CONCEPTS OF GIFTEDNESS:

(RE)CONSTRUCTIONS OF ACADEMIC IDENTITIES THROUGH LITERACY

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IDENTITIES THROUGH LITERACY

Dedication

To my students- past, present, and future. You bring me joy, challenge, and
inspiration.

Thank you for being not only my students but my teachers.

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ABSTRACT

CONCEPTS OF GIFTEDNESS: (RE)CONSTRUCTIONS OF ACADEMIC IDENTITIES THROUGH LITERACY

Sara Evensen Tilles

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Giftedness is typically defined as above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 2012). However, this definition is socially constructed and leans on the literacy practices of the dominant culture. Understanding various contributors and barriers to giftedness (Suboknik, Olszewski-Kubilis, & Worrell, 2012) can help identified students interrogate their own assumptions about their positions in the school system as well as those of teachers and peers. Since the gifted support classroom is relatively immune from the curricular pressures of the regular education classroom, it provides an ideal context for students to use various literacy practices to reflect on the complex dynamics of the public school system including the ways in which dominant literacies are valued over others generally and in regards to giftedness identification and services.

This practitioner-research study followed six gifted fifth-grade readers through a four-month long weekly Book Club as they used literacy and dialogue to reflect on, construct, and critically consider their academic identities. An inductive approach was used to generatively code responses and analyze the data.

Using literature and informational text, the work supported students in using a critical lens to articulate their academic identities, consciously contemplate the expectations placed upon them in the school setting, and consider the implications of their positioning in that context. They engaged in social practices that aided in and demonstrated comprehension and agency, resulting in their re-conceptualizing the notion of giftedness. In addition, participants viewed giftedness through the perspective of culture, ethnicity, and language. Students' transaction with and dialogue surrounding various text types served as a way to challenge the socially constructed notions of giftedness and the structures that support such definitions.

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CHAPTER ONE:
Problematizing Giftedness in the Literacy Classroom

Story of the Questions

As a classroom teacher of 12 years, I have always been astounded by the deep

levels of thinking even the youngest of readers are able to demonstrate in response to text

and the sophisticated ways in which students know themselves as learners. In my first

grade classroom, interactive read-alouds left me in awe of the profound responses coming

from the six year olds at my feet. When I moved to teaching second grade, I sat back as

small groups of seven year olds participated in passionate dialogue during their weekly

book clubs, unaware of the pride bursting from their teacher nearby. Shifting from the

regular education classroom to gifted support, I anticipated students' enriched ability to

comprehend and theorize about text and have observed my students develop theories and

build upon one another's thoughts about novels during Socratic Seminar. In each of

these instances, I have noticed students demonstrating their ability to go beyond literal

meaning to not only make sense of the text but also of the life experiences of the

characters and themselves. Throughout my career, my students have been a source of

awe for me, even though the worlds in which they live have emanated with tension. From

that dissonance grew the questions that blossomed into this study.

The power of literacy pedagogy that recognizes and makes space for collaborative

student engagement and voice is evident. In addition to the ability to contemplate text in a

sophisticated manner, when given the space to express their thoughts, children are

amazingly self-aware of their abilities as well as the expectations others have of them. An

example from my practice comes from when I led guided reading groups in my first grade classroom. As encouraging as I was with my struggling readers and as excited as they would be over mastering a new "chapter" in their text, I also observed them hiding their book from their peers, conscious of the difference in their reading levels. Another year during my second graders' Writer's Workshop, whenever a student was having trouble spelling a tricky word, a classmate would yell out, "Go ask Brian! He's the human dictionary!" During my year as an eighth grade English teacher, I could easily identify the jock, the artist, and the bookworm as well as what types of academic behaviors were expected of them; so could everyone else in the room. Eventually, I began to wonder how teachers' expectations of the roles students play in school affect their education and the way they view themselves.

Now as an elementary gifted support teacher, the ways that my expectations of students influence my pedagogy are even more obvious to me. While all children engage in complex literacy practices in their homes and communities, in the gifted support context I am surrounded by students who consistently demonstrate mastery of school sanctioned literacy practices. They read advanced texts fluently and apply higher order thinking skills to their responses. Still, whenever I talk with classroom teachers and gifted students about their experiences with one another, complex tensions emerge. For instance, my students tell me that when they know their language arts teacher is going to do a sticky note check[1], they quickly jot down a few ideas and place them throughout

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[1] Sticky notes are a literacy practice in which students write short responses to the text on Post-its. While meant to encourage close reading and engagement, in practice they have become more of a superficial response and a form of (inauthentic) assessment.

their books so they can get back to their reading. Rather than authentically respond to the text, the students treat this practice as a job to complete. Another example of tension is that it is not uncommon for me to stop by a classroom and observe one of my gifted students secretly (or not so secretly) reading a novel while the teacher is in the middle of a lesson. Clearly, there are academic practices students are capable of but do not see as valuable or engaging. Yet, adults expect gifted students to be independent, respectful, and confident in their ability to master new material of various types quickly and with little effort. These skills are not inherent; rather, these particular students live in home and school communities that inculcate them in opportunities to engage in the literacy practices of the dominant culture[2]. As a practitioner researcher, I cannot be aware of these tensions without doing something about them. Thus, it seemed natural for me to take up these ideas and engage in teacher inquiry as a key aspect of my doctoral work.

Wrapped up in these complexities is the fact that the school community highly values the label of giftedness. Parents push for their children to be tested and will go to an outside psychologist for identification if their child does not qualify through the school psychologist's process. Yet, gifted support in the home school does not seem to fulfill the expectations of all students and their families. In the 2012-2013 school year, Sunshine School District[3] paid out approximately $1.2 million to area charter and cyber schools, of which $180,000 went specifically to a local charter school geared towards

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[2] The cultural make-up of gifted identification at Homedale Elementary is particularly interesting. During the 2013-2014 school year, the 57 identified students comprised of 23 Caucasians, 23 Indians, 11 Asians, and 2 of mixed race. While the dominant culture is Eurocentric, the Indian and Asian cultures have traditionally emphasized school practices and dedication to educational pursuits which align with those of the school system. The ways in which culture intersects with gifted identification is explored in Chapter 5.
[3] Pseudonym

academically gifted students in grades 6-12. Since there are no exit interviews, we do not

know why families are attracted to a charter school over our highly regarded public

school system, one that was placed in the top 20 districts in the state for math, reading,

and writing scores in PSSAs and whose high school was ranked in the top 15 in the state

on the U.S. News & World Report's Best High Schools list. However, the district still

needs to know what is being offered in alternate settings that appeals to the gifted learner

and his family as well as what is being sacrificed by removing these learners from their

public school placement.

When I think back to my teaching experiences over the past twelve years, I can't

help but wonder how students see *themselves* within the framework of the school system.

In particular, in a community that views giftedness as a highly sought after label, how do

students identified as gifted understand the myriad expectations of their peers, parents,

and teachers? Once a child has the label of giftedness, how do they interpret membership

in that group? How do they see their gifted identities as fitting (or not) in school?

Since these students have been identified as particularly adept at academics and

critical thinking, an examination of their literacy practices was the ideal avenue to

supporting them as they considered these questions. In this dissertation, I make the case

that gifted students should be asked to think about who they are as learners, thereby

supporting these students in having agency over their learning as well as helping teachers

understand how to better meet their needs within the home school. Doing this work will

result in students' greater understanding of the complex ways in which their abilities,

passions, learning behaviors, and beliefs intersect with the expectations others have of

them. Weaving identity work with a critical look at the many influences on the social constructs of giftedness will increase students' awareness of not only themselves, but the unique contributions every individual has to offer. Perhaps providing the space for gifted students to consciously consider their position in the school system via their areas of strength would engage them in ways that would, in part, fulfill their educational needs.

Problem Statement

The era of accountability has narrowed the focus of what teachers should teach so that state-mandated academics are seen as the sole purpose of school. While the Common Core has raised the levels of rigor expected of students, it still emphasizes school sanctioned intellectual practices to the detriment of the development of childhood curiosity[4] (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). In an effort to prepare our children for post-secondary academia, the human objective -- including the development of students as active participants rather than spectators -- is often ignored (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). Pedagogy that empowers learners to consciously and critically consider issues of power, knowledge, and inequality locally and globally is often overlooked. All too often, "students' constructed student 'selves' are eliminated from dialogue about academic

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[4] The Common Core State Standards use the end goal of college and career readiness to back-map literacy dimensions to the pre-kindergarten level, resulting in even primary grades with foundations of high level textual analysis and production. While the CCSS leave instructional methods up to the individual district, the focus on phonics, classical content such as myths and legends, and a rhetorical approach to writing reflect the values of the CCSS authors, demonstrating the value of a particular set of literacy practices. The assumption is that the use of a universal set of standards can overcome the diversity of the population and result in a country of students with uniform skills and knowledge. Rather than a focus on making sense of the world and one's place in it, the standards are heavily focused on use of text evidence while unique, personal transaction with text is ignored.

expectations [and] personal texts are excluded from the curriculum" (Rex, 2003, p.36). The lack of space in the curriculum for student voices and multiple interpretations of text undermines student engagement and agency over one's learning. Therefore, we need to provide opportunities for students to use literacy to explore who they are and their place in the world.

As teachers support learners as they explore literacy and identity, bringing our own expertise and wonder as teachers is necessary (Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012). Curriculum in which all participants "have the freedom to make choices, to create personal meaning, to see curriculum as connected to something relevant, and to maintain control of their learning" (Davenport, Jaeger, & Lauritzen, 1995, p.61) is especially conducive to this work. Because teachers and curriculum are central in the development of children's attitudes and behaviors (Wile, 2000), there are powerful implications when students' questions, thoughts, and ideas are also positioned as central in the design of educational experiences (Scholl, 2010). In this context, power structures are not eliminated but flattened as the roles teachers and students play in the classroom shift. Teacher and student readers are positioned to transact with text according to these shifting roles. In addition, engaging students in dialogue about their intellectual worlds supports them in "lay[ing] claim to their educational experience" (Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012, p.481). The concept and purpose of literacy, then, is expanded to be defined as "the range of competencies needed to achieve academically *and* to effect positive personal and social change" (North, 2009, p.557, emphasis added). Literacy is

no longer merely about reading the word, but about reading the world (Freire, 1970). In schooling and in society, students read both the word of the text, as well as the world of their experiences. By providing spaces for critical literacy we can support students in recognizing the ideologies behind institutions, social practices, and text that work to privilege some and oppress others (Freire & Macedo, 1987). With this knowledge, students can actively challenge existing structures. Thus, the word is a vehicle for understanding and acting upon the world.

Although all children benefit from an education that values dialogue and recognizes the unique identity of each learner, gifted students are particularly in need of such pedagogy. While the goal of remediation is to help students become more like their typically developing peers, "…the focus of gifted educators is to develop the talents of students in such a manner that they become more different from their regular education peers" (Hughes & Murawki, 2001, p.197) as enrichment and acceleration causes them to move farther from the mean. So that students can make sense of this dynamic, it is imperative that teachers incorporate sociocultural work into the gifted curriculum in order for students to deconstruct what it means to be "different." As students are positioned, or position themselves, in academic roles (Rex, 2003), their unique positioning within the school system as 'superhuman intellectuals' who learn independent of instruction and are advanced in all areas prompts the need for dialogue, meaning making about the specific nature of giftedness, acknowledgement that giftedness is context-dependent, and a redefinition of the label. Understanding the complex forces that create the label of giftedness allows students to recognize the tensions and privileges that exist within the

label and the accompanying opportunities. If the unfulfilled need to find their meaningful place within the regular education environment is a factor for the desire to seek charter schools exclusive to the gifted child, guiding students in unpacking what it means to be a gifted student in the school context and how one can understand that may help students feel more at home in the public school.

How do gifted students feel about their educations? While the voices of the students themselves are missing from much of the literature, a few studies have been done in which researchers followed up with gifted students later in adulthood. Hertzog (2003) interviewed 50 college students about their gifted experiences in the K-12 school system in an effort to evaluate gifted program effectiveness and recognize their sometimes segregated nature. Participants shared negative feelings about being separated from their peers, distress about the inflexibility of grouping procedures, and the stigma attached to the gifted program. They saw a noticeable difference in the expectations, behavior, and enthusiasm of teachers in the gifted versus general education classes; gifted support classes provided a more relaxed atmosphere and engaging instruction. For many of the participants, this led to a sense of injustice that they had access to a better education than their peers. While this seems to be in direct conflict with the desire for some students to attend schools meant exclusively for gifted students, perhaps that setting provides a safe alternative to the pseudo-segregated nature of gifted services within the home school. Teacher facilitated reflection and discussion surrounding these issues may have supported gifted students in resolving these conflicts.

Based on the influences of state mandates, the unique positioning of the gifted learner, and the lack of student voice in the educational system, it is imperative that we allow our students to enter into the conversation about teaching and learning. As a gifted support teacher, I am in the unique position of having the flexibility to design educational experiences for my students. While it would be ideal for all students to engage in this work, this study sought to work within and against the system in some small way with the hope that the work would enhance the worlds of my participants.

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Research Questions

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Recognizing the absence of current student voices in understanding how the school system provides for gifted students, the need for gifted education to include instruction on sociocultural issues, and the contested nature of the label "gifted" itself, this study offered six gifted students the opportunity to critically examine their identities along with their positions in the school system and prompted dialogue about the ways in which we might respond to these dynamics. In developing the following research questions, it was my intent to support my students in doing conscious identity work, especially surrounding their academic selves, and provide them an opportunity to have their voices heard. Research questions were framed as follows:

- What issues of identity do students consider when they transact with text surrounding themes of giftedness and difference?

- What are the social practices that this group engages in during book club?

- How does the label of giftedness intersect with students' ethnic and cultural identities?

- What is the gifted support teacher's role in this work?

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

Embedded in these questions are assumptions about the active, conscious nature of the learner. The following strands of work form the lens through which I read and write text, conduct research, and view the world.

Reader-response Theory

I find reader-response theory particularly helpful as a way to challenge traditional school sanctioned literacy practices in that it places the reader at the forefront of meaning-making and expands the notion of what it means to understand text. Although there are many variations, all reader-response theories place readers into transaction, rather than interaction, with the text. The term transaction implies a dialogic relationship in which the text both affects and is affected by the reader. Because each reader and reading is unique, multiple interpretations of the same text exist and are considered valid. These theories explore "who" the reader is and how, with all her experiences, a reader makes meaning out of the text. When reader responses are shared, both common and unique experiences are discovered. In a respectful environment, these become powerful

strategies for gifted and regular education students to realize commonalities and appreciate unique thinking.

Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory (1982) recognizes the importance of the relationship between the reader and the text. She moves the interpretive authority away from author and text and proposes that meaning is created only through the convergence of the reader and text. Her distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading is important not only in its definition of two very different reading stances, but because of her contention that both stances have a place in reading instruction. Although text structure may seem to suggest one approach over the other, the context and reasons for reading will determine how the reader will engage with the text. Rosenblatt (1964) sees aesthetic reading especially as an active endeavor in which the reader's schema about literature and life are activated with the text serving as a guide for reworking one's consciousness. This is a highly personal approach to reading and strives to make the most intimate connections between reader and text, ones which I would argue can be used to examine one's identity. Yet Rosenblatt views reading as not only personal, but social. Because each interpretation is unique, multiple interpretations exist even by the same reader, all of which can be shared and influence subsequent readings. This approach encourages the reader to integrate and assess how all one's former knowledge can live in the same intellectual world with new information or experiences. For the gifted reader, using literacy practices as an opportunity for critical thinking and interrogation of assumptions is especially important for students' understanding of the

world (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Transaction between the reader, the text, and other readers results in increased metacognitive and world awareness in the gifted.

Wolfgang Iser (1978) sees fiction in particular as a means for telling the reader something about reality. When readers must fill indeterminacies, they become active participants in the meaning-making of the text; imagination must be invoked. In contrast to our engagement with the real world, engagement with literary fiction is perceived through "imaginative interpretations of sensory perceptions" (Sumara, 1996, p.37). Yet these imaginative interpretations have powerful consequences for reality:

> The participant will see what he would not have seen in the course of his everyday life; the observer will grasp something which has hitherto never been real to him. In other words, the literary text enables its readers to transcend the limitations of their own real-life situation; it is not a reflection of any given reality, but it is an extension or broadening of their own reality. (Iser, 1978, p.79)

This can be a highly motivating approach to reading which nurtures curiosity and wonderment and encourages consideration of identity.

Finally, Bleich's conception of the false nature of reality is helpful in adding to the idea of reader as meaning-maker. Bleich (1976) contends that there is no objective knowledge. Rather, reality is constructed by each individual. By reading and discussing literature, we are able to share our subjectivity. This creation of inter-subjectivity often fosters the revision of ideas but at the very least makes us aware that alternate subjectivities exist. This approach strives to develop a point of view which assists the student in clarifying her own identity and providing opportunities for interaction with other points of view. Gifted students are often accustomed to drawing quick intellectual conclusions, or what is for them the 'obvious,' so that they may miss the subtleties and

sensory characteristics of the literary experience. The developmental level of the learner in nudged from an egocentric point of view to a more mature level of awareness and respect of multiple perspectives.

Literacy as a Sociocultural Practice

Like reader-response theory, proponents of New Literacy Studies see literacy as a social practice that is embedded in context. NLS questions the role of dominant literacies and how politics determine how literacy is defined in ways that value some literacies while marginalizing others, work that prompts critique of existing power structures and is especially helpful in critically considering how giftedness is a social construction. Street's ideological model of literacy offers a culturally sensitive model that sees literacy as "embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (Street, 2003, p. 77) and places value on the local context and argues that it is connected to global considerations through power relations. Although literary theorists tend to consider literacy practices as involving written text, those working from the New Literacy Studies perspective argue that language is just one of several modes of communication. The work of Gunther Kress in multimodalities, for example, recognizes that people use multiple strategies to deal with literacy tasks (Street & Lefstein, 2007). These forms of communication are highly social involving a performer and an audience and never just one individual receiver of literacy. Literacy becomes both an intimate and shared social experience. In this way, New Literacy Studies expand the conceptualization of literacy into literacies while continuing to recognize the social nature of those literacies.

Yet New Literacy Studies does not represent the first time educational theorists have thought about literacy as a social practice. Although written almost 100 years ago, in *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education* John Dewey (1916 and 1938 respectively) sought to foreground the relationship between formal schooling and ordinary life. He recognized the social nature of learning and the opportunity that social practices offer, emphasizing the individual as a meaningful part of society and the practical element of learning. He argued that acquiring knowledge is a social and interactive process and therefore students should have an active role in their education. Dewey saw school as not only a place to learn content, but to realize one's full potential and place in the democratic society.

In the field of development psychology, Vygotsky (1978) also recognized the social nature of learning, asserting that the cognitive processes necessary for deep levels of understanding can only occur through interaction with others. His concept of the zone of proximal development is a useful way to think about how social interaction around a text can support students in developing their literacies in ways that would not be possible when working with text individually. Recognizing the social practices that demonstrate individuals' use of literacy is an important first step in building on that knowledge in a more formal educational setting.

Education for Social Justice

Practitioners who see education as an avenue for social justice view students through a human lens and work to embody the personal in the academic. Those who

believe in this approach expand the purpose of school to address not only academic, but personal and societal goals as well. School is viewed as a place to examine the self, the community, and the dominant culture in order to support young people in becoming productive members of a democratic society. As a practitioner in the K-12 school system, the need for embedding the personal in the academic has been my greatest passion. I admire practitioners like Patricia Carini, who structured her Prospect School in ways that honored the child first and foremost independent from customary assessments, holding as its primary responsibility the dignity of each child (Carini, Himley, Christine, & Espinosa, 2009). Her teachers viewed student work as true and partial, physical evidence capable of revealing the desires, passions, and goals of the child, as well as at once ordinary and extraordinary (Carini, 2001). Carini recognizes that all humans simply do not learn and make sense of the world in the same way and therefore should not be taught or assessed identically either. When thinking about our gifted students, following Carini's lead would inspire us to consider the multi-faceted nature of the student -- including expanding the idea of *who* gets to be gifted -- rather than pigeon holing them into an expected mold.

Unfortunately, school systems often do not recognize the capacities that students bring with them from their homes and communities. Campano's work in the "second classroom," a space created not only during regular hours but before and after school and that extended to community and home spaces, sought to foreground the students' complex contributions at home and in neighborhoods despite the fact that they were positioned as objects of remediation at school (2007). Through the sharing and

intersections of stories, a community was created in which students were recognized as already being productive global citizens. Yet this capacity was not recognized in the school setting. Consequently, Campano contends that equitable distribution of resources should be thought of as a precondition, not a reward, for educational progress.

Similarly, Nieto (1999) writes about the ways in which the school environment hinders or supports learning. She recognizes that children come to school with differing amounts of cultural capital; when students from the dominant culture enter school with experiences valued by the system, they are put at an advantage. Though many teachers believe that racism no longer exists, the limited educational opportunities available to students of diverse backgrounds acts as a type of second-generation discrimination, one in which the subtle racism of unequal access to learning through inflexible tracking and differentiated curriculum results in a cycle of low expectations and poor achievement. The pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, materials, and climate of a school support or work against the ways of knowing valued in the student's everyday life. This is an issue of socialization, not ability. The more we can align these cultures the more successful students will be in the school context.

Published in 1983, Heath's ethnographic study, *Ways with Words*, illustrates this point. She found that the children of Roadville and Trackton both displayed complex literacy practices in their home communities. However, the more 'successful' students were those of Maintown, a mainstream, middle-class community made up of children whose home literacies matched closely with those valued at school. Rather than viewing students through an additive lens, the general view in the school was that non-mainstream

homes lack what mainstream homes have. Therefore, the children of Roadville and Trackton were assumed to come from an illiterate tradition. Instead, Heath found that each community's ways of reading and using this knowledge was interdependent with the ways children learn to talk in their social interactions with caregivers; the traditional dichotomy of the literate and oral tradition was invalid. This research is useful as I approached the study with the belief that my students are complex people who come to school already full of capacities formed in the social contexts of their communities whether or not they align with school expectations. Such a kaleidoscopic view (Royster, 2000) reminds me that the picture we see of our students is always partial. They hold multiple identities in multiple contexts and their identities at school are just one small part of who they are. In reality, the school appears to view students through its own lens which by its nature limits the view.

Critical literacy views education as one of the human services of our society, questions what groups are privileged and disprivileged by pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment, and has as its goal the empowerment of people to problematize oppression and affect change. Theorists and literacy educators such as Freire, Kincheloe, Giroux, and Edelsky see education in general and literacy in particular as having the potential to engage students in interrogating the underlying ideologies that operate within society and to alleviate human suffering. In fact, Freire "maintained that education [has] as much to do with the teachable heart as it [does] with the mind" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 3). Freire's work with the oppressed emphasized liberation through the active quest for freedom. He challenged the dichotomy between humans and the world, arguing against the idea that "a

person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator" (Freire, 1970, p. 75), similar to the views held by reader-response theorists. However for liberation to occur, "[students] must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (p. 49). Thus, individuals must have agency before they can take action.

Through critical literacy, individuals are acknowledged as unfinished beings and are encouraged to participate in acts of cognition rather than simply receive knowledge. Critical reflection is considered a form of action. The teacher-student dichotomy is also questioned, so that both are simultaneously teacher and student. Therefore, teachers must continually reflect on their role. Freire believed that teachers should adapt a humanizing pedagogy which teaches students to educate themselves about their reality (Freire, 1970). As a critical pedagogue, I am learning alongside my students and although I act as a facilitator, I do not believe that I have all the answers. Rather, in this study we co-constructed meta-knowledge about the concept of giftedness. The four dimensions of critical literacy identified by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002)- disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice- demonstrate the view of education as both a personal and political endeavor with the potential of having major consequences for society. Literacy experiences allow students, along with teachers, the opportunity to examine powerful social issues in a safe and guided environment. Certainly, our gifted students can and should be nurtured to develop their talents to help sift through the

problems and solutions of humankind, but we should also be mindful of the implications of students' placement in gifted programs as a path towards certain courses, certain colleges, and certain jobs. How might that positioning cause students to view their non-gifted peers? Vice-versa? Like any population experiencing the consequences of preconceived notions of their position in school and society, these students have a particular need to consciously deliberate issues of knowledge, power, and culture.

Historical Context

What do we mean when we talk about giftedness? What does gifted education look like and what are its goals? Understanding the historical context of giftedness in the United States and what the literature says about giftedness and the purpose of gifted education provides a working definition from which the study will expand.

Historical Background

While in the pre-scientific era, creativity and high achievement in literature, astronomy, music, and dance was highly valued (Phillipson & McCann, 2007), the late 1800s brought mandatory school attendance laws and the Industrial Revolution to the United States, prompting a standardization of society. The purpose of education was to assimilate immigrants and freed African Americans which diminished the potential for talent development of many in an effort to integrate them into the dominant society rather than explore their culture (Friedman & Rogers, 1998). In the early 1900s as diversity increased, grade levels were established and children were categorized. Recognizing

rather than developing talents continued during World War I when the army used intelligence testing to identify people who could fill positions in the war. High intelligence was measured using psychological tests originally developed by French researchers Binet and Simon to identify children of inferior intelligence and adapted by Lewis Terman into the Stanford-Binet in 1916 (www.nagc.org). Throughout the next few decades, standardized testing, tracking, and differentiated curriculum aimed to establish order and respond to the realization that graded schools could not adequately provide for all children. Thus, the school system was used to prepare students for their expected adult lives as students were moved ahead on the basis of their achievement (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). Mental testing became a way to rationalize these educational practices.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the belief that intelligence was hereditary was widely held. Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius*, published in 1869, described his study of over 400 British men which concluded that intelligence was a result of heredity and natural selection. In the US, a lack of English proficiency was seen as an indicator of low mental ability and reinforced the belief that intelligence was hereditary. Therefore, it was believed that attempting to educate these populations at high levels would be futile (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). The 1950s and the Space Race caused the U.S. government to recognize the need for intelligent and talented people to be educated and money was spent to identify these students. However, the belief remained that intelligence was innate and needed to be identified rather than fostered.

It was not until the Civil Rights movement that the use of mental testing and the consequent inequity in educational opportunity was brought to the forefront (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). The Marland Report (1972) contained the first formal definition of giftedness and described the failing state of gifted education. It increased the public's awareness of the neglect of the gifted population and broadened the definition of giftedness to include general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability (Phillipson & McCann, 2007). Based off of that report, Congress established the US Office of Gifted and Talented and categorical funding was made available for gifted education. However, the actual amount totaled about $1 per year per student (Ford & Harris III, 1999). For decades various acts were passed which alternately eliminated and reinstated funding for gifted education and the US Office of Gifted and Talented was even closed for some time. Nevertheless, since the creation of programs was not mandated, legislation was not consistently effective.

Consequently, reports released in the late 20th century continually demonstrate American students' failure to compete with international counterparts. A Nation at Risk included US students' lackluster scores and promoted changes in policy and practice in order to appropriately provide curriculum for gifted learners (1983). While the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, part of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1988, was created in order to provide financial assistant to state and local educational institutions and gave special priority to the economically disadvantaged, handicapped, and English Language Learners, it did not

mandate the creation of programs (Ford & Harris III, 1999). The United State Department of Education released its report National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent (1993) which outlined the continued neglect of advanced youth (www.nagc.org). Clearly, while attempts had been made to acknowledge the need for specialized programming for talented youth, systematic and sustainable opportunities had yet to be established.

Whether No Child Left Behind (2002) acts as a support or hindrance to the gifted population is contestable. While Javits was included in NCLB, expanded to offer statewide grants, and modified the definition of gifted and talented students, the overall focus and funding of the educational system remains on raising the achievement level of struggling students. Despite an expanded concept of what it means to be gifted, schools still tend to rely on one narrow measure- the intelligence test- to assess and label students as gifted (Friedman & Rogers, 1998). Schools must now be tasked with acting as talent developers rather than purely identifiers.

Conceptualizations of Giftedness and Gifted Support in the 21st century

Current definitions of giftedness vary from state to state, so consulting the literature on conceptualizations of giftedness is especially important in understanding what we mean when we use this term. The most widely accepted definition involves a three-ring conception which describes the overlap of three areas: above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 2012). Above-average ability refers to a general and/or specific intellectual ability thought to remain somewhat constant over

time, typically as measured by intelligence tests such as the Stanford-Binet or the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children. Task commitment, on the other hand, refers to an affective collection of behaviors such as perseverance, will power, and positive energy. Creativity may or may not be academically based and includes traits like curiosity, originality, and willingness to defy customary practices. The literature describes gifted individuals who are intrinsically motivated with high levels of passion and drive, thrive on proving their ability through accomplishments, and tend to require little direct instruction or practice before mastering content and skills. Gifted learners are also described as having a "decontextualized mind" (Rogers, 2007, p. 391) in which they store conceptual information in their in long-term memory as a whole rather than as unrelated pieces. While I certainly observe these attributes in many of my gifted students, it would be misleading to use a blanket statement to describe this population. That would ignore the individual academic and affective profiles of the students and fail to acknowledge the range of abilities and behaviors even within the identified gifted population. Additionally, the assumption that non-gifted students are *not* intrinsically motivated, curious, big picture thinkers reinforces a deficit view of children.

Instead, the sociocultural implications of using the three-ring definition (often with an emphasis on the above-average ability component) to develop the gifted identification process must be examined. Suboknik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2012) recognize additional contributors to giftedness, emphasizing the importance of parental influence, opportunity, cultural factors, and chance in determining whether or not a student is identified as gifted. Additionally, they point out that even when a student

is identified as a gifted learner, affective qualities such as ability to cope with challenges and criticism, motivation, and willingness to take intellectual risks will discern who will go on to develop higher levels of talents and who will not. What Coleman describes as the phenomenon of "educational malnourishment" (as cited in Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012, p. 180), lack of access, poverty, and low expectations also act as barriers to gifted development. Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell's discussion of both contributors and barriers to giftedness reminds us to think critically about who gets to be labeled as "gifted." Educators must critically reconsider whether giftedness is innate or can be developed over time, whether it differs from being academically advanced, and what sociocultural factors influence the gifted identification process.

Taking a Critical Stance

Considering the history of discrimination within the American public school system can help illuminate ways in which the gifted identification process may recognize certain groups over others. Although there is data to suggest that African Americans have experienced increases in academic achievement since desegregation, there continues to be a discrepancy between the African American and white learning experience (Gadsden, Smith, & Jordan, 1996). While research has shown that the variation in the black-white achievement gap does not exist when children start school, by fourth grade the gap is substantial (O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009). Thus, differences in achievement appear to be school-based rather than race- or child-based. School

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organization and resources are vital for student academic success, yet as Gadsden, Smith, and Jordan (1996) point out, access to quality buildings and materials are not enough. How well children are treated, not only with kindness but high expectations and instructional goals, is a key factor in student achievement. While overt forms of racism are not as common in the schools today as in the past, these actions have been replaced by more subtle forms of racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1985). The American belief in fairness and racial equality confounded by structures of institutional racism leads many white Americans to develop feelings of antipathy towards blacks and other minorities. But because overt racism is no longer socially acceptable the focus centers on surrogate issues such as finance or what is perceived to be a lack of support at home. In the midst of this, the intellectual gifts of minorities are overlooked as the academic practices of the dominant culture are valued.

Donna Y. Ford has done extensive work in the area of giftedness and multiculturalism. Her interviews revealed that gifted Black students experience a racially and culturally limited curriculum, causing school to lack relevance and decreasing motivation and interest in school (Ford, 1995 as cited in Ford & Harris III, 1999). Instead, she suggests educators teach from a multicultural perspective in which they challenge and increase understanding of assumptions and stereotypes and consider content from a broader perspective. Ford and Harris III (1999) emphasize the need for multicultural considerations not only in programming but in assessment and identification as well. Test bias has been documented in regards to content, construct, and predictive ability, a concern since nearly 90% of states rely primarily on standardized, norm-

references tests for gifted identification (VanTassel-Baska, Patton, & Prillaman, 1989 as cited in Ford & Harris III, 1999). In addition, teacher recommendation remains a common method of referring students for gifted testing. As culturally diverse learners may demonstrate their knowledge and exhibit learning behaviors differently from the majority, these very capable thinkers may be overlooked in the identification process.

