

# Examining the Underrepresentation of Underserved Students in Gifted Programs From a Transformational Leadership Vantage Point

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*Within the United States, the underrepresentation of historically underserved student groups continues to be a phenomenon in gifted and talented (GT) programs. In a phenomenological study exploring teachers' and African American parents' perceptions of the underrepresentation of gifted African American students, four themes emerged from the study. Those themes are: (a) misperceptions regarding a student's race and ability; (b) the lack of parent awareness programs about issues related to gifted and talented education; (c) the need for professional development training related to the needs of minority gifted students; and (d) issues related to testing and assessment instrumentation. A paradigm shift in leadership and GT program practices must occur to reduce identification and placement gaps. The Chadwell Transformative Model for Gifted Program Reform is a means to improve the identification and placement of historically underserved students into gifted and talented programs.*

In the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Court's judicial majority declared, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Robinson, 2005, p. 53). Although overt evidence of segregation may not exist in post-modern schools, a national trend suggests the resurgence of segregation in many U.S. schools (Bigg, 2007; Dyson, 2005; Ogletree, 2004; Orfield & Eaton, 2003; Robinson, 2005). Given the overrepresentation of White students in gifted and talented (GT) programs, Staiger (2004) postulated that a covert segregation agenda exists in U.S. public schools. Likewise, there is an underrepresentation of culturally, linguistically, ethnically diverse students in gifted programs in comparison to their overplacement in educational services for students with learning challenges throughout the U.S. (De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Ogletree, 2004).

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of regular classroom teachers and African American parents who participated in the nomination of African American students for GT programs and who were not identified for placement into such a program. In the study, the participants offered their perceptions of how nomination, assessment, and identification procedures contributed to this particular student population's group underidentification in GT programs. Themes extracted from this study determined two predominant outcomes.

### **Significance of the Study to Education Leaders**

Based on the findings from the study, the development of the Chadwell Transformative Model for Gifted Program Reform (CTMGPR) emerged, grounding the participants' recommendations within a framework applicable to improving the identification and placement of historically underserved student populations into gifted and talented programs. The CTMGPR integrated the premise related to the transformational leadership theory, given the review of literature indications of a behavioral change needed among educational leaders influencing GT program practices and procedures. Transformational leaders motivate followers to change behaviors, which lead to the achievements of "extraordinary outcomes by providing both meaning and understanding" (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007, p. 16). The significance of the CTMGPR is to assist educational leaders in facilitating the implementation of culturally relevant procedures designed to reach an increased population of underrepresented, underserved gifted students.

### **Literature Review**

The aim of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation is to improve the academic achievement levels of all students, specifically to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008). A criticism of NCLB is that the legislation ignores educational programs designed

for the gifted (Bureau of Educational Research, 2004; Kaplan, 2004; Krisel, 2004; National Association for Gifted Children, 2008; Olenchak, 2005; Pfeiffer, Petscher, & Jarosewich, 2007). Aggravating this concern are disparities in adequacy and equity in the funding allocations to gifted programs resulting from weighted funding systems, sometimes referred to as pupil weight (Baker & McIntire, 2003). Under such a system, states supplement financial aid to programs based on a funding weight per student. For example, districts in Texas receive 12% supplemental aid multiplied by the base allotment for the instruction of each identified gifted child (Anderson & Dawn-Fisher, 2010; Baker & McIntire, 2003).

With the focus of U.S. public education systems on improving the academic competency of their low-performing students, questions regarding the feasibility of maintaining enrichment programs for gifted students persist. Given the increased emphasis on high-stakes testing, many parents of gifted students contend that instructional practices supporting memorization suppress the higher level academic skills attributed to gifted programs (Matthews, 2006). Matthews asserted that much of this parental concern stems from the likelihood of gifted students' ability to demonstrate proficiency on states' high-stakes assessments.

A systemic need exists to improve current paradigm practices that embrace diversity by making allowances for students from a whole-child vantage point. The overrepresentation of White students, as opposed to historically underserved students, in gifted programs exists because of traditional characteristics associated with gifted children versus gifted behaviors attributed to cultural differences or experiences (Baldwin, 2005; Manning, 2006; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Traditional behaviors attributed to academic giftedness are "high grades, high scores on standardized achievement and aptitude tests, and strong classroom performance" (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008, p. 132); yet Briggs et al. (2008) noted that racial and cultural customs influence the manifestations of advanced behaviors not comparable to the norm, often causing the misidentification of culturally diverse students. The continued underrepresentation of underserved student populations in gifted programs will persist unless a procedural shift occurs among educators and other stakeholders in the nomination and identification procedures (Callahan, 2005; VanTassel-Baska

& Johnsen, 2007). Within institutions of higher learning, efforts to refine knowledge-based foundation courses in gifted education to emphasize that “gifted learners are different from other learners in respect to characteristics, developmental trajectories, and idiosyncratic ways of learning” (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007, p. 184) are necessary.

