncertainty of gifted African American students' success in the gifted program. "I think the numbers drop from 6 to 8 African-American

gifted students.” But Charlotte, who was at the same school as Evelyn, thought the “success rate of [gifted] African-American students is very, very high at our school because their parents are supportive and they push to make sure that their children succeed.”

These veteran educational leaders built positive relationships with these students, encouraged them, recognized their own biases, and tried to incorporate multicultural literature and curriculum in their classrooms and schools. Ford et al. (2005) argued that multicultural education empowers all students, especially diverse groups, by giving them mirrors to see themselves reflected in education. Daniel, Olivia, and Charlotte shared similar sentiments about diversifying the literature and curriculum in their classrooms. Daniel shared the importance of diversity of literature in his classroom. He wants to “let them see that African-Americans can do anything that any other race can do.” He believes that when teachers let them see that, [it] helps them” believe in themselves a little more." Charlotte wants to make sure every voice is heard, and their experiences were shared. She wanted to make sure her students in her class experienced diversity and appreciated it. Evelyn continuously encouraged and "pushes work ethic" in her classroom. She did not allow African American students or any students in her gifted class to give up. In her early educational career, Catherine described how her experience of not being around various cultures made her want to encourage her students and let them know they were brilliant.

All participants reported high parental involvement among the gifted African American students who participated in the gifted program. Charlotte explained, "My students' parents are on them, and they email me constantly, and they're so supportive."

Kim added additional support options which were proven to not only retain gifted African American students, but also, all students in the gifted program:

> Before school tutoring, after school tutoring, lunchtime tutoring, reaching out to parents to see if I can help in any way with any parent of any race ... Parents who may not have grown up in the education world, [helping them to] understand some of the language we use. Understanding how they could support their child [by] helping them understand how to navigate our classworks, Google Classroom, IXL, Infinite Campus, all of those kinds of things. So helping a parent so that they can support their student and then just trying to build a relationship with those students to help monitor.

In addition to encouragement, parental support, and building positive relationships with students, participants reported using mentor support groups to help gifted African American students succeed academically and socially. Floyd et al. (2011) found that school personnel must focus on maximizing strengths within the community, promoting parental involvement, utilizing technological innovations, and incorporating systematic staff development to improve educational quality. By promoting parental involvement, encouraging students and parents, addressing students' academic needs, and utilizing technology, these practices contributed to the retention of African American students in the gifted program.

Connecting the Findings to Conceptual Framework

Using Gardner's multiple intelligence theory as one of my conceptual frameworks helped me understand how the life and career experiences of seven veteran educational leaders created a desire for the participants to become more culturally aware and

competent. It also helped me understand the practices and strategies used to identify and test African American students for the middle school gifted program, despite most of the students coming from elementary school already identified as gifted. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory expressed that human intelligence could be expressed beyond anything measured by an IQ test (Gardner, 1983). Human intelligence could be expressed through intelligences such as interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, and linguistic skills (Gardner, 1999).

The criteria for gifted testing in Clearland County incorporate some of Gardner's proposed intelligences. Clearland County Schools Resource Manual for Gifted Education Services (2019) gifted policy reports using data from several norm-referenced assessments to test students in the domains of mental ability, achievement, creativity, and motivation. Most of the educational leaders reported that African American students recommended for advanced content or gifted classes were typically very creative, enjoyed hands-on projects, and worked well in groups. Some participants reported that African American students who were recommended for advanced content or gifted were also highly motivated and achieved high marks academically and on standardized testing. Hernandez-Torrano et al. (2014) asserted that gifted assessments should rely on a differentiated profile of a student's intelligence that will showcase all of the student's strengths and weaknesses. All participants at both middle schools reported infrequent instances when a student was tested for the middle school gifted program. When a student is tested in a middle school setting, the middle school staff rely on the expertise of an elementary teacher who regularly tests students to help identify them as gifted.

Critical race theory helped me understand the life and career experiences of seven veteran educational leaders and how their experiences prompted some of them to seek ways to become more culturally aware and ultimately, try to incorporate multicultural curriculum in their classes, check their own biases, build positive relationships with African American students, and support families of gifted African American students. Delgado et al. (2001) suggested that CRT can be used to disrupt structural barriers and obstacles to students' achievement. Most participants reported a lack of diversity growing up and realized they must learn to interact with others outside of their race. CRT theorists and some of the participants realize the lack of diversity in the school curriculum and rigor, distortions, omissions, and stereotypes that need to be readdressed to help educate not only African American students, but all students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a result, the participants' personal experiences of racism and growing up in a predominantly low to middle class Eurocentric rural area, prompted several of them to take additional classes in diversity, incorporate multicultural curriculum in their classrooms, and build positive relationships with their gifted African American students and families.