Helpful in thinking about expanding our definitions of giftedness to recognize qualities in all students, Joseph Renzulli (2012) identifies two types of giftedness. High-achieving or schoolhouse giftedness describes students who learn quickly in the traditional school environment. They are organized, follow school rules, and respond quickly to instruction. Creative productive giftedness, on the other hand, involves the ability to apply traits to economic, cultural, and social capital. These individuals are adept at creative problem solving, the creation of well-thought-out artistic work, and design. While Renzulli reminds us that these two types of giftedness are not mutually exclusive, they should be considered as we design appropriate instruction for these learners. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences also takes a multidimensional approach to defining intelligence. Using Multiple Intelligences as an alternative definition of giftedness recognizes the varied ways in which learners have gifts and talents and can be adapted for any learner, content area, or grade level (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). Unfortunately, due to the amount of financial resources, teacher training, and time necessary to appropriately provide services to students using these expanded models of giftedness, they are not often used in the public school system. True individualization, it

turns out, is a challenging endeavor, one the public schools do not seem ready to fully embrace.

Programming for the Gifted Learner

Even when giftedness is limited to academic achievement, there is sometimes resistance to addressing the needs of gifted learners due to the increased focus on improving the abilities of struggling learners and the assumption that gifted children will be successful in school no matter what (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012). However, this view goes against the philosophy that *all* students require instruction and motivation in order to develop their talents. Programming that incorporates a variety of organizational techniques and instruction with an emphasis on inquiry, acceleration, higher order thinking, and affective issues has been shown to be most successful (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007), including the Stanley Model of Talent Identification and Development, Renzulli Schoolwide Enrichment Triad Model, Schlicter Models for Talents Unlimited, Steinberg's Triarchic Componential Model, and Van-Tassle-Baska's Integrated Curriculum Model. Such models stress student decision-making and engagement in complex creative problem solving and employ a variety of structures including pull-out services, grouping, acceleration, and enrichment. They include opportunities for gifted learners to be exposed to daily challenge, work independently in their specific areas of talent, socialize and learn with like-ability peers, and participate in instruction that is adapted in terms of pace, practice, and organization that best meets the needs of the gifted learner (Rogers, 2007). Teachers and students work as expert-novice

pairs and learners easily link new knowledge to previously learned skills. This is

instruction that all learners deserve, not just those identified as gifted.

But the development of academic ability is only part of the reason for specially

designed instruction for gifted learners. Renzulli (2012) describes the purposes of gifted

education as the following:

> …to provide young people with maximum opportunities for self-
> fulfillment through the development and expression of one or a
> combination of performance areas where superior potential may be
> present…to increase society's reservoir of persons who will help
> solve the problems of contemporary civilization by becoming
> producers of knowledge and art rather than mere consumers of
> existing information…[and] to show the sensibility in modeling
> special programs and services after the modus operandi of these
> persons rather than after those of good lesson learners. (p. 151)

Thus, gifted support classrooms should not only assist students in accessing and making

use of academic information, but also prepare students for problem-solving, leadership

roles, and self-actualization. If highly able people end up in positions of power in

society, one aspect of gifted education should be to infuse a sense of responsibility to

society at large. Executive functions like realistic self-assessment, action orientation, and

altruistic leadership comprise behaviors that will be necessary in the anticipated roles of

gifted learners and should therefore be taught through gifted support. Gifted support

should also be structured in such a way that instruction is modeled after the complex

ways in which the gifted understand and apply information.

Implications for Policy and Practice

       The definitions of giftedness and current gifted support have important implications for future practice. Policy contends that gifted students learn differently from their non-gifted peers and that they are therefore in need of specially designed instruction. Most of this instruction is focused on academics and 21st century skills, areas the Common Core now emphasizes to a much greater extent than the Standards of the NCLB era, yet the literature emphasizes the need for psychosocial work as well as academics (Grant, 2002; Renzulli, 2012; Roeper, 1996; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). Although teachers are not in a position to facilitate psychosocial work, they can provide structures that would support students in critically examining their positions as academics in their communities which would prompt them to consider the sociocultural influences at work in society. In an era of high-stakes testing, teachers are afraid to teach in ways that differ from the lock and step curriculum, and administrators are afraid to let them (Gentry, 2006), but while classroom teachers for the most part are bounded by a set curriculum, as a gifted support teacher I have the freedom to design curriculum and instruction that will meet the individual needs of my students. This in itself demonstrates inequities in the structure of the school system. What does it say about current views of giftedness that the gifted support context is somewhat immune from the curriculum and assessment demands of the regular education classroom? This may mean considering the multiple purposes of education in general and gifted education in particular and expanding the ways in which we enact those beliefs.

Although I would argue that it applies to all children, the field of gifted education recognizes the need of the gifted learner to search for meaning (Gross, 1993; Hollingworth, 1942; Silverman, 1993, as cited in Grant, 2002). As big picture thinkers who ponder philosophical questions about life (Schultz & Delisle, 1997), education must move beyond schooling and address the "deepest, most powerful, most important desires and inclinations of gifted children" (Grant, 2002, p. 13), namely self, meaning, spirituality, purpose, ethics, and the like. For gifted learners, "self-actualization, talent development, and creativity are all intertwined," (Roeper, 1996, p. 18). Roeper (1996) is worried by gifted educations' focus on the development of cognitive abilities of children, asserting that it should also be concerned with "the growth of the individual as well as his/her responsible membership in the world community" (p. 18). Learning without self-knowledge, then, is unconnected and meaningless (Grant, 2002; Palmer, 1998; Roeper, 1996; Schultz & Delisle, 1997). Reflecting on life "through the narrow lens of the possible and acceptable in school" (Grant, 2002, p. 11) can be a scary proposition for both teachers and students. Yet, this work would counter the rise in psychological distress, stress, and boredom that occurs when gifted youth feel unable to move forward in their thinking (Rogers, 2007). It would also act as a way to work within and against the system as students critically consider the sociocultural implications of their label. The inequities in the gifted identification process as well as the types of education these students receive compared to their peers makes it critical for all stakeholders to interrogate the assumptions inherent in these structures.

Conclusion

Gifted education has been largely ignored as the era of accountability has prompted school systems to focus their attention and resources on ensuring that all students are proficient on academic assessments. However, the literature demonstrates that the gifted population is still very much in need of specially designed instruction that not only targets academic gifts but the sociocultural domain as well. Coinciding with what we know about how gifted students make meaning, this work should incorporate dialogue, problem-posing pedagogy, and student choice. This study worked to support six of my gifted students in participating in conscious identity work in ways that acknowledge readers' unique transactions with text and develop agency over one's education as well as critically consider the ways in which giftedness is socially constructed. In the following chapters, the reader will come to know Sapphire, MS, Ludwig, Markus, May, and Tim and understand how they use literacy to make sense of themselves and their worlds.

CHAPTER TWO:
Practitioner Research into Literacy and Gifted Identity

Research Typology and Underpinnings

My inquiry into gifted readers' use of literacy and dialogue in order to explore students' identities is a practitioner research study that used ethnographic methods and included narrative as a way of understanding and interpreting the data. Because humans are unique, multifaceted beings, quantitative methods often limit the description of events and practices. Therefore, I relied on qualitative paradigms in order to more fully describe human behavior and investigate the reasons behind that behavior in a way that recognizes the kaleidoscopic nature of the social sciences. I utilized narrative as a writing method to tell my participants' stories, thus noting both commonalities and unique aspects of their experiences and embedding participant voice in the writing up of the research. Thus, I was able to understand the complexity of what it means to be identified as gifted in this context and share this interpretation with my readers.

In my daily actions as a teacher, I take an ethnographic stance when I observe the formal and informal interactions of my students. I look for what is *there*, not what I hope to see, and use the patterns that emerge to describe and theorize about my students' behavior. As a practitioner, in many ways I am immersed in the culture of my school and classroom as a daily participant, yet most of my observations are not taken to the next step and turned into data by committing them to writing in a research format. Rather, observations remain connected to an individual student's profile or progress, so although

I am influenced by ethnographic methods I am not routinely conducting true ethnography. Additionally, I realize that I see my students in only one context, even within the larger context of school culture. For example, they do not exhibit the same behaviors in the cafeteria or the hallway as in my classroom. As an ethnographer, I would need to work to expand the contexts in which I view my participants in order to gain a fuller picture of the "truth."

While I was influenced by ethnographic methods, my dual role as a full time teacher and part time doctoral student positioned me as a practitioner-researcher. The practitioner research movement grew out of the belief by many educators that significant changes in the educational system could only be caused by educators themselves (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). As more and more policy is set by high level government officials with little or no educational background and 'teacher-proofed' curriculum spreads, practitioner research provides educators with a way to respond credibly and professionally while still working within the system. Practitioner research is a systematic way of generating knowledge with the goal of educational and social change rather than describing or 'fixing' a problem. Research develops into a sort of professional conversation as rich description becomes a habit of mind, an art of seeing, a genre in itself (Himley, 1991). The conversation acts as a both knowledge generator and a springboard for action.

In many ways, practitioner research, and more specifically teacher research, challenges traditional notions of research and knowledge construction. Teacher research attempts to join research and action, theory and practice, and the academy and K-12

school system, binaries that have long stood firm (Labaree, 2003). The traditional view of the university academic coming into a site for study, collecting data, and developing theories, never to return to the site, is called into question as teachers and other insiders are seen as knowledge-generators and agents for change. For me, a full time teacher and part-time doctoral student, teacher inquiry represents the lens through which I teach each day. It is a natural approach for one who constantly feels the worlds of K-12 and the academy swirling inside oneself. Additionally, it is a particularly appropriate approach as the study seeks to explore the ability of students themselves to be seen as knowledge-generators and agents for change within the school setting.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue for research *for* education, not *about* education. They describe a critical educational science that involves teachers, administrators, parents, and students working together on critical analysis of their setting with the goal of educational reform. This is not to say that outsiders from universities should not conduct or be a part of K-12 research. In fact, when teachers participate in practitioner research they tend to seek out more university-based research (Anderson and Herr, 1999). Rather, university-based outsiders can act as critical friends who support insiders in conducting critical research. Since the aim of this type of research is to transform education, change cannot be done solely by the outsider without any vested interest in the local environment. In fact, Anderson sees practitioner research as a form of research capable of making "contributions beyond the scope of traditional research, whether quantitative or qualitative" (2002, p.22). In this way, practitioner research is meant to be used in addition to, not as a replacement of, traditional research. Taking a practitioner inquiry

stance in not only my day to day teaching but in the context of this study allows me to be purposeful about the pedagogical and curricular decisions I make in the classroom, prompting me to reconsider the implications of how and what I teach. It empowers me to be an active participant in the design of curriculum and materials I use in my classroom and consider the powerful implications of systemic structures in my school. Good teachers observe their students, theorize about their behavior, collect data at times, and make purposeful decisions about their instruction. However, Hutchings and Shulman (2004) see research, what they term the 'scholarship of teaching,' as going beyond those practices to include systematic investigation related to student learning with the goal of improving instruction in local and broader contexts. Part of the power of teacher research resides in the fact that the researcher is personally involved with and passionate about the topic, setting, and participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Throughout my study, I was particularly cognizant of the implications of my complex role on both the students' participation and learning and the outcome of the research. Yet I believe it was worth navigating those complexities as practitioner research results in not only more effective curriculum and educational structures but powerful understandings for researcher and participants.

Since one of the goals of the study is to empower the participants to use their knowledge of their identities to develop agency over their learning and school experience, it is influenced by, but cannot claim to be, (Participatory) Action Research. The study involves participants who have a stake in the issues under investigation, the students themselves. Still, as the researcher I designed the study itself and the activities

in which we engaged, despite the fact that my students' involvement and discussions shaped my research decisions. In addition, my participants were my own students. Although participation was optional, that choice did not eliminate all my influence as a teacher and any pressure to do as I asked that came along with that relationship, further negating the participatory aspect of the research. I approached the research with a critical stance and cannot assume that including my students' voices in the study counteracted all systems of power or created a perfectly democratic environment. I had to be aware of the assumptions I brought to my research and unpack them through reflection, conversations, and journaling, remembering that, "like all forms of inquiry, action research is *value laden*" (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p.4, emphasis in original). Specific strategies for articulating and minimizing the effect of my assumptions will be discussed in a later section.

Context

Homedale Elementary School

My research was conducted in the suburban Philadelphia elementary school in which I teach. The purpose of the site selection was twofold. First, I believe that practitioner inquiry is a powerful way to understand the context in which one works; research in and of one's practice can lead to positive changes for multiple stakeholders. Second, my role as a gifted support teacher has prompted me to think more deeply about the ways in which gifted learners are positioned within the school setting, particularly in the subject areas in which they have specific talents. This research informs educators about the ways gifted readers view themselves and their place within the school system,

thereby shaping our own view of these students and prompting critique of the ways in which we position these learners in the classroom.

Sunshine School District is located in a suburban setting approximately 25 miles outside of Philadelphia. Overall student performance on the reading, writing, and math PSSA placed the district as a whole among the top 20 districts in Pennsylvania while it is ranked first in the state in science ("Annual Report", 2012). Homedale Elementary School is the largest of four elementary schools, with a total enrollment of about 575 students from Kindergarten through Grade 5. During the year of the study, 48% of students identified as non-Caucasian. All of the buildings throughout the district were newly built or renovated within the past ten years and boast modern technology in most rooms, including Smartboards, document cameras, and student computers. Every teacher has a laptop and iPads have begun to be circulated throughout grade levels and departments. Halls are wide and light, with framed photographs of groups of former students on the walls. Classrooms are uniquely shaped, with alcoves and cubby areas to break up the space and create nooks in which groups of students can work. Carpeting through the majority of the classroom completes the cozy feel. School-wide, many annual events are held to celebrate students' cultures and talents, including Heritage Night, the Science Fair, Family Literacy Night, the Fifth Grade Talent Show, and family fun events sponsored by the PTO such as the Fall Festival.

Gifted Support at Homedale

Identified gifted students comprised 4.88% of the district population while 5.56% of those attending Homedale Elementary receive gifted services during the 2012-2013 school year (PA School Performance Profile, 2012-2013). During 2013-2014, the year of the study, 58 Homedale students were identified gifted. That year, the Board approved the appointment of a third elementary gifted support teacher in order to decrease case loads, allow us to be more permanently located at specific buildings, and more effectively support students. In addition, we made significant changes to the ways in which services are provided at the elementary level since I moved into the gifted support position for the 2012-2013 school year, replacing the former teacher who had been in the position for 30 years. While in the past, students 'qualified' for reading and/or math enrichment, the new team made a conscious decision to make services more individualized and simultaneously consider giftedness both more holistically and specifically than in the past. As a team of three teachers and an administrative supervisor and without specific curricular directives from the state or district, we are in the unique position of being able to make thoughtful, yet quick decisions about the ways in which we provide for our students.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, identified gifted students were pulled out from the classroom to attend gifted support services twice each five day cycle for 45 minutes each. During this time, students participated in curricular enrichment activities that support students in developing higher order thinking skills. Each grade level participated in modules surrounding a theme connected to a topic in the regular education

curriculum. During these sessions, students worked independently and cooperatively to expand their thinking about ideas and demonstrate their knowledge in unconventional ways. As the teacher, I acted as a facilitator rather than lecturer, providing them with the structure necessary for creative thinking and collaborative learning to occur. Since the largest group consisted of eleven students and we met in a full-sized classroom, the setting wass comfortable and spacious. Students sat on bean bag chairs, wheeled teacher chairs, or the couch, or gathered together around one of the three small group tables around the room. In this way, the physical space supported collaboration and social interactions.

While the majority of identified gifted students participated in the Gifted Seminar, a few demonstrated a need for enrichment in subject specific areas beyond that which can be provided in the regular education classroom. Students worked on content-specific independent projects, received acceleration and enrichment in math, and worked towards individual goals in areas such as public speaking and creative writing. Students who received consistent pull-out services from me in reading were both identified gifted and reading at least two years beyond their current grade level based on Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking assessments. These students were pulled out of the classroom once per week for 45 minutes for additional acceleration and enrichment in literacy. While gathered around a small table with a sunflower centerpiece, students participated in Socratic Circle as a dialogic structure and used various visual representations to think about and beyond the text. During the year of the study, there were 6 fifth-graders, 6 fourth-graders, and 3 third-graders who qualified for such support.

Participants

Data collection took place in the gifted support classroom during these weekly reading enrichment sessions. In this setting, a small group of 6 fifth grade students and I gathered together to use literacy and dialogue to reflect on, construct, and think critically about our identities. All participants were identified gifted by the Sunshine School District, which was based on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's guidelines for identification. Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania Code states that an IQ of 130 or higher along with multiple criteria determines giftedness (22 Pa. Code §16.21). Specifics that define 'multiple criteria' are not delineated, but a range of assessments including student performance, early use of higher level thinking skills, and a high rate of acquisition and/or retention should be included. Within the identified gifted population, participants were chosen based on Catron and Wingenbach's (1986) definition of the gifted reader, one who is both identified gifted and is reading at least two years above grade level, as this advanced level is considered too far outside the typical range to be appropriately accommodated for in the regular education classroom. These readers display distinct differences in their processing and comprehension of text, internalize their own word attack strategies, process text for immediate comprehension, and use top-down processing. They also tend to anticipate meaning in a text using visual cues, organizational patterns, and syntax and have strong metacognitive skills, even if they are not aware of the proper terms for their reading processes (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986).

The fifth grade gifted readers were chosen as study participants for a number of reasons. First, five out of six had participated in the dialogue-based Socratic Seminar the

previous year and therefore were experienced with the book club format. Additionally, the year prior these students participated in the Grade 4 Gifted Seminar, which focused on the acknowledgement of multiple perspectives in social, literary, and historical contexts, participation in philosophical dialogue, and development of informed judgments. This previous work served as a foundation for the work we would do together in exploring our identities. Finally, the following year this group would move on to the middle school for sixth grade. As the school structure and social dynamics change in that setting, it was even more important for students to become comfortable with whom they are, understand the complex forces at work in a school system, and develop agency over their learning. As discussed in the literature review, these students were also likely to be considering their identities at this stage; our discussions scaffolded students in this work. In addition, the local charter school for gifted students begins in sixth grade, so fifth grade is an ideal time for students to critically consider their place in the school setting. Might facilitating identity work allow students to develop the agency necessary to forge one's own way within the *current* school system? Although some may consider this convenience sampling, practitioner inquiry necessitates the use of participants within one's own context. Thus, this method is better considered a purposeful sample as the particular individuals "can best inform the researcher about the research problem under consideration" (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). The fifth grade reading group proved to be the ideal context for work.

Meet the Book Club Members

At the start of the study, I had known the book club members from between one and three years and taught all six of them the previous year in gifted support. One was in my general education classroom in second grade and another's brother had been in my class. This both strengthened and complicated our relationship as I will discuss in greater depth in a subsequent section. All six students attended Homedale Elementary in previous years and had been in the district since at least third grade, with the majority attending since kindergarten. They were passionate, curious, and innovative thinkers. They were certainly accomplished students, yet also had a bit of non-conformity to them. For example, each had a particular skill or passion that fell outside of typical mainstream activities such as chess, gymnastics (for one of the boys), and comic design. In addition, although they generally completed classroom work sufficiently, they tended to gravitate towards alternative academic practices and found ways to circumnavigate the system in order to engage in what they believed to be more meaningful practices[5]. However, each student has a unique personality and contribution to the group.

Sapphire moved to Pennsylvania from California and her family was originally from Singapore. On the outside, Sapphire appeared to be reserved, but she could be quite animated and passionate when she was comfortable. She was an accomplished violinist and flutist, attending regional practice for a few hours every Friday evening. Sapphire described her thinking style as "weird" and "different," with ideas that just "pop up"

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[5] During interviews and Book Club meetings, participants referred to their resistance to certain expected literacy practices. For example, Ludwig asserted that he "[didn't] need" to record his thoughts on Post-It notes and would prefer to continue reading without interruption. Rather, he was able to draw on his ideas from memory during discussion or in written responses.

(Interview, 9/6/13). May described herself as Chinese and thought of herself as the "center of attention" (Interview, 8/30/13) who likes to experiment and participate in hands-on educational experiences. She resisted written responses and instead prefers to "read freely" (Interview, 12/18/13), like many of the other book club members. Markus, our resident computer programmer, was drawn to electronics for its unlimited possibilities. In fact, he named the computer as his favorite place because "it's total freedom. There are no boundaries. You can do whatever you want…Yeah. It's not like making something out of wood. You can craft something that is totally abstract" (Interview, 8/29/13). He enjoyed pushing the limits in the classroom as well, often requesting even minor exceptions to assignments, such as a format change. A self-described Hindu, Markus was greatly influenced by his parents' technological abilities but shared that he did not know much about his Indian language. Still, Markus' knowledge of his family's Indian traditions was evident to me through his discussions concerning food, geography, history, and other cultural elements.

Although all six participants important roles in the study and were included in the data, analysis focused on Tim, MS, and Ludwig. This decision was based on who was involved in the key moments to which I kept returning in my analysis. For that reason, I will describe these participants in detail.

Meet Tim

Tim qualified for the MG program mid-way through Fourth Grade after a parent request for evaluation. The son of two Caucasian middle school teachers, Tim described

himself as the one who "usually likes to just keep quiet sometimes" (Interview, 8/30/13). He was a triplet and found this to be a defining characteristic others should understand about him. Otherwise, Tim considered himself a typical kid, one who loved Angry Birds and enjoyed seeing his friends at school.

Within the school setting, Tim was well aware of his relative strengths and weaknesses as a learner and often referred to his academic self-view during his time in the MG classroom. He considered himself a strong reader with a "decently high reading level" (Interview, 8/30/13), basing his evaluation on the long classic novels he read that contained more formal, antiquated language and the fact that he tended to notice details and subtleties in his reading. He enjoyed Book Club because it exposes him to literature he otherwise might not choose on his own and gave him the opportunity to discuss a common text with others, something that he felt does not often happen in other settings. An active and observant reader who predicted what would happen later in the novel or even in the series, he acknowledged that some readers "just…read something and …wait for the next one," but found it "just not fun that way. Like I like to do stuff, like guess ahead. And then I get to see what happens" (Book Club 12, 12/3/13). This tendency is consistent with the research as, compared to their peers, gifted learners most often use interactive strategies such as predicting, evaluating, and inferring (Fehrenbach, 1991). Tim used the saying "the more you look, the more you'll see" to apply to reading, "not because it's an awesome phrase but because if you pay close attention to your book, you can figure out exactly what's going to happen next. You're not left in the dark when this guy pushes this other guy off a cliff. No, you can tell that he's going to do that" (Book

Club 13, 12/9/13). Inherent in this statement is the assumption that reading is an active

process in which the author leaves clues behind for the reader. Like Rosenblatt (1964,

1982), Tim believed that reading is a physical and mental interaction which results in a

unique, complex understanding for the reader.

Tim was a voracious reader, a common occurrence for the gifted reader. His

commitment to reading supported the tendency for gifted readers to view reading as an

enjoyable, and therefore preferred, activity and may fulfill their desire to know

information and story (Vosslamber, 2002). Although he was perfectly happy hiding out

in his room with "all the books [he] want[s]," (Interview, 8/30/13), he resisted writing

responses to reading, citing his poor handwriting and sharing that he was "not the fastest

and best writer" (Interview, 8/30/13). Like many of my students, Tim was also resistant

to Post-It noting, a common literacy practice of brief responses required in the school:

> There's a lot of Post-It noting in that, and sometimes you just want to read and
> then write down, not read, stop in the middle of a suspenseful part, because you
> have to make a Post-It on that page. (Interview, 8/30/13)

Like many gifted learners, Tim's hand couldn't seem to keep up with his thoughts.

Therefore, he tended to write short, simple sentences rather than the complex ideas that

flooded his mind (Cramond, 2004). Instead, Tim preferred his reading be uninterrupted

and his responses varied and authentic:

> Like sometimes you'll just get, like a Post-It page that you have to stick five Post-
> Its to. Why do you think this Post-It was important? Five times. Then, at the end,
> rate your book. Out of five stars. What did you think? Write a four to six letter-
> word- no, four to six sentence paragraph about this. It's always the same thing.
> (Interview, 12/17/13)

Because gifted readers tend to use top-down processing to comprehend text, Catron and

Wingenbach (1986) suggest that this population responds best to instruction when it is

less tightly structured and allows for independent learning and critical thinking. Tim

found the ways in which responses were structured in Book Club more appealing because

they allowed him the freedom to decide when and how to craft his response. Although at

times there were focus questions, "we have different assignments every time because it

changes with what books we're reading and how they relate to our life" (Interview,

12/17/13). As Schultz and Delisle (1997) suggest, gifted children are big picture

thinkers. They constantly are searching for ways to connect school learning to self-

knowledge (Grant, 2002). Tim attributed the difference in reading response to the fact

that "in the regular classroom, they're trying to get you to learn one point. [In Book

Club], we're trying to view every different point…" (Interview, 12/17/13). He described

the ways in which he has pushed himself to consider multiple perspectives while reading

George Washington's Spy to move beyond the superficial assumption that the Rebels

were in the right and acknowledge the perspective of the British. He surmised that, had

this book been assigned in his homeroom and the class tasked with writing a report on

which side they support, most students would automatically side with the Rebels because

"they were awesome. They won the war" (Interview, 12/17/13). Instead, Tim believed

that a gifted reader would go against the grain to consider what it would be like to lead

the life of a Loyalist. Rogers (2007) argues that gifted learners thrive when taught using

a whole-to-part conceptual model. They have the ability to decontextualize and store

information in the long-term memory as a whole rather than disparate chunks. This

aligns with Tim's tendency to consider the multiple perspectives that make up the broad context of a text rather than focus on one aspect to the detriment of the greater concept. Additionally, the main format of response in Book Club was verbal, with written response serving as preparation for discussion rather than end product. "We mark the text…and with a book, in like a classroom thing, you can't really just grab a pencil or a highlighter and slash across the pages" (Interview, 12/17/13). Thus, for Tim, physically marking up the page was an embodiment of his active relationship with the text. This approach appeals to Tim and other gifted readers as they approach reading as a social action in which reading response and discussion is used as a platform for thought formation. He valued group discussion "because you get other people's ideas" (Interview, 12/17/13) as another way to consider the multiple perspectives in and perceptions of text. Because gifted readers process text for immediate comprehension, a focus on critical reading, interpretation, and application of ideas is more appropriate (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986).

While Tim considered himself an accomplished reader, he was equally aware of his struggles in math: "I'm not good at math, right straight fact" (Interview, 12/17/13). In fact, when I asked him what he likes about being gifted, he responded with the following:

> It gives me a chance to boost my confidence in school, that I can do better. In math, I'm in the bottom math class, and I got dropped down a level, but knowing that I'm in the MG program makes me think, okay, I'm smart enough. I can just be good on this level…And then maybe advance up to the next one. (Interview, 8/30/13)

Thus, Tim saw his gifted identification as an affirmation of his academic abilities and an opportunity to further develop his strengths and improve on his weaknesses. Although

his comments implied that he has hope for improvement, Tim considered the fact that his mother is a math teacher to be unconnected to his difficulty with math: "There's really no bloodline like that" (Interview, 12/17/13). This belief in the lack of a connection between academic ability and heredity was evident in the ways in which Tim conceptualized and defined giftedness (discussed in depth in Chapter 3).

Meet MS

MS bounded into the room and put his pile of binders and text books down on the table. "I finished the series!" he said, and went on to describe his favorite parts as well as critique other aspects. MS was an unstoppable force, constantly pushing himself to his limits with a smile on his face. He was humble, insatiable, and truly alive.

MS may well have been the most advanced student I had in my twelve years of teaching, yet he remained relatively well-rounded. When asked to describe himself, he stated, "Well, I'm kind of into sports and into academics…whereas a lot of kids are mostly academic or mostly sports. So I like soccer, cricket, a lot of sports, and I'm really interested in math, science, that kind of thing" (Interview, 8/29/13,). MS competed in state gymnastics competitions and county spelling bees alike. He celebrated his Indian heritage and was active in his Hindu community. Within the school setting, MS met with me in the gifted support classroom daily for the last thirty minutes of math to receive acceleration and additional enrichment as well as for our weekly book club. He completed independent studies to enrich every Social Studies and Science unit throughout the year. MS felt that math was one of his best subjects since it was primarily

"just the factual information. I think that kind of gets in my head a lot easier than like science. Because there are so many questions about every single thing, and math, there's just like one answer, basically. Like this is this. You can't really oppose that much" (Interview, 12/13/13). Yet I don't think that MS gave himself enough credit here. He was far from a surface level thinker. Rather, he was a completely engaged learner who thought both convergent and divergently. He was one of those rare students who was academically well rounded and excelled in every content area. Beyond academics, in school he participated in Envirothon, an environmental academic challenge team, and Superkids, a support for teachers and students, and was a Safety. Interestingly, MS originally did not sign up to be a Safety because he was dismayed by the way "a lot of the safeties…just became safeties so they could boss everyone around" (Interview, 8/29/13). However, after realizing that this year many of his peers were working to change that trend, he requested to join the group. His academic and extra-curricular interests were fostered at home, where his mother and father spend a great deal of time working with him on building skills and providing enrichment opportunities to MS. "Well, I like challenges. And so I ask for a lot of challenges. But at home, my parents already know that, so they try to already challenge me as a normal- that counts as normal" (Interview, 8/29/13). Thus, the norm at home was that MS craved continuous challenge and his parents worked to provide that. He learned computer coding at home, read extensively, and began attending chess lessons.

MS was full of passion. He thrived on challenges and, when he felt that a task was an appropriate level for him, it "[caught his] focus completely. No other distractions

whatsoever" (Interview, 8/29/13). Like many gifted learners, he became completely engrossed in thinking about a topic or participating in an activity (Subotnik & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2012): "Learning about those things just completely takes up my interest and so I'm able to do better in that because I focus…if I like the topic, I'm passionate about the topic I'm writing about, I feel like I need to get this done. If I don't like it, brain shut off" (Interview, 8/29/13). For MS, a task had to be in his zone of proximal development in order for him to engage. He shared that if it was too challenging he struggled and if it failed to provide any challenge at all he also typically lost focus. He found that he was 'on' constantly, and at times appreciated being "left alone and given a small break like if they're teaching something I already know I can just relax and calm my brain down for a second" (Interview, 8/29/13). This tension between the desire for challenge and the need for mental respite will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two.

One of MS's many passions was reading. It was his favorite type of homework since it gave him "an excuse to read" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). He read quickly and "can go through completely a page in like maximum five seconds" (Interview, 8/29/13). MS typically completed a book even if he didn't like it at the beginning. However, he did feel that a book needed to have a point to engage him:

MS: Very, very, very rarely do I ditch a book halfway and go.
Sara: Really?
MS: But I've done that with some books- one of them is actually supposed to be a really good book. It just doesn't catch me.
Sara: What book is that?
MS: *Eragon*.
Sara: Oh, with the dragon on it?
MS: The middle of it, they just keep going random places. They go in circles for like two hundred pages.

MS demonstrated that his interests and evaluation of a text were not reliant on what the critics or the masses thought. Rather, like many gifted readers, he was in a constant search for meaning (Gross, 1993; Hollingworth, 1942; Silverman, 1994, as cited in Grant, 2002). Without sensing a direction and purpose in the story, MS could not continue to attend to the text. He perceived differences in the ways in which gifted readers engage with text compared to the typical fifth-grade reader:

> Well, I think sometimes the typical reader, they try to go for books that are more their level, but this is just off me, I tend to try to go for books that are a bit more challenging sometimes, when I have the chance to, try to take something that's a bit harder than what I usually do…I think that the gifted reader will- in, like the majority of the situations, probably like sixty percent, they read faster than the typical. Or slower. Because either they're taking a lot of time to comprehend everything that they can… They're like squeezing all of the juice out of it. Or they're able to just skim- not skim, but go through the pages faster and still take in what they need, the essentials. (Interview, 12/13/13)

MS focused on the differences in text difficulty as well as reading speed. He felt that gifted readers push themselves to read more challenging books and stretch their abilities. Interestingly, he observed that the gifted reader will read at either a faster or slower rate than is typical. MS was capable of reading quite quickly and processes text for immediate comprehension- the "essentials," a habit Catron and Wingenbach (1986) observe as characteristic of the gifted reader. Alternately, he valued a slow read in which he had the opportunity to "squeeze all the juice out of" the book.

