Fourth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions of Giftedness: Implications for Identifying and Serving Diverse Gifted Students

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The present study sought to examine the perceptions of giftedness and identification procedures held by experienced teachers of gifted minority students. Twenty-seven 4th-grade teachers of gifted students in an urban school system with a high representation of minority and economically disadvantaged students were surveyed. Results indicated that experienced teachers still held a narrow conception of giftedness and were not aware of how culture and environmental factors may influence the expression of giftedness in minority and economically disadvantaged students. Findings also indicated that these teachers expressed concerns for approximately one third of their students qualifying for the gifted program. These concerns were based primarily on students having a skill deficit in one area, poor work habits, or behavioral or family problems. Teachers were less likely to notice gifted characteristics in these students compared to other identified students, even though both groups were identified in the same way. Implications for teaching gifted minority and economically disadvantaged students are discussed.

Despite a general consensus that minority and economically disadvantaged children are underrepresented in gifted programs, the problem remains unresolved, a concern that has been well established in the literature in gifted education (Boothe & Stanley, 2004; Daniels, 1998; Ford & Harris, 1994; Frasier, 1997; Morris, 2002; Naglieri

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Journal for the Education of the Gifted. Vol. 30, No. 4, 2007, pp. 479–499.

& Ford, 2005; National Research Council, 2002). To illustrate the lack of progress in identifying minority students for gifted programs, Ford (1998) completed an overview on the identification practices for gifted programs. Her research found that during the past three decades, African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic students have been consistently underrepresented in gifted programs whereas White and Asian Americans have been consistently overrepresented.

Educators have proposed several explanations for the underrepresentation of minority students, including overreliance on standardized tests (Cornell, Delcourt, Goldberg & Bland, 1995; Ford & Harmon, 2001; Maker, 1996; Sarouphim, 2002), inequity in educational experiences (Boothe & Stanley, 2004; Ford, 1998), cultural prejudice and indifference to the issue (Bracken, 2000; Passow & Frasier, 1996), and negative cultural perceptions of and attitudes toward giftedness (Morris, 2002; Winfield, 1986).

Teacher referral practices have also been cited as contributing to the problem of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs. In a review of the literature, Frasier, Garcia, and Passow (1995) highlighted a number of reasons teachers may fail to refer minority students for gifted programs, including bias against certain minority groups, lower achievement expectations for these students, unfamiliarity with the unique characteristics of giftedness that may manifest in different minority groups, and failure to consider the effect disadvantaged life circumstances may have on students' behavior and attitudes toward school. Moreover, teachers may focus on such attitude and behavior problems and therefore overlook these students when nominating for gifted programs. Teachers may also rely exclusively on characteristics of gifted students that appear on published checklists without realizing that all gifted kids do not demonstrate all of the characteristics. Finally, Frasier, Garcia, and Passow noted that teachers may operate under a "deficit model" wherein they focus more on the remediation of any identified weaknesses at the expense of identifying students for programs aimed at developing strengths.

The literature highlights the problems with teachers effectively nominating students for gifted programs. Would the same issues

be found with teachers who are currently teaching identified gifted minority and/or economically disadvantaged students and therefore seemingly more familiar with their backgrounds and characteristics? The present study sought to explore this query through survey methods by examining the following research questions: (a) What are perceptions of giftedness held by teachers of minority or economically disadvantaged students, (b) do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs, and (c) to what extent are the teachers in agreement with each identified student's qualification for gifted services?

Background

The Center for Gifted Studies and Talent Development (Center) at Ball State University (BSU) is composed of a group of 20 professionals in education focused on helping students realize their own talents academically, technologically, and artistically. Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) is a 41,087 student urban school corporation that has been challenged historically by factors that negatively influence urban education: negative perceptions of student potential; a poor sense of efficacy among many involved in the delivery of education services to children; the challenges of poverty, cultural bias, and lack of significant numbers of parents who are active partners in the educational process; and a growing Hispanic population that has added another layer of diversity to the corporation (Adams et al., 2002).

Over the last 6 years, IPS has "initiated significant changes in its philosophy, belief structure, and implementation of gifted and talented education by embracing the belief that many children have gifts and talents and that all schools must meet the needs of their students with special gifts and talents" (Pierce et al., 2007, p. 114).