Although many school districts have maintained the status quo in their identification procedures for potentially gifted students, some researchers have argued that testing creates a cultural bias through an overt reliance on students’ mathematical and linguistic abilities as well as IQ test scores (Cross & Cross, 2005; Gardner, 2006). The National Association for Gifted Children (2008) advocated for the sustained exploration, adaptation, and reevaluation of alternative assessment instruments and practices that grant equal opportunities to all potentially gifted children. Viewed from a societal perspective, Johnson and Kritsonis (2007) opined that the continued underidentification of gifted minority students in the United States symbolizes a considerable waste of ability and talent. Within the scientific community, the shortage of skilled and talented African Americans signals a growing need for their participation; consequently, Johnson and Kritsonis concluded that a need exists for the reevaluation and development of programs to improve their performance in math- and science-related disciplines.

Burney and Beilke (2008) noted, “The field of gifted education has long sought to identify more students from traditionally underrepresented populations for high-ability services” (p. 295). This coincides with the body of literature indicating a need for GT program decision-makers to review procedures of nomination, assessment, and identification that suppress the placement of underrepresented and underserved student populations into such programs (Baldwin, 2005; De Valenzuela et al., 2006; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Manning, 2006; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of regular classroom teachers and African American parents who participated in the nomination of African American students for GT programs who were not identified for placement into such a program. In the study, the participants offered their perceptions of how nomination, assessment, and identification procedures contributed to this

particular student population's underidentification in GT programs. Four research questions guided the course of the study:

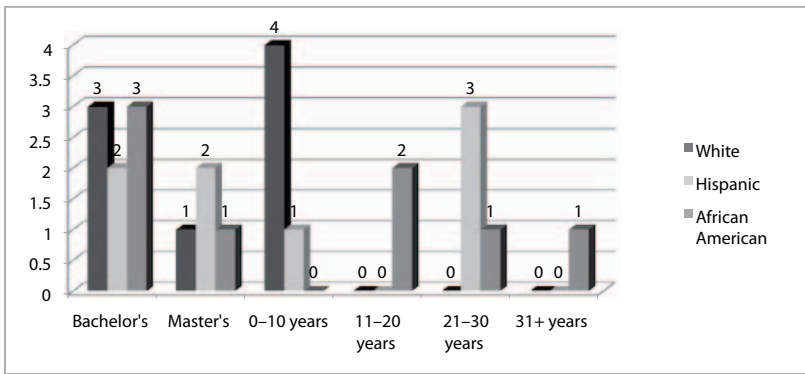
1. What factors contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented programs?
2. Are there differences between African American parents' and regular classroom teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of giftedness and talent in the nomination and identification of gifted African American students?
3. What effects do the experiences of African American parents concerning giftedness have on their perceptions of the child's academic and social outcomes?
4. What are the implications of race and racism in gifted and talented programs for the future identification of gifted African American students?

For the purpose of this article, the primary focus will be on the recommendations of the participants that led to the development of the Chadwell Transformative Model for Gifted Program Reform as a means to improve the identification and placement of historically underserved students into gifted and talented programs.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

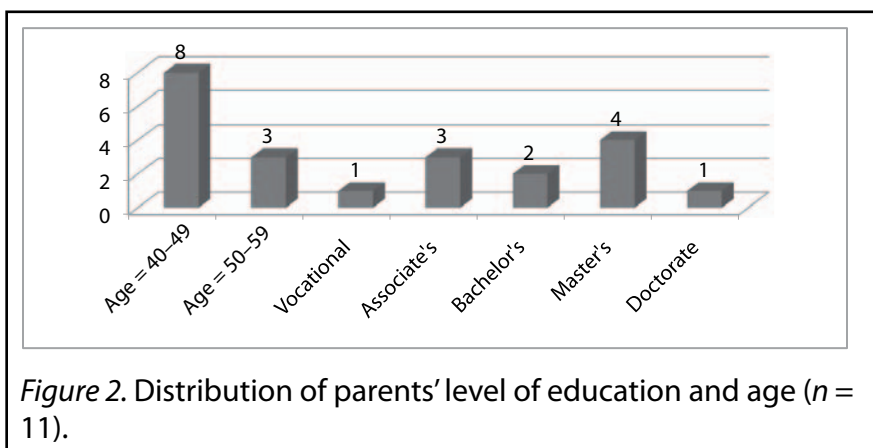
This study was limited to participants living in San Antonio, TX. Twelve regular classroom teachers and 11 African American parents were selected for the study. Using purposive sampling, the criterion for participation in this study was that teachers and parents participated in the nomination process of potentially gifted African American students who were later not identified as gifted or talented learners. Among the teacher participants, equal numbers of teachers represented the three major ethnic groups in San Antonio—4 White, 4 Hispanic, and 4 African American. The use of three organizations assisted in the identification and selection of qualified participants for this study: two predominantly African American churches and the



**Figure 1.** Distribution of teachers' highest level of education and years experience by ethnicity.

Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)-Region 20. San Antonio hosts 15 independent school districts, three of them on military installations (Education Service Center Region 20, 2005). For that reason, the selection of ATPE-Region 20 increased the opportunity of identifying teachers employed in different school districts within San Antonio. Figure 1 highlights the demographic information of the teachers who participated in study.

Identifying and selecting parents who were members of a church where the congregation is predominantly African American was appropriate considering the role of the Black church in the African American community. Historically, the Black church has been the recognized center of the “spiritual, social, and political life of Black Americans” (Thomas, Quinn, Billingsley, & Caldwell, 1994, p. 576). Furthermore, Thomas et al. (1994) determined that the selection of African American participants through Black churches was more efficient than trying to access them through mainstream systems for research studies such as those involving public health or social services. Hence, the selection of parents from two major African American church congregations within the San Antonio area helped increase the chances of targeting parent participants who might reside within the different school districts. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the parents according to their highest level of education and age.



### Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions created by the researcher was the method used to collect data. Part of this process included asking the respondents to define giftedness as a means of framing the focus of the research study. The participants received a reminder that their participation in the study was voluntary with the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each private semi-structured interview session for this study lasted approximately 60–75 minutes.

During the study, the regular classroom teachers and African American parents reviewed and answered a series of 10 questions (Michael-Chadwell, 2008). Appendixes A and B contain the interview protocols used in the study. Each participant had the opportunity to expand on those questions. For the purpose of this article, the focus will be on the following two questions:

Interview Question 7: What factors do you believe contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented programs?

Interview Question 10. What recommendations can you offer educational leadership concerning the issues of this research study?

## Procedures

Because of personal experiences in the identification, nomination, and assessment of former students for gifted programs, contemplation of those experiences had to occur—both the successes and failures—until a sense of closure was established. Epoché is a means to prevent superimposing a researcher's feelings, memories, judgments, or biases onto the research participants as well as a part of the transcendental phenomenological research process (Moustakas, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the researcher underwent epoché. In doing so, she established the ability to activate improved active listening skills, to think about what the participants would say occurred without injecting her personal opinions or feelings.

The ethical foundation surrounding the data collection process was maintained through informed consent of participants and statements of confidentiality by both participants and researcher. Second, each participant received a pseudonym. For example, SATP 1-12 stands for San Antonio Teacher Participant; SAPP 1-11 stands for San Antonio Parent Participant. This coding system in the transcripts maintained the participants' confidentiality and the researcher's neutrality for the duration of the study.

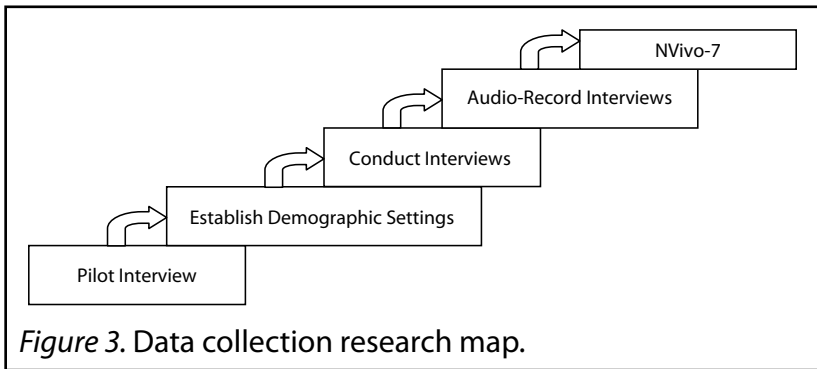
Between October 17 and 18, 2007, a pilot interview with a panel of two parents and three GT teachers occurred to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of the interview questions. Later, the data collection for the current study consisted of either face-to-face or telephone interviews conducted over a 2-month period between October 20 and December 30, 2007.

Figure 3 illustrates the procedures applied in this study's data collection process.

Scheduling of the 23 interviews depended on the availability of the participants as well as their geographic location within San Antonio, TX. Each interview began with a verbal script reiterating the purpose of the study, the confidentiality associated with participation, the option to withdraw, and explaining how the materials would be safeguarded and stored after the completion of the study.

No observed differences were noted in the quality or value of the data collected.





Both parents and regular classroom teachers were asked to respond to 10 questions (see Appendices). The research infused two methods of inquiry: Moustakas's modified van Kaam method (Jordan, 2001) and Hiles's (2002) phenomenological process of heuristic indwelling. Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam's method incorporated the following recommended steps:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping (horizontalization);
2. Reduction and elimination;
3. Clustering and creating themes of the invariant constituents (core themes);
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application (validation);
5. Constructing an individual textual description of the experience;
6. Constructing an individual structural description of the experience; and
7. Constructing a textual-structural description of the meaning and the essence of the experience. (pp. 120–121)

Hiles's (2002) process incorporated the following basic phases:

1. Choosing a text or cultural/spiritual practice for engagement with no expectation of what themes may emerge;
2. Engaging with the text/practice as well as participating deeply in the experience and exploring the demands placed on the researcher;

3. Indwelling over an extended period through exploration and discernment, following patterns but always returning to the primary focus of the study;
4. Sifting through the responses and looking for relevant themes and meanings to emerge;
5. Reflecting on the authenticity and reliability of the response or insights;
6. Formulating a synthesis of the inquiry reflecting the authenticity of the participants' responses; and
7. Sharing the creative synthesis to establish credibility and validity of the research study outcomes. (Heuristic Dwelling section, Table 2)

The process of phenomenological reduction enabled the isolation of invariant constituents from descriptions, words, or phrases gained from the semi-structured interviews. Reviewing transcripts and coding, then the subsequent review of both, allowed for the emergence of units to form clusters or themes. A sufficient number of constituents determined if the participants' statements were horizons to the lived experiences; key-word analysis helped in the extraction of sequences. Overlapping phrases or expressions were eliminated. Textual and structural descriptions gave voice to the participants' descriptions and perceptions of their experiences. The remaining invariant constituents became the horizon or scope of the participant's experiences.