While MS was in class with other advanced readers, Book Club presented the opportunity to read a common text with a group of gifted peers who shared the desire to

truly dig deep into the book. He especially valued the chance to hear the various

interpretations of his peers:

> The clustered grouping thing, where all of us come together, and we read the same thing, and we kind of share our ideas because I think that really helps, since you learn from other people who have views that you never really thought about, and you're like, oh, yeah, I suppose that could work too. And you understand a lot more than you would have. (Interview, 12/13/13)

Like reader-response theorists, MS viewed the text as the foundation for understanding,

but not the final say. Rather, each reader is able to have their own unique interpretation

of the text. The ways in which our ideas intersect shape and reshape our thinking in

interesting ways:

> You have a better understanding because say I think so and so about so and so book. Somebody thinks a similar thing, and they kind of overlap. Like, this is one person's idea. This is another person's idea. They go like this. This person learns about this edge of that hand, and that person learns about this edge of that area. So they kind of overlap. It's kind of like a Venn diagram. Like the extra sides, this side can learn about that, and that side can learn about this. Extra, leftover. So slowly you kind of open your knowledge level, and it kind of grows and grows. (Interview, 8/29/13)

As MS demonstrated by placing one hand partially over the other, our thinking overlaps

with the ideas of our group members. It is on the edges of where our thinking deviates

from one another that new learning occurs.

Meet Ludwig

"Robotics today?" Ludwig asked me as he passed me in the hallway coming in

from the bus. Hyper focused on his areas of passion, Ludwig had strong opinions on the

instructional needs of the gifted learner and how school should be structured in order to

facilitate that work.

When asked to describe himself, the first thing he shared was his love of the arts, including music, origami, and the "arts in any form" (Interview, 8/30/13). He was an accomplished pianist who had been invited to take part in master classes and had entered his work in composition competitions. He often asked about or recognized the composer of the music playing in our classroom, from Bach to the Beatles. In fact, his original idea for a pseudonym was Ludwig van Beethoven; we agreed on the first name only. He felt that his musical abilities set him apart from his peers, sharing that "a lot of people don't really like music, so well, I cannot like talk about music to other people because it's like that's one of my favorite things, and a lot of people just do it as a side thing" (Interview, 8/30/13). Ludwig participated in a variety of other extracurricular activities including chess clinics and competitions, but he considered himself "not like amazing at sports like a lot of kids are, and I'm more on the learning side, kind of, the academic side" (Interview, 8/30/13). He shared that he was not good at running long distances and was cognizant of the fact that he had not qualified for the Turkey Trot, an annual one mile race. Still, Ludwig did not appear to be dismayed by this and even took part in a running club last year.

Ludwig was quite open about what he sees as his strengths. He considered his placement in math and scores on reading tests as evidence of his abilities in those areas, but truly considered himself to be strong in all core subjects:

> [My best subject] that surpasses all by far is math. Definitely, definitely. So my favorite MG right now is actually math…Reading is also one of my extremely strong subjects. I like reading MG, and finally science, I really do love science, and that's why I go to science MG, and it's interesting, and social studies, now we switched to social studies. (Book Club 8, 10/25/13)

As this was shared during a book club session, Ludwig clearly had no qualms about voicing his strengths to the group. He also stressed that his strengths correlated to his interests and passions, even attributing the fact that he had a science goal in his GIEP[6] to his love of the subject. He also commented that math was his best subject which caused it to be his favorite. Clearly, for Ludwig, there was a strong interaction between passion and ability.

Ludwig considered reading a priority in his life, sharing that although he did not have much free time due to all of his extracurricular activities, he made sure to read daily: "I always get my reading done because usually free time is converted into reading time. And I also read at breakfast, lunch, and dinner" (Interview, 8/30/13). Such voracious reading habits are typical for the gifted learner (Vosslamber, 2002). Although he had a passion for reading, Ludwig perceived additional differences in his reading tendencies (along with his gifted peers) compared to the typical fifth grader:

> We tend to- at least I tend to read fast. Like I cannot speak for everyone else, but I tend to read fast, and some people are more slow and careful, but I usually just care about the big picture. I don't like jotting down on Post-It notes or thinking deeply of- ah, that's not my favorite thing. I just want to read and- and usually, I really don't care about what I have until somebody- say when it [comes in use], then I can kind of pick it up from the book, so it's not really- so I have a non-fiction book about something, it's like, I'll read the book and I seem to forget the facts. When somebody asks me about something, I can recall, kind of, [in a way]. (Interview, 12/11/13)

As a big picture thinker (Schultz & Delisle, 1997 as cited in Grant, 2002), Ludwig was able to read quickly and comprehend the big ideas of the text while still remembering

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[6] Each child has a GIEP, Gifted Individualized Education Plan, that is developed annually to share quantitative and qualitative data about the student, set learning goals, and describe the specially designed instruction necessary for the student to meet his/her goals.

details that support the larger concepts (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Like many gifted readers, Ludwig resisted writing about his reading. For him, the experience of reading and the practical use of the information learned was the end goal rather than a written demonstration of comprehension. Sticky notes were simply an inauthentic practice to Ludwig, and as is typical for gifted learners, what is perceived as an inauthentic literacy response may be resisted and even result in a decline in a positive attitude about reading (Haslam-Odoardi, 2010). "I really don't need Post-Its to like remember this and that" (Interview, 8/30/13). Forcing him to participate in a literacy practice that was unnecessary and ineffective served to disengage Ludwig from his reading. Instead, Ludwig appreciated the interactive, authentic, open-ended nature of book club.

> Book club is more- you have more leeway, kind of. You can do more- it's a broad question that you give, or so- you can- you're not forced to do this, and it's not like you have a paper and you have to put the sticky note here, explain what's there. It's not like that. It's just a question, so you can do what you want with the question, kind of thing. (Interview, 12/11/13)

While in his homeroom's reading class response topics and formats were dictated by the teacher, in book club he was able to determine the discussion topic and choose the ideas to consider more deeply. In fact, he saw book club as a way to interact with others, even commenting that "reading MG is technically socializing with your friends…in a more structured way" (Interview, 12/11/13). The oral interactive format of book club also appealed to Ludwig since it allowed him to hear different viewpoints as well as gave him the opportunity to "argue" (Interview, 8/30/13). His love of arguing was more evident when he felt strongly about the discussion topic.

It depends what the- sometimes the topic is not kind of- the topic is not my stuff- it's like a little different from what I'm really good at, so then I might take more of a back burner, kind of. It's just- I talk a little less during the discussion. Sometimes- like especially with the racial- like that one, that was kind of in my way- like it was my thing, so I was- I talked- I started a lot of the topics, and I was active, really active, during that book club. (Interview, 12/11/13)

Again, Ludwig's level of interest in a topic was vital for his engagement and participation.

Based on his reading habits and self-assessment, Ludwig had strong ideas about how reading should be taught in school. He saw direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies such as compare and contrast as largely unnecessary since "all of us know how to read…A lot of it does come naturally, what they teach. Activating mental schema. Yes. That has to- that pretty much probably comes natural for everybody. It's just something that you do" Interview, 12/11/13). Inherent in his statement are his assumptions that what comes "naturally" for him is typical of most readers. He also fails to acknowledge that although he may think these processes occur naturally, he is still going through a very active process when he reads whether or not he realizes it. Because gifted readers tend to internalize word attack strategies and process text for immediate comprehension (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986), instruction should include supporting students in metacognitive awareness of their reading process. Research does support Ludwig's feeling that reading instruction should be adapted as the needs of the gifted reader extend beyond the instruction that is typically offered in a heterogeneous reading group (Dooley, 1993; Reis et al, 2004). While teachers fear that students may not develop decoding skills, the gifted learner actually risks regression if he

is not exposed to text and responses that require depth, complexity, and challenge (Cramond, 2004; Dooley, 1993; Robinson, 1986). Rather, reading instruction for the gifted learner should include critical analysis, creative reading, and a seminar approach (Dooley, 1993; Reis et al, 2004; VanTassel-Baska et al, 2002), techniques that are included in book club. In general, Ludwig preferred to read or watch a video in its entirety before having to do exercises or follow up activities. This allowed him to "soak in everything" rather than having his learning disrupted by continuous pausing and writing.

Teacher, Researcher, Colleague, Community Member?: My Role as a Practitioner Researcher

While the six participants described above were truly the focus of my study, I acknowledge my multi-faceted role in the Book Club group and the readers' need to understand it. Practitioner research placed me in a unique position and considering the complex ways in which my life was intertwined with those of my students, participants, families, and colleagues cannot go unexamined. I grew up just a few miles from and attended school K-12 in the district bordering the school in which I teach. Many of my colleagues also grew up in the immediate area, citing our love for our schools and communities as our reason for remaining local. I currently live ten minutes from my school. Although I cannot completely be considered a community member, I believe that my past in the area helps me bond together with my colleagues, students, and families; we have a sort of shared history.

As a child, I would spend hours in the basement playing school. I gave "tests" to my stuffed animals and put stickers on their worksheets. I drove my younger brother mad as I set up a complex system for him to check out a book from our library. As the daughter of a teacher, I listened to my mom think aloud and narrate our lives; teachers are teachers all day long. Although I took dance classes, I was never an athlete. I preferred to lose myself in a book and keep elaborate diaries. The story of my life played out in my head as I roller skated around the driveway or explored the woods and creek in the backyard. Looking back, I realize that I used literacy to explore my own identity from early on.

I was part of the gifted program in elementary school. In Challenge, as it was called, we participated in enrichment activities in small groups, including designing Rube Goldberg-like contraptions, learning about medieval times, and creating a model of a solar panel-powered home using my dollhouse. Although I have fabulous memories of this experience, I do not remember when I was pulled for this group. What was happening in the classroom while I was at Challenge? In no way that I can recall did the work we do connect to our other studies or replace subject-specific material we had already mastered. And, to my memory, there was never any discussion about why we were there. I'm not sure I had any idea I was "gifted" or what that meant. It does, however, provide me with a window into the experiences of my current students, however blurry that view may be.

After graduating from Pennsylvania State University, I returned to the area and was lucky enough to be hired to teach second grade in my current school. I then taught

first grade for five years and returned to second grade for another three. After a one year stint in eighth grade English, I returned to the elementary school to teach gifted support, a position for which I applied. During my years as a classroom teacher, I was never one to blindly enact the curriculum. Rather, I considered it a guide for my instruction. I did research on best practice and implemented the Reader's and Writer's Workshop, a framework that the district eventually implemented K-5. I quietly worked within and against the system, always with the best interest of my students in mind. Over the years, I worked on curriculum and assessment teams to write the math, reading, and writing curriculums. As I earned a Master's degree and Reading Specialist certificate and began a doctorate, my colleagues considered me a relative expert in literacy and often approached me for advice on instruction. In my current position as gifted support teacher, I am in a unique position in that no set curriculum is prescribed. Rather, I am able to craft experiences that I feel will be most effective for my individual students and their goals and adapt that instruction based on their needs.

I have always been an overachiever. From elementary school when I would have rather melted into the floor than disappoint my teacher to college when I interviewed with a panel of teachers, university faculty, and district administrators to earn a position in a year-long student teaching internship to my aspirations to earn a doctorate from University of Pennsylvania, I have always put pressure on myself to achieve. Yet I can also be very self-conscious and unsure of my abilities. This is something I feel I have in common with my gifted students. Sharing who I am with them attempts to level the playing field in some small way.

Relationship with and Recruitment of Participants

The relationship I already developed with the participants and their parents both aided and complicated the consent process. I established a solid reputation in my twelve years in the school community and knew the participants' families for between two and four years. I taught one student in Second Grade and taught another's brother that same year. In addition, I worked at the middle school with that student's parents for a year. I tend to develop both professional and personal relationships with many of my students' parents, attending parties at their homes and even celebrating their birthdays at local restaurants. I believe that participants' parents trusted and respected my professionalism, yet I have to wonder if they were reticent to question my intentions in the research for fear that their resistance may change the way I felt about or treated their child. In an attempt to be proactive in assuring parents that their decision to participate would not affect their child's education, I made phone calls home to each family to describe the research and answer any questions they may have. I explained that since the study was situated within the standard instruction of the classroom, anyone who chose not to participate in the study would continue to be included in weekly reading enrichment, but their responses would be excluded in data collection. I had previously obtained IRB approval from the University of Pennsylvania and consent from the Sunshine School District before beginning the research and pseudonyms for students and the school district were used in all formal writing. Although I offered an information session with the parents of all six gifted readers in Grade 5 so that they could ask any follow up questions and further understand the purposes of the study, all declined and simply

returned the signed letters of consent. All six students were included in the study in order to achieve maximum variation possible within such a small sample size. Because I could not anticipate what the data would hold, I was prepared to remain open to discovering any essence to the experience of the gifted reader doing academic identity work as well as diverse experiences.

Afterward gaining consent from their parents, I met with the students to explain in kid friendly language the nature and purpose of the study[7]. It was important to me that, although their parents had provided consent, the decision to participate in the study ultimately resided in the students themselves. I had spoken to each student individually but used this space to describe more about what research is (in this context) as well as the content of the research. They "appeared to be quite interested, smiling, getting loud, asking questions. They are particularly excited to come up with their pseudonyms- two already think they know what names they want to use!" (Research Journal, 9/6/13). After reading through the Letter of Assent together (see Appendix B), I asked them to take it home and go over it with their parents if they'd like. I encouraged them to carefully consider their participation and ask me any questions before signing. I also emphasized that I was open to questions that may arise throughout the course of the study and that they were allowed to change their minds at any time.

I was ever aware of my position of power while seeking parental consent and student assent. After meeting with my students to discuss the research, I wrote the following in my journal (9/6/13):

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[7] See Appendix A for the slideshow presentation I used to guide our discussion.

I also emphasized how open I am to questions throughout this study and that if
they choose not to participate at any time that's okay- and what that would look
like. It really is impossible to ignore the power inherent in my position as their
teacher, though. In some weird way, I almost felt like the more I talked about
how it would be okay if they didn't want to participate the more I was pressuring
them to participate. Two gave [the signed letter of assent] to me before dismissal.

This was a tension I felt throughout the entire research process and continually

considered. I held power in my dual role as a teacher researcher. As a researcher, I was

ultimately in control of how I represented my participants. Although I do not assign

grades in gifted support, as a teacher, I have a certain amount of power over the

educational experiences of my students. Is it possible for my participants, my students, to

ever feel that those issues of power do not exist? Since it is impossible to completely

eliminate that hierarchy, would I even want them to ignore that power structure?

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from late August through December 2013 and consisted

of a combination of participant observation, video and audio recorded book club sessions,

in-depth interviews, document analysis, and a research journal. Table 2.1 demonstrates

which data points informed each research question. Although I initially had an overall

plan for the texts and topics on which to focus, specific plans were influenced by the

students and initial analysis.

Book Club met once per week for just under one hour. In preparation for our

meeting, students read a mutually agreed upon selection of text[8] and took notes in the

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[8] As avid readers, the group tended to want to read quite large amounts of text at a time. In order to ensure
that we spent adequate time thinking deeply about the text, often I had to limit the number of pages we read
each week.

	Unit of Analysis	Participant Observation and Audio/Video -recordings	Interviews	Document Analysis	Research journal
RQ1: **What issues of identity do students consider when they transact with text surrounding themes of giftedness and difference?**	-Issues/topics	X	X	X	X
RQ2: **What are the social practices that this group engages in during book club?**	-The group as a social entity/actions of the group	X			X
RQ3: **How does the label of giftedness intersect with students' ethnic and cultural identities?**	-Individual students -Cultural groups (as defined by students)	X	X	X	X
RQ4: **What is the gifted support teacher's role in this work?**	-Me as a teacher	X	X		X

Table 2.1: Research questions and data collection methods

notebook I provided in order to support our conversation. I had no requirements about

the amount of note-taking necessary or the form of written response[9]. Rather, I

emphasized that the goal was to have some written record of the ideas each reader wished

to explore during Book Club. I did provide a focus question[10] in order to bring attention

to a particular issue in the readings, but did not require students to write about that topic

specifically.

As students entered the room, they spread out and engaged in "Quiet Reflection,"

a five to ten minute time period in which readers quietly centered themselves and

prepared for Book Club. During this time, participants produced a written response

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[9] In fact, written response could include drawings, a form that Tim often took up.
[10] Please see Appendix C for a chart illustrating the weekly readings and focus questions.

exploring one of the ideas they previously marked or a new thought they wanted to

consider. They also used this time to scan and reread the text. We then gathered our

thoughts and joined together at the table. The majority of Book Club was used for

conversation, led by the students themselves. I acted as a participant observer,

contributing my own responses to the text and members' questions, and used the focus

questions to redirect the conversation during lulls or if the group had not addressed the

issue on their own. At the conclusion of the session, we recorded our next meeting date

in our notebooks, agreed upon the next chunk of reading, and glued the focus question

into our notebooks.

We used the first half of the sessions to use Gordon Korman's novel *Ungifted* to

explore our initial ideas about giftedness and surrounding issues. *Ungifted* tells the story

of Donovan, a seventh grader who is better known for being a trouble-maker than for his

academic prowess. Due to a mix-up by the superintendent, instead of getting in trouble

Donovan is sent to the Academy of Scholastic Distinction (ASD), a special school for

gifted and talented students. As Donovan tries to fit in in order to stay hidden and avoid

punishment, the students and teachers attempt to discover the gifts that resulted in

Donovan joining them at ASD. Through a science experiment, robotics competition, and

school dance, Donovan demonstrates that he is truly gifted in ways the other kids are

lacking. I chose *Ungifted* as our primary text due to the ways in which definitions of

giftedness are addressed and complicated. Although on the surface the text reinforces

stereotypes of gifted students as skinny dorks with glasses and no social skills, those very

stereotypes offered the group an opportunity to consider the ways in which students

labeled as gifted are perceived by the masses. Thus, the novel provides the basis for compelling conversations regarding the assumptions and expectations placed upon students identified as gifted as well as how giftedness is typically identified in American schools. For the twelfth week of Book Club (12/3/13), students read a novel of their choice that focused on the concept of difference more broadly. I provided options, but students were free to choose their own text as well. While only one of these novels referred specifically to academic giftedness, all included characters with some type of gift that separated them from their peers or community. Together with *Ungifted,* these novels provided the opportunity for the students to consider their own life narratives through the lens of fictional characters.

We turned to informational text for the final seven weeks of Book Club in order to gain knowledge of the history and sociocultural ideas that exist concerning giftedness[11]. Although I had planned for some of the topics, my choices for specific readings were informed by the students' conversations. For example, during the first Book Club 1 the group spent time discussing IQ and, through the conversation, it became clear that students did not have background knowledge on IQ tests, what they are meant to measure, and how they are used. Consequently, I sought out readings about the development of the Stanford-Binet test and how it was taken up over time in different ways and for different purposes. I found it quite difficult to locate material that was accessible to my students despite their advanced reading levels. *The Gifted Kids'
Survival Guide* (2009) provided a great foundation as a non-fiction text specifically

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[11] See Appendix C for a full list of readings and topics.

meant for an audience of kids aged ten and under. However, due to a lack of text that was both readable and focused on the desired topics, I created the majority of the readings from sources used in my own research. When I felt a section was readable for my students, I kept it intact. I wrote adaptations of selections that were out of their reach and indicated as such. In addition, with student approval, I included excerpts of transcripts from previous Book Club sessions during Sessions 11 and 13 as conversations had centered on issues of causes of giftedness, responsibility to use one's gift, and inequity. Informational text was not to be read as fact, but to be critically considered. In this way, I asked readers to transact thoughtfully with the non-fiction selections just as they had with the novel[12].

Observations and Audio/Video Recording

As a teacher researcher, I was present in weekly reading enrichment sessions and acted as a participant observer. I made use of an observation protocol as a method for recording field notes which included both descriptive and reflective notes (Creswell, 2007) and can be seen in Appendix D. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note, "it is important to record even things that one does not immediately understand, because these might turn out to be important later" (p. 178). Immersion in the context allowed me to learn firsthand from my own experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). However, I also had to consider my role as a teacher in this setting. Although the nature of the dialogic

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[12] That is not to say that one approaches informational in the same way as narrative. Rather, because a text is informational does not mean that it contains irrefutable fact. The reader must think critically about the issues discussed within and not blindly accept it as truth.

classroom positions the teacher as co-learner and facilitator, my students and I could not ignore the fact that I was their teacher with the all the power inherent in that title. Observation allowed me to draw inferences about the perspectives shared during interviews just as data from interviews influenced the focus of subsequent observations (Maxwell, 2005). In this way, multiple data points informed each other.

To supplement these field notes, class sessions were audio and video recorded, then transcribed by Dr. Heather Hurst, a friend and member of my doctoral cohort. Although ideally I would have completed my own transcriptions, I ultimately decided to employ Dr. Hurst in the interest of time. As a member of my cohort, Dr. Hurst served not only as transcriptionist, but critical friend and co-researcher of sorts[13]. Our shared knowledge from GSE and similar teaching and learning philosophies made her uniquely suited as transcriptionist for the project as she not only transcribed the audio-tapes but at times offered her own observations and feedback. She was once removed from the research, but our personal relationship along with her intimate knowledge of the data made her the ideal critical friend. This complex relationship will be discussed in Chapter Six.

While audio-recordings using an MP3 digital recorder were used for transcription, video recorded on my personal iPad supported me in identifying speakers and clarified speech. It also revealed interactions that the audio recorder was unable to pick up. Both the audio and visual data provided details about the interactions and conversations that

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[13] In fact, along with another cohort member, Heather and I will be presenting at the Literacy Research Association's 64th Annual Conference regarding the rethinking of the role of the transcriptionist in literacy research. In this presentation, we will explore the expanded role Heather played in my research and how one might benefit from and work through the complexities of such a relationship.

took place during discussions that I was either not privy to in the moment or was unable to commit to memory. Finally, it provided a source of ideas for final interview questions. Video and audio recordings were password-protected and kept on my personal computer as well as backed-up on my personal Dropbox account.

Interviews

In-depth interviews with participants were semi-structured and occurred at the beginning and end of the study. They were held one-on-one in our classroom at a time that was agreeable to me, the student, the parent, and classroom teacher (if it occurred during the school day). Interviews lasted between twenty and fifty minutes depending on the participant. I designed the initial interview protocol in order to begin to understand participants' concepts of their identities as gifted learners, how they are positioned within the school system, and their views on reading practices (see Appendix E). Weiss (1994) asserts that interviewing can help us learn not only what people perceive but how they interpret those perceptions, thus aiding me in understanding the context in which my students learn. The initial round of interviewing was also used to establish the research relationship, one in which we worked together to produce information useful to the research project (Weiss, 1994), as well as initial understandings of the academic identities of the gifted reader. It prompted participants to reflect on their lives and (hopefully) better understand themselves (Weiss, 1994). I used transcripts and fieldnotes to inform the questions in the final interviews, and used them as member checks in which I asked participants to reflect on specific actions, comments, and artifacts that emerged from the

research (see Appendix F). Final interviews sought to understand how participants' conceptualizations had shifted throughout the course of the research and give them an opportunity to articulate their ideas following the literacy work we'd done together. All interviews were audio-taped, saved as password-protected files on my computer, and backed up on Dropbox. As with the book club sessions, Heather transcribed them throughout the data collection process so that I could use them in initial and final data analysis.

Because participants were elementary aged students and I was their teacher, I had to interrogate my ability to establish the "warm, caring, and empowering [dialogue]" I hoped to achieve since "the interview is actually a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution between the interviewer and interviewee" (Kvale, 2006, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 140). I also reflected on what Weiss and Fine (2000) describe as participants' ability to articulate the forces that interrupt, suppress, or oppress them (as cited in Creswell, 2007). How did my position of power influence respondents in presenting a particular picture (Weiss, 1994)? Are we always conscious of the motivations behind our emotions, reactions, and actions? These are questions I needed to interrogate throughout the study.

Document Analysis

A third chunk of data involved the collection of documents created by participants and me throughout the study. Marshall and Rossman (2011) acknowledge the advantage of using documents and artifacts since they do not "disrupt ongoing events" (p. 161).

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This was true of the focus questions I created and students' reading responses in various forms (journals, sticky notes, graphic representations of thinking) collected from the gifted support setting. However, I also asked participants to create documents specifically for the research, such as reflective journals. In addition, I asked students to narrate some of the artifacts to me. As the participant understood, under what conditions were the artifacts created? How did the participant feel about the artifact? How did creating it affect his understanding of his academic identities? As with all other aspects of the study, consent to use these artifacts was sought from the participants. Photocopies were made of these artifacts and any names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms.

At times, students spontaneously created visuals to describe their ideas to the group in a more concrete way. When this occurred, I used my iPhone to take a photograph of the representation and transferred this file to my computer and Dropbox. After the first occurrence, the students themselves made suggestions for me to photograph certain visuals for my later use.

Research Journal

Finally, I regularly kept a research journal in order to reflect on the research process and make initial inferences about the data. Since as a participant observer I was only able to record minimal fieldnotes in the moment, the research journal was an important supplement to observation fieldnotes. I made an effort to write in the journal as soon as book club was over in order to remember as many details as possible. I also

wrote in response to discrete events that stood out to me. These pieces occurred as a way

of recording thoughts about informal conversations and observations that were

unplanned. Both types of writing demonstrate that writing itself is a way to capture and

facilitate thinking and stimulate analytic insights and acts as both data points and

analysis. In addition, "emergent insights may require new selection plans, different kinds

of data, and different analytic strategies" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 81). While I wrote in my

research journal soon after each Book Club session, I wrote a secondary journal as I

listened to the recording and added pseudonyms into the transcript. While the immediate

writing recorded my observations and thoughts while I was close to the moment, the

secondary writing allowed me to consider a slightly more holistic perspective as I looked

back on the session as a whole and saw the conversation in print. Journals were one way

to track my insights and make informed, purposeful changes in the data collection plan.

Thus, the journal served as concrete pieces of both data and analysis.

Data Analysis

Approach to Analysis

While qualitative research is highly context-dependent, analysis is more than

intuition. Rather, researchers conduct data collection and analysis in specific ways. I

situated my analysis in grounded theory which consists of simultaneous data collection

and analysis, structured data coding, constant comparative methods, writing as a form of

analysis, and sampling to refine one's theories (Bailey & Jackson, 2003). Glaser (1978

and 1992, as cited in Bailey & Jackson, 2003) maintains that grounded theory is built on

the assumption that the researcher is a neutral observer who objectively discovers and reports data. While I disagree with Glaser's contention that a researcher can be completely unbiased and objective, I find grounded theory's analytic strategies particularly helpful in determining categories and interpreting the data. I used Corbin and Strauss's (2008) steps of analysis as follows:

- Initial Read: Read materials from beginning to end. Do not take notes. Rather, the purpose of the first read is to "enter vicariously into the life of the participants" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

- Open Coding: Read closely each section of data, coding with conceptual labels reflecting one's interpretation. Use the constant comparative approach and continue to search the data until categories are saturated.

- Axial Coding: Find connections between codes. Connections may be causal, explain the central phenomenon, or relate to each other in some way.

- Selective Coding: Develop propositions or statements that connect the categories, working to build a story through and out of the data.

Although I was able to use grounded theory to develop categories and compare and contrast across data, as Bailey and Jackson (2003) noted, traditional grounded theory tends to de-humanize each individual's story. In response, I was influenced by narrative and phenomenological analysis to ensure that my participants were central to data. I considered stories and epiphanies shared by participants and, when possible, asked

participants to theorize about their experiences. I looked within and across what I perceived to be significant statements to determine the essence of a particular experience (i.e. peers pitting gifted students against each other during classroom competitions like Around the World). I embedded the voice of my participants into the writing through the influence of narrative and phenomenological approaches.

Data analysis occurred in two phases, with the first taking place throughout data collection and later analysis beginning in December with the conclusion of data collection. Both phases are described in detail below.

Initial Analysis

The initial and ongoing phase continuously informed the data collection process as analysis should begin as soon as there is data collection (Weiss, 1994). I recorded my thoughts in my research journal immediately after each Book Club session[14]. My writing consisted of a combination of observations and initial theories. I included wonderings and made initial connections. Initial themes emerged from these reflective entries which shaped the remainder of the data collection process. For example, when students discussed IQ in Book Club 2, I found reading material that focused on the history, purpose, and uses of IQ for the group to discuss in a later session. Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasize the importance of memos as tentative thinking on paper. Conceptual labels used in this early analysis should be considered initial and will often be rethought

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[14] When I was unable to write immediately following Book Club, I wrote in my research journal as soon as my schedule allowed.

as analysis accumulates.

This initial phase also included the transcription of interviews and class sessions as they occurred, along with note-making and secondary journal entries in which I developed tentative ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2005). I provided Heather with the Dropbox link to the audiotape immediately following each book club session or interview and she generally had the transcript back to me within a week or two. As Agar (1980, as cited in Creswell, 2007) suggests, I read through the transcripts in their entirety several times in order to gain a sense of the sessions and interviews as a whole before analyzing the details. I then listened to the recording with the transcript in front of me, inserting pseudonyms for each speech turn and writing initial notes, reflections, and possible themes. These notes grew into the open codes used in later analysis. Because I conducted this work while collecting data, analysis occurred in a spiral, rather than linear, process (Creswell, 2007). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe analysis as a funnel, so that well into the process one might determine that the research is really about something quite different than originally foreshadowed. As a practitioner researcher, I had to plan for analysis while allowing myself to remain open and let the data shape the research.

"Final" Analysis

Phase Two began in late December after the conclusion of data collection. While final in a sense, this phase of analysis continued to be recursive even through the final stages of writing. First, I read the entire data set chronologically and by looking across

the data as a cumulative whole, used inductive coding to identifying major themes in commonality of experience while also attending to variations in experience. The first reading served primarily as an overview for me; many of my notes and initial codes had to be revisited and refined to establish open codes. I used emic terms whenever possible and generated them recurrently until I established a stable set of substantive categories (Maxwell, 2005). I developed these theoretical categories inductively by finding relationships among terms (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) rather than using a previously established theory in order to emphasize the importance of keeping the participants as central to the research. In this way, I put the coded data into a more abstract framework which included etic terminology and sought to explain the phenomenon of the gifted reader's experience(s) with identity work.

At that point, I organized the data in an Excel spreadsheet[15] and sorted it based on open codes, creating a color coded system for each code. As Creswell (2007) suggests, I reduced my tentative list of codes into themes in order to make connections between data and plan for the chapters of the dissertation. These themes became the categories for which I established axial codes. Organizing the data in this way allowed me to see commonalities across data points as well as made clear unique phenomena. By linking data, I more elaborately considered the significance of the data points and built higher-level concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I then considered unique data. Was the data irrelevant to the current study? Or was there a nuance that I could explore that would

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[15] See Appendix G for the coding spreadsheet on Issues of Identity. Although the color coding is not evident in this copy, I highlighted each category in a different color.

provide an alternate perspective[16]? Finally, I used the spreadsheets to organize the data

once again into interconnected collections. I developed selective codes to describe the

relationship between the data and used them to narrate the story of each category

(Creswell, 2007). The resulting theories were the basis for the writing of this

dissertation.

A Note about My Lens of Analysis

I focused my analysis on the concepts of giftedness that emerged from the data.

While identity and culture were connected and in fact integral to the participants' ideas

about giftedness, this study was not meant to be a comprehensive examination of identity

or culture as discrete topics. Rather, theory and research on these concepts informed the

way I interpreted the data.

Validity Constructs

Qualitative research presents a unique challenge as researchers attempt to

conform to traditional methods of validation that do not transfer to this type of research.