> Prior to the 2002–2003 academic year, each school served its gifted students in whatever manner it deemed appropriate. The types of services were inconsistent and varied from "clubs" to self-contained classes. Although there were individual identification plans implemented at each school, they

> were not based on current research, and the students identified by them did not reflect the diversity of the corporation. (Pierce et al., 2007, p. 114)

In the spring of 2002, the Center and administrators and teachers from IPS developed a new identification plan designed to more consistently recognize gifted and talented students who are economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and others who may not be identified and served by traditional assessment methods. The new identification plan used three instruments: the TerraNova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Ravens Coloured Progressive Matrices (CPM-C), and the Adams/Pierce Checklist (APC). Identification for gifted services consisted of meeting one of the following four criteria:

- Criterion 1. Scoring at or above the 90th percentile on the TerraNova Achievement Total Battery;
- Criterion 2. Scoring at or above the 90th percentile on two of the three subtests of reading comprehension, math problem solving, or science on the TerraNova;
- Criterion 3. Scoring at or above the 90th percentile on the CPM-C; or
- Criterion 4. Scoring 8 or higher on the APC.

In the fall of 2002, the Center and IPS were jointly awarded a 5-year Javits grant, Clustering Learners Unlocks Equity (Project CLUE), a university-school partnership that has resulted in an increase in minority representation in gifted programs. Project CLUE uses cluster grouping as a means of serving gifted students in third- , fourth- , and fifth-grade classrooms in 37 of the 52 IPS elementary schools and provides professional development for these teachers. One outcome of Project CLUE, thus far, is a research-based, multifaceted identification plan that provides a talent pool reflecting the diversity of the school corporation. Other Project CLUE outcomes will incorporate new information that improves the capability of IPS and other schools to plan, conduct, and improve programs to identify and serve gifted and talented students from underrepresented groups. Further information about Project CLUE is available at http://www.bsu.edu/clue.

Method

Instrument

As a part of the evaluation plan for Project CLUE, a survey for teachers was developed and administered each year. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about teacher beliefs and perceptions about characteristics and needs of gifted children. The survey directed teachers to describe their personal definitions of giftedness, including typical characteristics and behaviors of a gifted child. In addition, teachers were directed to write in the name of each gifted child in their classroom and specify (a) how the child was identified as gifted (if known), (b) the characteristics and behaviors of the child, including details or stories that exemplify these traits, and (c) if they had concerns about the child's qualification for gifted services and, if so, to specify those concerns.

Participant and Data Collection/Analysis

During Fall 2003, 40 fourth-grade teachers who were teaching a gifted cluster and involved in Project CLUE were given the survey to complete and return. Teachers were reminded at least once through phone calls and e-mail messages to return the surveys. It took several attempts to gather completed surveys from 27 teachers; the response rate was 68%. Of those who returned the surveys, 96% of these teachers were female and 93% were Caucasian.

These 27 teachers reported a total of 184 students who were identified for gifted services at the end of the 2001–2002 academic year. At that time, the students were second graders, and the total population of second grade IPS students was 58% African American, 30% White, 9% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and less than 1% American Indian and Asian and Pacific Islander. The gender breakdown was 49% female and 51% male. The socioeconomic breakdown was 57% on free lunch, 19% on reduced lunch, and 24% in neither category.

Complete demographic data were obtained for 144 of the 184 students. Of the 144 students, 46% were female. The ethnic breakdown was 49% Caucasian, 30.5% African American, 14% Hispanic, 5.5%

Multiracial, and .5% other. Information on the socioeconomic status (SES) of the individual students was not available. Identification and demographic information were available for 135 students and they qualified for gifted services as follows: 77% Criterion 1 (TerraNova total battery), 17% Criterion 2 (TerraNova subtests), and 6% Criterion 3 (CPM-C). None of these students qualified under Criterion 4 (APC).

Prior to completing the survey, the majority of the teachers had received some information about working with gifted students. Twenty-one of the 27 teachers had attended a 4-day summer institute focused on gifted education as part of Project CLUE's professional development phase. This institute was held to provide teachers with information about the principles of identifying gifted students, particularly those from underserved populations; differentiated instruction; various instructional strategies to assist them with meeting the needs of the gifted students in their classrooms; and implementing cluster grouping in the regular classroom. Five additional full-day professional development workshops were held during the school year to provide support and encouragement and to address teacher concerns about identifying or serving the gifted students in their clusters. Topics presented at these workshops included tiered lessons, cluster grouping, characteristics of gifted children, myths and realities about gifted children, preassessment, questioning strategies, critical thinking, and compacting, as well as the specific math and reading curriculum units. Twenty-three teachers provided information about their teaching experience. They had an average of 17.4 years teaching, with a range of 3 to 32 years; and an average of 4 years teaching gifted students, with a range of 1 to 15 years.