### **Treatment of the Data**

Interview Question 7: What factors do you believe contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented programs?

**Teachers.** Four of the 12 teacher participants stated that the assessment instrument was culturally biased. Three of the participants indicated that parents' unawareness of the program and their rights contributed to the phenomenon related to the underrepresentation of African American students in GT programs. Five of the teachers responded that one factor was GT or classroom teacher bias. Two of the teachers reported that social or home factors in addition to

Table 1

*Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to African American GT Underrepresentation*

Emerging theme	Participants
GT or classroom teacher bias	SATP 3, 4, 6, 7, 10
Culturally biased test	SATP 3, 5, 11, 12
Minority parents unaware of program and rights	SATP 6, 8, 10
Social or home factors	SATP 4, 9
Peer pressure: Negative image of GT	SATP 1, 6
African Americans not heading gifted programs	SATP 1
African Americans not in policy-making positions	SATP 1
Teacher not aware of underrepresentation	SATP 2
Belief that only 2% of the total population is gifted	SATP 11
Low performance in the classroom	SATP 10

teachers' perceptions about students' behaviors might be contributing factors. Other factors included the negative image of being GT among minorities, the lack of African American leadership in decision-making positions, an unawareness of the underrepresentation phenomenon, and a belief that only 2% of the total population is gifted. Table 1 provides detailed information on the emerging themes.

**Parents.** Eight of the 11 parents believed that misperceptions regarding race and ability contributed to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted programs. Four of the parents believed that teachers were unable to recognize the potential of African American students, or that issues regarding testing and scoring were factors contributing to the phenomenon. Two of the parents thought that minority parents were not aware of the program, while one parent suggested that one factor was the lack of African American teachers in gifted programs. Table 2 provides more information on the emerging themes.

Interview Question 10: What recommendations can you offer educational leadership concerning the issues of this research study?

Table 2

*Parents' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to African American GT Underrepresentation*

Emerging theme	Participants
Misperceptions regarding race and ability	SAPP 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11
Teacher unable to recognize potential of student	SAPP 1, 2, 9, 7
Issues regarding testing and scoring	SAPP 1, 7, 8, 10
Program is not well known to minority parents	SAPP 9, 10
Lack of African American trained gifted teachers	SAPP 11

**Teachers.** Seven of the 12 teachers recommended an increase in the scope of the GT program and testing to capture different student backgrounds. Six teachers proposed a reexamination of the GT program from a minority perspective. Four suggested that teachers receive professional development training on identifying potentially gifted students. Other recommendations included: (a) improving feedback to teachers on assessment results; (b) examining program policies for the gifted and talented among campuses and school districts; (c) giving teachers more time to identify students for the program; and (d) increasing the number of African Americans in leadership positions as well as increasing diversity on panels of teachers, administrators, and parents who make decisions on how to improve opportunities for the identification and recommendation of students for placement into the GT program. Table 3 provides more information on the emerging themes.

**Parents.** Five of the 11 parents recommended teacher training on recognizing the gifts and talents of minorities. Four suggested improvements in the nomination and identification procedures of GT programs. Three of the parents recommended that educational leaders ask parents for input on how to enhance the GT program. Table 4 provides more information pertaining to the emerging themes.

### Structural Analysis of Question 7

Following a structural analysis of the participants' responses, predominant themes emerged. Three themes emerged from the regular classroom teachers' responses: (a) bias among GT and classroom

Table 3

*Teachers' Recommendations to Administrators*

Emerging themes	Participants
Increase scope of program and test	SATP 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12
Examine GT program from the minority perspective	SATP 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12
Providing training for parents	SATP 3, 4, 5, 9
Provide professional development on identification	SATP 3, 5, 9
Increase best practices peer-to-peer training opportunities	SATP 2
Examine policies among campuses and school districts	SATP 3
Improve GT assessment feedback to teachers	SATP 4
Give teachers more time to identify students	SATP 7
Recruit more African Americans into leadership positions and on GT panels	SATP 1
Increase diversity on GT panels	SATP 1

Table 4

*Parents' Recommendations to Administrators*

Emerging theme	Participants
Train teachers to recognize gifts and talents of minorities	SAPP 2, 4, 5, 6, 11
Improve GT program nomination and identification procedures	SAPP 1, 4, 10, 11
Ask for more parent input to enhance program	SAPP 1, 3, 9
Require teachers to attend GT workshops	SAPP 5, 7
Understand that test does not measure whole child	SAPP 1
Provide more GT orientation for parents	SAPP 7
Provide more GT orientation for students	SAPP 7
Give precedence to teacher's recommendations	SAPP 8
Have minorities administer tests to minority students	SAPP 7

teachers, (b) culturally biased testing, and (c) parents unaware of the GT programs and their rights. Educational leaders should consider how to improve communication efforts between the schools and school districts to parents regarding the GT program and their rights as advocates. Improving communication efforts between schools

and parents of underserved students help educators increase their understanding of the students' experiences outside of school, thereby improving chances for their identification, placement, and retention in academically rigorous programs. According to Henfield, Moore, and Wood (2008), similar efforts in understanding the life experiences of African American gifted students increases their retention in K–12 advanced coursework and opportunities for enrollment in higher education science, math, engineering, and technology (STEM) related programs.