Although participants provide us with access to knowledge we do not and could not

possess on our own, one of the limitations of qualitative research is that we cannot

assume participants are consciously aware of the reasons they act the way they do

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Critics also contend that generalizability poses a

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[16] As a qualitative researcher, no analysis is free of bias. What I determined to be less significant another
researcher may perceive to be central to analysis.

problem in qualitative research. As a response to these arguments, I used a variety of methods for confirming my analysis which follow Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constructs of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility demonstrates the extent to which findings are trustworthy. In other words, how can I prove that my analysis is appropriately grounded in the data? As a teacher researcher, my prolonged engagement in the research setting assisted in my goal of collecting rich data. I triangulated the data through the collection of multiple data points including a comparison of data from different points in the study and accounts from different participants and methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) as well as considered the data through various lenses, what Denzin (1978) describes as theoretical triangulation. I considered question such as: Might there be alternative explanations for the data? Does negative evidence present itself (Maxwell, 2005)? I found Richardson's (1997) concept of crystallization particularly effective as a supplement to triangulation, which suggests the existence of multiple perspectives and prompts researcher reflexivity. Further, the final interviews provided me with the participants' perspectives. Finally, I worked with a critical friend[17] who participated in peer debriefing, "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.308). Although as a friend and colleague, it is impossible for this person to be completely disinterested, their perspective

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[17] In addition to Heather, another cohort member acted as a critical friend. We had monthly phone calls in which we would report on the status of our research and talk through any burning issues or questions.

was more removed from the research and thus provided another lens through which to view the work.

Transferability, comparable to generalizability, is qualitative research's way of demonstrating a study's ability to apply to contexts beyond the local. As with most qualitative research, results are context dependent and social context, timing, and social location must be taken into account (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Yet, by using thick description of participants' experiences, I was able to describe the social and educational contexts which existed not only in the local context, but in settings with shared characteristics. In addition, positioning this work within the larger conversation of gifted education and student identity demonstrated how my work can inform policy and practice.

Lincoln and Guba describe dependability as the capacity of a study to show that the findings are consistent and could be replicated. Literacy as a social practice and reader-response theory, key aspects of my theoretical framework, contend that an individual's response to literature is dependent on various aspects of the time and place in which one transacts with text as well as the others with which that transaction takes place. Thus, no exact replication of the study is possible through this lens. However, triangulation of data and prolonged exposure to the research context and participants support the dependability of the findings.

Finally, confirmability is the degree to which findings are shaped by participants rather than the researcher herself. Once again, triangulation through the collection of multiple data points aided in confirmability by ensuring a rich, comprehensive account.

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Participants were asked to take part in aspects of analysis through member checks during the final interview. Finally, reflexivity was embedded throughout the research process. Qualitative researchers must accept that "all writing is 'positioned' and within a stance" (Creswell, 2007, p.179). Interrogating the position from which I collected, analyzed, and wrote up the data was imperative in maintaining the trustworthiness of my study. Within the research journal, I continually examined the decisions I made in the study and reflected on the assumptions and values I brought to the research. I was both an insider and outsider in this study, and the position of power I held as a teacher research could not be overlooked. Throughout the study I endeavored to represent the students' voices in an accurate and celebratory manner.

CHAPTER 3:
Complicating Issues of Gifted Identity

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which students used the novel *Ungifted* along with informational text to conceptualize what it meant to them to be gifted. Students developed and revised their definitions of giftedness, then complicated those ideas by identifying the ways the expectations of others affected their learning, behavior, emotions, and identity. Finally, I will describe the educational opportunities participants wished to experience based on their conceptions of giftedness and their past experiences in the school system. Students' work demonstrated the importance of infusing identity work into the literacy classroom.

Identity, Literacy, and Giftedness

The Intersection of Literacy and Identity

Conceptualizing literacy as simultaneously a personal and social practice empowers the reader as knowledge generator and meaning maker. Used in conjunction with each other, literacy theories can be used to develop pedagogy that supports students in understanding and developing their identities. Although identity has been defined in the literature in many ways, the view of identity as social and fluid is widely accepted (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009). Identities are enacted and performed for others, so vary depending on context. Identities are also fluid, meaning that they depend on interactions and stories people tell about themselves. Therefore, actions are partial representations of self, what Royster (2000) refers to as a kaleidoscopic view. Mohanty

(2004) also recognizes the complexity of identity, emphasizing the need to examine the intersection of class, race, sexuality, nationality, and culture in order to situate more clearly one's identity. The term "identities in practice" emphasizes that the sense of self is intertwined with figured worlds, the socially produced and culturally constructed "realm of interpretation" (Bartlett & Holland, 2002). When cultural artifacts- images, memories, and narratives- are used to manage one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, they shape one's social position and influence one's sense of self. In this way, identity becomes both a personal and social phenomenon.

Literacy provides an opportunity for individuals to form and reform their identities. The reader is changed by reading as is the writer changed by writing; it is inherent in this very action. Through reading and discussing literature, readers make connections between stories and their knowledge of the world. These narratives form a relationship between lived and imaginary worlds and help us know what choices are possible in our lived narratives (Davies, 1990) and literature becomes an "interpretive resource for dealing with [the] everyday world" (p.328). For example, McGinley and Kamberelis's (1996) year-long study of third and fourth graders and their use of literacy practices to understand themselves and their social worlds showed that children use reading to "imaginatively explore a variety of new roles, responsibilities, and identities derived from both real and fictional story characters" (p.89). As Sumara writes, "confronting something or someone unfamiliar requires a re-interpretation of who we are (us) and a re-interpretation of the world that contains the unfamiliar (not-us)" (1996, p.213). In fact, learning is more likely to occur when readers are confronted with shifting

or competing worlds in literature since they are more likely to engage in inquiry about the issues (Galda & Beach, 2001). Frank and McBee (2003) demonstrate how teachers might use literature to support gifted students in particular in beginning the process of identity development using texts with characters that are battling identity confusion themselves. Through bibliotherapy, the classroom then becomes a safe environment in which readers can encounter new ways of thinking. "Reading, especially aesthetic reading, extends the scope of that environment and feeds the growth of the individual, who can then bring a richer self to further transactions with life and literature" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p.274). Better understanding of the self results in better understanding of one's world.

Similar to reading, writing also helps students form identities. Writing has been described as "an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.93). Providing space in our classrooms for our students to write is one way for us to support them in making sense of their worlds and even write themselves into being (Hesford, 1999). The inner struggles of their young lives[18] can be played out on paper, a physical place for them to become aware of, explore, and manipulate their senses of self, a necessity since "nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 109). In fact, Anzaldúa contends that our most traumatic experiences can be most transformative if we are able to make meaning of them; they can "lead us toward becoming more of who we are" (p. 68), but only if we support students in

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[18] Here I refer to both the lives of my own students as well as students in general.

thinking and writing critically and challenging their own assumptions as well as those of others. Critically rereading and rewriting our own works as Laurel Richardson did in *Fields of Play* (1997) brings to our attention our presence in our works, but also reminds us that "we are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us" (p. 2). As Erikson noted, the historical era in which a child lives offers "only a limited number of socially meaningful models for workable combinations of identity fragments" (1968, p. 53). Thus, the process of rereading one's own work and engaging in deep discussion allows us to engage in self-dialogue and gives us the opportunity to move beyond those models available to us and to rewrite not only our work but ourselves.

Using literacy for identity formation in the school setting has powerful implications. If we believe that texts and literate practices serve as tools for identity construction, might the types of texts and practices available to students shape the possibilities available for one's identity work[19]? Classrooms contain and produce resources for identity work that come from many places; identity is not static, but constantly changing. It is messy work, but in this research my goal was to nurture "moments of instability…'third spaces' when power relations are being reworked" (Leander & Zacher, 2007, p. 146) as these are opportunities for identity reformation. The classroom must create a place of intellectual diversity and safety for students to explore identity as a result of interacting with literacy. Viewing students through a human lens, one which recognizes the identity work in which we all engage, means using literary

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[19] This study included various text types as they provide diverse opportunities to engage with others, narrate oneself into the world, and develop consciousness.

theory in novel ways to engage learners in deep self-dialogue in which the self can be continuously created and recreated.

Identity as a Social Construction

Psychologist Erik Erikson's view of identity as a process located both in the core of the individual and in the common culture is particularly helpful as I consider the ways in which gifted students view themselves within the school context. Erikson believed that individuals go through a series of stages, each with a crisis. The crisis is not necessarily a negative experience, but acts as a "necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson, 1968, p. 16). Within the "identity vs. identity confusion" stage of adolescence, the crisis is comprised of doubt and defiance as individuals attempt to work through the active tension involved in defining oneself as separate from one's family. Identity formation involves a continual process of reflection and observation in which the individual judges himself[20] based on the ways in which he imagines others to judge him. At the same time, he judges their way of judging him. When self-definition becomes too difficult, he experiences a sense of role confusion. Erikson contends that while identity is never 'established' in a complete and finished manner, the adolescent identity crisis determines much of what follows in one's life. If one is successful in developing a clear sense of identity, he will approach later challenges

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[20] For the ease of reading, I will use the male pronoun 'he.' However, I mean to be gender neutral and intend to be inclusive of males and females unless otherwise noted.

with solidity. However, failure to develop a clear sense of identity will result in confusion about one's place in society, uncertainty when faced with life decisions, and difficulty in forming solid interpersonal relationships as an adult (Gross, 1998). Although Erikson emphasizes that most of this process is unconscious, I believe that bringing some of this work to the conscious level would support students in achieving success in defining themselves and making peace with how others define them. One of the goals of my research was to use text to facilitate this work.

The Intersection of Giftedness and Identity

Although the identity vs. identity confusion stage generally takes place during adolescence, there is evidence that, in addition to early onset of speech, information processing, and abstracting reasoning, gifted youth may begin the identity formation process sooner than their nongifted peers (Frank & McBee, 2003; Gross, 1998). Throughout one's elementary years, the egocentricity of early childhood turns into an awareness of "the opinions, abilities, and achievements of others" (Gross, 1998, p. 3), a shift that appears to correlate more closely with mental than chronological age. Gifted students' internal conflict often arises from heightened emotional sensitivity coupled with the tension that they may feel between their social and intellectual worlds (Silverman, 1997, as cited in Frank & McBee, 2003). For the gifted, identity development is confounded by the differences between the ways in which they understand and interact with their peers and the world. Thus, they may "mask and camouflage" their identities (Gross, 1998, p. 2) in order to more easily assimilate into the social environment. This

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phenomenon runs antithetical to the assumption of many that gifted students have a feeling of superiority. Rather, the period of role experimentation is often interrupted by students' need to conform to the behavior of peers to the detriment of one's true self. Because of this, my study supported students in using literacy practices to reflect on, dialogue about, and essentially (re)write their worlds.

Student perspective is lacking in the literature about identity formation. However, Zuo and Cramond's 2001 work did seek to include student voices by expanding the work of Terman's 1921 longitudinal study of the intellectually gifted. After describing the group as having superior development and in position to have a promising future, Terman followed the participants into adulthood and compared the least and most successful[21] sub-groups. He found that they did not differ much in IQ, but beginning in high school the least successful group tended to get poor grades. As adults, successful gifted individuals had positive social development and better mental health. Zuo and Cramond applied Erikson's identity theory and Marcia's operational definition of identity to this follow up study, finding that the most successful group was made up of Identity Achievers who were cognizant of their goals and directions in life whereas the least successful group tended to be Identity Diffusers, individuals who had little commitment or serious exploration. These findings imply that (gifted) education should take into account the importance of identity development in future success in multiple areas of life; the establishment of a clear sense of identity sustains motivation for self-actualization.

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[21] Terman defined success based on: "(1) nature of work, importance of position, and professional output; (2) qualities of leadership, influence, and initiative; (3) recognition and honors (scientific, civic, professional), awards, biographical listings, election to learned societies, and so forth; and (4) earned income" (Zuo & Cramond, 2001).

This chapter will focus on the ways in which the participants used text and dialogue to consider issues of identity.

How Participants Defined Giftedness

Ludwig, MS, Markus, May, Sapphire, and Tim were contemplative, opinionated youngsters. As such, they had strong beliefs about the many types of giftedness, including academics, leadership, theatrics, and physical activity. Although they believed that giftedness could take many forms, they observed that academic ability as demonstrated on assessments was the primary "gift" recognized by American schools. As they read, they considered the reasons for that in discussions, in interviews, and in writing.

While the novel never formally defines giftedness, the fact that the only students to get in to the school for the gifted are academically advanced implies a narrow, cognitively based definition. However, the lesson throughout the book is that *all* individuals have gifts to share, whether they be intellectual, physical, creative, or social. The non-fiction readings included an overview of a variety of definitions in order to expose students to a range of schools of thought. For example, Renzulli's Three-Ring Definition[22] views giftedness as context dependent, developing in certain people, at certain times, under certain circumstances and defines two types of giftedness. Schoolhouse giftedness is demonstrated through strengths in test-taking or less-learning. These students are excellent consumers of knowledge, while creative-productive

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[22] For a more detailed description of Renzulli's model, please refer to Chapter 1.

giftedness is evidenced by excellent producers of knowledge. Renzulli (2012) asserts

that creative-productive individuals possess above average ability, creativity, and task

commitment. The group used specifics regarding *Ungifted* and informational texts as

well as their own experiences to consider the complex interactions between intelligence,

ability, passion, and opportunity.

Definition #1 -"Not, like, smarter than the average bear"

Participants differed in their definitions of giftedness. Tim's view of giftedness

was subject-specific in nature. Rather than being "smarter than the average bear," he saw

giftedness as being "really good at this one thing" (Interview, 8/20/13), a view that best

correlates with that of Howard Gardner. Gardner originally identified seven modes of

intelligence that encompassed different abilities rather than a single general intelligence

and later added two additional modalities (1983). Tim's beliefs may be grounded in his

own experiences as a student who has a wide range of abilities. Tim shared in both

interviews and Book Club sessions that while he is an advanced reader, he struggles to

earn even average grades in on grade level math class. He believed that one must be

honest in one's self-assessment and should attend gifted support for only those subjects in

which one excels, an educational plan that involves achievement grouping, enrichment,

and acceleration for subject specific instruction (Rogers, 2007). Rather than an IQ test,

he believed that some sort of assessment "revolving around what you were good at"

would take into account the "strength of each person skill wise, not how smart your IQ

is" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13), since he saw IQ as a measure of general intelligence rather

than a valid appraisal of one's abilities.

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But for Tim, ability was fluid and not the only prerequisite for giftedness. Passion was just as important as knowledge and skills, and in fact may be the variable that causes one to be gifted in the first place. Citing a study we discussed in Seminar, Tim reminded the group that "…like the grand chess masters and just the chess masters…the passion for what we learn about" (Interview, 12/17/13) was often what sets him and his fellow gifted peers apart. Teachers might observe "signs of being really into something…want to be great at that. Like always paying attention during that class" (Interview, 8/30/13). Passion, then, is paramount to ability and achievement[23]. Tim further explained "it's not the situation where if life gives you lemons, make lemonade. It's more of the situation of, if life gives you lemons, make lemonade if you feel like doing it. If you really want to open a lemonade stand or just make some lemonade for your friends and make sure they're happy…" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). Thus, while one might have the ability to excel in a certain area, the ultimate decision of whether or not to pursue that ability is left up to the individual. He or she might seek to develop the ability to its maximum, use it merely for specific purposes which may be self-serving or humanitarian, or ignore it completely.

Much like Tim's conceptualization, Renzulli's three-ring definition of giftedness also takes passion into account. Renzulli uses the term 'task commitment' to describe the extent to which an individual devotes himself to the development of a skill or ability. According to Renzulli (2012), it is only through the interaction of above-average ability,

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[23] May agreed, explaining that "some people out there…might be able to do it, but they might not have the motivation" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). "…If you have a lot of passion, you're most likely to succeed" (Interview, 12/18/13).

creativity, and task commitment can one be considered a gifted producer of knowledge.
Others (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012; Rogers, 2007) have also
acknowledged the importance of motivation and passion in achievement, especially in
independent study contexts, as the way one responds to challenge, feedback, and setbacks
determines the extent to which skills will continue to be developed.

Tim also stated the importance of opportunity and exposure in the development of
both ability and passion. By using his family members as examples, he illustrated for the
group the ways in which his siblings have excelled in areas for which they have been
exposed:

> I remember something, like Markus was saying, is it possible that what you're
> surrounded by influences you, and does that happen in families? I can answer that
> with a resounding yes. Like I remember, like when we were younger, [my
> brother] Bobby, he's a big fan of Mario and Luigi and wants to try to program a
> few or something like that- he- like when we first got our Wii, he loved just
> sitting around and watching my dad play those with my brother Ethan. And
> eventually, nowadays, he's just playing those 'cause he likes them. And I
> remember, I make a lot of movies for the classroom. A lot, a lot. And I remember
> days that I would just sit around and like review movies that I'd seen, and I
> remember like a few times when Dad's like, oh, I'm putting in this movie. Does
> anyone want to see it? Yes. I don't care. I want to make movies. I want to see
> what they're like… So I was influenced by that, and Jennifer, she just loves
> songs, and she's been listening to her songs on the radio and stuff like that, and
> she loves to sing. She even got in the musical this year 'cause she loves singing
> and [   ] and all that. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

The fact that his father was a music teacher and a movie lover exposed his family to the
arts more than most, which in turn allowed for his sister to learn more about musical
theater and Tim to develop his knowledge of film. Yet he acknowledged that his father's
job had no bearing on Tim's ability to play the saxophone, an instrument he began earlier

in the year. "So being gifted is, in my opinion, really a gift. It's random that you were born and you had, like, or you got the experience to learn to be gifted" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). Consequently, his father's passions prompted increased opportunities for him and his sister, but it was random that he was born to a father with such passions. Here, Tim stated that he believes giftedness is random, but that randomness seems to come in two forms: innate ability or opportunity and exposure to experiences.

Tim struggled with the idea of innate ability, wondering "…is there really such a thing as being a natural, or do you have to wait and see something that, like, sparks your interest, let's say uh…Oh my god. How did that paper fall and go sideways and go around and fly? I want to be a plane designer. Like what does something like that?" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). Later in the same discussion, Tim again wondered about the source of giftedness. "…Is there such a thing as born giftedness? Is it a thing, or is it grown? Or is it just- there's- you have the people who pay a lot of attention to class, and they learn. They want to learn, and that gets them gifted…" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). To further his thinking about the source of ability and his shifting views on the nature of giftedness, Tim considered the experiences of the cavemen to explore how one becomes 'smart:'

> When we had these cavemen who were just running around grunting and going through evolution, do you think there were any of the smart ones, but since there was nothing there to let them do their uses…besides like hunting and stuff, but there was really- if you had a skill, and it was in your brain, it's gonna go away because you're not doing anything with it. (Book Club 9, 11/1/13)

The fact that Tim grappled with these questions demonstrates his belief in the need for exposure and practice with a skill or topic in order for giftedness to develop. This

thought aligns with the psychological view of giftedness, in which biology and sociology are not enough to explain giftedness and genius (Friedman & Rogers, 1998). Rather, motivation, attitudes towards independence, and social influences such as birth order come into play. From this perspective, children cannot meet their full potential without many opportunities for an enriched environment. Otherwise, any potential will not materialize and innate ability will wither away.

As a deep listener with a tendency to synthesize the group's ideas, Tim observed that "our ideas keep shifting and pointing out that someone is gifted or not. And if you earn it or don't earn it. If you have to work for it, or if you get it" (Interview, 12/17/13). While during Book Club 11 he wondered aloud whether there is such a thing as born giftedness, he later appears to be settled on the nurture end of the debate:

> I'm standing right here, and I keep saying in almost every book club that I can prove my point that you have to earn giftedness…Well, I figured out that I was in the MG program in Fourth Grade. If I had been born with it, I probably would have already had been in, if I had been born with it. Not trying to earn it in the subjects that I'm good at…And it's like, life isn't about being given, in real- like when you grow up. It's about earning it. You have to do your job well to earn something. You have to do- you have to focus in school very well to earn being gifted. (Interview, 12/17/13)

Tim's identification later in his elementary career supported his belief that giftedness is learned rather than innate. Although he saw interest and effort as the primary factor, the cause of giftedness remained multifaceted in his mind. "If you threw [ability, interest, and hard work] into a blender, you'd have something really good come out" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). Yet the necessity for each component and from where they originate was still unclear for Tim. This was a concept he continues to grapple with throughout the study.

Definition #2 - "When it comes to academics…"

Although MS believed that there are many types of giftedness, his discussion seemed to center on academic giftedness. In general, he defines being gifted as "to excel at things beyond the average standard" (Interview, 12/13/13) and skills or subjects that "you are slightly better at because you're happy that you're interested" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). Therefore, giftedness for MS involved both ability and passion. He said that everyone can be gifted in some way, including leadership and specific subject areas. However, "mainly schools are meant to teach academics, so the people who excel at what they're teaching, they can go farther with it" (Interview, 12/13/13). Markus concurred, theorizing that schools don't "really know how to treat [non-academic] giftedness" (Interview, 12/13/13). Thus, although there are many ways to be gifted, academic giftedness is the primary type acknowledged within the school setting since intellectual work is the focus of the school. During Book Club, MS made it a point to specify when characters are not *academically* gifted. For example, when referring to Fred and George from *Harry Potter*, he was reminded that "they don't think their future likes in academic achievement" (Book Club 3, 9/20/13). He observed that in *Ungifted*[24], Donovan is "not gifted when it comes to academics" (Book Club 3, 9/20/13) and that Abigail didn't like Donovan being at the Academy because he "wasn't gifted, as in brains" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). Thus, although these characters are not academically advanced, they have talents, skills, and potential and could be considered gifted in other areas.

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[24] For a summary of *Ungifted* and its use in the study, please refer to Chapter 2.

MS appreciated these alternative gifts. During Book Club 6, we were discussing

what Donovan's gifts might be. "If you're put into a really heated, like a- you're in the

heat, you have to like act, those academy kids can't do it. They need some rapid-fire, you

call Donovan" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). Whereas the academically gifted students were

so stuck on considering the implications of each and every action, Donovan was able to

perform. Later, MS went on to tell more about Donovan's strengths:

MS:	I would describe his gift as glue.
Sara:	Tell me more.
MS:	He can bring a random bunch of people-
Ludwig:	Together.
MS:	-and give them motivation and make them work as a team. For example, the robot. He named it Tin Man. That just made five different people come together with one motivation kind of.
Markus:	No, then what really showed that happen was that they called it Tin Man, and then he's like Metallica, and he thought-
Students:	((in unison)) Squarepants.
Markus:	Right? So they're kind of like-
May:	Tin Man Metallica Squarepants.
Markus:	Yeah, so they're kind of like- he's kind of inspiring them that- give it a name. You know.
Sara:	Which is something that- it never occurred to any of them.
Markus:	Yeah.
Sara:	No matter how smart they are.
Markus:	They always think the most advanced things, but I don't- I think that they miss out on the small, small little details. (Book Club 6, 10/11/13)

Although in the novel Donovan is labeled as a struggling academic, he is a true leader,

able to motivate and bring a group together. As Markus added, he was inspiring and able

to focus in on the details that the abstract, conceptual thinkers ignore. While this may not

be a form of giftedness acknowledged by the typical American school system, MS and

Markus expanded the definition to include non-academic gifts.

Definition #3 - Ludwig's Context-dependent, Multi-faceted Definition

Ludwig, like MS and Tim, believed that academics are only one type of giftedness. However, he was more explicit in his expanded description which goes beyond academics to include the arts, sports, and other areas. His definition was "being better at something than your society" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13) or "excel[ing] at something more than average" (Interview, 12/11/13). Since he identified many types of giftedness, he was unable to describe a single instance/case. Ludwig's concept of giftedness correlates with that of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences which challenges the way that traditional school systems assume that all students learn and can be assessed in the same way (Gardner, 1983). In this model, individuals are recognized for giftedness in one or more areas of focus, including verbal-linguistic, mathematic-logical, naturalistic, visual, and kinesthetic, many of which are not currently acknowledged within the school setting.

Although Ludwig had an expanded concept of giftedness, he did observe that schools focus on the academic definition: "…if somebody says something about gifted, and it always refers back to this classroom, who's here, so it's usually the society actually defines giftedness as similarly as schools do" (Interview, 12/11/13). Society as a whole limits the definition to intellectual giftedness and, consequently, so do school systems. In this setting, Ludwig described giftedness as "good at…cardinal subjects, like your math and your reading and your science. Those are like the main…subjects in schools" (Interview, 8/30/13). He expected teachers to identify students who "get all problems

right and…are the most smart and talented kid in the class" (Interview, 8/30/13). In some ways, then, giftedness is inherently relative to one's peer group.

For Ludwig, being gifted was intricately tied to being different. He believed that everyone is different or unique in some way, and that giftedness is one type of difference, "more of a zoomed-in kind of version of difference" (Interview, 12/11/13), an idea May agreed with: "different is very broad, and giftedness is just one type of difference" (Interview, 12/18/13). Ludwig particularly connected with my drawing of a typical gifted person, shown below.

Figure 3.1: Sara's drawing of a gifted person

Sara: So I made- really, the face could be any face, but what I thought of for a gifted person was all of the thoughts that are constantly going through their minds.
Ludwig: Ding-a-ding-a-ding-a-ding.
Sara: And all different kinds of thoughts, so that's what I was doing with kind of these swirlies here, is that their mind is constantly moving. So there's a music note. There's math problems. There's a book- that's supposed to be a paintbrush.
Ludwig: You have really captured it. (Book Club 4, 9/27/13)

Ludwig identified with the idea of a mind in constant motion, finding that giftedness involves quick thought, an accelerated ability to learn new information, and multi-tasking

by the brain. Thus, the mind of the gifted learner differs from others in its ability to

remember, comprehend, and synthesize information in rapid and flexible ways.

For Ludwig, academic giftedness was not only dependent on high grades, though.

Ludwig's drawing of a pie chart illustrated what he saw as the components of giftedness:

> Ludwig: I made a pie chart, kind of. So I put a- education-
> Sara: So the pie chart represents-
> Ludwig: Giftedness. Or, well, having- becoming a good person. (Book Club 9, 11/1/13)

Interesting is that, for Ludwig, giftedness and "becoming a good person" were somewhat

interchangeable terms. Giftedness, then, was not an end in itself, but a means to a greater

accomplishment.

> Ludwig: So fifty percent around fifty percent's education. Around twenty-five percent is opportunity.
> Sara: What do you mean by opportunity?
> Ludwig: Like, you get exposed to certain things. Like Markus said.
> Markus: -that would be the man and woman thing, and the-
> Ludwig: Exposed to, say, like those types of maths. Something like that.
> Sara: Okay. Things that you might be around when you're younger, that kind of thing? (Book Club 9, 11/1/13)

These sections are comprised of experiences in education and other opportunities. When

Markus referred to "the man and woman thing" and raises the issue of gender

discrimination and the lack of educational opportunities afforded to women in the past, in

contrast, Ludwig acknowledged the influence of one's environment and exposure to

experiences and opportunities. However, he could not ignore the impact of nature:

> Ludwig: The next is intelligence or capacity.
> Sara: So by that, do you mean something you're born with?
> Ludwig: Yeah, kind of. So this is around twenty percent so now I'm up to seventy. So this would be around twenty percent, too. Or even twenty-five percent is intelligence. And the last five percent's genetics.

Sara: Okay. So can you explain, in your thinking, the difference between the genetics and intelligence?

Ludwig: Intelligence is what you're born with, something. It just- It just happens. It's just your luck…And genetics is, like little part. Say your parents are extraordinarily smart. You might inherit a little and be a little above average.

Nature, according to Ludwig, could not be ignored but did not make up the majority of one's giftedness nor did it guarantee or preclude one from becoming successful in life. His description of an ideal gifted program (described in a subsequent section) underscored the importance of honest self-evaluation and commitment to a challenging academic environment.

Ludwig's ideas about the multi-faceted nature of giftedness align with Renzulli's Three-Ring Definition in which giftedness is composed of above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment (Renzulli, 2012). In order for an individual to be identified as having creative-productive giftedness, an interaction between all three components must take place. Ludwig believed that teachers should look for not only students who earn "good grades," but demonstrate "hard work on your tests…and how much you enjoy the subjects that you have to be good at for gifted" (Interview, 8/30/13). Interest, then, is vital for achievement. Like Ludwig, Renzulli believed that giftedness develops in certain people, at certain times, and under certain circumstances (Phillipson & McCann, 2007), and is thus very context-dependent. Instead, giftedness is a complex interaction between innate intelligence, education and experiences, and effort, a component that Ludwig failed to include in his pie chart but emphasized in many conversations throughout the study.

Complicating the Definitions: Nature vs. Nurture

Throughout the study, book club members grappled with the source of giftedness.

While the influence of opportunity and exposure to learning experiences could not be

denied, the students were less sure about the ways in which one's biology impacts

giftedness. Participants used their knowledge of genetics in regards to physical traits to

inform their ideas about intelligence. For example, Tim shared that he and his father can

both cross their left eye at will but that his siblings did not inherit this ability. The ability

did not result from opportunity or practice. Rather, genetics seemed to be a stronger

determinant for physical traits and abilities. However, their ideas about the influence of

nature and nurture were fuzzier when it came to the more abstract concepts of

intelligence and giftedness. While they felt there was certainly a biological piece to

intelligence, they recognized the impact of opportunity and experience as well.

MS acknowledged genetics as impacting one's intelligence, but he disagreed with

Donovan's view that they are the determining factor in one's intellectual achievement:

> He kind of expects a lot of DNA. Donovan as a person. He like thinks- well, if
> I'm like this, then definitely, one hundred percent, there has to be somebody that
> was born before me, like my ancestor, that did these exact same things in this
> exact order. His name was Donovan Curtis. He went to Hard Castle Middle
> School. [Dh dh dh]. He went to the academy. And he did everything- like a
> complete ditto. Copy-paste, DNA. (Book Club 2, 9/13/13)

MS knew it was more complicated than that, yet he didn't deny the impact biology has on

one's processing and memory capabilities. After reading informational text about the

brain, MS described how giftedness might be explained scientifically:

> Well, it says on the beginning of page eighteen, the more neuro connections you
> have in a given area of your brain, the bigger that area will be, and then the bigger
> that area is, like it kind of depends on how smart you are…So then I was thinking,

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then, maybe some people could be born with more neuro connections. So that would make them born gifted. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

Markus also acknowledged the influence of biology when he referenced evolution and the ways in which the brain has changed over time:

> So it started as monkeys. Then we turned into- then we turned into Neanderthals. But Neanderthals didn't have that kind of brain capacity to do that kind of stuff. But then they evolved into homo sapiens. And then the new homo sapiens took over the Neanderthals as the most abundant. (Book Club 9, 11/1/13)

Markus's description of how the brain physically changed over time supported the idea that intelligence, or at least capacity or potential, might be partly biological[25]. He believed in the power of innate potential, theorizing that even someone with a "little wisp of giftedness" can grow it over time, but "you can't just start with nothing and create it. You have to start with something" (Interview, 12/13/13). "You can train giftedness…or you can half eliminate it, but you can't really like create it" (Book Club 7, 11/18/13). For Markus, then, giftedness must start from some biological seed that an individual then can foster or inhibit. He likened it to "stretching your hamstrings and stuff like that, to make you more flexible. If you stop doing it, then it just goes away" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). MS, though, stressed that biology is only one part of the equation, not the "ultimate

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[25] A discussion of the biological origins of intelligence should be complicated by issues of scientific racism, sexism, and nationalist views in history. For example, Francis Galton's theory of giftedness contends that individual variance in intelligence is due to biological inheritance which translates directly into achievement. He relied on family pedigrees to demonstrate that those individuals whose accomplishments were recorded in history were likely to come from distinguished lineages. However, he failed to recognize the negative effects of systemic racism and sexism on educational opportunities for certain groups (i.e. women, minorities, the poor). Rather, evidence suggests that many cognitive processes are culturally dependent (Phillipson & McCann, 2007) as well as heavily influenced by exposure to language and education. Please see Chapter 5 for a review of the literature and extended focus on the influences of culture, ethnicity, language, and family on intelligence and ability.

thing" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). While genetics determined your starting place, to MS, the

environment is more influential in forming one's intelligence:

> The whole thing I was thinking is, it's kind of like saying hard work is more
> influential, than like born giftedness is the path to success…I think that's true,
> because I mean, if you just are born with a great mind and then you don't even try
> to put in some hard work, it's not going to get you places…But then you don't
> need the factor of the born giftedness to achieve success in life. (Book Club 11,
> 11/18/13)

Not only would a lack of effort and hard work "not get you places," MS saw it as actually

causing a negative change in the brain as neurons suffer from a lack of use:

> …if you were born like Noah IQ and you don't have any interest in anything, the
> IQ can go down because you don't really care and you're lazing around the whole
> day. It's kind of like, you need- you need to exercise frequently to keep yourself
> fit. If you are born super fit, but then you just don't even exercise, then it's going
> to mess up your- (Book Club 14, 12/17/13)

Thus, the IQ is always changing as we learn and "come up on something that [we] never

knew before" (Book Club 2, 9/13/13). This belief has powerful implications for the ways

in which we identify and provide for gifted learners in the K-12 school system. MS

believed that students should be able to take an IQ test multiple times in order to

demonstrate their growth over time. He also believed that the IQ test identifies only

academic giftedness, thereby ignoring those with gifts "in other standards, like in sports

or something like that" (Interview, 12/13/13). Additionally, schools must provide

educational opportunities for all students so that their innate intelligence can "blossom."