The responses to the survey questions were analyzed inductively through the development of coding categories. Coding categories are developed through multiple readings of the data that include searching for words, phrases, or patterns of behaviors that are indicative of themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The number of participants whose comments were indicative of each coding category was recorded. Finally, each of the categories and its frequency count were entered into a separate table for each survey question.

Table 1

Teachers' Conceptions of Giftedness (*N* = 27)

Characteristics	Frequency
Self-motivated to achieve/independent learner in classroom	21
Learning should come faster/more easily in one or more areas	17
Can work and understand at level above the average level	18
Creative	18
Reasoning abilities and problem-solving skills	10
Thoughtful/sees connections others do not notice	11
Curious about many things	7
Different mindset or viewpoint	5
Extensive vocabulary	4
Loves to read	4
Artistic	4
Boredom/noninterested	4
Loves challenge/competitive	3
Socially immature	3
Hyperactive/impulsive	3

Results and Discussion

The first question on the survey directed teachers to write their personal definition of giftedness and characteristics of gifted children. Responses for this question and all of the questions in the survey were categorized and tallied under broader themes. For example, teacher comments such as "works well alone," "does not need reminders to complete work," "highly motivated," "internal drive to achieve" were all included under the umbrella term *self-motivated/independent worker*. Table 1 summarizes the teachers' definitions of giftedness and characteristics of gifted children. Items mentioned by fewer than three of the teachers were not included in the table.

A high percentage of teachers mentioned typical characteristics of gifted students, including learning easily and understanding

above the average level, 63% and 67%, respectively. Fewer teachers, however, noted other characteristics that are also typical, such as awareness of patterns/connections (41%), curiosity (26%), and an extensive vocabulary (15%). Sixty-seven percent of teachers saw creativity as a characteristic of giftedness, although it is not necessarily correlated with high IQ scores (Davis, 2004). Few, if any, teachers mentioned gifted characteristics that are prevalent in minority populations, such as oral tradition, movement and verve, communalism, and affective characteristics (Ford, 2002). Finally, 78% of teachers mentioned self-motivation as a characteristic of gifted children, even though gifted students are not necessarily more self-motivated than the normal population (Ford, 1996). Only 15% of teachers recognized that boredom or noninterest may be common in gifted students, and, with the exception of hyperactivity, teachers did not recognize behavior problems or underachievement as potential outcomes of boredom. These findings suggest that the teachers may have equated giftedness with productivity, failing to recognize that the two constructs are unique. As Ford (2002) cautioned, "when one equates giftedness with high achievement (itself a relative term), gifted underachievers will go unrecruited and/or unretained" (p. 57). She also noted that because many Black students underachieve they are more likely not to be identified for gifted services, and, therefore, their needs will continue to be unmet.

The results from this initial survey question shed light on the first two research questions in the study: What are the perceptions of giftedness held by teachers of minority and disadvantaged students, and do these perceptions reflect an awareness of the unique issues facing students who have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs? The findings indicate that despite having attended multiple in-service professional development days on gifted education and having taught identified gifted students, these teachers did not appear to have a well-developed understanding of giftedness and its characteristics. More specifically, these teachers did not appear to have a clear understanding of how giftedness may manifest in minority and/or economically disadvantaged students.

The next question on the survey was designed to address the second research question guiding the study by asking teachers if

they had any concerns about each child's identification as gifted and qualification for gifted services. Out of the 184 children, teachers were concerned with the qualification of 63 students. They explicitly stated that 6 children were not gifted and gave no justification for that conclusion. For the other 57 children, they elaborated on concerns about their qualifications for gifted services. These concerns are summarized in Table 2.

Several issues are readily apparent from Table 2. First, skill deficit in one area was mentioned frequently as a concern for students' placement into the gifted program. This concern has validity, as it is indicative of a potential mismatch between identification and programming. For the IPS gifted program, students could qualify by scoring at or above the 90th percentile on two of the following TerraNova subtests: reading comprehension, math problem solving, or science. Identified students, however, received services in both mathematics and language arts. As a result of the teachers' concerns, the identification and programming may be revised. Hopefully, such revisions will allow teachers to realize that children who have skill deficits in one or more areas can still be gifted in a particular area. These children justifiably qualify for gifted services that will strengthen talent in that area.