Educational leaders should consider the effects of bias in hindering historically underrepresented students from entering gifted programs from the context of structural and social constructs. Schroth and Helfer (2008) claimed that little information is available pertaining to the relationship between the beliefs of educators and the identification of students for gifted programs. A structural analysis of the participants' responses in this study suggests a linkage to the mindset known as *deficit thinking* as a factor perpetuating the phenomenon. Rather than building upon the cultural, social, and intellectual capital of minority students (Landsman & Lewis, 2006) as well as other underserved student populations, their underrepresentation in gifted programs might be a reflection of how the education system views minority students as liabilities. Expanding definitions and perceptions of giftedness beyond Eurocentric descriptions increases a reconciliation of moving GT programs from a single-cultural dimension to one more representative of embracing multiculturalism.

### **Structural Analysis of Question 10**

Four themes emerged from the teacher participants' discussions, suggesting recommendations to educational leaders in addressing the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted programs to include other underserved student groups. A resurgence of two themes occurred: (a) provide teachers professional development on identification, and (b) provide parents with more training on the program for the gifted. Other themes, such as increasing the scope of the GT program and assessment, appeared to complement the recommendation of examining gifted programs from the perspective of minorities. Collectively, these themes support literature

suggesting that educational leaders rethink gifted programs through the cultural lenses of students (Milner & Ford, 2007).

Although the predominant theme focused on training teachers on the needs of gifted minority students, a secondary theme was the implementation of improved nomination and identification procedures in GT programs. The parents' responses complemented the teachers' responses as well as literature on the subject of underrepresentation of historically underserved students in gifted and talented programs that educational leaders rethink the exclusivity associated with these programs (Milner & Ford, 2007; Ross & Gray, 2006). Schools more successful in identifying and placing underserved students into GT programs are aware that "diverse learners' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles sometimes differ from those of Caucasian students" (Schroth & Helfer, 2008, p. 157).

## **Discussion**

Based on the outcomes of research on the underrepresentation of historically underrepresented student groups in GT programs, the phenomenon continues to be pervasive within the U.S. public education system (Anguiano, 2003; Baldwin, 2005; Bonner, 2003; Callahan, 2005; De Valenzuela et al., 2006; Michael-Chadwell, 2008; Milner & Ford 2007; Morris, 2002; Schroth & Helfer, 2008). Both the parents and teachers in this study indicated a need for educational leaders to improve the scope, oversight, and evaluation of GT programs, especially procedures and training needed to increase the numbers of historically underserved students in such programs. Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, and Jantzi (2003) and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2005) suggested that education leaders adopt a balanced leadership framework including instructional and transformational leadership models as a part of an organizational change process. This development should be in addition to developing procedures promoting school improvement and student success. Addressing the phenomenon from the vantage point of transformational leadership signals a transformative approach of ensuring that all students, especially those underserved, have equitable access to rigorous academic programs and curricula.

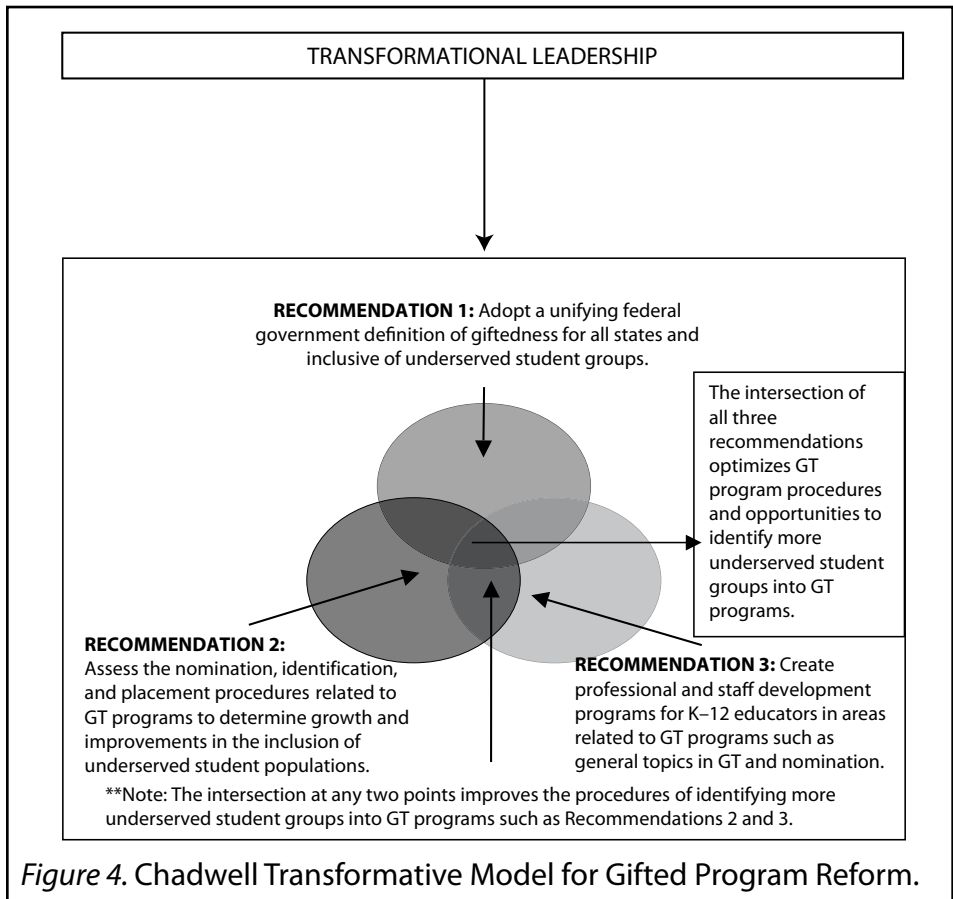
## **Chadwell Transformative Model for Gifted Program Reform**