Despite the number of neurons and neural connections a person is born with, according to

MS, experiences such as excessive tutoring and schools like the Academy for Scholastic

Distinction in *Ungifted*, positively affect one's intelligence. He used a story from the

news to illustrate his point:

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>…my mom told me this was on the news, so there was this homeless person in New York, and he met this computer programmer, and so the computer programmer said he could do two things for that homeless man. He could give him a hundred dollars right then and there, or he could teach him to program every day in the morning. So the homeless person chose the programming. (Book Club 14, 12/17/13)

While on the surface it might appear that this man had no ability, he knew that with education he would be capable and gain so much more than a one-time cash payment. MS explained that the man used his new computer skills to become gainfully employed and find adequate housing, demonstrating that it is impossible to have no ability whatsoever. What is possible is to have no opportunity.

MS also saw personal habits and learning behaviors as significant influences in developing and maintaining one's intelligence. "Well, the innate ability, I think, is definitely not needed…you can just bullet through with motivation alone…I think motivation leads to a lot of hard work, and hard work is actually- like what you need" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). What MS did not acknowledge here are the factors which influence one's motivation and ability to devote time and effort into one's studies. What about the child who speaks little English and whose teachers focus on basic skills? What of the teenager who is working two jobs to help support his family? These are issues of access that MS has yet to deeply consider.

That being said, MS had a strong belief that his family has had a profound effect on his giftedness, stating that "I definitely would not be in the MG program if not for my mom" (Interview, 8/29/13). His mother chose to stay home with MS rather than rejoining the workforce in order to teach him reading and math skills, helping MS to be able to do four digit addition, three digit subtraction, and multiplication as a

kindergartner. At home, where as an only child he is the sole student, his mom "knows exactly what [he is] struggling with, so she can put more practice on that subject, whereas in school they can't do that" (Interview, 8/29/13). However, the constant interaction between nature and nurture remained strong in MS's mind:

> You can have like a family, like the environment, that's like really strict towards one thing, and then you could be born with more neuro connections in something else, and then you really stand out. So I'm thinking that the interest thing kind of can defy the nurture thing, so nurture versus nature, I'm thinking, like, that debate- I think if you're like really interested in something, if you have a lot of nature, then the nurture can get defied. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

During Book Club 9, he referred back to Markus's earlier comments about how scientists believe that our experiences might be able to actually create or change our genes:

> Markus: The thing is that you have a strand of DNA. In that strand of DNA, boom, you- you get- when you're a little kid, you get exposed to your dad playing the guitar. Boom, that would sort of create a gene, sort of, that kind of like helps you with music, and that can- that- I think that's how it is. I've sort of- I didn't read the whole article in that Nat Geo. But I read a little bit, and I saw that over time, your genes can change. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

Returning to this discussion, MS pointed out that parents are not the only influencers of how our genes might change over time:

> MS: Well, what I was thinking was sometimes, your parents or something don't have to do that. It can be an event. Say you're in *Harry Potter*. And you're this neutral person between Voldemort and-
> May: It always connects to *Harry Potter*.
> Ludwig: I love that one.
> Tim: I always connect to movies.
> MS: And then say you see somebody die.
> Sara: Okay.
> MS: That might affect your view on the thing. (p. 29)

Here, MS expanded the genetic influence from strictly heredity to environment and experience. This concept of how nature and nurture may not be the dichotomy we

consider it to be is critical in the ways in which we define giftedness and provide

appropriate educational opportunities for all learners. Inherent in this thinking is the idea

that once giftedness has been achieved, one must continue to work hard and exercise

one's intellect in order to maintain that high level of intelligence and ability. MS used

the symbol of a gold medal to describe giftedness:

> Because you can be born with what it takes, and you could be ahead of everybody
> else, but then you need to keep trying to- like keep practicing to achieve what
> you- the gold medal, and then you could be born, just with everybody else, or
> even maybe lower. But then that constant practice that you put in could get you up
> to that stage. (Book Club 14, 12/17/13)

Once you achieve a level of giftedness, you still must continue to learn and flex your

intellectual muscles in order to maintain intelligence, "like the defending champion"

(Book Club 14, 12/17/13). Achievement is not a singular occurrence, but an ongoing

endeavor. MS's definition of giftedness seemed to be shifting, as he nuanced his ideas

about intelligence and performance.

While Ludwig believed that people can be born "with a sense of being extra-good

at something than normal" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13), he agreed with MS that innate

ability does not guarantee future success. Rather, "the hard work is what you really

need…The born gifted, that gives you a jump start, but if somebody can learn to be

gifted, the hard work is actually" what makes the difference (Interview, 12/11/13). He

used himself as an example, explaining how his exposure to Singapore math at a very

early age allowed him to master his basic operations which led to his current advanced

math skills. Ludwig used the metaphor of a seed to describe his thinking: "People might

be born gifted, but you still have to work to use the- like if you have a seed, if you don't

water it, it's not going to grow, and eventually- it'll be there for some time. It won't

grow, but it'll eventually actually wither away" (Interview, 12/11/13). Thus, not only

will a lack of nurturing stunt the growth of one's abilities, but eventually it may eliminate

the potential for future growth altogether.

Alternately, being born without enriched ability does not preclude one from

becoming gifted. Rather, Ludwig believed that "you can develop it" (Book Club 13,

12/9/13) through effort and educational experiences. In fact, in the pie chart he

developed to show the factors that determine giftedness, he identified fifty percent as

education and twenty-five percent as opportunity or exposure to experiences, leaving

only the remaining twenty-five percent as innate intelligence and genetics. Sapphire

went so far as to say that "most of the kids who are in the gifted program aren't mentally

gifted. They just did work to get in" (Interview, 9/6/13). Instead, they did workbooks,

went to after school programs like Kumon, or got tutored; gifted was "something you

have to strive for" (Sapphire, Interview, 12/16/13). The group believed strongly in the

power of opportunity and exposure, especially at a young age. Markus provided the

following explanation:

> My idea for how it kind of works is that as a little- as a baby, a very very teensy
> baby, once you get exposed to something, like if you see your Dad every day, if
> you listen to him play piano every day and you see him play instruments, then
> you'll start to like that because as a baby, you don't know what's out there in the
> world, but once you see only this, you start to like that, and then you become
> really good at that. If you see lots of electronics, if you're crowded with
> electronics, if you get a tablet when you're one, and you start playing around with
> it- (Book Club 9, 11/1/13)

His statement that "as a baby, you don't know what's out there in the world" illustrated

his belief in humans as a sort of blank slate, open to the influence of the world to which

they are exposed. He provided evidence to support his ideas by sharing an article he read

about identical twins separated at birth. One became athletic and the other artistic due to

their families' habits. Markus considered Mozart another example of how one's

surroundings influence one's abilities:

> Markus: Well, really, what he did was that, he was around music, so he started
> liking music, and then he- and then he found out that he had this great skill,
> and I guess memory, so he didn't become a chess player. Instead, he became a
> music player because he really loved music, so what you love really
> influences-
> MS: It kind of like- you find some way to intertwine the both of them. Because if
> Mozart wasn't around music, I don't think he would become a music person.
> (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

Here Markus considered the complex ways in which exposure, passion, and ability

interact. Mozart's musical skill and incredible memory was discovered through exposure

to music. MS pointed out, though, that had Mozart never been exposed to music in the

first place, he never would have become the composer and musician for which he is

known. It was the "intertwining" of ability and passion that truly caused giftedness.

After reading about various theories of giftedness, Ludwig was particularly taken

aback by Francis Galton's biological view, which contends that natural ability is

dependent on biological inheritance, which then translates directly into differences in

achievement (Friedman & Rogers, 1998). Instead, Ludwig agreed with the sociological

view that attributing giftedness solely to biology ignores the societal racism and sexism

that has occurred across place and time: "I think that's very true…Especially since

women never got an opportunity to learn before…[An] example of another one is African

American people" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). While in the past, members of minority or

oppressed groups may have had incredible potential, their abilities were not fostered

through education and opportunity. The idea of cultural and societal racism and sexism

and its effect on giftedness identification will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Complicating the Definitions in Regards to IQ and Identification: "I don't think that feels so comfortable in some people"

Due to his belief in the influence of experience and exposure to opportunity on

intelligence, Ludwig saw IQ as variable over time and therefore giftedness as dynamic.

While reading *Ungifted*, which lists each character's IQ when they narrate a chapter,

Ludwig commented that he believed Donovan's IQ should have increased over time as he

had more and more experiences at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction, an idea May

supported by explaining that "being with those [kids] rubbed off a little" (Book Club 6,

10/11/13). He personally felt that his IQ has changed over time, pointing out that he did

not "pass the test for being gifted in first grade" but did so the following year (Book Club

7, 10/18/13). Ludwig also took issue with the cut off points that identify one as being

gifted:

> May: On page six, on the very bottom, the last paragraph, it says the average IQ is a hundred. Anything over a hundred is above average. It's like, you get a hundred one, and they're just like, you're above average. There should be a range. There should be a range.
> Sara: And then, one point difference- average.
> May: It's like, yeah, anything over a hundred is above average. One sentence, and it's like, done.
> Ludwig: And one point below is-
> MS: There's got to be a breaking point.
> Ludwig: There should be a range. (Book Club 10, 11/11/13)

Ludwig resisted the idea that one point on an IQ test can separate someone from being classified as average rather than above average. While there is, in fact, a range as Ludwig suggested, MS made the point that there has to be a cut-off established.

Part of Ludwig's objection to the reliance on IQ tests was that he felt they put some learners at a disadvantage:

> …especially when you're taking the test to get into the gifted program, sometimes the test itself is not your style of learning, so you can be ruled out just because of that, but you're actually really gifted, so it's almost certain to be a yes in some ways…You cannot just give a standard test for everybody because the people who actually learn that way- it's nice for them, but it's not nice for others. It's unfair. (Interview, 12/11/13)

May agreed with Ludwig and passionately attacked intelligence tests as an invalid assessment of one's giftedness. She contended that schools typically define giftedness as being "really good at tests" (Interview, 12/18/13), but pointed out that most tests require written responses and that isn't what "feels so comfortable in some people. Some students may be like, I hate tests. I stink at them. I'm not going to do well on this test, and they don't do well because they don't want to do well" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13). This self-defeating attitude may put students at an immediate disadvantage as school systems would not identify their giftedness: "Then [schools] might not know. They're just like blind. They just go like oh, yeah, they did bad. You can't go in the gifted program" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13).

Ludwig also saw IQ tests as fraught with cultural biases and resisted the idea that a child's IQ is a strong indicator of adult success despite the fact that they are the most frequently used tool in identifying gifted students. Instead, he believed that identification should include performance on a variety of assessments including tests as well as

consideration of a student's passion, motivation, and desire to participate in learning experiences. Research supports Ludwig's concerns, documenting both content and construct validity in IQ tests (Ford & Harris III, 1999). Still, a 1989 study by Van Tassel-Baska, Patton, and Prillaman (cited in Ford & Harris III, 1999) found that almost 90% of states rely primarily on standardized, norm-referenced tests for gifted identification. Although Ludwig and May focused on learning style and did not explicitly mention culture or language, such biases are inherently interconnected. For example, Nisbett and his colleagues found differences between East and West in numerical tasks of memory and speed of processing, categorization tasks, causal reasoning, and communication styles (Phillipson & McCann, 2007). These tasks are incorporated into intelligence tests such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) and would cause results to be skewed based on the expectations of the majority culture. Ludwig and May perceived some of the limitations of our current assessments of IQ and therefore giftedness.

"MG is where I feel most at home": Group Membership and Expectations

Research shows that it is vital for gifted students to have time to collaborate with like-ability peers on instructional activities that meet their learning needs (Rogers, 2007). While Ludwig believed that it is possible for someone to grow their abilities and develop the need for gifted support, he also observed and appreciated differences in instruction and culture between the regular education and gifted support classrooms. His unidentified peers perceived differences as well:

> They say that I'm part of this three- so this threesome, which is MS, Markus and me, and we're like the smartest in the grade. It's like, there are so many different

ways- you cannot always- we might be academically gifted, but there are other people who are so much more gifted in sports than both of- the three of us. Which there are many people that are, and then there might be people that are really good at art, so yeah. (Interview, 12/11/13)

Ludwig perceived his classmates as placing him with MS and Markus in a separate category from their peers based on their intelligence. While in the previous comment Ludwig appeared to resist that fact and emphasize an expanded definition of giftedness, he also embraced the group membership that giftedness provides him. When asked what he likes about being gifted, he responded that "there's a lot of extra activities you can do, and you have like- you have your own friends circle, kind of, in the MG itself" (Interview 8/30/13). Here, he acknowledged the unique educational opportunities that identification brought as well as described the "friends circle" that was established in this alternate learning context. May craved the safety of the gifted support classroom. When asked to complete the statement "MG is where I…" May responded:

> Feel most at home. 'Cause I felt like, all- usually in class sometimes, there are people who are like there, but they're not so supportive of you. Don't understand how you really feel about like subjects and stuff, and I feel over here is very friendly. Like everyone has like what you feel, like everyone's mostly at the same level as you. (Interview, 12/18/13)

This correlates with Bar-On's findings that grouping gifted learners together throughout the school day may have not only positive academic effects, but ease feelings of anxiety, social isolation, boredom, and self-esteem (2007, as cited in Lamont, 2012). Conversely, Hertzog (2003) documented that segregated groupings can have a negative effect on students especially when transitioning from elementary to middle school, something that Markus sometimes worried about as he did not want "to be treated like this isolated person" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). Sapphire as well was concerned about fitting in and

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being 'normal,' the reason she most identified with Chloe in *Ungifted*. It is particularly

encouraging, though, that Ludwig seemed to appreciate the social ties that being in the

MG program can form, but at times may have gone too far in distinguishing between

gifted and unidentified peers. During a discussion of *Ungifted*, talk centered on the fight

between the Hardcastle and ASD students over Tinman and Ludwig described the chaos

as "gifted versus ungifted" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). While he may have simply been

labeling the two groups, the dichotomy of using this terminology, rather than

academically gifted and unidentified for example, to pit the groups against each other is

troubling to say the least. He used similar language to describe where he felt he belonged

socially, saying "…I'm not amazing at sports like a lot of kids are, and I'm more on the

learning side, kind of, the academic side" (Interview, 8/30/13). Again, Ludwig set up a

dichotomy, this time academic versus athletic. While he did think critically about the

ways in which culture and opportunity affect one's academic success, other times he used

language that suggests otherwise. Yet, Ludwig wished that lunch were extended since

"the only way you can actually get done with your lunch is not talk a word. And that's

pretty much impossible at lunch because that's one of the main times you get to be with

your friends" (Interview, 8/30/13), indicating that he did have peer groups outside of the

gifted support class.

Group membership and assumptions stem in part from the expectations that peers

and adults have about gifted learners. Participants felt a mismatch between how others

view them and how they viewed themselves. For example, Ludwig shared that his

classmates "might picture you as sitting up straight in your chair and listening to every

word the teacher says" (Interview, 12/11/13), but this did not match the vision he had of himself. Instead, he wanted others to know that gifted students "might not learn the way you expect them to. [For example], I like to fiddle, so do something with my hands, and I cannot just stare at the teacher…especially when it's something I don't- am not too fond of" (Interview, 12/11/13). Sapphire was also cognizant of the mismatch between how she saw herself and the way others viewed her. While most classmates considered her to be "smart and quiet," (Interview, 12/16/13) her friends knew she could be quite outgoing and loud. Alternately, May tended to be talkative and easily distracted, but understood that teachers especially expected her, as a gifted student, to be "super listening and like writing and like taking notes and stuff" (Interview, 8/30/13). While the previous examples demonstrate expectations regarding behavior and personality, Markus experienced untrue assumptions about his feelings about school. He described a game of True/False in his homeroom in which each student shared one truth and two lies about themselves. When he read "I like doing homework" everyone assumed that it was the truth statement. As Tim explained, "there's like that whole- he's in MG. He must love doing homework" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). Finally, Ludwig found that others make presumptions about his abilities. He observed that his teachers and peers expect him to be "good at every single subject there is…like school…[and] think school's the greatest place on earth, and that's not true" (Interview, 12/11/13). As Markus explained, most students are "not expected to do everything right. They just expect what's average…because they think that, if you're in the gifted program, then everything about

you is perfect" (Interview, 8/29/13). In each instance, intelligence is thought to correlate with certain behaviors that do not necessarily align with the students' self-views.

The group was also aware of expectations their peers have about what the gifted program was. Markus found that his classmates thought MG was just extra homework, while Sapphire experienced the opposite assumption. She tried to help her classmates understand that gifted support was not about "play[ing] games all day. We're mainly here to learn and be challenged. So then I think that's important thing to let people know that we're also learning other than just having fun" (Interview, 12/16/13). Although he could not recall anyone ever asking him about what the gifted support room was like, Ludwig had a different approach and predicted that he would react by telling them "a couple times, I'm like, okay, fine, I don't really care what you think. I really cannot change it" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). He went on to use the historical event of "King George forcing [his] religion upon everybody" as evidence that you can attempt to physically control someone but "mental, they could not change them" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). As a result, his own reaction was to *not* react: "I told you, and if you don't listen, I don't care" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13).

Why are there so many assumptions about the gifted learner and their educational experiences? Ludwig believed that it is the "human way to make assumptions" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13) and when asked why he thinks his peers make assumptions about what occurs in the gifted support room, he joked that it is "because they think they are more awesome" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). Although he said it in a playful manner, he signaled his perception that unidentified peers might make assumptions about gifted students as a

form of self-preservation. This correlates with Hertzog's (2003) finding that gifted

students reported sensing a stigma about being part of the gifted program and developed

negative feelings due to the response of their peers. During a book club discussion in

which we each read a novel that had something to do with giftedness or difference, we

were focused on the idea of how others react to difference. Ludwig had clearly thought

through the possibilities:

> But the thing is that you really cannot completely hide- like there's a difference
> between genuinely not knowing [someone is different] and actually knowing but
> trying to hide it, so I actually kind of wrote on that topic a little. Basically what I
> said is that there's like four outcomes. Sometimes people only openly hate, like an
> example would be trash talking somebody in front of them. Sometimes people
> keep hate to themselves to kind of just stay away or just don't talk to them, which
> is- sometimes people openly like- openly talk to them, good friends, social, and
> sometimes people are not social about- they internally are fine with them. Cool.
> (Book Club 12, 12/3/13)

In his experience, Ludwig found that when one senses that someone is different in some

way, they might share their negative feelings openly, hide their negative feelings but act

like they like the person, or accept the person's differences as part of who they are.

The students themselves were not immune to making assumptions, though.

During Book Club 4, the group was asked to draw what they envision as a gifted person.

Sapphire drew a gifted person's weekly schedule, packed with constant activity since

"they would have to keep up with the grades" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). Tim, Markus, and

Ludwig all drew more 'classic nerd' illustrations, skinny males with thick glasses, a tie or

bowtie, and a plaid collared shirt. Markus included socks that reached high up to the

boy's pants while Tim added books and a watch. Even May, who modeled her drawing

after Chloe, the character in *Ungifted* who wanted to fit in with the Hardcastle Middle School kids, drew her "nice and like regular, except maybe like wearing different clothes like glasses or something" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). Her illustration included a girl in a lab coat with "regular clothes underneath." What about a lab coat and glasses is not "nice and regular"? Why did these students, who were so aware of the inaccurate assumptions classmates and adults have of them, hold some of those same assumptions? As Sapphire explained, "those kind of myths are good for stories…then the kids are led to believe that's true" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). If this is the case, then how do those assumptions affect the ways in which they experience educational and social situations?

Pressure and perfectionism
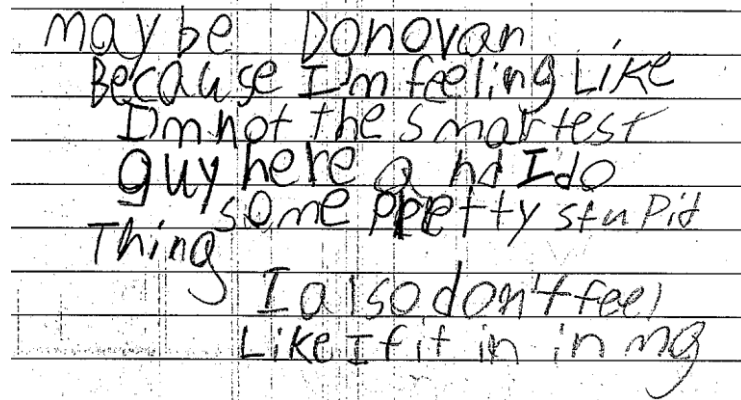
"There's a bit of pressure there": Comparisons and Misconceptions

Tim's definition of giftedness emphasized strength in one or more particular areas, but did not imply perfection. He was well aware of the expectations put upon him as an identified gifted student and resisted these expectations by both internalizing and pushing back against them. "My dad is a great musician. I thought one year in piano practice, I wasn't doing so well. But I didn't feel I was up to that. Whoa, your dad's a music teacher. Are you that good, or are you eh?" (Interview, 8/30/13). The expectations put upon him by his piano teacher, based on his father's skill, did not match the view Tim had of himself. While he pushed back against that expectation as well as the assumption that, as the son of a math teacher, he should be a good math student, he also seemed to internalize this pressure, wishing he was "at least better than I am, I suppose" (Interview, 12/17/13). Although he and his siblings each had their own areas of

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expertise, he also felt pressure to keep up with one of his triplets who had been in the gifted program since second grade. "There's sometimes a big amount of pressure because you're supposed to be gifted. Some people are gifted in different ways, but some people are really smart, and it's hard to keep up with like my brother and stuff" (Interview, 8/30/13). Two out of the three other participants with siblings commented on the pressure they felt in regards to their brothers and sisters. While Markus was the older brother and felt he had to live up to his expectations (Interview, 8/29/13), Sapphire was the younger sister and felt like she is constantly trying to keep up with her big brother's abilities (Interview, 9/6/13). She felt "angry because I'm trying my best to get it done, but it's not enough" (Interview, 9/6/13). Research on the effects of giftedness on sibling relationships are mixed. While some studies have found that sibling interactions seem typical, others have demonstrated that when one child is gifted, non-gifted siblings may suffer from low self-esteem (Grenier, 1985 as cited in Friedman and Rogers, 1998). Although there was no data to suggest that Tim's family emphasized his brother's early and continued achievement over that of his siblings, Tim himself may have been aware of the differences in the accomplishments and educational opportunities of his brother. The tendency to compare himself to his sibling may have been exasperated by the fact that he was a triplet, allowing him to compare himself to a sibling his own age.

Tim also considered his position in relation to his gifted peers beyond his brother. During Book Club, he compared himself to Donovan, the main character in *Ungifted*: "I feel like I'm not the smartest one in the MG program, and sometimes, I feel like I just don't belong in the MG program that much. I don't know why" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13).

The following entry in his Response Journal demonstrated the internal conflict Tim feels

when considering his place in the group:

Figure 3.2: Tim's journal

When the conversation briefly settled on math class, Tim asked the group to

change the subject: "Well, this is making me feel bad. I'm in the bottom math class, and

I got booted down last year. I don't like to talk about it, but this whole conversation is

kinda making me feel bad" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). Yet he stressed that giftedness

doesn't necessarily guarantee high grades: "It's not straight As, straight A pluses, straight

unmarkable how many A pluses you have" (Interview, 12/17/13). Thus, Tim seemed to

put pressure on himself to achieve while simultaneously voicing his belief that giftedness

did not equate to perfection. At times, he demonstrated emotion-focused coping

(Lazurus, 1993) in which he changed the way he interpreted the environment. Rather

than accept the stereotype embraced by his peers, Tim stated that remarkably high grades

not a given for gifted students. Other times, as Sowa and McIntire describe (1994), he

effectively redirected the conversation in order to avoid discussing a stressful situation.

This form of withdrawal acted as a way to remove himself from his feelings of inadequacy.

Researchers have documented the levels of perfectionism in gifted students as well as the extent to which perfectionism affects students' lives. While perfectionism can have positive effects, such as task completion, intrinsic motivation, and organization, the trait is recognized as multidimensional with negative effects such as the need to set unachievable goals and a feeling of being overwhelmed (Pruett, 2004). Pruett contends that while the negative effects of perfectionism often aren't observed until adolescence, these behaviors tend to begin much earlier and are heavily influenced by the family. Because the root of perfectionism begins so early, elementary school is an opportune setting for interventions which support students in collaboratively exploring the characteristics of perfectionism and its emotional and behavioral effects.

Tim was also cognizant of the assumptions that his classmates have of his time in the gifted support classroom. He sensed a stereotype that gifted students are "nerds, skinny, not good at sports" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13) and pushed back against that view: "No. You're not. Not always." He also observed two very different views of what the gifted program entails at the school. Either his classmates thought that the gifted program consists of extremely challenging work with no element of fun or they believed that it is "all fun and games" (Interview, 12/17/13). He saw the reality of the gifted program as a compilation of the two extremes:

> So what I've been hearing is that, if like a regular person were to see- like I'm not saying anyone's really regular, but just as an example, if someone were to look through a window that was labeled the MG room--one window- like if it was a double-sided, it could flip. One side, someone would see, like, this is the one-

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assumption that people make, tons of people working. Slaving away at work and stuff. But then if they flipped it and like we had just come back and been like, it was awesome. We played a computer game, and it was fun, and we did this fun activity that helped us learn, they wouldn't even pay attention to the help us learn. They'd just be like, you guys got to have fun? They'd see us like, yay, running around, having fun…playing video games in the classroom- that's what people see. If you mash those two windows together into one big- there's no working your butt off- It's reality, but everyone comes up with their own version of it. Which is mostly us working. We're geniuses. No. It's not true. And I hate it. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

Tim was careful and purposeful in using terminology that clarified his view that no one is "really regular." Still, peers who were not part of the MG program selectively pieced together their view of what went on in our classroom. They chose to omit the purpose behind the activities and concentrate solely on the level of fun they perceive to occur. In another metaphor, Tim used the idea of a chicken sandwich as a way to explain the process students go through when forming opinions about the gifted program:

Yeah, like well- it's like- if you went to Chick-Fil-A and got one of their regular, with nothing on it, crispy sandwiches? Those come with pickles on it. If you don't like the pickles, you take those out. People are just taking off- pickles, which is the stuff that tells it apart… You take off the pickles and then you shove the sandwich in your mouth, and you're like, umm. Well, in this version, they're taking the sandwich, and then they're being mad at us because you get stuff like games? (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

Tim's metaphor of removing the pickles from the sandwich demonstrated his belief that his classmates remove certain realities from their vision of the gifted program so that it supports their previously held misconceptions. He went on to challenge his peers to join the group to understand the reality of what occurs in the gifted program: "Actually, work harder. You'll get in. Then you'll see that it's not all games" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). In this statement, Tim again demonstrated his belief in the power of effort and interest in one's gifted identification, the task commitment ring in Renzulli's model. Additionally,

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he sought to push back against the expectations of others and set the record straight about the purpose and nature of the gifted program. His tendency to believe in meritocracy in regards to the gifted program may have stemmed from his own experiences. During his interview, he shared that he "got in" to gifted support later than most after he worked hard to earn it.[26]

Tim also had ideas about why his classmates might have these misconceptions by considering the ways in which the human mind works. He recognized the ways in which popular culture, books included, tends to exaggerate and stereotype groups of people in order to entertain. For example, the gifted students in *Ungifted* are portrayed as skinny, frail middle schoolers who wear glasses and are out of touch with popular culture. While Tim didn't believe in that typecasting, he could appreciate the power of books: "Isn't it awesome, though?...These are works of hypnotizing" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). He went on to describe how "the human mind- will it can't be ruled…but it can be so easily bended to believe one thing- like tricked" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). Thus, his belief in human nature and the way learners make sense of the world explained how his peers might have misconceptions about the gifted support program.

"It's like war with Aces.": High Stake Situations with Peers and Teachers

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[26] Yet Tim did not see the contrast between the belief that he worked hard to earn gifted identification and the fact that, despite putting in extensive effort, he struggled to master mathematical concepts taught in class.

MS felt an incredible amount of pressure from his parents, teachers, and peers to achieve. At home, MS was grateful for the individualized attention and educational and extracurricular opportunities that his parents provided for him. His father emphasized the importance of competition as motivation and preparation for adult life and the job market. His mother, who stayed home in order to concentrate on raising MS, constantly pushed him to move forward academically and pursue his interests. MS was unconditionally appreciative of his parents' efforts, but such efforts did not come without (intended or unintended) pressures, as he described here how he felt pushed to complete an online math program that wasn't meeting his educational needs. "The Pearson Successnet[27] thing? My mom wanted me to do all the test preps. I got bored after three. I'm like, no. I've already learned this stuff. This is boring" (Interview, 8/29/13). Other times, he felt his parents helped alleviate some of the pressure he felt. This was the case when an online fact practice competition became unreasonable:

> MS: I used to sit up 'til eleven o'clock doing that. I wasn't getting much learning out of it, but I was like, I have to be the number one in school. For like sixth months, I was the number one in the school-
> Sara: Well, you got a lot of practice.
> MS: Yeah, I got a lot of practice. I was the number one in the school, but then it started getting like cheap. A lot of the other people, they started helping their kids- they would- they were doing it for their kids. So that their kids would get more stickers, and they would be the number one. I was facing adults, and my mom said, no. Quit it.
> Sara: Not equal competition.
> MS: No. Just quit it. No. I don't want you to do this anymore. And I ended up not doing it for the next two months. End result, I was the fourth kid in school. (Interview, 8/29/13)

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[27] Successnet is the online component to the math textbook.

MS's mother directed him to stop participating in the program because she felt it was not

a fair competition, even though MS himself wanted to pursue it at first. At the same time,

while MS was appreciative of the work that his mother does with him, he also felt that it

would be helpful to have a bit less pressure from home:

> Sara: Okay. Anything that you think your family could change to help you succeed in school even more?
>
> MS: One, probably not put so much pressure on me. They sometimes unknowingly tend to put more pressure. Because they want me to be like three grade levels higher in a lot of things. Math, science, social studies-they want me to go really, really far. Even in math. I start to- I'm doing some algebra. I really enjoy that, but then there's something else, like the K-7 kind of thing math. My mom wants me to keep doing that. I don't exactly really like it. My mom says, no, you want to go uniformly higher because they're not going to just grade you on algebra. They're going to do a lot of other things, too.
>
> Sara: All of the other areas of math.
>
> MS: Yeah.
>
> Sara: So you feel like if some of that pressure was taken off, it would actually help you-
>
> MS: Go higher.
>
> Sara: Succeed even more.
>
> MS: Because I would then start liking it. Because my mom puts so much pressure that I should do that one first. I should do like three of those, and one of these. Three to one ratio. (Interview, 8/29/13)

Thus, MS acknowledged that his parents don't intend to put such a large amount of

pressure on him, but believed that lightening up a bit might actually result in an increase

in enjoyment and motivation and, consequently, ability, a concept that is supported by the

fact that when gifted learners do not feel that they are making progress, the result is

lowered academic self-esteem, cognitive risks, and underachievement (Rogers, 2007).