Implications of the Study

This study has revealed implications for identifying, testing, and retaining African American students for middle school gifted programs. Findings from this study suggested the need for district leaders, school administrators, and teachers to examine their schools' gifted program student data and demographics. Furthermore, educational leaders should investigate possible barriers preventing African American students from being identified and tested for the middle school gifted programs. Floyd et al. (2011) encouraged educators in rural areas to become talent scouts for and advocates for African American

students and to proactively update their beliefs about the gifts and talents found in students in rural areas. They would need to do this while demonstrating the importance of developing a broad perspective while meeting the needs of these children. However, using only standardized test scores and grades received on classroom assignments did not solely explain why African American students performed low in school (Ford et al., 2005). Multicultural education would help African American students relate to the curriculum and all students and be more likely to engage students with peers and teachers (Ford et al., 2005). This engagement might lead to future discussions and actions between administrators and teachers about making their school's gifted program more inclusive. Furthermore, engagement might help educators meet their students' academic needs and determine if their gifted program is successful. It would also drive needed discussions between middle school and elementary administrators and teachers about establishing and following a unified procedure. Additionally, administrators could schedule yearly meetings with all teachers (gifted and non-gifted) to discuss students' progress in the gifted program, potential interventions, and examinations of students who were not classified gifted previously.

Four major themes emerged from this study: a) veteran educational leaders' competence and awareness, b) identification and testing of African American students for the gifted program, c) student retention, and d) encouraging parental involvement. The first theme, veteran educational leaders' cultural competency, and awareness conveyed the leaders' personal experiences during pre-college, college, and careers. This theme also explained how these experiences prompted them to find ways to become culturally competent and more culturally aware in identifying African American students for their

school's gifted program. The second theme explained how African American students are identified and tested for the gifted program according to set district policies and criteria. The third theme, student retention, revealed the challenges educational leaders have observed gifted African American students struggle with while participating in the gifted program and providing strategies that helped retain talented African American students in the gifted program.

Lastly, the fourth theme, encouraging parental involvement, explained how veteran educational leaders gained parental participation and support for their gifted African American students. Furthermore, this theme also revealed ways educational leaders supported students and families of gifted African American students.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to one rural South Georgia school district and two middle schools in this district. Expanding the research to other rural school districts in Georgia and other veteran educational leaders might present more opportunities for future research. Thus, the present results and future ones could be used to successfully identify African American students for gifted programs in elementary and middle schools and to better retain them in these programs.

According to Maxwell (2013), some possible threats to validity include researcher bias, the lack of rich data, and distorted responses (Patton, 2002). Researcher bias is a threat to qualitative data because the researcher could select data that fits goals, existing theories, and preconceptions about the data collected in the study (Maxwell, 2013). My data sources were limited to interviews and documents. I could not make observations due to school closure. Due to COVID-19, I could not physically interview

or observe participants in their natural work settings or during their scheduled school year. Google Meet was a new experience for the researcher and for many of the participants due to the pandemic. The use of Google Meet did not affect the data collected. I also gathered many rich, detailed notes from the interviews and memos. I validated responses from the participants by asking questions and giving them a copy of the transcribed interviews (Maxwell, 2013). As Maxwell (2013) posited, respondent validation is one of the most fundamental ways to rule out misinterpretation of the participants' meaning. Collecting rich data, validating the respondents' answers, memoing, transcribing, and utilizing comparison methods with documents and literature helped reduce the threat to validity and credibility in the study (Maxwell, 2013).

I also continuously addressed any biases experienced during the study by memoing during and after interviews and data analysis. Seidman (2013) said that although shared assumptions from ordinary backgrounds could help build rapport, the researcher must not share assumptions with the participant and keep distance to explore and ask real questions. Documents gathered from primary and secondary sources can also have limitations (Patton, 2002). Due to COVID-19, sudden school and government shutdowns, and no standardized testing and other records, including demographics of students in the gifted program, might not reflect the most recent school year's population. Transferability could potentially be another limitation. The small sample size of seven veteran educational leaders in one, small rural school district may not yield results to a broader context for another study.

Finally, other possible limitations were distorted responses (Patton, 2002) and researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). Distorted responses would be due to participants' self-

reporting. I did not have any control over what the participants shared with me. I reassured them that anonymity was and will be maintained, and their participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Nevertheless, these interactions could have impeded some of the participants' responses.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study offered insight into the experiences and perspectives of veteran educational leaders familiar with identifying African American students for the gifted program. Several opportunities for future research originate from the findings of this study. After completing my analysis, seven recommendations for future studies emerged.