Based on the findings from this study, the development of the Chadwell Transformative Model for Gifted Program Reform (CTMGPR) emerged, incorporating the participants' recommendations within a framework applicable to improving the identification and placement of historically underserved student populations into gifted and talented programs. Using a Venn diagram to frame the model depicts an interactive relationship within a system (Renzulli, 1999; Sussman, n.d.). Within the context of organizational change, the interconnecting components of the Venn diagram signal an organization's adaptability to accommodate or generate change according to environmental circumstances (Sussman, n.d.). These circumstances include political, cultural, social, or technological factors that affect the functionality of an organization. Furthermore, Sussman (n.d.) asserted that the Venn diagram captures an organization or system's ability to create organizational effectiveness based on how its capacities interact with one another. In contrast, linear models do not account for fluctuations in the system and only support conditions of stability (Hodge & Coronado, 2007).

A transformative change model, visualized within the context of a Venn diagram, is appropriate when recommending systemic changes within the U.S. public education system because the format allows for adaptability to environmental effects. The underrepresentation of underserved student groups in GT programs is an indicator of the limited adaptability associated with nomination, assessment, and identification procedures as well as practices within the U.S. public education system. Focusing on the interconnectivity of procedures should sustain program reform and increase the placement of historically underserved student groups into GT programs.

In order for an organization to move from one lifecycle stage to the next, Adizes (2004) asserted there must be an organizational abandonment of old behavioral patterns to accommodate the new patterns. One of the major challenges imposing on organizational change is reestablishing or acquiring employee commitment. Conger (1999) argued that this challenge lies within the leader's ability to "simultaneously [build] employee morale and commitment" (p. 146).





The premise of the CTMGPR centers on leadership capable of using transformational leadership styles when the organization's position in its lifecycle demands substantial changes in organizational practices (Castiglione, 2006). By integrating the tenets of transformational leadership into the reform process, the actions of the leader as well as followers become apparent when communication of the mission and purpose of the change is transmitted from the leadership to the followers, and when both leaders and followers recognize and accept the systemic outcome by interconnecting the three key actions during the change process. In addition, task recognition and acceptance must occur among followers, as demonstrated by leadership, to enable a transformative process for gifted reform to occur.

Considering the significance of the emerging and predominant themes, the CTMGPR features three key actions suggested to key stakeholders (federal, state, and local education agency leadership):

1. adopt a unifying federal government definition of giftedness for all states and inclusive of student groups underserved;
2. assess the nomination, identification, and placement procedures related to GT programs to determine growth and improvements in the inclusion of underserved student populations; and
3. create professional and staff development programs for K–12 educators in areas related to GT programming such as general topics on giftedness, nomination procedures, and giftedness among minority populations.

The success of these recommendations is contingent on understanding the interconnection of the three key actions rather than those actions being linear processes.

The underrepresentation of African Americans as well as other underserved student groups in gifted and talented programs requires a progressive change effort away from traditional modes of practice. Piaget stated, “The principal goal of education is to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done (Cultural Commission, 2005, p. 17). Looking at the Venn diagram in Figure 4, addressing any two intersections improves the process of identifying more underserved student groups into GT programs. However, the center point or area of intersection for the three circles promotes a goal of optimizing historically underserved student groups’ access into GT programs. The rationale related to the recommendations for transforming gifted and talented programs represents a shift in not repeating procedures of past generations.

## **Rationale for Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1: Adopt a unifying federal government definition of giftedness for all states and inclusive of underserved student groups.** The findings from the study and literature pointed to variances in the definitions and perceptions of giftedness. Both

parents and teachers in the study recognized that bias, both teacher and test, was a factor affecting the recognition of underrepresented gifted students as well as perpetuated misperceptions regarding race and ability. Among the various education agencies in the United States, there are limitless definitions of giftedness. In 1993, the U.S. government revised its definition for giftedness to read: "Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and all areas of human endeavor" (as cited in Ford & Moore, 2005, p. 77).

A need exists for a revision to the federal government's definition maintaining the multicultural aspects of giftedness, yet indicating that traditional modes of demonstrating gifts do not necessarily identify all gifts. The following definition of gifted and talented suggested for the federal government is a selective incorporation of the U.S. Department of Education's (1993), the NAGC's (2005), Gagné's (2000), and the Texas Education Code §29.121 (Education Commission of the States, 2004, Texas section) definitions of giftedness, and Gardner's (2006) definition of intelligence and talent:

When given the chance, children and youth from all social, cultural, socioeconomic, and human endeavor groups can demonstrate or have the potential to demonstrate outstanding giftedness and talents, when they are:

1. observed or assessed in one or more areas of multiple intelligences using nontraditional methods, and
2. compared to their peers of the same age and from the same environment.