From MS's point of view, teachers also pressured and had unfair expectations of

him, and consequently he perceived a difference in the way they treated him compared to

his non-identified peers:

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I would say for one that sometimes, they tend not to call on us during math class...Maybe because they know that we know the answer. They want to see if the other kids can figure it out. Like because they know sometimes they think that, if we have our hand up, it's like ninety-nine point nine nine percent sure that we have the right answer. We know what's going on. And so I for one. If I don't know the answer, I'm kind of hesitant I'm- even if I'm ninety percent sure about it, I won't raise my hand. (Interview, 8/29/13)

Because the teacher believed that MS and his gifted peers knew the correct answer, they chose not to call on them because in some way it would be a waste. Instead, they called on a student that they felt was still working through the answer in order to use it as a learning opportunity for the class. Concerning in MS's comment is the impact that the teachers' actions had on him. Unless he was certain of the answer, he would not raise his hand. However, if he raised his hand, his teacher was certain he was correct and would not call on him. What resulted was less engagement in the lesson for a student like MS. During his final interview, MS again referred to this observation:

And one more, I think, is not here, but in regular classes, the teachers, I think, call on the other kids a lot more, and when you're really like itching to answer that question, they always like- they can read your mind and then they- on purpose, they go and pick someone else...Because they know that we know the answer, and they don't want to waste the question, in quotes, on us because they know we have the right answer. They're like ninety-nine percent sure. So they want to see if the other kids can answer. (Interview, 12/13/13)

Here, he differentiated the norms in the gifted support classroom compared to those in his regular education classes. He reemphasized his perception that his teachers do not want to "waste the question" on gifted students but use their questioning to assess the understanding of the rest of the class. Even when he was "itching to answer" the question, he anticipated being ignored. Additionally, MS worked to be a model student at all times. "Well, usually I'm on my super duper best behavior at school. At home, I

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need time to just let the other part of me go. You know. Just like, relax" (Interview, 8/29/13). He did not feel that the relaxed part of himself belonged at school, so he made sure that it "stays put in its cage" (Interview, 8/29/13). Here, we see that MS did not feel comfortable truly being himself in the school setting, in part due to the expectations that were placed upon him. Instead, he needed to maintain the façade of perfection in not only academics but behavior as well, compartmentalizing his identity based upon the context.

MS was well aware of the expectations his classmates had of him. He described the general notion of a gifted person being a "classic nerd" with glasses and a bowtie. He shared that his classmates assume that he was "super smart in the techy zone because Markus is, and then people associate me- Markus and I because we're quite similar, I guess, in some things" (Interview, 12/13/13). Because they were both Indian, male, and in the gifted program, their classmates grouped MS and Markus together. This was, in fact, based partially on accurate observations. These two students spent a great deal of time together, had similar interests, and regularly collaborated on projects. However, their individuality was often downplayed by their peers. His non-identified peers had assumptions about what occurs in the gifted support classroom, though, with ideas "on opposite ends of the spectrum. Either we're getting like pushed to the limit with loads of homework or we're just playing around" (Interview, 12/13/13). These views were held, in MS's view, because "they're so stubborn that they don't see everything" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). He used The Mist from *Percy Jackson* to explain the ways in which students' perceptions about the gifted support classroom may be inaccurate:

MS: Yeah, so the- whatever these demigods and the gods do, it's kind of like shielded by this magical mist- So people can't see what's going on. But they make crazy assumptions.

Sara: Because they can't see.

MS: Yeah. Because they can't see it…Because a lot of kids- it's like- it's almost like, we're like the demigods, and whatever we do is kind of shielded by the mist, and people perceive it differently.

Sara: How do you make that mist go away? Or do you even care to?

MS: Well, sometimes you go into the people's minds and change their views. ((laughs))

While MS joked that one might "go into the people's minds and change their views," in reality he rarely attempted to clear up misconceptions for his peers. MS's non-gifted peers had the power to formulate a reality of the gifted program based on their perceptions, but as the one being observed, MS was objectified[28]. Beyond their ideas about what happened in the gifted support classroom, MS's classmates expected him to achieve perfection in all areas and at all times. This did not go unnoticed by MS:

> Sometime I feel way too pressured. Like…my least favorite class game, which is everybody else's favorite class game, is Around the World. Because people come across the room to see me and Ludwig face one math problem. (Interview, 8/29/13)

What was typically a fun break from the monotony of math class became a high stakes situation where MS felt put in battle against his fellow gifted peer on a stage with his classmates in the audience were just waiting to see who would fall first. While for any other student an incorrect answer was a common occurrence, for MS it became "breaking news" (Interview, 12/13/13). MS shared another example of a situation he was dreading: "…like spelling bee. I'm completely terrified. Because if I make one mistake,

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[28] As David Spurr explains in Hesford's *Framing Identities* (1999), sight is power for the observer, but a trap for the observed. Hesford uses the idea of frames to consider how theory and pedagogy shape how we view and are viewed by others. The viewer holds the power, but the observed is subject to the viewer's perception.

everybody's going to jump up and then talk about it for like thirty hours" (Interview, 8/29/13). Informed by past experiences, MS voiced anxiety about participating in an event that would foreground his strengths before any interactions had even occurred. He reacted based on what he foresaw to be his peers' unreasonably high expectations.

In the classroom, MS anticipated his classmates relying on him for help when the teacher is unavailable:

> …if the teacher's already occupied, the other kids will always come to the gifted kids to kind of ask their question. Because they think we have the answer all the time, and in some cases, we don't, but also in some cases, we do, but then there's so many people asking us questions that we can't get on with our own work… (Interview 12/13/13)

MS perceived a separation between the "gifted kids" and the "other kids" each with their distinct roles. The "other kids" expected students identified as gifted to be not only a resource, but a stand-in for the teacher. MS's comments imply that students accepted, or at least enacted, the identities assigned to them based on their academic classification. Labels, especially academic labels, complicate and blur the lines between learners. MS expressed frustration with the role pushed upon him and felt pressured to fulfill that role.

During discussion about *Ungifted*, MS empathized with Noah, the smartest student at ASD who constantly attempts to fail just to see what it would be like: "He doesn't feel unpressured. He *wants* to feel unpressured" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13, emphasis added). Like Noah, MS wanted to feel unpressured and knew "what it feels like to be gifted- well, different" (Interview 12/13/13). He shared that he didn't "like being on stage and being the person to talk. I don't know why. I just like to be the backstage person. Do all the work, throw all the credit away" (Interview, 8/29/13). MS

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compared his experiences to those of the main character in *The Report Card:* "And then she's like gifted, but then she wants to fit in, and she doesn't want like the pressure and stuff like that" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). Thus, for MS giftedness put him in a different category than the majority of his classmates, one that separated him from the typical student and caused him to stand out. In her book *Some of My Best Friends Are Books,* Halsted (2009) describes the ways in which gifted students may actively try to fit in to the majority by downplaying their abilities. While MS did not appear to hide his abilities, he did express the pressure he felt when he was not treated like any other kid. He sensed

that his classmates had unattainable expectations of him and he wished they would understand him more: "[we] can't be great at everything because sometimes people think, okay, you're gifted. Then you have to be great at everything and you can do everything in the world. You're like Superman" (Interview, 12/13/13). He craved the feeling of freedom that would allow him to make mistakes without being under the microscope of his peers.

The gifted support classroom provided a respite for MS as he felt he was safe to be himself since there he was surrounded by his intellectual peers.

> Well, I think I feel free to be myself because there are a lot of kids like me, like academic-standings-wise. There's a lot of kids like that, so I can kind of express my ideas more freely, thinking they can understand because in regular class, some kids might not understand what I'm saying and misunderstand that or something like that...On the same level. They- you know that they're pretty much on the same level as you are, so you can pose these questions. And also, I think I can say something without thinking about it because I'm yet another kid in this classroom, but in regular classrooms, I'm like supposed to be the brainy kid, so if I get something wrong, it's like breaking news....[here] it's just- I'm one of the other kids. (Interview, 12/13/13)

While he felt misunderstood at times in other settings, the gifted support classroom provided an opportunity to have the types of conversations he gravitated towards without feeling self-conscious that his classmates would think his ideas were odd because he was surrounded by like-minded peers. Researchers find such a structure necessary for gifted learners as friendships with intellectual, rather than chronological, peers allows them to thrive (Halsted, 2009) while stress can prevent them from moving forward academically (Rogers, 2007). Additionally, MS could avoid the anticipation of a mistake because the students were expected to take educational risks in this setting. There was an assumption that learning could not occur without pushing ourselves beyond our boundaries. This culture of educational risk taking is vital as qualities like the ability to cope with challenges may differentiate between students who will continue to develop their talents and those who will remain stagnant in their abilities (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012).

Yet there is inner pressure as well. At the beginning of the school year, in particular, MS found it difficult to go from a summer of low key expectations to "boom, like six and a half hours a day of learning and stuff like that" (Interview, 12/13/13). For the first time, he felt that he was being appropriately challenged where he had a "whoa" feeling which "caught [him] in surprise." When his mom asked him to do an hour of studies after school each day, MS felt that he couldn't live up to the expectation:

MS: I want to do that, but I'm not able to, especially like the first two days of school, I was completely drained of energy. I just have to go down into my room, shut my brain off, and just like watch some video or game.
Sara: Take some time.
MS: Take some time to just chill.
Sara: So how did that make you feel?

MS: Well, I was kind of upset and disappointed in myself, because I was like oh, come on. I can't live up to this. And everybody wants me to do it, and it's good for me. It's not like their benefit. It's my benefit.

Sara: Okay. So you kind of went to your room and took some time? Did you do anything else about it?

MS: Well, I'm still trying to like do more and more, if possible. But sometimes my mom wants me to just stop it and [   ], but I mean like, almost done. Five more minutes. So it, sometimes irritates my mom a little.

While the task was initiated by his mother[29], MS appeared to put the pressure on himself to complete the task to the level he deemed acceptable. He had guilt because studying is to benefit him, even if others also wanted him to do it. Even when he mom asked him to stop, he continued working until he felt that he worked to his own standards. This correlates with Lazurus's concept of adjustment as a process (as cited in Sowa & McIntire, 1994). Because the gifted child's cognitive ability is advanced but social maturity may be age-appropriate, they tend to be more influenced by internal and external expectations. This asynchronous development can result in increased anxiety (Lamont, 2012).

For MS, perfection and drive was the ultimate goal, although not for selfish purposes. During a heated discussion in which the Book Club members debated the merits of *Ungifted*'s Abigail, MS described how he admires Abigail:

MS: That is exactly how I want to be in life. I want to be a male version of Abigail.

Markus: I don't want to be like Abigail, who's like so stuck up.

Ludwig: She's not stuck up.

Tim: She's not stuck up. She's-

May: She's a little arrogant.

Ludwig: She's too concentrated-

Markus: She takes everything way too seriously. She's like, oh my God.

Ludwig: That's good. You should take it seriously.

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[29] Please see Chapter 5 for in depth discussion on the influence of family.

> Tim: To her, it's as if the world's going to die-
> MS: Yeah, if she gets a B plus.
> MS: That's exactly how I would be. (Book Club 4, 9/27/13)

While May and Markus saw Abigail's actions as arrogant and overly intense, MS viewed

these characteristics as demonstrative of a high level of commitment and responsibility.

Tim specifically referenced Abigail's overreaction to a lack of perfection and MS's

response empathized with Abigail's view. While Tim's comment that "that's really good

but if you're feeling that much pressure" signaled his belief in the importance of balance

in life, MS was insistent on constant drive. Later in the discussion, I asked each of us to

do a quick write in which we consider with which character we most relate. Again, MS

describes how he connects with Abigail:

> MS: I chose Abigail, same as Ludwig, because I am scared of Bs and I just
> want to like
>   go straight perfect so I can help the world in the end, like revolutionize the
>   world. You may think Abby- Abigail is selfish, but-
> May: She's a little arrogant. A little arrogant.
> Ludwig: No.
> May: A little bit.
> MS: -I think she's generous, because-
> Ludwig: No, she's not arrogant at all.
> MS: But her goal in life at the end is to change the world.
> Sara: Which is a selfless desire.
> MS: That is a truly selfless.
> May: I don't think it's that selfless.
> MS: Like I bolded truly.
> Ludwig: And why is it not truly selfless?
> May: 'Cause she doesn't care-
> MS: Because if you're selfish for five years to help change the world in the
> end, like
>   cure cancer-
> May: She doesn't-
> MS: -like that kind of thing-
> May: She only takes her smartness for herself. (Book Club 4, 9/27/13)

Here, the students were using fiction to make sense of their world (Enciso, 1994; Willis, 2007), using the experiences of the characters to make comments on their own identities and goals for the future. May's perspective was that Abigail is not applying her intelligence or ability for the greater good, but MS, Tim, and Ludwig saw things differently.

> Tim: No, she doesn't.
> MS: No, she doesn't.
> May: She doesn't help any other people.
> Tim: What do you mean? It says, she's keeping half the tutors in town
>   still on.
> Ludwig: Okay, you're extra intelligent, right?
> May: Yeah.
> Ludwig: Okay, I want you to go right now and cure cancer. Every person
>   in the whole world should get rid of cancer, okay? Do that now.
> May: Why would I do that?
> Ludwig: Exactly. You cannot change the- like, well, you can do big
>   things, but you cannot like revolutionize the world in completely when
>   you're a kid because I doubt a lot of people would even listen to a kid,
>   even though they really can change-
> MS: Yes. Exactly. Exactly.
> Sara: So you're saying that she needs to progress the way that she plans
>   to in order to get to a place where she can-
> MS: I'm thinking that she's trying to-
> Sara: -really change the world.
> MS: -get as far as possible when she's a child so that when she's an
>   adult, she can go even farther.
> Ludwig: So she cannot be completely selfless.
> MS: -and touch the borders [with magic]. (Book Club 4, 9/27/13)

Like Abigail, MS pushed himself constantly. Every incorrect answer was a disappointment and every achievement led to the next step. However, MS saw his

perfectionism not as self-serving, but as a way to help him gain a position in life that would allow him to serve others[30].

"Bs, I don't like them.": Grades and Assessment

Although there is no empirical evidence that the rate of perfectionism is higher among gifted students than their non-gifted peers (Fletcher & Speirs Neumeister, 2012), research does show that gifted learners may deal with perfectionism differently. Hewitt and Flett (1991) identified three types of perfectionism, which can be viewed as either healthy or unhealthy. Self-oriented perfectionism describes unrealistic expectations of one's self while other-oriented perfectionism aims those unrealistic expectations on others. Socially prescribed perfectionism is the tendency to perceive that others have unrealistic expectations. Through studies on gifted students and perfectionism (Parker, 1997 & 2002; Parker & Mills, 1996), researchers found that healthy perfectionists scored low on measures of concern over mistakes, parental criticism, doubts about one's actions, and neuroticism, yet high on measures of extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Dysfunctional perfectionists, though, scored low on agreeableness and high on concern over mistakes, personal standards, parental expectations, parental criticism, doubts about one's actions, neurosis, and openness to experience.

Based on his words and actions, it is difficult to determine whether Ludwig demonstrated a healthy or unhealthy type of perfectionism. When asked to consider with which character in *Ungifted* he most identifies, Ludwig chose "Abigail, because I like

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[30] Please refer to the section titled "Societal Responsibilities of the Gifted Mind" later in this chapter for further discussion about participants' views on how they should apply their gifts.

perfect scores, and I want to be the best at everything. And Bs, I don't like them, and I want to be excellent in what I do in life" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). What was unclear is whether the expectation of "perfect scores" was self-imposed or put upon him by others. When Ludwig made a mistake on a test, he did not appear to overreact. In fact, he often referred to careless errors on his math test as a "Ludwig mistake" and seemed to brush it off even as he brought it up to me. However, the fact that Ludwig continually mentioned any mistake or misunderstanding led me to believe that being less than perfect bothered him. As explored in a previous section, gifted students as a group felt that others had unrealistic expectations of their role and abilities which make any error a high-stakes event.

In fact, the only negative Ludwig saw about being gifted was the pressure to achieve that he felt from his peers:

> …we were playing Around the World, and if me and MS esp- both of us- everyone was like, you are going to win. And that puts so much- and usually we lost because of that. We- we were just like focusing so hard because of- and then we just kind of lost track. (Interview, 12/11/13)

Later in the interview, he brought up the Around the World game again:

> Mostly [the pressure] is from your peers. Like in Around the World and in- when you're talking about different- different people give different types of pressure. Like some might- you have to get every answer right on every test, which is not true. And you're a complete A student and you are doing above eighth grade math. Or something like that, and it's- not all of them apply to everyone. (Interview, 12/11/13)

The nature of this game inherently pits one student up against another. Ludwig perceived himself to be the center of attention as his classmates waited to see him very publicly succeed or fail. He also referred to what he agreed are unrealistic expectations for his

instructional levels and performance on tests. His comment that such performance did not "apply to everyone" as well as his ability to move past his own mistakes indicated that he, in fact, had realistic expectations of himself and that he experienced socially prescribed perfectionism rather than self-oriented. Nevertheless, experiences like Around the World were noticeably present in Ludwig's memory and undoubtedly had an impact on his self-perception.

Although Ludwig shared that "there's not too much pressure from teachers, not too much from parents," he did sense that "my mom, like, really wants all As and stuff like that…It makes me kinda feel frustrated, because like there's no kid in school that's gotten all As in a year" (Interview, 8/30/13). Furthermore, adults may mistakenly assume

that gifted learners 'have it all together,' yet that may not be their reality (Fletcher, & Speirs Neumeister, 2012). Instead, gifted learners' self-oriented or socially prescribed perfectionism in particular may internalize their inability to achieve unrealistic goals.

Considering Ludwig's comments more globally reveals contradictions in how he thinks about perfection. While at times he seemed to demonstrate self-oriented perfectionism, more often he revealed the unrealistic expectations of him he perceived from others. This is a concern because socially prescribed perfectionism in gifted learners may decrease intrinsic motivation and increase external motivation, leading to decreased school engagement and the development of anxiety, anger, and boredom in school (Miserandino, 1996 as cited in Fletcher, Speirs, & Neumeister, 2012) and even depression (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010 as cited in Lamont, 2012). Educators need

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to infuse discussion around identity and expectations in not only gifted programming but in all classrooms. By helping all students consider the ways in which assumptions affect them and others, educators can work to break down the stereotypes that limit students' possible selves.

Actions and Reactions

How students who are identified as gifted deal with issues of identity demonstrates their attempt to make peace with differences between how their classmates view them and how they view themselves, especially when confronted by the expectations and assumptions of their peers. While some book club members actively challenged their peers, others tried to mask the full extent of their abilities or opportunities. Still others co-opted the terms and expectations of their classmates to take back the power of these words and ideas. These actions and reactions demonstrated typical coping behaviors documented among gifted students as well as any child who feels isolated in some manner[31]. The section below will show some of the actions and reactions of my students as they read and discussed *Ungifted.*

"If they misunderstand me, they'll dislike me": Downplaying Giftedness and Gifted Support

In an effort to fit in, MS downplayed his abilities at times. When I asked how he responds when peers ask him what he does in the gifted support classroom, MS realized

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[31] Please refer to the literature review in the Intersection of Giftedness and Identity section of this chapter for more information about issues surrounding the asynchronous development of gifted students.

that he had never had that experience. Instead, he imagined how he might respond:

> Actually, I don't think they've ever asked me that...I try to downplay the whole thing...Because if they misunderstand me, they'll like dislike me. So I don't want that happening. If they think I'm just coming here for fun, playing around, they'll see it as unfair and they'll like not like me anymore. (Interview, 12/13/13)

By anticipating his peers' misunderstanding of him and the gifted program, MS chose to avoid a discussion on what occurs in that setting. Although he was comfortable with who he was and worked towards his goals, there was still a part of him that sought the approval of his larger peer group. If he had never had this conversation with his peers, though, what would make him believe that they would dislike him? Why didn't MS feel confident in his ability to accurately describe not only what happens in the gifted support classroom but the reasoning behind it? MS used The Mist from *Percy Jackson* as a metaphor for his classmates' assumptions:

> MS: Because they can't see it…Because a lot of kids- it's like- it's almost like, we're like the demigods, and whatever we do is kind of shielded by the mist, and people perceive it differently.
> Sara: How do you make that mist go away? Or do you even care to?
> MS: Well, sometimes you go into the people's minds and change their views. ((laughs))
> May: And you just keep telling them. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

By joking that one might "go into the people's minds and change their views" MS was taking back the power that the other students held by making assumptions about him. Yet, in reality, it did not appear that MS actually does this. In contrast, May spoke to her peers outright in order to set the record straight about gifted support. While MS did not purposely produce average work or downplay his intellectual abilities like some gifted learners attempting to fit in (Gross, 1998; Halsted, 2009), he did attempt to hide the full

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extent of the opportunities that were presented to him, despite feeling that those opportunities were fair and valid.

Sapphire similarly downplayed her participation in the gifted program. She made it a point not to "take advantage" of coming to the gifted support classroom despite her need for and love of the extra challenge. She worried about her classmates' perception that she is trying to show off: "Like for example, when we come back here from math to come here for MG, I try to slip in unnoticed and get my stuff and come here, so then I try not to make a big deal of it..." (Interview, 12/16/13). She anticipated that her peers will think it is unfair that she got to miss certain activities in her homeroom. Rather than explaining the reasons for her attendance in gifted support, she avoided her classmates even noticing her by "slipping in" as best she can.

Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of covering is especially helpful in understanding participants' tendency to downplay their abilities and participation in gifted support. Goffman describes the ways in which, when they differ from the accepted norm in regards to behavior or appearance, people manage how others view them. For example, his cabinet was aware of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's physical disability, but he made a point to emphasize the aspects of his identity that were more conventionally appealing for someone in a position of political power, namely his gender and race. However, the very moves people make in order to conform to the standard reinforce the discrimination they seek to avoid. For example, women may be proud of their gender, but not mention their involvement in women's rights groups while they are in the workplace. Requesting that someone downplay an aspect of their identity, even though it

may help advance the individual in some way, is discriminatory and at times even illegal (Yoshino, 2007). For the gifted support students in this study, covering provided a less overt way to resist stereotypes of the gifted. However, although their immediate actions may have been successful in helping them blend in with their peers, they simultaneously reinforce and in some ways allow for those stereotypes.

"I'm proud of the labels": Embracing Expectations

Still other times, MS seemed to embrace the expectations and labels that others put on him in a similar manner as Donovan. Just as Donovan accepted the labels others put upon him in *Ungifted*, MS discussed his reaction to being called a brainiac and a nerd:

> MS: I'm proud of the labels.
> Sara: You're proud of them? How come?
> MS: Well, basically it means top heavy.
> Sara: Top heavy?
> MS: I should put it that way. (Book Club 3, 9/20/13)

Like Donovan, MS took language that could be considered insulting and co-opted it to match his own flattering definition. Tim was concerned that these terms were being used in a derogatory manner:

> Tim: Who's saying this to you? Is it someone who's trying to say it in a
>   mean way? To put you down, or someone who's trying to be really nice?
> MS: Depends on the time.
> Tim: Or something in between?
> May: It's not-
> MS: Depends on the time. Half the time-
> May: In general, they just call him that.
> MS: Yeah. (Book Club 3, 9/20/13)

While MS acknowledged that they were sometimes meant to be hurtful and sometimes meant as a compliment, he chose to change the meaning of the terms so that they were always put in a positive light. That May chimed in to validate the fact that kids called MS brainiac and nerd is telling. When she began with "it's not," she seemed to be attempting to explain that their classmates' words were not meant to be negative, but more a statement of fact or observation. This was a very different reaction than Tim's, who was hurt by his sister's use of the word 'idiot' to describe him. Rather than internalize the pain of correlating one's self with a negative term, MS celebrated the positives about it.

MS also embraced the reaction from his unidentified peers that the activities in the gifted support classroom were fun and enjoyable.

> MS: I think it's fair because while we are people that need more pushing and more- I don't know what you call it- exercises-
> Markus: Extensions.
> MS: -to push our potential to the best it can be. So here, we do that. You do that. And that's good for us, and also, people who see it as like, it's a fun and games place, it can also serve as a motivation to learn for those other kids.
> Sara: Because you believe that it is possible-
> MS: Yeah.
> Sara: -for anyone to-
> MS: Right. If they work hard enough. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

While May worried that her unidentified peers "might not understand" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13), MS welcomed their view and challenged them to use that viewpoint as motivation to work hard. Yet at times May also embraced her classmates' assumptions:

> I come back there, and they're like, oh, you just missed out on everything. They kind of like emphasize everything to kind of make you feel a little unwanted or something. And I'm just like, well, I still had fun during core extension. Like try

to like keep my stand. I don't want to like fall over, be like all mad, 'cause that's what they usually want you to feel. (Interview, 12/18/13)

Here, May resisted pushing back against her classmates' statements in order to avoid giving them the satisfaction of provoking her. Instead, she responded positively to demonstrate that she was happy with her participation in gifted support and was unaffected by necessarily missing activities in her homeroom.

Markus pointed out that reacting to the viewpoints of classmates was not always that simple. While in *Ungifted* Donovan embraced the labels that others use to describe him but changes the meaning to put a positive spin on them, we are not always aware of the words people use to describe us. "The thing about it is that…you could have secret labels on you that people like- if people are saying, oh, he's a know it all, but they never say it in front of you, or they never show it, then that's a secret label, so you can't really pull off that label" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13). Markus emphasized the necessity of awareness as a prerequisite to agency and action. Once one is mindful of the roles he is assigned by others, he takes back the power over that role and can choose to embrace or co-opt it.

"I was like, whoa": Rejecting the Ideas of Others

Though Ludwig believed that making assumptions is the "human way" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13), he refused to accept inaccurate ideas from his peers and, in fact, actively rejected them. Furthermore, he rejected any expectations placed upon him that he felt were unfair or did not align with his identity. During a discussion on whether or not we can decide where we belong, the group considered the idea of one's ability to

change themselves intellectually, physically, or otherwise. While Tim brought up

positive changes we might make in order to help us belong in a certain category-

direction-followers for example- Ludwig pointed out that forcing a change upon someone

does not always have a positive outcome:

> Like me trying to eliminate origami… I don't think, like if you take origami and don't do origami for the rest of your life, I don't- I doubt I'm going to do any better in my subjects than if I actually did origami. 'Cause it's actually something that I love to do, and it's- I'm not going to be happy. I might even do worse in my subjects if I don't do it. (Book Club 7, 10/18/13)

For Ludwig, asking him to eliminate that activity would take away from who he was and

would have not only an emotional effect, but an academic one as well. His comment had

implications for the ways in which we explicitly or inadvertently pressure students to

conform to the ideal we conceptualize. 'Correcting' actions and behaviors that we may

interpret as distracting or off-task may in fact be an intellectual (as well as emotional)

detriment to a student. By reprimanding a child to look or act in a certain way that goes

against their natural tendencies, we in effect communicate that we do not accept the

student for who he is.

While Ludwig rejected the notion that he should change himself to match the

expectations of others, he also resisted assumptions about who he is *not*. He perceived

that his grade level peers assumed that gifted students are not good at sports because

"they focus…every single minute of their whole day on studying" (Book Club 13,

12/9/13) and experienced one particular situation in which he felt especially judged based

on his giftedness:

> 'Cause when I made a catch in kickball, basically, Jamie came up and said, ooh, I never knew you could do that. Yeah, I always pictured you as smart. I was like, whoa….I can understand why you think that, but yeah. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

Although by saying "I can understand why you think that," Ludwig acknowledged that such a stereotype exists, he rejected the notion that being smart and being athletic are mutually exclusive. Yet Ludwig himself, when asked to draw what he envisions as a typical gifted person, drew a boy with a bowtie and glasses, demonstrating that he, too, had stereotypical ideas about what giftedness looks like. He described his gifted person as someone who "rarely smiles…'cause he's always so absorbed into his amazing thoughts, and he doesn't have time to smile, and probably doesn't even have the energy to smile after his day" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). These conflicting ideas indicate that although Ludwig shared some assumptions with his grade level peers about the physical appearance and abilities of gifted people, he also actively resisted those stereotypes, especially when they are applied to him personally.

Societal Responsibilities of the Gifted Mind

Beginning in the 20th century as diversity in America increased, individuals' intelligence was assessed for various purposes. The goal was to identify who would best fill leadership positions in battle or determine placement in tracks used to prepare students for their expected lives (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). Sputnik, in particular, caused Americans to look to those identified as highly intelligent to develop their talents and apply them to the greater good (Ford & Harris III, 1999). When the Marland Report, published in 1972, formally defined giftedness, it increased the public's awareness of the

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lack of educational attention to this population[32]. The repercussions of these historical events, along with cultural influences, contribute to students' beliefs about the responsibility they have to use their gifts to benefit society.

MS had a strong belief that giftedness should be taken seriously and put to use. When he said that he wanted to be a "male version of Abigail" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13), he demonstrated his belief in constant hard work and dedication to perfection. He was almost offended by the idea that someone might choose not to meet their full potential, and had the following to say about the main character in *The Report Card*: "If she keeps on, like, flunking on purpose, then she's not going up to her maximum potential, so then she might like lose her ability to do certain things" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). The implication is that, despite innate ability, if any student fails to put their academic and problem solving skills into practice they will not develop and possibly even be lost. Additionally, in the school setting MS had clear ideas about where one's efforts should concentrate. During Book Club 4, the group was discussing Noah's purposeful failing on tests:

> MS: I just wanted to read an analogy that Noah gave…"It was like kicking puff balls of dandelion seeds as you walk across an open field. You could get them all. But why would you? It just didn't matter."
> Sara: And what stood out to you about that?
> MS: I thought it was a really good analogy. Because coming from his viewpoint, that's all it is. Kicking puff balls of dandelion seeds. It's no extra stressed-out thing. It's just like, oh, boom boom boom. It's like one test is boom. So it doesn't really matter to him.
> Sara: So if you don't have to put any effort into something-
> MS: There's no point in doing it. You don't get anything out of it. (Book Club 4, 9/27/13)

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[32] Please refer to the "Historical Background" section of Chapter One for more information on the historical issues that affect modern concepts of giftedness.

Here, MS agreed with Noah's view that if the tasks he is being given at school are not at the appropriate level and are not meeting his educational needs, he should not devote his time and energy to them. Instead, intellectual energy should be reserved for and applied to more challenging endeavors that will push Noah's thinking and develop his cognitive skills. MS contended that attending to unstimulating tasks produces a lack of meaningful results. The learner doesn't "get anything out of it." We continued to discuss this idea as well as where one's responsibility lies to put one's giftedness to use:

> Sara: And so I actually had also marked this page, and I was thinking about, first of all, I was thinking about from the page before where Oz says to him, "You've been blessed with an incredible gift, and you're wasting it." So if you have a gift, must you use it?
>
> MS: Yes, I would say yes, but use it properly. Don't waste it on tests. Don't waste it on these tests, because that's just wasting his energy. And his time.
>
> Sara: So what would be better for him to use it on?
>
> MS: Go to a college and learn. Like go to Harvard.
>
> Markus: He should skip a few grades.
>
> MS: Yeah, he should skip a few grades. (Book Club 4, 9/27/13)

Once again, MS emphasized his belief that effort and time should be focused on activities which are worth those efforts. He also touched on the responsibility of the school system to appropriately provide for Noah's gifts. Skipping grades and early entrance to a prestigious college, in MS's mind, would provide the proper level of challenge for Noah. MS again commented: "if you just are born with a great mind and then you don't even try to put in some hard work, it's not going to get you places" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). He felt that even if a student has multiple strengths, they should concentrate their time and effort on those few subjects that will give them the best opportunities in life:

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Say they like math more than science. Still, they're probably going to go for a science job over a math job. Because one, it's going to get them more in life. Two, they can help the world more in life with a science job. So you should just take- I think you should take your like top three maybe or like top few subjects and work with that super high. (Book Club 8, 10/25/13)

Here, MS revealed assumptions that he had about ability and responsibility. First, although he mentioned the importance of interest and stresses its significance in other conversations, here MS demonstrated that he valued certain jobs over others, at least in their ability to have a positive effect on society. Also inherent in his statement is the idea that because time and effort develops gifts, we must sometimes push some potential to the side in order to fully develop other areas.