Secondly, a frequent concern of teachers was that many identified students were high achievers but not actually gifted. This suggests that the teachers may have a more traditional conception of giftedness based solely on top aptitude scores (Feldman, 2003). Other definitions of giftedness include a broader conception based on above-average intelligence and recognizing that other factors may contribute to giftedness (Renzulli, 2002). For the IPS identification plan, the 90th percentile on the national TerraNova norms was used as a cut-off score for identification, and it resulted in identifying 8.6% of the students in this grade level for services. As Ford (2002) indicated in her summary of the literature on testing for minority and low-SES students, such students may perform poorly on paper-and-pencil tasks, do not perform well on culturally biased tests (Kaufman, 1994), have learning styles different from White students (Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997), have test anxiety (Ford, 1995), or have low achievement motivation (Ford, 1996). Therefore, the 90th

Table 2

Concerns About Qualifications for Gifted Services by Category (*N* = 27)

Concern	Frequency
Abilities	
Skills deficient in one content area: reading, math, communication	16
Grasps concepts more slowly than other identified peers	9
High achiever/good student—not gifted	8
Work Habits	
Not motivated	13
Underachiever	10
Slow to finish/does not complete work	9
Not interested/focused	6
Poor work habits	5
Characteristics	
Not curious	2
Frustrated with challenges	2
Not confident	1
Perfectionist	1
Overestimates knowledge	1
No gifted characteristics	6
Behavior	
Hyperactive	4
Social	3
Behavior problem	3
Attitude problem	2
Reserved	2
Family Circumstances	
Poor attendance	2
Transient family	1
Unstructured home life	1
Parents going through divorce	1

Note. Concerns were generated for 63 of 184 students.

percentile cut-off used by IPS may be effective in identifying a group of students whose aptitude is higher than that of their peers and thus warrant different instructional strategies.

Another concern held by teachers regarding students' identification as gifted was students' poor work habits, which they felt

demonstrated a lack of motivation that leads to underachievement. While frustrating for teachers, poor work habits do not mean a child is not gifted. These findings again suggest that teachers are equating productivity with giftedness without taking into consideration the prevalence of underachievement, especially in African American students (Ford, 2002). Additionally, gifted students do not always have well-developed work habits because many have been able to complete schoolwork with little effort. Therefore, the opportunity to develop good work habits has not necessarily presented itself naturally. Explicit training to develop metacognitive skills of planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress may be necessary for some gifted students. Similarly, some teachers also listed behavioral problems and family circumstances as reasons to question a child's qualification for gifted services. Rather than questioning the child's status as gifted, teachers may need to focus their energies on strategies that would assist such students with reversing their underachievement, addressing their behavioral problems, and coping with their stressful family circumstances. Suggestions for accomplishing this are explored at the end of the paper.

Finally, the third question on the survey asked the teachers to list characteristics of each of their identified gifted students. For the purpose of analyzing these responses, the students were divided into two groups: those whom teachers expressed concerns about their identification as gifted on Question 2 of the survey, and those whom teachers expressed no concerns for their identification. Table 3 presents these characteristics as categorized into themes.

Twenty-two additional characteristics cited for 3 or fewer children in either group included items such as strong retention, kinesthetic, overachiever, underachiever, not liked by others, good manners, and obsessive.

The results of this section of the survey suggest that teachers are less likely to recognize abilities and strengths in those students for whom they had concerns about their identification as gifted. One limitation of this study is that individual test scores for each identified child were not available from IPS; this unfortunately precludes a direct comparison of test scores between the two groups. However, for the 6 students listed by the teachers as having no gifted characteristics, 5

Table 3

Characteristics of Identified Gifted Children by Category

Characteristics	No Concerns*	Concerns**
Abilities		
Reading /vocabulary/writing abilities are high	26	5
Higher level reasoning/problem solving	19	11
Math skills high	13	5
Creative abilities	9	2
Learns easily	7	5
Strong retention	5	1
Skills are lower than other identified peers	0	9
Does not demonstrate any characteristics of gifted child	0	6
Achievement Characteristics		
High self-expectations/self-motivated	24	5
Enjoys reading	15	4
High achieving/works above grade level	15	1
Enjoys learning/special interests	12	3
Thorough in work	10	2
Excels in all areas	8	0
Participates in class activities/discussions	6	5
Responsible	6	0
Careless	5	0
Not self-directed/unmotivated	0	7
Social Characteristics		
Self-control	11	0
Well liked/social	7	1
Confident	5	2
Eager to please	5	1
Behavior/attitude problem	4	4
Shy/prefers to work alone	3	5

*The comments were related to 121 students that teachers reported were no concern. **The comments were related to 63 students that teachers reported were concerns.

were identified as gifted by Criterion 1. Their TerraNova Achievement Total Battery scores were 99%, 95% (2), 94%, and 90%. The other student qualified for gifted services through Criterion 3 with a score at the 90% on the CPM-C. These scores clearly show that the students

met the criteria for gifted services and indicate that something else is preventing teachers from recognizing their abilities.