Although more discussion might be necessary on defining a gifted and talented child or youth, if a federal definition is linked to federal funding supporting gifted and talented programs, the suggested definition could become the resonating factor in prompting programmatic changes at education agencies at all governmental levels.

Although this article pertains to examining gifted and talented programs from a transformational leadership perspective, the suggested definition also brings attention to the underinclusion of historically underserved students in other academically rigorous programs.

Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation has long ignored the educational needs of the gifted and talented learner. An accountability framework must be established to ensure that: (a) academically above-proficient learners are receiving the services needed to become more successful in their learning, and (b) the identification and placement of students into academically rigorous programs is equitable in its representation of an increasingly diverse student population.

The suggested definition takes into consideration a group's cultural or environmental perceptions of giftedness and talented behaviors as well as acknowledges the power of *chance* as an important catalyst in developing a student's gifts and talents (Gagné, 2000). In addition, the definition promotes the idea that procedures of assessment cannot always identify giftedness and talented behaviors. This is an issue many researchers have suggested prevents underserved students from entering GT programs (e.g., Bonner, 2005; Ford & Moore, 2005; Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, & Tavegia, 2005; Joseph & Ford, 2006).

**Recommendation 2: Assess the nomination, identification, and placement procedures related to GT programs to determine growth and improvements in the inclusion of underserved student populations.** Both parents and teachers in the study acknowledged a need for improved nomination and identification procedures related to GT programs. Approximately 70% of the collective participants in this study perceived the current procedures as not working. Many of their concerns stemmed from the perceptions of: (a) the limited participation of minorities in GT program leadership and oversight committees, (b) poor communication to parents on GT-related issues and programs, (c) poor feedback to teachers on GT assessment results, and (d) concerns regarding culturally biased testing. Based on a review of literature, researchers (e.g., Bonner, 2000; Gallagher, 2004; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006) expressed similar concerns regarding the assessment, nomination, and identification procedures in gifted and talented programs.

Within local education agencies, educational leadership should:

1. Review communication channels such as websites and other parent communication forums to determine if a clear articulation of the program for the gifted and talented is present.

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This review should include an assessment to determine if there is a description of:

- the program's mission and philosophy of giftedness;
  - GT services available in the district and schools;
  - how GT services are determined for eligible students;
  - how students are identified for school-based programs at the elementary and secondary levels;
  - the timeline for nomination and testing;
  - the nomination process and who can nominate;
  - description of GT screening committees and who comprise those committees;
  - forms and explanation of those forms; and
  - educational programs, organizations, and resources available to parents of students with high potential.
2. Make the students in the gifted population representative of the overall local education agency's community (e.g., ethnicity, limited English proficiency, socioeconomic status, and at risk of dropping out of school). This would minimize effects of overrepresentation and underrepresentation among student population groups.
  3. Incorporate alternative modes of assessment in relation to traditional modes of assessment, such as
    - rubric-based portfolios or
    - student demonstrations of gifts and talents unable to be assessed by traditional means of assessment such as intra- or interpersonal interactions or kinesthetics.
  4. Reassess the timeframe in which teachers are to make recommendations. Teacher participant SATP-5 was adamant that this was a necessity for teachers. This perception coincides with research supporting the need to give more weight to a teacher's observations and recommendations (Pierce, Adams, Speirs Neumeister, & Cassidy, 2007).
  5. Develop policies whereby teachers and parents receive more accurate and timely information and feedback on nomination, assessment, and identification decisions as well as options for reassessment.

6. Establish a district-wide GT program advisory committee consisting of parents more representative of the ethnic student population in a school district. For example, if the school district has an 18% African American student population, then the advisory committee should have African American parents representing that percentage. The goal is to improve the diversity of such committees in understanding the needs of gifted minority students.
7. Recruit and hire more African Americans into leadership positions as well as into GT programs as educators and facilitators.

**Recommendation 3: Create professional and staff development programs for K–12 educators in areas related to GT programming such as general topics on giftedness, nomination procedures, and giftedness among minority populations.** Both parents and teachers in the study indicated a need for improvements in the professional development of educators in issues and procedures related to gifted education, especially those related to minorities and other underserved students. Vital to the process of increasing historically underrepresented students' identification and placement in gifted and talented programs are schools and districts' willingness to create more culturally responsive learning communities. The reevaluation of how schools and districts train teachers in identifying candidates for GT programs could be a staff development issue rather than professional development, although the two forums are interrelated (Zepeda, 1999). According to Zepeda (1999), professional staff developers tend to be far too distant from a school site's proximity to have a direct effect on the learning process of teachers and administrators.

Speck and Knipe (1998) asserted that, to enable teachers to educate all students effectively, the focus must be on giving teachers the capacity to help students achieve. Teachers and administrators require information that forces them to reevaluate GT nomination and identification procedures and determine if the procedures hinder any particular group of students from succeeding. In order for state and local education agencies to qualify for capacity building grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), educational leadership at these levels should develop and initiate policies requiring yearly professional and staff development for teachers and administrators in GT program

requirements, the nature of the gifted child, the needs of minority gifted students, understanding the GT assessment process and instruments, and students eligible for GT programs.