But what is the point of that schooling and those efforts? For MS, good grades and achievement in school was not the goal in and of itself. In fact, he refused to believe that Abigail is a perfectionist purely for the grades: "Okay, why'd she get straight As? What are you going to do in life with straight As and nothing else?" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). He believed that it is acceptable to be "selfish for five years [while in school] to help change the world in the end, like cure cancer" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). What may appear to be selfishness in the short term is actually a very giving act in the long run. Like Abigail, MS's goal was academic perfection. Unlike Abigail, MS had deeper long term goals: "…I just want to like go straight perfect so I can help the world in the end, like revolutionize the world" (Book Club 4, 9/27/13). When his classmates questioned what that would actually look like, MS had this to say:

You can give- you can give most of the money away to charity, and the way you can do that in this term, you could like- you could make yourself a successful person so that-…-you give back the world-…Like if you believe in God, then

you'd think that God gave you that gifted ability, then-...-you give it back by helping everybody else, and you take off some load. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

High levels of achievement in school lead to quality employment[33]. Quality employment provides wealth, which can be donated to those in need and positive outcomes in the community. Thus, the end goal of intelligence and purpose of giftedness is to return the favor of those gifts to "take off some load" and better the world. Markus described this responsibility as a need to "communicate that knowledge. Then it's not being wasted" (Book Club 5, 10/4/13). This view aligns with that of Renzulli (2012), who believes that gifted services are necessary in order to increase society's producers of knowledge and art. Rather than focusing solely on the development of cognitive abilities, gifted education should be concerned with an individual's "responsible membership in the world community" (Roeper, 1996, as cited in Subotnik & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2012). Despite the fact that the American educational system primarily recognizes one type of giftedness, identified students often do possess incredible academic strengths. Gifted programs should not only nurture those gifts but help foster them into abilities that contribute to a democratic society.

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[33] One's definition of the term "quality employment" is dependent on one's beliefs about society and culture. While participants acknowledged the importance of many types of jobs, they still referred to careers in science, technology, and medicine when they discussed ways they could use their intellect to make a difference in the world. Students must interrogate the implication that these types of jobs, which require advanced education and training, are more worthwhile and have a greater effect on society.

Gifted Programming: Thoughts and Visions

"If it weren't for the gifted program, school would be zero.": *The Same is Not Always Fair.*

Historically, research and policy communities have been resistant to addressing the unique educational needs of the gifted learner because of the notion that gifted students will be academically successful regardless of educational programming (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012). Academically advanced students have been further ignored by the push to close the achievement gap and the resulting increased support for struggling learners.

Yet for MS, school should encourage passion and provide a multitude of opportunities in order to push students to develop their talents and meet their full potential. Although he acknowledged that there are many ways to be gifted, he believed that it is appropriate for schools to concentrate on academic subjects. "Mainly schools are meant to teach academics, so the people who excel at what they're teaching, they can go farther with it" (Interview, 12/13/13). Thus, schools should determine the strengths of students and work to further develop those strengths. In addition to talent development, though, MS identified cognitive and learning behaviors that should be developed by the school system: "To get a lifelong interest in studies. To want to have that thirst for knowledge. Classes. And cooperation" (Book Club 5, 10/4/13). Here, MS demonstrated his belief that the purpose of school is more than just gaining knowledge, but the ability to interact appropriately and collaboratively with others and to spark interest and passion in a skill or topic. Markus agreed, emphasizing that future employers seek workers who are able to interact and express their ideas. Therefore, school should not only transmit

knowledge, but push students out of their comfort zones. After passion and skill is identified, "their best subject is going to be enforced as much as it can. And like, unless it's your super interest, I think mostly people take their best subject and go with it for life…" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). MS's distinction between interest and ability is compelling. Although he was a strong believer in the effects of passion and effort on ability, here he emphasized the ways in which ability might determine where one's efforts will concentrate. For MS, effort and ability seemed to interact recursively.

Because MS saw the primary purpose of school as further developing one's strengths, he found it imperative that schools provide the appropriate level of challenge to all students. This is not a reward or extra, but what May described as a necessity "to go up to our needs" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). While peers may think gifted support is more of a "fun class," Sapphire described it as "another work class…an even harder class. To learn" (Interview, 9/16/13). MS empathized with *Ungifted*'s Noah, who is not receiving appropriate instruction:

> I think what Noah's trying to say, when he wants to go to Hardcastle instead of the academy is, well, for him, the academy is a book. For him, Hardcastle's a pencil. So he's not going to get anything out of the books…that he can't get out of the pencil. (Book Club 7, 10/18/13)

MS used the metaphor of lifting objects in order to strengthen one's muscles to explain how Noah is not receiving an appropriate education at the Academy (the school for the gifted). Since he isn't getting academically challenged at the Academy (ie. lifting a book), he might as well attend Hardcastle (a pencil), and at least enjoy a typical middle school experience.

MS believed that a variety of programming should be offered in order to meet the individual needs of each student; in his view, schools must consider alternative programs to appropriately provide for all students. After reading about various structures and instructional techniques used with gifted students, he came up with the following ideal system:

> So, this idea-...-popped into my head. I call it specialty schools. So say there are four subjects. Math, science, social studies, and language arts. Well, this is probably a bit weird, but so there's a school where they mostly focus on these two subjects. So then you have all the varieties that you can. And so then, the kids who are better at math and science will go into the math and science school. So that they can improve their talents further. (Book Club 8, 10/25/13)

In MS' ideal system, students would be segregated into different schools based upon their top two subject areas. While all subjects would be taught, the time and efforts of both teachers and students would be hyper-focused on the specialty areas. He also believed in curriculum compacting and acceleration: "They're getting things that I think mostly they could handle better than the other kids. So if you on two or three years later, we might be doing the things that they're doing in sixth or seventh grade…We could just- if we can go farther, let them go farther" (Interview, 12/13/13). Instruction, then, is not based on chronological age but on intellectual ability and readiness. What MS is describing is an educational structure comprised of curriculum compacting, acceleration, and non-graded classes (Rogers, 2002). Students with particularly high levels of independence and motivation thrive in this type of environment due to the ability to move through learning at their own pace. Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2012) found that such affective qualities differentiate who will reach increasingly high levels of talent development from those whose skills will become stagnant. While this approach may

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provide students with advanced coursework, it does not take into account the child's

social-emotional development. Just because a child is capable of comprehending an

abstract concept or engaging in a complex cognitive process does not mean that they are

ready to deal with some of the social and emotional issues with which they come.

MS was also concerned with the balance of challenge between subject areas. In a

typical school, gifted support occurs only a small portion of the day. Here, MS

considered the benefits of attending a full time gifted school even if one is not gifted in

every subject area:

> MS: Okay. Take gifted person A. So this person is exceptional at math, a bit less in science, a bit less in social studies, and then like language arts. But then even their language arts is better than average. Say that it's remarkably better than average. Putting them in a gifted program for math, social studies, language arts and science-
> May: They'd still be okay.
> MS: One, I don't think that they're going to spend the whole time in the classroom- in the gifted classroom.
> Sara: Right.
> Ludwig: Which they pretty much need.
> May: Not really.
> MS: Exact- well, example. MG. It doesn't happen the whole day.
> Tim: It could. But it doesn't.
> MS: But then, it's only like a small chunk. The other whole times, it's like not enforced, so then they're bored. But then put them in ASD, it might be a bit of challenge for language arts, but still they're getting that enrichment out of it.
> Sara: But it would be worth it.
> MS: Yes. It's more-
> Ludwig: 'Cause there's no point in-
> MS: It's worth- it's worth-
> Ludwig: -putting them in the gifted program without a challenge.
> MS: -being a bit struggling in language arts if you're getting the highest level that you can in math. (Book Club 8, 10/25/13)

Even though 'gifted person A' would have a bit of a difficult time in language arts, MS

felt the benefits of being properly challenged in other subject areas would outweigh the

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drawbacks[34]. These benefits are supported by research that demonstrates the tendency for gifted students to withdraw if they are bored (Rogers, 2007) or feel unaccepted by their peers (Halsted, 2009). Additionally, Kulik and Kulik (1982; 1984; 1987; 1989 as cited in Rogers, 2002) found that gifted students in a full-time gifted placement demonstrated a significant positive academic effect compared to intellectual peers in a mixed ability classroom. At the same time, MS found it important to not overextend oneself. For example, he was "very thankful for the gifted program…because if it weren't for the gifted program, school would be zero. I would be mostly completely bored" (Interview, 8/29/13). Yet he believed it to be important for parents to be able to "remove your kids if he's like- if they're having too much stress or they have not time" (Book Club 5, 10/4/13). "...if I went to ASD, I guess I might be able to cope, but then, say there was a school ten times harder than ASD. No way. Like everybody- if the worst student was two hundred IQ, I could not" (Interview, 12/13/13). Sapphire agreed, emphasizing that gifted students may need to be challenged in some areas, but that "also need help in a way" (Interview, 12/16/13) since they have weaknesses as well as strengths. Both MS and Sapphire's statements demonstrated the belief in appropriate education that keeps the whole child in mind.

Students considered not only alternative programming but the role of teachers in a gifted educational setting. MS was intrigued by the idea of an independent study, but questioned the importance of a live teacher in that situation: "What's the point of the

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[34] While Ludwig agreed with MS's program design, May appeared to challenge MS's insistence that a more comprehensive support program was necessary. By saying "they'd still be okay" and "not really" she demonstrated her opinion that a full time placement might not be the best situation.

teacher? They're going to just loosely describe everything? And if they are, then you can just have a computerized program with the list of subjects" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13). I'm not sure that MS realized that, during the year of the study, he completed independent studies for each Science and Social Studies unit throughout the year in which he was provided with a menu of options and guided through the independent study by me. When Tim shared his metaphor for giftedness as a flower blooming, he described the water as a teacher. MS responded that not all gifted people have a teacher to guide them, providing Leonardo DaVinci as an example of someone who was relatively self-taught. "I know that teachers are important. They're very important. But I don't think they're necessary" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13). For instance, one could read books and analyze them independently. Although he provided these examples, he did believe that these are the exception and not the rule. Rather, in school he felt that it was important to have a teacher who "can interact with us" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13) and whose job it is to "push the gifted kids farther" (Interview, 12/13/13). He also wondered about the type of person in the gifted support teaching position. "…what I thought of was, if they have people that are gifted, put it that way, like Miss Bevalaqua and Mr. Osbourne…their IQ is like one-thirty plus, so I think they use those people, gifted teachers, to teach gifted students…" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13).

Above all, MS had a vision of an educational system that provides the instructional format and learning opportunities that meet the needs of each and every child. Access to these opportunities would be in the name of a just and appropriate education for all:

"I think it's fair because while we are people that need more pushing and more- I don't know what you call it- exercises-...-to push our potential to the best it can be. So here, we do that. You do that. And that's-...-good for us…" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

"It depends on how you're gifted.": *The Importance of Varied Educational Opportunities*

As discussed in a previous section, Ludwig was a strong believer in the multiple intelligences definition of giftedness and, as such, believed that gifted programs at school should be multi-faceted and provide for the individual students' abilities and passions. When asked about whether there would be the same expectations of gifted learners in various schools, Ludwig further revealed his beliefs regarding the various ways one may be gifted:

> Ludwig: It depends on how you're gifted. Like certain kids in the grade want to like-
> > there are five kids that are really gifted in sports. Like they play every single sport you can think of. That kind of thing. And then you have certain kids that are really good at, say, writing, so they might be gifted in that. So most schools do expect the science, math and reading of the gifted learner. That's the thing.
> Sara: So why do you think that schools don't have a gifted program for sports? Or-
> Ludwig: I think in a way they do.
> Sara: How?
> Ludwig: Gym. And the Turkey Trot. That's a gifted- and then Stride is probably for
> > more- it's a more open program, but mainly- usually the more gifted runners and all those people go to Stride. (Interview, 8/30/13)

Here Ludwig expanded the definition of "gifted services" to include programs like the Turkey Trot, an annual mile long race for which students must qualify, and Stride, a running club. When asked to consider further why the school provides gifted services solely for academics, he again referred to the wide range of opportunities for

students who excel at the arts, sports, or other area: "Because- especially for sports, there are a lot of other sports. You have so many camps. You have your football season, soccer season, all these- and you have- you can do more of that outside of school, so there's not even- it's not necessary to keep it in school" (Interview, 12/11/13). Since there are ample venues for extracurricular experiences, schools focus on providing academic opportunities.

What should those academic experiences look like? Markus craved an open structure that would focus on talent development, an approach that uses independent studies and experiences focused on one's individual areas of strength. Ludwig envisioned the gifted program as not only a place where advanced students can continue to grow, but where anyone who is motivated can improve their skills as well. Individual drive was imperative for Ludwig, as he believed that "anybody who wants to take the test should take the test for getting into MG. If they fail, they could be put in like a getting to MG program, like a learn more" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). Thus, qualification for the gifted program would not necessarily be reliant on current ability, but on motivation and drive. He saw participating in gifted support as optional. "If you want to do it, you want the challenge, you- if I wanted, I don't want a challenge, I just want to stay in regular, I can easily quit" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). Again, for Ludwig, ability was only one component of a candidate for gifted support. The desire for a challenge was absolutely necessary and perhaps even more important than actual ability.

The need for self-motivation has implications for how Ludwig's ideal gifted

program would be designed. After being given a week to read about various structures

for gifted support and design his ideal program, Ludwig came up with the following:

> …you have to be very independent to do it. So- so you- the student would be
> given a list of subjects, so the basic subjects of school- math, science, reading,
> writing, social studies and the basics of grammar, history. So and physics,
> biology. You know. So you'd be- he or she would be given a list, and you'd be-
> they'd be told to pick some subjects from the list. And they could pick however
> many they want. They could pick all of them. They could pick one of them. And
> they'd necessarily don't have to be evaluated as gifted for that, but it's
> commitment, so they should honestly self-evaluate- well, evaluate themselves to
> being gifted in that category, and I think that's actually part of being gifted, or
> self-evaluating yourself honestly and correctly. That's important. So then in- after
> he's- he or she has picked so many subjects, they can have kind of- they'll get-
> it's kind of like, how do you want to learn? And- how do you like to learn- music?
> Computers? Listening to a teacher talk, take notes, that kind of thing. And the
> student could pick what they want from there, and then each student would be
> placed with other kids who learn in the same category, and so there'd be many
> groups and not too many kids, so each kid could get a lot of attention, too. And
> the teacher would loosely tell what to do, but students would have to do a lot by
> themselves and actually get a lot of work done by themselves. (Book Club 14,
> 12/17/13)

In order to successfully take part in Ludwig's gifted program, a student would need to be

extremely self-motivated and independent in their learning. He also emphasized the need

to honestly reflect on one's abilities, both academic and behavioral. Students would not

need to be officially evaluated for giftedness, but simply make an informed, reflective

choice to commit to the program. His program involved not only students choosing

academic subjects but also learning styles. This idea aligns with those which contend

that gifted learners need not only accelerated curriculum, but that the ways in which the

curriculum is delivered must be adapted to the unique needs of the gifted learner

(Renzulli, 2012; Rogers, 2007; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). He also brought up

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the need for small groups so that the teacher could give individualized attention to students and saw the role of the teacher as more of a facilitator who would guide students in having agency over their own learning.

Conclusion

Participating students' primary belief concerning the source of giftedness seemed to be that intelligence is based on experience and effort more than biology. This belief guided the way they experienced the expectations of adults and peers and react to those expectations. While the book club members touched on the fact that some groups of people are exposed to better educational opportunities than others, the complex relationship between effort and circumstance (social, educational, and financial) had yet to be examined fully. As participants came from the perspective of middle to upper middle class suburban students, the use of text that more explicitly centers on inequality of opportunity might facilitate further consideration of these issues. In the next two chapters, I will elaborate on how social practices and culture influenced students' conceptions of being identified as gifted.

CHAPTER 4:
Social Practices in the Dialogic Literacy Classroom

Pedagogy that places thoughtful discussion as central to instruction supports

learners in making sense of their worlds. In this chapter, I will explain how students used

varied social practices to enhance their comprehension of text as well as demonstrate

agency. They used complex social moves to transact with text (written and oral),

ultimately resulting in novel thinking and increased empathy.

The Power of Dialogue

In the classroom context, social practices are especially useful in developing

reading comprehension. In their work on literacy as a family of practices[35], Luke and

Freebody (1999) found that the shift from passive reception of information and skills

toward more active and oral construction of ideas that relate to a text occurs when readers

interact with each other's ideas about the text. Dialogue, then, is an opportunity for

scaffolding instruction. Bakhtin wrote that "life is by its very nature dialogic- to live

means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so

forth" (1984, p.293). Thus, pedagogy that encourages active participation and interaction

mirrors the social nature of life.

Discussion surrounding text not only improves comprehension, but also promotes

higher level thinking skills. Sipe (2002) found that the experience of talking about and

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[35] Luke and Freebody developed the four resources model of reading which consists of four roles for the reader: code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text critic. While they contend that these roles are necessary they acknowledge that they are not necessarily encompassing of all reading goals.

interpreting stories is critical if students are to become more than merely decoders of text. Socially constructing meaning with peers and their teachers through talk allows readers to go beyond a simple reading level to what Peterson (1984 as cited in Eeds & Wells, 1989) calls "dialogue," where a group constructs and discloses deeper meaning, enriching understanding for *all* participants. When such dialogue occurs, the "gaps" Iser describes can be filled in collaboratively. The text may offer different meanings to each reader, and meaning is constructed through dialogue & social engagement. It is important to note that literacy pedagogy that incorporates social practices should not include talk just for the sake of talk. Rather, the end goal of increased learning must be kept at the forefront. The stepping back of the teacher as a purveyor of information and the valuing of student thought and ideas work towards a democratic form of education, one in which students are recognized for the literacies they bring with them to school and the social practices that can enhance those very literacies.

A dialogic classroom can result in much more than increased opportunities for comprehension and engagement; it can promote democratic attitudes and provide opportunities to develop and demonstrate agency. Teachers use dialogue to share power with students and allow them "the right to speak their word" (Freire, 1970, as quoted in Scholl, 2010). The idea that "no dialogue begins with the premise that only some chosen among us can enter into the dialogue, or that some voices carry more weight than others" (Freire, 1970, as quoted in Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012) is fundamental. Literacy, especially, offers a powerful context for this work (Wile, 2000). Students use text and

dialogue as a vehicle for open communication and development of empathy and understanding.

This chapter focuses on the social practices students engaged in while participating in dialogue about text. These moves went beyond superficial comprehension of text to demonstrate the students' mindfulness about complex ideas and empowerment to act on them. First, I will explore how participants used intertextual connections to make sense of both text and their worlds. Next, I will illustrate the ways in which students demonstrated agency over their ideas about text and giftedness as well as their actions during Book Club. The next section describes the empathetic nature of participants' listening acts and the knowledge that was generated out of conflict. In the fourth section, I will explore evidence of active reading and theory building. Finally, I will analyze the exciting ways students used metaphor to communicate and develop their ideas. Taken together, these moves demonstrate the complex social practices participants engaged in during Book Club.

Intertextuality: Complex Connections

Making connections is a common response for young readers. However, these connections do not always result in greater comprehension and attention to text. For example, a reader might go on a tangent about his grandmother's dog after reading that the main character had a puppy without making the "so what" connection to consider how one's own experience might augment comprehension of text. However, participants in this study used intertextuality to enhance rather than distract from the heart of the reading or discussion topic. In this section, I provide evidence of the students' use of

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intertextual connections to increase engagement, enhance understanding, and explore related issues.

Using Wordplay and Performance as Intertextual Connections

Children are imaginative beings and they carry these abilities into their school experiences. They use their imagination to experiment with roles, empathize with others, and transact with written and oral language. Gifted learners have also been described as highly verbal with the ability and desire to manipulate abstract symbols, invent, and create (Robinson, 1986). Gifted readers in particular present with advanced language development including an awareness of figurative language, connotations, and etymology (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Additionally, their large store of knowledge about a variety of topics provides a bank of vocabulary and knowledge about the interrelatedness of words and concepts from which to draw. This increased awareness and ability allowed Tim and the rest of the group to play with words in meaningful and complex ways.

Tim was our resident pop culture expert and could often be heard quietly quoting movie lines that he found to be connected to the conversation. He was also a producer of media, as he created stop-motion animation short films with voiceovers and was regularly given the opportunity to demonstrate his understanding of a novel or content through this medium. Although at first glance, his connections and spontaneous performance of movie lines or songs may have seemed off-topic, deeper analysis revealed his use of pop culture as demonstration of his complex understanding of the discussion topic.

Tim enjoyed wordplay and regularly manipulated language in playful ways. From something as simple as brainstorming a pseudonym ["Bob is your first name.

Bobby is your middle name. And Bobertson is your last name" (Book Club 1, 9/6/13)],

Tim demonstrated his ability to work with words in interesting ways. When Markus

shared that he had a Youtube channel, Tim renamed it Markusalicious after Noah's

Youkalicious channel (Book 5, 10/4/13). Later that session, he, Markus, and MS played

with the inversion of KQ, the label for a routine used in Book Club called Keeper

Question, as it correlated with the inverse of the initials of one of their homeroom

teachers:

> Markus: KQ, right, not QK…
> MS: Not QK…
> Markus: Question keeper.
> Tim: Oh, yeah. The keeper of the questions.
> Markus: The question of the keeper.

Thus, these students understood that words can be manipulated in ways that change the

overall meaning while taking advantage of aspects of the original. While this particular

act did not appear to enhance understanding of the task or content from the novel, it

demonstrated their ability to use language in imaginative ways and understand the affect

that manipulation has on the message's meaning.

Tim went beyond this simple wordplay, though, to use phrases to connect to the

conversation in order to comprehend text. During our discussion of *Ungifted*, Tim

discussed the main character's use of Ancestry.com to learn about his heritage and

comments on the author's use of wordplay: "…fun with wordplay, Mr. Gordon Korman.

He- Donovan was telling him about the Titanic survivor. Then he said, I had a sinking

feeling. *Sinking*" (Book Club 2, 9/13/13, emphasis added). He understood that authors

make deliberate word choices when writing and appreciated the layered meaning behind

Korman's use of the word *sinking*. He emulated this strategy when sharing a theory about who may be guilty of cheating for Donovan: "Or was it Tin Man who just tagged on using his robot mind so Donovan could get in trouble and he could literally rule the world with an iron fist?" (Book 5, 10/4/13). This type of wordplay appeared to be part of how Tim thought. He didn't look for a reaction from the group, but used puns and multiple meaning words to communicate his ideas and interact with the text in lighthearted but complex ways. Tim also embedded sayings and adages in his talk. The group debated the sincerity and friendship of the Daniels, Donovan's trouble-making sidekicks, and tried to decide whether they deserve to defend Donovan during their conversation with his ASD classmate, Chloe. "Woulda shoulda coulda," (Book Club 5, 10/4/13). Tim also inserted an adage into his response to my observation of his pencil metaphor:

> Sara: You're looking at the same exact object and judging it by different criteria.
> Tim: Don't judge a book by its cover. (Book Club 10, 11/11/13)

He used this language not only to communicate his ideas, but to process them as well:

> MS: I mean, he- he- he's gotten off by the skin of his teeth, I think too many times.
> Tim: Teeth doesn't have skin . Ah! Oh my gosh.
> MS: That's why the saying is a saying. (Book Club 6, 10/11/13)

Beyond his use of wordplay, Tim used performance to communicate his ideas and respond to text and discussion. When the group welcomed Dr. Hurst at the start of each session, Tim often greeted her using an Italian accent with "It's a me, Mario," imitating one of the lead characters in Mario Brothers. After Markus greeted her using his self-

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created term "haloha," Tim built off of it with a Santa-inspired "ho ho ho ho" (Book Club 7, 10/18/13). Robinson (1986) found that the use of dramatics in the language arts curriculum, while recommended for many types of learners, is particularly appropriate for gifted students because it provides the opportunity for children to experiment with social and emotional contexts and exercise their imaginations. Although Tim's performative responses were spontaneous and not designed by the teacher, they allowed him to make connections between concepts, actively engage in the discussion, and elicit imagination and creativity (Criscuolo, 1974). Tim appeared most engaged when performing or otherwise responding imaginatively to the text.

For example, during the Book Club in which we each read a different book, I gave a brief summary of my book, *The View from Saturday,* and explained that the characters competed in an academic quiz show. In response, Tim used a loud, booming voice to imitate a TV host. In each case, Tim used various voices to perform his response. Likewise, Tim was inspired by song when listening to the contributions of others:

> May: That's why he's changed.
> Tim: ((singing)) Ch-ch-ch-changes. (Book Club 6, 10/11/13)
>
> MS: Well, one- sometimes randomly, without knowing what's scaring him, he gets completely- like horrendously freaked out.
> Tim: ((singing)) Freak out! (Book Club 12, 12/3/13)

Since Tim's father was a music teacher, it was evident that Tim has been exposed to a great deal of music at home, including classic rock that the average fifth-grader might not know. As with wordplay, Tim did not allow his interjections to distract him from the heart of the conversation. Rather, these performances seemed to demonstrate Tim's

understanding of the topic and his ability to actively listen. Sipe (2008) identified five

major types of response describing the ways in which young children make meaning

from text. He describes Transparent Response as one with a spontaneous quality which

does not seem to have communicative intent. For example, when Tim sang under his

breath or inserted a sound effect, he demonstrated his active involvement in the world of

the text yet was not performing for the purpose of inciting a response from the group.

These responses indicate that Tim had become immersed in the world of the text, whether

that be the novel or the discussion. When the response is intended for communicative

purposes and not self-talk, Sipe labels it as Performative Response. In this type of

response, the reader takes the response a step further and manipulates the text in ways

that are intended to be "heard, seen, and appreciated by other children" (Sipe, 2008, p.

174). During a discussion on the robot from *Ungifted*, Tim takes on the role of Tinman,

saying "'Cause I like to pick things up and put them down…And I like to be Terminator"

(Book Club 4, 9/27/13). When Tim sang out to the group, he was using intertextual

connections in a performative way. As Sipe describes, these performances may appear to

interrupt the thoughtful meaning-making process and trivialize the text. However, deeper

analysis reveals that they represent a complex manner of interpreting, manipulating, and

conceptualizing the text in ways that go beyond reception to expression.

Tim's use of intertextuality also focused on a wide array of texts, broadly defined,

from popular culture. He regularly referenced Star Wars, Terminator, Indiana Jones, and

Disney Pixar movies. At times, like his use of wordplay and performance, his

connections consisted of brief outbursts that may or may not be acknowledged by the

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group. For example, when discussing the term 'reckless' to describe Donovan, Tim shared that "they use that in Star Wars" (Book Club 2, 9/13/13). During another book club, MS accidentally called *Harry Potter* 'Happy Potter,' to which Tim chimed in, "Happy Gilmore*"* (Book Club 3, 9/20/13). Again, Tim did not demand recognition or a reaction from the group. Rather, these expressions were his way of interacting with the text, including our discussion, in a performance, arts-based manner, a response that Sipe (2008) would characterize as an Associative Link, an unelaborated statement of intertextuality.

Other times, Tim made an Analytical Link as he expanded on his ideas by describing the similarities between texts (Sipe, 2008). While at first, his connections to these movies could seem off-topic, given the time Tim made apparent to the group the ways in which the movie informed his thinking about the conversation. During Book Club 6, the group discussed Donovan's strengths and what he brings to the gifted group that no one else can. Tim explained how his own experience creating a name for his custom character in a Lego Star Wars game mirrored the process that the students went through with Tin Man. It never occurred to the gifted students to name their robot: "That's kind of what they're missing…Like this average kid, okay, I'm just going to think, and boom, it's done. They don't even think about it" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). Here, he was identifying with the "average kid" more than the gifted group, just as he sometimes did not feel that he belonged in the gifted support classroom. Later in the same Book Club, Tim connected the situation in *Ungifted* with that in the sixth episode of Star Wars: "Han Solo always gets away. Well, there's a scene- he gets captured by the

guy who's been hunting him down…Kinda reminds me of Donovan. He just got

captured by Mr. Schultz" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). Stars Wars, a movie Tim had

watched and re-watched, served as a model of the story of pursuit and capture. In Star

Wars, Han Solo is the hero that is temporarily captured, just as Donovan acts as the hero

in *Ungifted*. Tim's use of Star Wars as a sort of framework for his understanding of the

novel demonstrated his ability to make complex connections between storylines with

seemingly very different plots. Tim contrasted *Ungifted* with A Christmas Story:

"There's like the scene where he imagines the teacher gives him an A plus plus- just

keeps adding plus- that's kind of what I think of whenever Noah even turns in a blank

sheet of paper…That's what I thought of, A plus plus" (Book Club 7, 10/18/13). In this

case, Ralphie's dream of his teacher giving him an A plus plus on his paper was

contrasted with Noah's nightmare.

At times, Tim used intertextual connections to make Synthesizing Links (Sipe,

2008) in which he made generalizations and drew conclusions based on several texts.

For example, Tim used Disney Pixar's *Cars* to help the group understand the idea of

passion for a particular topic being temporary in one's life:

> Well, if you've seen Cars, like the- there's that great scene where the main
> character drives into the doctor's- the back of his house and he sees these- the
> trophies that he so wants to get. The doctor comes in. He's like, oh, they're just-
> they're nothing. They just collect dust. What are they worth to me? Well-He was
> into it when he was into it, but stuff can change your life, and you're not going to
> want to do that anymore. That's kind of the lesson that the main character learned
> throughout that movie. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

Once again, Tim used a theme from another text to build his understanding of situations

in the novel *Ungifted*. This particular scene in *Cars* supported Tim, and consequently the

group, in understanding an underlying theme in the novel. Thus, to Tim, popular culture consisted of 'texts' which add to the repertoire from which we can draw when thinking deeply about other texts.

Most of the performance and intertextual connections made by Tim were not taken up by the group or built onto in any way. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the majority of movies Tim referenced are not within the typical elementary school child's repertoire, especially those of the other members of the club, students whose families were deeply entrenched in their home country's culture. This point reinforces the idea that Tim was greatly influenced the traditions of his family which include exposure to popular media, songs, and literature. Thus, for Tim, intertextuality is a multimodal and performative way to respond to text.

Bridging Non-fiction and Fiction to Shape Ideas

Fiction and informational text both have a place in literacy curricula as they serve different purposes for instruction and comprehension. Fiction provides the reader with an alternate reality, one that may be quite similar or very different from their own. Thinking about strong characters to whom readers can relate allows learners to reflect on their own positions in family, peer, and educational contexts (Dooley, 1993). On the other hand, non-fiction provides historical and scientific perspectives that allow readers to consider the societal influences on the contexts of the lives of book characters and themselves. In this study, students used both types of text as well as connected the two to shape their

ideas about giftedness. Thus, understandings from fiction and non-fiction informed each other recursively.

While Tim focused on popular culture, Markus leaned on informational text when making intertextual references. He consistently read and took home issues of *Super Science*, a Scholastic magazine I ordered for our classroom. Additionally, he was a reader of publications meant for adults, including *National Geographic* and *Parent and Child*, a text type Cavazos-Kottke (2006) found to be one of the preferred genres for talented boy readers.

Markus used the knowledge he gained from informational text both as evidence for his ideas during dialogue as well as to help him understand the way the world works. When discussing his belief in the power of interactive learning, he referenced an article in Super Science which described a professor from New York University who taught students about lava by guiding them through making a model which demonstrated how the process of eruption works. By providing a specific example of instruction that was adapted to be participatory rather than passive, Markus was able to better support his stance. During a Book Club debate on the effects of nature and nurture on giftedness, Markus used informational text to help shape his theory of the cause of giftedness. He had read an article in *National Geographic*, a magazine to which his parents subscribe, about twins who were adopted at birth to two different families.