- A study using the perspectives of other veteran educational leaders in elementary and middle schools in other rural school districts.
- A study including veteran educational leaders who did not grow up in the community or surrounding communities from their school district.
- A study on strategies used by veteran educational leaders familiar with the challenges of identifying African American students in a rural Georgia elementary school.
- A study on practices used by veteran educational leaders familiar with the challenges of identifying African American students in a rural Georgia elementary school.
- A study on strategies used by veteran educational leaders familiar with the challenges of identifying African American students in a rural middle school.
- A study on strategies used by veteran educational leaders familiar with the challenges of identifying African American students in a rural middle school.

- A study on how the life experiences of veteran educational leaders affect the identification and testing of African American students in a rural elementary school.

Conducting these types of studies on the life experiences of veteran educational leaders and their strategies and practices used to identify and support African American students in the gifted program, in addition to using observations, could provide helpful insights on how best to identify and support these students throughout their participation in the middle school gifted program. Such research could provide solutions and help to process implementation strategies in rural elementary and middle schools to significantly enhance African American students' academic experiences and future endeavors.

Final Conclusion

This study reflected seven veteran educational leaders' life and career experiences and perspectives in a rural South Georgia school district. Throughout their pre-college and college careers, most participants sought ways to understand the importance of diversity to benefit themselves and the students in their future classrooms. Furthermore, previous jobs, on-campus organizations, and optional multicultural college courses allowed participants a chance to gain insight and understanding of other cultures. Exceedingly few teacher programs offered courses that required teacher candidates to take more than one course in educational, cultural diversity, and social injustice (Ford et al., 2005; Sleeter, 2017). Once the veteran educational leaders started their careers as educators, they sought higher degrees for more pay from colleges and universities through cohorts because it was close to home and affordable.

My conceptual framework allowed me to understand how these veteran educational leaders' experiences allowed them to recommend African American students for advanced content and retain gifted African American students in the program. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory helped me to understand the practices and strategies that were used when the participants identified African American students for advance content and potentially the gifted program. Participants from the study stated that they examined a number of intelligences when recommending African American students for advanced content such as being highly motivated, creative, collaborating well with others, and performing well on standardized tests. Critical race theory helped me to understand the participants' personal experiences of racism and growing up in a predominantly low to middle class Eurocentric rural area and how those experiences prompted several of them to take additional classes in diversity, incorporate multicultural curriculum in their classrooms, and build positive relationships with their gifted African American students and families.

The challenges of identifying African Americans for the middle school gifted program are significant. All participants stated the rarity of African American students being enrolled or even tested for the gifted program in middle school. Most of the students arrive at middle school with their gifted label from elementary school. As a result, these veteran educational leaders recommended and placed high-achieving African American students in advanced content classes because certified gifted teachers helped meet their academic needs and build positive relationships with each student.

Each veteran educational leader shared common barriers they observed African American students experience while participating in the gifted program. The most-

reported barrier that gifted African American students faced was fitting in among their peers. Ogbu (2004) explained that African American students experienced peer pressure from other African American students to discourage them from making good grades and behaviors. By encouraging parental support, the veteran educational leaders recognized that one of the keys for gifted African American students to succeed was garnering their family support. Through tutoring programs, parent nights, and various communication platforms such as Remind and Google Classroom and encouragement, these practices helped the parents understand their children's needs. They retained most of the gifted African American students in their school's gifted program. Future studies will be needed to help further understand if these barriers apply to gifted African American students across the state. Other veteran educational leaders used strategies and practices to help identify, test, and retain these students in their middle school gifted program.

Educational leaders within the district must work together to understand and create a plausible solution to the underrepresentation of African Americans in the gifted program. Policymakers and teacher preparation programs should emphasize the importance of cultural diversity, the socio-emotional aspect of students, and how to help teacher candidates learn how to incorporate multicultural education. It is critical in preparing teacher candidates as well as future gifted teachers seeking endorsement. With meaningful policy changes and accountability, all students can better meet their educational needs. Furthermore, identifying and testing students, building positive relationships, encouraging gifted African American students and their families, and making meaningful attempts to identify high-achieving students can help make their school's gifted program more diverse.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04040-2020 **Responsible Researcher:** Erin Harvey