Overall, 70% of the 63 children for whom the teachers had concerns were identified as gifted by Criterions 1 or 2, that is, scoring at or above the 90th percentile on the TerraNova Achievement Total Battery or scoring at or above the 90th percentile on two of the three subtests of reading comprehension, math problem solving, or science on the TerraNova. Another 6% of the 63 children were identified as gifted through Criterion 3, that is, scoring at or above the 90th percentile on the CPM-C. No information on identification method was available from IPS for the remaining 24%. Among the students for whom teachers had no concerns, the percentages are virtually the same, that is, 70%, 5%, and 25% respectively were identified through Criterions 1, 2, and 3, illustrating no ability differences between the two groups.

Given this similarity in measured abilities, the survey finding that teachers were far less likely to identify strengths in students for whom they were concerned about their identification as gifted is even more troubling. Perhaps these students' behavioral problems and underachievement are preventing teachers from recognizing their strengths. Additional survey responses support this hypothesis, as more characteristics dealing with achievement and behavioral problems were noted for the students for whom teachers had concerns. These results are consistent with the deficit model that Frasier, Garcia, and Passow (1995) discussed in which teachers are less likely to notice abilities and more likely to focus on problems for minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Implications and Need for Future Research

The results of the survey indicate a need for more professional development on the characteristics of giftedness, how giftedness may manifest in minority and economically disadvantaged populations, and how to teach these gifted students effectively to increase interest and motivation.

Characteristics and Identification

In order to successfully refer students to undergo the identification procedure for participation in gifted programs, teachers need a solid understanding of characteristics found in gifted children. The fourth-grade teachers in the present study were able to identify several common indicators of giftedness, such as the ability to learn quickly, to understand above the average level, and to see patterns/connections that others do not. The teachers, however, did not mention any characteristics of giftedness that are more prevalent in the minority students, such as oral communication, kinesthetic, communalism, and affective traits. This finding suggests that teachers may not take into account that giftedness is culturally defined. As Harris (1991) stated, "giftedness results from the interplay of culture, language, world-view, conceptual style, values, and personality" (p. 11). Sternberg (2004) similarly remarked that intelligence cannot be meaningfully understood outside of cultural context. Therefore, teachers need to consider the cultural context of their students when interpreting their abilities.

Teachers of gifted minority and economically disadvantaged students may need professional development to recognize unique gifted behaviors in these populations (Frasier et. al., 1995b). Such professional development workshops should also include a section on underachievement in gifted students, so teachers are aware of this phenomenon and do not confuse productivity with giftedness. Teachers may benefit from a model such as the staff development model proposed by Frasier and colleagues (1995a). The purpose of this model was to train teachers to recognize how core attributes of giftedness (Frasier et. al., 1995a) may manifest in economically disadvantaged students. Frasier and colleagues (1995a) found that out of 246 teachers who participated in the training, more than 80% thought the training was useful for identifying characteristics of giftedness in economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, 99% said that after participating in the training, they would actively advocate for potentially gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Other researchers have also advocated for similar professional development programs to facilitate teacher awareness and referral practices of underrepresented students for gifted programs

(Hunsaker, 2000; Siegle & Powell, 2004). In addition, time for the teachers to reflect on and revise their own beliefs systems should be incorporated as an essential part of this professional development as well (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Based on this research and our survey results, we feel future professional development for Project CLUE needs to include opportunities for teachers to discuss unique behaviors of gifted minority and economically disadvantaged students. It is important for such sessions to emphasize the unique challenges and experiences that result from economical hardship, independent of race. In the present study, SES information was not available on individual children, so it remains impossible to determine to what extent teachers' perceptions of their students were influenced by the students' SES apart from their race. Future research is needed on the influence of class on teachers' perceptions of gifted characteristics and identification without the added complication of ethnicity differences.