### Implications

This research has three implications. Given the limitations of the study and based on the findings, the first implication is that regular classroom teachers and African American parents are aware of discrepancies in identification and placement procedures in gifted education programs. Many of the factors they believed attributed to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs have been well documented in other studies. Similar concerns have been expanded to the underrepresentation of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students (Briggs et al., 2008; De Valenzuela, 2006; Joseph & Ford, 2006).

The second implication is that the Chadwell Transformative Model for Gifted Program Reform includes a suggested action for the federal government to revise its current definition of giftedness. A critical component in the suggested definition is the recognition of *chance* as a viable means of increasing the identification and placement of historically underserved students into gifted programs. Briggs et al. (2008) discussed “front-loading” as a pre-identification method whereby high-potential students receive opportunities to participate in academically rigorous work prior to identification. In addition, federal involvement in reforming gifted education programs to become more culturally and ethnically responsive reduces criticisms that No Child Left Behind ignored issues related to such programs.

The third implication is that the model encourages educators and policymakers at all levels to consider how definitions and perceptions of students’ abilities affect their K–12 and beyond educational experiences. Within the context of gifted education, increases in the identification and placement of historically underserved students due to the implementation of two of the areas of recommendation in the model signals GT program improvements. The optimal goal is the interconnection of all three recommendations. Although not every child can gain placement into gifted programs, improvements in

teacher preparation and professional development in gifted education practices will enable K–12 students to enhance their identified and unidentified gifts and talents.

### Summary

Prior to the legislation of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, Kozol (1991) declared, “Nationwide, Black children are three times as likely as White children to be placed in classes for the mentally retarded but only half as likely to be placed in classes for the gifted” (p. 119). For a nation that proudly declares liberty and justice for all, Kozol’s statement implies that this nation can no longer have hidden testimony of public education’s ineffectiveness. Outcomes from this phenomenological study should challenge educational leaders as well as educators to view the underrepresentation of historically underserved students in gifted and talented programs as a systemic and systematic issue. To reduce the academic gap between those students consistently placed into these programs and those students experiencing identification and placement barriers in the same academically rigorous programs, a transformation in leadership behavior and follower mindset must occur. As a result, educational leadership must be willing to challenge current nomination, assessment, and identification policies and practices in order to improve the educational opportunities for the underrepresented gifted.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions for Regular Classroom Teachers**

1. Please describe your definition of the terms: *giftedness* or *gifted and talented*.
2. Looking at the following descriptions or definitions of giftedness, which do you find more aligned to your philosophical beliefs and why?
  - a. Gifted children are described as demonstrating high-performance achievement singly or in a combination in the following areas: (a) general intellectual ability, (b) specific academic aptitude, (c) creative or productive thinking, (d) leadership ability, (e) visual and performing arts, and (f) psychomotor ability.
  - b. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and all areas of human endeavor.
  - c. [A] gifted and talented student [is] a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:
    - i. exhibits high-performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
    - ii. possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
    - iii. excels in a specific academic field. (Education Commission of the States, 2004, sect. Texas)
3. Describe your lived experiences and perceptions concerning the nomination and identification of students for gifted and talented testing.
4. What types of interactions do you engage in with parents before and during the nomination and identification process?
5. What educational training have you received to enhance your understanding of the needs of minority gifted children?
6. Do you think the current nomination and identification process is working? If so, what is making this process effective; if not, what do you consider to be the obstacles preventing this process from being effective?

7. Research indicates an underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted programs. What factors do you believe contribute to their underrepresentation?
8. What types of strategies do you use to help minority students enter gifted programs?
9. What types of programs are there to help parents become aware of the gifted and talented program and how they can become involved?
10. What recommendations can you offer educational leadership concerning the issues of this research study?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions for Parents**

1. Please describe your definition of the terms: *giftedness* or *gifted and talented*.
2. Looking at the following descriptions or definitions of giftedness, which do you find more aligned to your philosophical beliefs and why?
  - a. Gifted children are described as demonstrating high-performance achievement singly or in a combination in the following areas: (a) general intellectual ability, (b) specific academic aptitude, (c) creative or productive thinking, (d) leadership ability, (e) visual and performing arts, and (f) psychomotor ability.
  - b. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and all areas of human endeavor.
  - c. [A] gifted and talented student [is] a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:
    - i. exhibits high-performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
    - ii. possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or

iii. excels in a specific academic field. (Education Commission of the States, 2004, sect. Texas)

3. Describe your lived experiences and perceptions concerning the nomination and identification of students for gifted and talented testing.
4. What types of interactions did you engage in with teachers during the nomination and identification process?
5. What educational training have you engaged in to enhance your understanding about the needs of minority gifted children?
6. Do you think the current nomination and identification process is working? If so, what is making this process effective; if not, what do you consider to be the obstacles preventing this process from being effective?
7. Research indicates an underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted programs. What factors do you believe contribute to their underrepresentation?
8. What opportunities have you provided your child to improve his or her potential for placement in a gifted program?
9. What types of strategies do you think schools should use to help minority students enter gifted programs?
10. What recommendations can you offer educational leadership concerning the issues of this research study?