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu

Project Title: *Strategies and Practices used by Veteran Educational Leaders to Identify African American Students for Gifted Education in Rural Georgia Middle Schools.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *For the health & safety of yourself and others, please consider the COVID-19 precautions established by the CDC and the Georgia Department of Health (masks, social distancing, hand sanitizer, etc.) when scheduling/conducting face-to-face interviews.*
- *Upon completion of this research study all data (email correspondence, transcripts, participant & pseudonym lists, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *Exempt guidelines permit the recording of interviews for the sole purpose of creating an accurate transcript. All recorded sessions must be deleted immediately upon creating the interview transcript.*
- *The informed Research Statement must be read aloud to each participant at the start of recorded interview session.*

☒ ***If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.***

Elizabeth Ann Olphie *05.18.2020*
Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AGREEMENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Strategies and Practices used by Veteran Educational Leaders to Identify African American Students for Gifted Education in Rural Georgia Middle Schools.

You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled *Strategies and Practices used by Veteran Educational Leaders to Identify African American Students for Gifted Education in Rural Georgia Middle Schools.*

This research project is being conducted by *Erin Harvey*, a doctoral student in the college of education department at Valdosta State University. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research study. You can withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time and doing so will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University. The time required to complete the study is 60-90 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

Purpose & Procedure: The purpose of this study is to identify practices and strategies used by veteran educational leaders in a selected rural school district familiar with the challenges of identifying and placing African American students in a gifted program served by a certified gifted teacher. You will be interviewed via Google Meet using Seidman's Three-Series Interview process. You will be asked to participate in three separate interviews. Each interview will gather information about your early educational experiences, strategies and practices used for gifted identification and finally, reflect on the meaning of your educational and career experiences. Your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of the area.

Possible Risks or Discomfort: There are no known risks associated by participating in this study. When your participation is over, the study will be explained to you in full detail, and you can ask questions. The University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. If you experience any distress from this study, you may request counseling services from the counseling services from the Student Counseling Center at 229-333-5940 or health care services from Student Health Services at 229-333-5886.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. The data collected from this experiment will not contain personal identifiable information. Only the researcher will have access to the data collected. No single identifiable cases will ever be reported.

Information Contacts: Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Erin Harvey* at eethridge@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted ethically and that the rights and

welfare of individuals participating in research are protected. Any questions concerning the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator by calling 229-333-7837 or sending an email to: irb@valdosta.edu

Agreement to Participate: The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form has been made available to me.

_____Printed Name of Participant

_____Signature of Participant _____ Date

_____Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

I would like to receive a copy of the results of the study: ____ Yes ____ No

Email address: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONS

Interview Guide #1- Participant's early educational and life experiences up to the present time, focusing on the topics of cultural awareness and educational training.

1. Describe your background in terms of your childhood, home life and upbringing.
    a. Describe your family background and dynamics.
    b. Describe your family's geographic and living environment.
    c. Describe the educational attainment of members in your family (parents, siblings, etc).
2. Describe your earliest educational experiences including your experiences with cultural diversity up to the age of 18.
    a. Were the schools public or private?
    b. How was this decision made?
3. How did these schools influence your choice of becoming an educator?
4. Were you considered gifted and participated in your school's gifted program? According to what set criteria?
5. Describe your experience in the gifted program.
6. Describe your collegiate background. What made you choose this school (major/minor)?
7. How did your choice of this college influence your decision to become an educator?
    a. If not initially an education major, what factors led you to that particular major?

i. What factors led you to become an educator?

8. Describe your educational experiences throughout your undergraduate program.
    a. Describe any organizations, community service, or job experiences while obtaining your undergraduate degree.
9. Were there any motivating factors that influenced you to obtain a graduate degree and how did you determine your area of concentration?
10. Describe your educational experiences throughout your graduate studies, if any.
11. Describe your educational and life experiences with multicultural education and cultural diversity in college (undergraduate, graduate, GaTapp).
12. How did your educational and life experiences, particularly experiences with cultural diversity and awareness, shape you into the teacher/administrator you are today?

Interview Guide #2- details of the strategies used by educational leaders that successfully identified and placed African Americans in the gifted program based on the details of the participants' present career experiences in regards to the facilitation of gifted education policies and educational practices in their respective school and grade level.

1. Describe your current role. How long have you been in your current role?
2. What led you to choose this role? What makes this role different than any other role at this school?
3. How long have you taught gifted education courses?

4. Describe your experience, if any, teaching regular education or special education students.
5. How does teaching gifted students differ from teaching other students (i.e. regular education and/or special education students)?
6. What led you to obtain an endorsement in gifted services?
    a. Describe your experience in the gifted endorsement program. Did your gifted endorsement program adequately prepare you to teach gifted students?
    b. If no, why do you feel the program did not prepare you to teach gifted students?
7. Who is responsible for overseeing gifted services in your school? Describe their role.
8. If you are responsible for gifted coordination in your school, describe this position.
9. Describe your school's gifted program?
10. What criteria students must meet before they are placed into the gifted program at your school?
    a. What data is used to determine if a student is placed into the gifted program?
11. What is the criteria for placing a student into the middle school gifted program that was not previously considered gifted in elementary school?