More research is also needed to understand to what extent the role of classroom experience plays in identifying characteristics of gifted minority children. It was our assumption that teachers with years of experience teaching these students, coupled with the Project CLUE professional development workshops, would be able to identify their gifted characteristics. However, attitudes are deeply engrained, and perhaps the more seasoned the teacher, the less effective the professional development experiences would be in altering his or her understanding of giftedness as it occurs in the context of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Future research should examine this in more detail. For example, studies should carefully examine the content of professional development workshops on these topics and quantify the number of hours spent to gain a better understanding of exactly what content and how much exposure is necessary to alter such long-standing beliefs about identifying giftedness in children.

Professional Development in Multicultural Education

In addition to professional development designed to facilitate teachers' ability to identify giftedness in minority and economically

disadvantaged students, the results of the survey also indicate the teachers could benefit from professional development in multicultural education in general. Perhaps some of the underachievement, behavioral problems, and lack of motivation reported by the teachers stemmed from a mismatch between teacher and student race. Although 51% of the identified students were minorities, 93% of the teachers in the present study were Caucasian. This "cultural gap" (p. 94) between teachers and students is a problem nationwide (Sleeter, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Sleeter), in 1996, the enrollment of public elementary and secondary schools was 64% White, 17% Black, 14% Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. In contrast, the racial breakdown of teachers in 1994 was as follows: 87% White, 7% Black, 4% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native.

To bridge this culture gap, one practice that Ladson-Billings (2000) recommended is the need for immersion experiences in diverse communities for preservice teachers. She contended that such experiences would allow preservice teachers the opportunity to understand the daily lives of minority and low-SES students in context. She argued:

> Moving away from the predictability of the classroom, with its rules, routines, and rituals, prospective teachers may recognize that limited access to goods and services, poor health care facilities, uneven police and fire protection, and unsafe and dilapidated playgrounds all work against students' willingness to participate in school tasks. (p. 209)

Simultaneously, such experiences could help preservice teachers develop an appreciation for the unique strengths of cultural groups that may otherwise go unnoticed in a traditional school setting. Perhaps if the fourth-grade teachers in the present study would have participated in such an immersion experience, they would have been more cognizant of the roots of underachievement, motivation, and behavioral problems they observed in their students; consequently, they may not have drawn the false conclusion that the presence of

these characteristics indicates a lack of giftedness. Future research should examine this hypothesis in more detail.

Another way to bridge the cultural gap between teachers and students is through teacher preparation in culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994) Such instruction allows for teachers to aid students in fostering connections between themselves, their community, and the world while encouraging interdependence and a belief that all students can succeed (Harmon, 2002). Bernal (2002) recommended the adoption of Banks' (1993) five multicultural education components: content integration, which is using examples from different cultures to explain ideas and clarify points; understanding how ethnicity influences knowledge construction; actively reducing prejudice; developing an equity pedagogy that appeals to different learning styles; and creating a student culture that welcomes students from all ethnic backgrounds. In turn, culturally relevant teaching should increase intrinsic motivation and the desire to learn within students, while simultaneously decreasing the lack of motivation and behavioral problems that teachers in the present study listed as concerns. With the ever-increasing population of minority students, this area of preservice education proves ripe for future research as teacher educators strive to modify their programs to better prepare their students for addressing the needs of diverse students in the classroom.

In addition to providing teachers with instruction on how to facilitate Banks' (1993) model, Bernal (2002) also recommended actively recruiting minority teachers to teach in gifted programs. Minority teachers would serve as role models for minority gifted students, thus increasing enrollment and retention in gifted programs while simultaneously creating a gifted program that is more responsive to the needs of culturally diverse students (Bernal, 2002). Future researchers may want to examine whether or not underachievement and behavioral problems such as those noted by the fourth-grade teachers in the present study would occur to the same degree in gifted minority students who had teachers of the same cultural background.

The results of this study suggest that even experienced teachers of gifted minority and economically disadvantaged students may have a narrow perception of giftedness. This conception reflects a lack of

awareness about how cultural and environmental factors may influence the expression of giftedness as well as attitudes toward school achievement in these students. Minority populations are growing at a rapid pace in America. Thus, the need for training in multicultural education is great. Teachers need to be prepared not only to advocate for fair representation of minority students in gifted programs, but also to develop culturally relevant curricula that will pique their intrinsic motivation and achievement.

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End Note

Research for this document was supported under the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program (Grant S206A020035) as administered by the U. S. Department of Education. Grantees undertaking such projects are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment. This document therefore does not necessarily represent positions or policies of the Government, and no official endorsement should be inferred.