12. What data is used for placing a student into the middle school gifted program that was not previously considered gifted in elementary school?
13. What is the procedure for testing a student for the middle school gifted program that was not previously considered gifted in elementary school?
14. What are the mandated requirements for gifted students to remain in the gifted program at your school?
15. What happens if these requirements are not met?
16. What steps or actions are taken for students who do not meet the requirements for the gifted program?
17. If a student is no longer served in the gifted program, is there a chance for that child to be readmitted into the program? If so, describe the protocol for readmittance.
18. What is a typical class schedule for a gifted student?
19. What are some benefits of a gifted student taking all gifted academic courses?
20. What are some disadvantages of a gifted student taking all gifted academic courses?
21. What are some benefits of a gifted student taking some regular education academic courses?
22. What are some disadvantages of a gifted student taking some regular education academic courses?

23. What are some interventions used for students who do not meet these requirements to help retain them in the gifted program at your school. If so, what are they?
24. How do you determine if your school's gifted program is successful?
25. What are some challenges you have experienced while being a gifted teacher? Administrator of the school?
26. What role does regular education and special education teachers play in the gifted program at your school?
27. What role does the administrators play in the gifted program at your school?
28. How do students benefit from being in the gifted program?
29. What are some challenges you have seen students experience while they were in the gifted program?
30. What are some challenges you have seen African American students experience while they were in the gifted program?
31. Describe some strategies that are utilized to assist African American gifted students who exhibit reluctant behavior or are considered underachievers.
32. How successful were these strategies?
33. How would you describe the inclusion rate of African American students in gifted education at your school?
34. How would you describe the success rate of African American students in gifted education at your school?

35. What role do parents play in their child(ren) being selected into the gifted program?
36. How important is parental involvement?
37. Describe some ways in which parental involvement is encouraged with gifted students in your school.
38. How would you describe parental involvement in the education of African American students in the gifted program?
39. What are some strategies you have used as a teacher to encourage parental involvement of your gifted African American students?

Interview Guide #3-Reflect on the meaning of their educational and career experiences by addressing the emotional and intellectual connections between the participants' life and career experiences (Seidman, 2013).

1. How does your past teaching experiences influence your instructional practices as a gifted education teacher? Administrator?
2. How does your life experiences with cultural diversity influenced /have affected (administrator) your current instructional practices with students, specifically with African American students in the gifted program?
3. How does your life experiences affect/have affected (administrator) your instructional strategies and practices, specifically with African American students in the gifted program?

4. How does your career experiences affect/have affected (administrator) your instructional strategies and practices, specifically with African American students in the gifted program?
5. How does your educational experiences help you to identify any barriers for African Americans in the gifted program?
6. How does your career experiences help you to identify any barriers for African Americans in the gifted program?
7. During your career, can you describe some ways how you have helped gifted African American students overcome potential barriers they faced while participating in the gifted program?
8. Describe how you plan to encourage African American participation in the gifted program at your school?
9. Are there any aspects of your school gifted program or policies involving the gifted program that need to be changed to allow for more diverse student participation? If so, what are they?
10. Are there any aspects of your district's policies involving the gifted program that need to be changed to allow for more diverse student participation? If so, what are they?
11. How do you see your role changing going forward? Where do you see yourself in the future and what role do you see yourself serving in?
12. How influential is the principal's role in ensuring diversity in the gifted program?

13. How influential is the district's role in ensuring diversity in the gifted program?

Follow up Questions

1. Do you think that the lack of diversity in your formative years (pre-k-12) influences who and what characteristics you look for in a gifted student? Why or why not?
2. What are some characteristics you look for in a gifted student?
3. What are some ways you have tried to become more culturally competent? Explain and list examples.
4. What are some ways you worked to become more racially aware?
5. What are some ways you differentiate or have differentiated in class to include other cultures?
6. Do you collaborate with other gifted teachers? How is collaboration beneficial to you? Your students? List examples.
7. What is your own definition of cultural knowledge? In what ways have you become more knowledgeable about other cultures?
8. What are some characteristics you look for in students of different backgrounds when trying to include them in the gifted program?
9. What is your take on the current situation in gifted education?
10. What are your long-term goals?
11. What vision do you have for gifted education?