> Markus: I actually read- I actually read like an article from *National Geographic*, and in it, it said that twins, when they're born, they're not exactly identical in every way because on what kind of exposure it has. If one of them- they did some things with some twins that got adopted. From being separated-
> Sara: Into two different families?

Markus: Yes, two different families. One of them was sportsy. One of them was really artisty. And one of them is now a good- a really good sport because- now they're really good at sports, and the other one is really good at that, so it all depends on what you're exposed to, and so you can create new genes based on what they're exposed to. (Book Club 9, 11/1/13)

Markus used this instance to provide an example of two people born genetically identical who were raised in different settings. Their abilities were shaped based upon the exposure they had to either athletics or the arts. His statement that "you can create new genes" may not have been accurate, but the intertextual reference served its purpose of providing research-based evidence in support of the effects of nurture on ability.

Finally, Markus used references to informational text to add to dialogue about giftedness identification and programming. He was a regular reader of *Parent and Child*, another magazine to which his parents subscribed, "just to see what parents think of us" (Book Club 2, 9/13/13). On two separate occasions, Markus referred to information he had learned about how giftedness is measured and provided for from articles in *Parent and Child*. Reading about the IQ ranges that qualify students for gifted services and the ways that different schools design gifted programs empowered Markus. Thus, for Markus, these types of intertextual references were not superficial. Rather, reading informational text allowed him to be a more knowledgeable and critical consumer, positioning him not just as a child, but as an individual with agency.

Using Fantasy to Understand Reality

Unlike Tim and Markus, MS had a propensity to make intertextual comparisons to books from the fantasy genre. As the reading preferences of young adolescents tend to

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shift from realistic fiction towards fantasy and science fiction (Halsted, 2009), in part due to the influence of technology and popular culture (Willis, 2007), MS enjoyed surrounding himself in imaginary worlds with complex systems in place. Children are more open to accepting the idea of alternate worlds with new rules and they gravitate towards the text structure of a protagonist coming into his or her powers, invasion of a malevolent force be it aliens, technology, or a governmental group, and epic battles of good and evil (November, 2004). Although the events are out of the protagonist's control, he must embrace his powers and rise to the occasion. Throughout a fantasy, readers must work alongside the characters to break codes and solve puzzles in order to understand and negotiate the inner workings of the imaginary world.

The fantasy world acts as an alternative space, separate from the adult world, in which anything can happen and unlikely heroes prevail (Willis, 2007). Hall (2011) describes the genre as carnivalesque, providing the opportunity for children to consider life outside of adult societal parameters. The resulting world is full of adolescent comedy, reshaping of power structures, rebellion, and rebirth. Characters use magic to create order in a chaotic world (Willis, 2007), something young readers often feel unable to do in their own lives. Early adolescence and teenage years are a difficult, confusing time for students as they try to make sense of the physical and social changes in their worlds. Although all fiction experiments with possibility, science fiction and fantasy does so more strongly and overtly. Through imaginary worlds, children are able to point out injustice since they act as outsiders in the adult reality (Hall, 2011). As November (2004) asserts, the ways in which these genres mirror the young readers' shifting worlds

allows them to tackle complex philosophical questions and helps them determine their own stand on the issues.

Students identified as gifted are particularly drawn to fantasy as it embodies the creative expression and active imagination that gifted learners possess. The magic incorporated in many fantasy stories can act as a metaphor for giftedness, especially when that magical ability is only possessed by a few (Frank & McBee, 2003). Since intellectualism is not always valued during adolescence, gifted children may need to make decisions between academic and social needs. In that case, popular fantasy series can provide a way for students to be both intellectual and participate in mainstream culture.

The group referenced the series *Nerds* (e.g. Buckley, 2010) several times throughout Book Club to consider the traditional vision of a nerd, a scrawny boy with glasses and high-waisted pants. However, MS went beyond the superficial elements of the story to consider how the plot might inform our thinking about how others respond to one's difference:

> MS: Also, another book where the parents don't know about the child's secret identity, some of the kids in the book *Nerds*, the *Nerds* series. Sometimes they don't even know that their child is a superspy.
> Tim: Until like the very end.
> Markus: Until- until it gets revealed. Then their parents accept it. Sort of.
> MS: Yeah, sometimes, the kids- the parents do know, and they like-
> Markus: Like Duncan, for example. In the second book, Duncan Dewey, he- his- you can really tell that his parents know because he- once his parents- I think he willingly told his parents, and now he has all these gadgets, like these high-tech gadgets in his things.
> MS: They have like- you just type in some stuff, and you get a cup of hot tea.

While some parents might accept their child's difference, others might resist it or want to

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hide it from others. MS again used characters from the *Nerds* series to expand the definition of difference: "I was thinking that sometimes difference can be also doing a normal thing on a larger scale…As in…the *Nerds* books, there's a kid who likes candy, and I know a lot of kids who like candy, but then this kid, he goes way overboard. He has like too much. Way too much" (Book Club 12, 12/3/). Here, MS took what could be considered a superficial aspect of the book- a boy who overdoes it on candy- and used it to build his thinking about the complex concept of difference. Whereas Sipe (2008) would call this the creation and modification for schemata for stories, here MS used an intertextual connection to modify his schema for the concept of difference. MS used another fantasy series, *Percy Jackson*, to help explain how his classmates have inaccurate assumptions about what occurs in the gifted support classroom: "There's this thing call This Mist. Yeah, so the- whatever these demigods and the gods do, it's kind of like shielded by this magical mist...so people can't see what's going on…But they make crazy assumptions" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). He went on to describe how his classmates couldn't see through the "mist" to see what was actually happening in gifted support and instead continued to hold on to their preconceived ideas.

Although the students referred to a variety of texts during our discussions, by far the most common intertextual reference was to the *Harry Potter* series (e.g. Rowling, 1997). The phenomenon of *Harry Potter* has continued long past the 2007 release of the final installment of the series. Christopher Booker (2004, as cited in Brown & Patterson, 2010) documented seven basic master plots from Western cultural tradition and determined that the most impactful stories include more than one. *Harry Potter*

incorporates all seven somewhere in the brand. Although it seems to transcend

generations, *Harry Potter* particularly appeals to adolescents due to its carnivalesque

content (Hall, 2011). Fred and George's bathroom humor, the way Hogwarts acts as a

removal from regular life, and cycles of life, death, and power that occur all represent the

universal truths that are celebrated at carnival and appeal to younger readers. Willis

(2007) documented the ways in which *Harry Potter* parallels adolescent life. Like the

computer games young people play, *Harry Potter* offers the reader a new and unknown

world in which he can work *with* the characters to solve riddles, overcome obstacles, and

follow intricate narratives. As a bildungsroman written as a sequential series, readers can

literally grow up alongside the characters (Brown & Patterson, 2010) and have a sense of

security knowing that their protagonist will, in fact, survive while safely experiencing the

dark side through Lord Voldemort (Mills, 2010). In this way, readers can use Harry's

development as a safe way to consider issues of growing up.

Like other cult fiction, *Harry Potter* also provides a way of belonging for

children. They are part of a special club, some readers even referring to Harry as a "close

friend" (Brown & Patterson, 2010, p. 551). The marketing surrounding the series, such

as rare author's personal appearances, midnight book releases, and countdowns, has

further encouraged adolescents' excitement. Who wants to be the only one unable to

participate in a discussion at lunch or be left in the dark during a *Harry Potter* reference

on the bus?

As Frank and McBee (2003) contend, the *Harry Potter* books are especially

useful for prompting gifted students to consider issues such as perfectionism, friendship,

isolation, the expectations of others, and identity development. Just as most of what

Harry knows about himself comes to him as secondhand knowledge, gifted students

constantly deal with messages from adults, peers, and society about who they are and

should be. There were 29 overt references within 11 conversations to *Harry Potter* over

the course of fourteen book club sessions. At times they appeared to be superficial

remarks, as in the following excerpt in which MS mentioned Snape and the parody web

series Potter's Puppet Pals in response to Tim and May's wish that the YouTube videos

referenced in *Ungifted* would be real:

Tim:	I want to see all those YouTube videos.
MS:	Robots behaving badly.
Tim:	I want to see like the author's-
MS:	Youkilicious.
Tim:	-the author's, like-
May:	I wonder if there really are videos. It'd be funny if Gordon Korman made videos.
Tim:	I want him to make videos of something like that.
MS:	Yeah. Like cartoons, like Potter's Puppet Pals.
MS:	Snape.

However, MS used *Harry Potter* primarily as a metaphor or illustrative example to

explain his thinking about *Ungifted*. In Book Club 2, the students were grappling with

the idea of whether IQ was a fixed measure or if it could change over time. When

Ludwig asserted that learning an incredible amount in one year would increase one's IQ

while a lack of any effort might decrease IQ, MS responded "Fred and George, for

example" (p. 17). No further discussion occurred about these characters. A similar event

occurred when May struggled to understand why Miss Bevalaqua, a teacher in *Ungifted*,

would be so concerned with who helped Donovan cheat on his test:

May: But then why is she all of the sudden interested in cheating and

stuff? She's just a math teacher.

Sapphire: 'Cause it's Donovan.

May: But still.

MS: She hates Donovan.

May: If she was like-

MS: It's kind of obvious.

May: -the- if she was like the principal, kind of, of like-

MS: She's like the Voldemort of this book.

May: If she was like the principal-

MS: It's the Voldemort of the Academy.

MS made a nuanced comparison between Miss Bevalaqua and Lord Voldemort, implying that Miss Bevalaqua is just as conniving and motivated to defeat who she sees as her nemesis as Voldemort is. Yet once again, MS's reference was not taken up by the group nor did he expand on it. Did MS assume that everyone was in the know when it came to *Harry Potter* and that no further explanation was necessary? In the next Book Club, the students were discussing Donovan's reckless behavior, inattention to school work, and lack of concern over the consequences:

May: He doesn't care about it at all. He's like [   ] get in trouble every second.

MS: It kind of reminds me of Fred and George.

Tim: Oh, geez, yes.

MS: They don't think their future lies in academic achievement.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

May: Except for that they die, but.

MS: No.

Tim: Not-uh. George doesn't. Fred does.

MS: Fred dies.

Sara: Where- where are they from?

MS: *Harry Potter*.

Students ((in unison)):*Harry Potter*.

Sara: Oh.

((laughter))

It was obvious that I was an outsider looking into the *Harry Potter* club. Here MS voiced the connection he made between Donovan, Fred, and George and inferred that their

behavior was due to the fact that "they don't think their future lies in academic achievement." May took up MS's comparison by pushing back and contrasting the characters' fate, ignoring the purpose of MS's parallel.

Still other times MS's reference was a meaningful building block to a larger conversation. While sharing their ideal gifted programs, the students discussed the importance of a teacher and whether a book could be considered a form of a teacher.

> MS: When you're just reading a random book, and if you disagree with something, the book doesn't have- it's not like Riddle's Diary, that magic thing that talks to you. If it says something and you can disagree and you don't understand it, it's not really- I don't think-
> Sara: The author doesn't hear your-
> MS: Exactly.
> Sara: -reaction.
> MS: Your reaction to it. (Book Club 14, 12/17/13)

MS used Riddle's Diary as a counter-example to prove that, unlike the magical *Harry Potter* book, traditional texts do not provide the conversational feedback that a human would. During Book Club 7, the final session about *Ungifted*, MS shared that his only gripe about the ending of the book was that the author should have had Miss Bevalaqua fired for the way she treated Donovan. While the students were passionately debating the merits of Miss Bevalaqua and May defends her, MS reasoned that she is "like the villain of the story" (Book Club 7, 10/18/13). May continued to support Miss Bevalaqua, arguing that she is a "good memory" at the school and that firing her would be too harsh. To punctuate his point, MS used *Harry Potter:* "It's like going to Harry Potter and reading the book and saying…oh, no, Voldemort's not the villain. Look at Voldemort's perspective. He's not the villain to himself." Although MS acknowledged that Voldemort's viewpoint would place blame elsewhere, his belief in how stories work was

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stronger. In the end, the reader is meant to accept the evil ways of some characters. Harry is the ultimate protagonist, Voldemort the flagship villain. Thus, for our group, *Harry Potter* became the touchstone text to which all other readings could be compared and understood.

Participants used a variety of fantasy texts to understand the complex workings of their realities. These novels provided a common language and a safe way to discuss difficult issues such as perfectionism, peer pressure, and difference. Through the imaginary worlds of the characters, participants explored their own lives.

Demonstrations of agency

While students' feelings of agency are influenced by a variety of forces including family dynamics, personality, and past experiences with pedagogical structures that either enhance or stifle student agency, the dialogic format used in Book Club encouraged democratic attitudes and behavior. When students have agency over their learning, there is a clear move towards participatory engagement (Brantmeier, n.d.). In this section, I will demonstrate participants' agency over their ability to shape the conversation, define the language we used in Book Club, and evaluate text, authors' craft, and published theory.

Power to Shape the Conversation

While traditional classrooms use the IRE pattern of response in which the teacher initiates a question, students respond, and the teacher evaluates the answers, Book Club consisted of dialogue that sought to be a more authentic conversation about text. As

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discussed in Chapter 1 and in the introduction to this chapter, the structure of Book Club encouraged student engagement as participants collaboratively transacted with text with the goal of readers developing and sharing their individual thinking. Consequently, students must be positioned to not only respond to others, but set the tone and topic of the conversation. In this section, I will illustrate Ludwig's agency as demonstrated by his shaping the direction of discussion in Book Club.

Ludwig was confident in his capacity to act, speak, and make decisions about his life. He was intent on his ability to decide whether and to what extent he would participate in the gifted program, stating, "It's optional. If you want to do it, you want the challenge, you- if I wanted, I don't want a challenge, I just want to stay in regular, I can easily quit. I can probably quit and just do math if I want" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). He showed that he held the power over his educational experiences and that his desires and motivation mattered when it came to his educational programming. His reaction to the inaccurate assumptions of others also demonstrated the agency he feels. When others held on to their misconceptions about the gifted program, Ludwig would "tell them a couple times" then say "okay, fine, I don't really care what you think. I really cannot change it" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). He was comfortable enough in his own skin and consequently did not rely on the opinion of others. In addition, he had strong ideas about who he was and how he learned, using a learning styles chart from our readings to identify his own tendencies and even taking offense to the ways in which he felt they categorized him stereotypically as an Indian.

Ludwig regularly took the lead in book club, shaping the conversation and introducing us to a new discussion topic. He did this in a respectful way, asking a question of the group before sharing his own thoughts on the subject. For example, during Book Club 6, he asked the group "Who do you think was likely to have helped [Donovan] with the test, the retest?" (p. 13). He also invited others to participate and felt able to make decisions about who would contribute, as evidenced by a conversation as we finished our Quiet Reflection and prepared to begin Book Club 10 (11/11/13):

> Sara: All right. Come on back over.
> Ludwig: Want to start it May?
> May: What?
> Ludwig: Want to start the discussion?
> May: No.
> Ludwig: Okay.
> May: You're starting the discussion, right?
> Ludwig: I don't really care. If you want-
> May: I'll start!
> MS: I'll start.
> Markus: Ludwig already called it.
> May: I called second.
> Ludwig: Yeah, I did start last week, so.
> May: Yay.

He gave up his spot as the first to shape the conversation and assigned the job to another book club member. When Ludwig felt passionately about a topic, he was more likely to participate and attempt to shape the conversation. He felt particularly strong about the informational reading on culture and its effect on learning style and gifted identification. Ludwig interrupted the conversation four times requesting that we go through True/False statements concerning culture and intellect. Finally, his request came during a break in the conversation and we moved to his topic. He completely led the conversation, reading

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each statement, fielding responses, and at times sharing his own answers and reasoning

behind them.

> Ludwig: So a child's IQ is a strong indicator of adult success, true or false.
> MS: Uh.
> Ludwig: I did false.
> MS: False, mostly.
> Tim: Oh, we were supposed to fill that out?
> Sara: You don't have to.
> Ludwig: I- I- IQ scores are the most frequently used tool in identifying
>   gifted students. That's true.
> MS: Yes.
> Tim: Eh, yeah.
> Ludwig: IQ scores are the most accurate identifiers of gifted students.
> Tim: False.
> MS: False.
> Ludwig: False. Good. Cultural bias is a major weakness in intelligence
>   tests.
> May: Well, there's no right or wrong answers. It's based on your own
>   thinking.
> Tim: What's- oh, cultural bias. False.
> Sapphire: Well, yeah, there's no real answer.
> May: There's no real answer.
> Ludwig: Genetics-
> Sara: Keep going.
> Ludwig: Genetics provides a primary contribution to superior
>   intelligence.
> MS: False.
> Ludwig: I did false. Higher IQ scores guarantee a person's ability to
>   perform higher status jobs.
> MS: False.
> Ludwig: That's what I got. (Book Club 10, 11/11/13)

At times he made judgments on the others' answers ("Good.") despite the fact that

Sapphire and May contended that there were no correct answers. Primarily, though,

Ludwig ran the conversation in order to fulfill his own need to explore these ideas.

Power to Define Terminology

Ludwig went beyond influencing the direction of the conversation to demonstrate ownership over the language we used as well. This aligns with research that finds gifted learners tend to be highly verbal, have the ability to manipulate abstract symbols and play with language, and process language to obtain meaning (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Reis et al, 2004; Robinson, 1986). In addition, they use words in creative ways by recognizing relationships between concepts (Haslam-Odoardi, 2010). This makes it ever more important for them to understand how others are using words to ensure their own comprehension and make clear the definition and context within which they are using terminology themselves. They feel they hold the authority to make decisions about the language they use.

Ludwig had a need to clarify what we meant by the words we used and felt that he was able to make those determinations. When designing his ideal gifted program, for example, he found it important to call his program Advanced Learning in Academics to specify the type of giftedness that is included. "…If we just talk about the gifted program it should be for everybody. That means all the different types of gifted, but if we just say for academic learning, it's more specific" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13). In an earlier club session, the group discussed what it meant to be different and how difference was connected to giftedness:

Ludwig: Like, every one of us is different. First of all…Because Tim is one of the only ones in my class that writes comics.
Sara: So you're saying that's a way that he's different.
Ludwig: I really don't know that many people who do gymnastics other than MS.
Tim: I tried to make a few [   ] comics.

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Ludwig: Markus, I don't know who's as good at computers.
Sara: So we each have something that makes us different-
Ludwig: But are we classified as different in our school? No, I don't think
         so…I think what means different is when you are missing a leg or
         something like that and you come to school.
Sara: So there's like levels of difference that you're talking about.
Ludwig: Completely out of the ordinary. It's never really happened in
         school.
Tim: There's different different, different, and [   ]
Ludwig: It has to be so different that it's actually classified as different. It
         really has to be different to be classified as different in this- any, like,
         society.

Ludwig considered one definition of difference to be connected to one's talents or

actions. This type of difference was not necessarily equivalent to uniqueness. A group

of people in the school, for example, could be good at computers. However, Markus was

the best at programming. Ludwig then added to the definition by providing the example

of someone missing a leg. Such a difference would be "completely out of the ordinary"

and thus present another degree of difference.

Sara: So just like we were talking about different levels of giftedness,
         would you say there's different levels-
MS: Yeah. Definitely.
Sara: -of difference?
Sapphire: Yeah.
MS: Yes.
Markus: Yeah.
Sara: And that depending on which level it is-
Ludwig: I would say like-
MS: Everybody's different on some scale.
Ludwig: You know like IQ, hundred is the-
Sara: Average?
Ludwig: -yeah, and then above hundred, you start to be more bright? Like
         that. It's almost like that, where you have a level, even gifted, you have to
         be above one-thirty before you be- like even then-
Markus: Categories.

Here, Ludwig began to break down how these levels of difference are determined. Using

intelligence as an example, he described how the quantitative ranges of IQ designates the

categories of average, above average, superior, and so on.

> Ludwig: Yeah. Categories. So even in difference, you have to say, be so
>   much different, but levels of differentness, you have to be so much in this,
>   and that- the society has to decide how that's categorized, the difference.
> Sara: How wide that range of acceptable?
> Ludwig: They have to make that own list. They have to make their own
>   chart. So after a certain period, then only there'd be- I think that period is
>   quite high. Like you've got to be pretty different to be called different,
>   actually be labeled as different.
> Sara: And so if the society decides that, and it's not like that means that
>   everybody in the society sits down and makes an actual list. It's-
> Ludwig: It's just kind of-
> Sara: It's just kind of unsaid.
> Ludwig: Yeah. It's like unwritten law.
> Sara: But would you say that different societies might have a different
>   scale for that?
> Ludwig: Yeah. Yeah.
> Sara: Just like different societies have a different way of judging
>   ?
> Ludwig: Like schools have a really high one before you get to be called
>   difference-different. But some other societies can be a little more-
> MS: Intolerant.
> Ludwig: Yeah. Like especially when it comes to adults, one of the groups,
>   they- they're all very similar- like they have a lot of characteristics in
>   common, and it's quite easy to tell when somebody's a little different.
>   Their manner is different.
> Sara: Okay.
> Ludwig: The adults can usually tell much better than kids, so they can tell
>   somebody's manner and behave- just their way of talking and their way is
>   a little different than somebody else.

Ludwig theorized that society as a whole determines how levels of difference are

categorized, but they do it in subconscious ways, as "unwritten law." Because every

society functions in its own way, cultures create their own categories for defining

difference. Again Ludwig returned to the IQ ranges, pointing out that a student must be

in the Very Superior range to be given the different label of "gifted." He noted, though, that as we age what is labeled as difference changes. What is unclear is whether he meant that adults are better at noticing difference ("adults can usually tell much better than kids") or whether the range of what is 'normal' narrows as we grow ("they're all very similar…and it's quite easy to tell when somebody's a little different").

During Book Club 8, Ludwig wrestled over the terminology of *normal* and *average* as well. He pointed out that these terms are based on comparing a part to the whole and are, therefore, relative. "What's the difference between normal and average?...Because normal in a gifted school might mean, oh, they can do calculus by second grade or something like that…Some kind of crazy gifted school. Like that would be abnormal in a regular school, like any Sunshine school or something like that" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). Later in the same session, Tim sorted pencils by their erasers to demonstrate the relativity of giftedness. Markus pointed out that we could resort them by lead tip and come up with completely different groupings[36]. Ludwig chuckled at a pencil with a stubby tip that is placed in the "average" section and comments "That's unworthy" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). He offered his own for the "gifted" section. "Me. Mine is powerful" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). These comments are concerning in that, however playful, they indicate that there is part of Ludwig that believed that the label of giftedness somehow demonstrated superiority.

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[36] I will discuss Tim's sort and its implications later in this chapter.

Power to Judge the Text

Ludwig went beyond interacting with the text through theorizing to make judgments about the author, characters, and society, demonstrating that the author does not hold all the power over a text. Rather, the reader can question the author's decisions and act as a literary critic (Landes, 1983; Sipe, 2002). Research shows that gifted readers demonstrate strong critical reading skills, including deduction, evaluation, and analysis (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dooly, 1993; Fehrenbach, 1991). Readers should be given the opportunity to engage in this work collaboratively to analyze and evaluate text for a variety of purposes.

In our first discussion about *Ungifted*, Ludwig made a comment about the author's writing style:

> The thing is that it's very simple to understand- that's why I really like-…The characters- the, um- the plot that's going on. It's just very simple, very straightforward. There are no- like, some books have ten characters introduced to you in like one scene. You're thinking of which one is which. (Book Club 2, 9/13/13)

It is interesting that Ludwig would appreciate this style of writing since he often gravitated towards learning experiences that were more complex and challenging. Ludwig also appreciated the humor in the text, applauding Gordon Korman for the absurdity of the scene when we learn that Noah had no knowledge of YouTube.

Ludwig evaluated the appropriateness of the characters' actions as well. He defended the teachers at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction when they thought Donovan didn't belong: "They all already understood Donovan. He is not gifted. That's true" (Book Club 3, 9/20/13), judging Donovan's intelligence based on his actions so far

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in the text. He made judgments about Noah, assuming "I doubt he uses Google. He's too

smart" (Book Club 3, 9/20/13). He also had strong ideas about how the adults in the

novel should react to various situations. For example, when Mr. Osbourne talked with

the principal about the requirement for his students to take Human Growth and

Development, he referred to the class as Sex Ed. Ludwig was aghast:

Ludwig: On page sixty-seven, Mr. Osbourne is not that much more
         mature than- especially in a board meeting, saying this kind of stuff, and
         he's a gifted teacher. That's not true, though. I don't think so.
MS: Yeah, he teaches gifted people.
Ludwig: It may- it's immature and-
MS: So he's a gifted teacher.
Ludwig: -it's inappropriate and it's in a board meeting, which makes it
         even more inappropriate.
May: I don't like that page. It disturbs me.
Sara: So, can you remind us what happened in this section?
Markus: It was just the principal.
May: He's kind of like rude. He's just like, why should I teach it? And
         stuff.
Ludwig: Okay. ((reading)) 'I sighed. Let me guess. Donovan again? This
         time, it isn't Donovan. As you may know, all students graduating from
         middle school are required to complete one quarter of human growth and
         development ((laughing)). It's [   ], and then yes, 'human growth and
         development? You mean blank education?' In the middle of a board
         meeting, saying that-
Markus: It's not a board meeting. He's saying that to the principal.
Ludwig: Or not- anyway, saying it in front of a principal- is that-
MS: No.
Ludwig: He's saying it in front of official figures, and-
Markus: He's as higher.
May: And he made the principal make a face.
Ludwig: But no- but he's talking with the head of the school, and he says
         that multiple times, and it's first of all inappropriate, and he's saying it at
         the wrong time. (Book Club 3, 9/20/13)

Ludwig disapproved of the author for including the word 'sex' in the text and wouldn't

even read it aloud, replacing it with the word 'blank.' He believed that Mr. Osbourne

was immature and inappropriate for using the word in front of the principal, an authority

figure. He stood his ground and defended his opinion against his fellow book club

members who pointed out that, rather than at a public board meeting, the conversation

was a private one between Mr. Osbourne and the principal, two adults who are both in

professional positions.

Beyond making judgments about characters, Ludwig went even further to use the

text and our discussion to make generalizations about people and society. For example,

when Markus and May inferred that students are not sent to the Academy until middle

school because school officials think younger students might be intimidated, Ludwig

made a sweeping statement about gifted children:

> Markus: Because- because- they must have six, seventh, and eighth. I'm just
> thinking that right now, the elementary school, some people do this, and
> they don't- even if you're in first grade, and you're really- and you're
> gifted, they don't want to put you in it, because it might- they don't want-
> May: Intimidate you.
> Markus: No. Yeah, they don't want to intimidate you into stuff like that, so they
> don't put you in the gifted program until you come to a certain-
> May: Age.
> Ludwig: If you're gifted, you should not be intimidated. (Book Club 3, 9/20/13)

While Markus and May believde that screening for the gifted program did not occur until

the end of first grade because more challenging programming would "intimidate" such

young students, Ludwig strongly disagreed. His comment that "if you're gifted, you

should not be intimidated" demonstrated his belief that giftedness is not made up of

solely intelligence and ability, but learning behaviors like determination and openness to

challenge. Ludwig again used text to make generalizations during our discussion on

theories of giftedness. He was especially struck by Francis Galton's biological view of

giftedness which contents that individuals vary dramatically in their natural ability, which

is due to biological inheritance and translates directly into differences in achievement and

therefore the legacy one leaves behind (1869, as cited in Friedman & Rogers, 1998).

While discussing Galton's theory, Markus brought up the possibility of growing one's

brain capacity:

> Markus: But here's the thing. Sometimes there are the, like, there are
> some creatures, and all creatures have a brain capacity.
> Ludwig: Yes, they do.
> Markus: We have a certain brain capacity. So if we- we can't- we can
> expand our brain capacity-
> Ludwig: And we have-
> Markus: -but that is only over generations and generations and
> generations, we can-
> Sara: So there definitely is some scientific part to it where physically, the
> of the brain over time has changed.
> Ludwig: But there are too many exceptions to this rule of- for- Galton
> might say that the groups- there's just too many exceptions. It's not a-
> MS: You can have an amazingly smart Neanderthal.
> Ludwig: It's not as- it's got to be concrete.
> MS: No schooling or they [   ]
> Ludwig: It's got to be concrete. It is a very unstable rule.
> Sapphire: Can I say something?
> Ludwig: There are so many exceptions to this rule.
> MS: So many variables.
> Ludwig: That it's really not a rule. There's probably more exceptions than
> more things that fit in here.

Ludwig went so far as not only to challenge an author's writing moves, but question the

authenticity of a well-known theorist's ideas. For a ten year old to feel knowledgeable

and confident enough to feel that it is in his right to dispute the validity of a published

and cited theorist is impressive and demonstrates Ludwig's feeling of power and agency.

As evidence by Ludwig, students were adept at critical reading, used text to make

conjectures about the world, and evaluated the author's writing style and ideas. They took issue with and passionately debated characters, actions, and theories. Book Club provided the time and space for the type of open communication that fostered such dialogue.

Listening, Empathizing, Debating

Open dialogue has both affordances and detriments. When multiple voices are encouraged and valued, differences in opinion enhance understanding but can cause conflict as well. In the following section I will explore the manner in which participants used social practices to comprehend, appreciate, and respond to each other's thinking in sometimes contradictory but always generative ways.

"What it sounds like to me is…": Deep listening

There were moments during Book Club, between his singing and dramatic interpretations, that I almost forgot that Tim was there. It was in these quiet moments that I knew he was about to say something profound. Tim didn't just hear what his fellow book club members had to say. He listened, truly *listened,* with every ounce of his being and then he brought the discussion together in a succinct and unique way. Here, I use term 'deep listening' to describe the empathetic way in which Tim worked to understand and then synthesize the essence of his fellow readers' ideas. This social practice resulted in more nuanced understandings for both Tim and the rest of the group.

During Book Club 13, the students were discussing the preconceived notions that their classmates had of what actually occurred in the gifted support classroom. While

some thought it was all fun and games, others anticipated endless homework and

insoluble math problems. Tim listened as the group shares personal experiences and their

reactions to the comments from their peers:

> So what I've been hearing is that, if like a regular person were to see- like I'm not
> saying anyone's really regular, but just as an example, if someone were to look
> through a window that was labeled the MG room--one window- like if it was a
> double-sided, it could flip. One side, someone would see, like, this is the one-
> assumption that people make, tons of people working. Slaving away at work and
> stuff. But then if they flipped it and like we had just come back and been like, it
> was awesome. We played a computer game, and it was fun, and we did this fun
> activity that helped us learn, they wouldn't even pay attention to the help us learn.
> They'd just be like, you guys got to have fun? They'd see us like, yay, running
> around, having fun… If you mash those two windows together into one big-
> there's no working your butt off- it's reality, but everyone comes up with their
> own version of it. Which is mostly us working. We're geniuses. No. It's not true.
> And I hate it. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

Here, Tim synthesized the group's conversation and used the metaphor of the double-

sided window to bring their ideas together into one explanation of how classmates

viewed the gifted support room. Additionally, he layered in his own feelings about these

preconceived notions and assumptions about not only the nature of what occurs in the

MG room, but what gifted students are like. At the end of the session, I shared the

students' task for our final book club, in part the development of a metaphor for

giftedness. After everyone shared, Tim again succinctly brought together the group's

conversation, this time an observation of our discussions over time:

> It's kind- I just realized this. I feel like the- this room, when we're at the reading
> book club, sometimes we talk about do you earn gifted, or do you not earn gifted.
> Well, we have two sides, and I feel like we're kind of like the government. We
> have two parties that agree on different things, like one side- me, and whoever
> else- like MS just said, who thinks that you can earn gifted, and you have
> to…And then we have this party who's always pushing the point that you're- you
> get- you have it. You just- it happens. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

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Once again, not only did Tim state the big idea of the discussion, but he used a metaphor to express his ideas.

Gifted children are big picture thinkers[37] (Schultz and Delisle, 1997), with a tendency to process information as a whole before attending to the parts. They understand text by thinking deeply about compelling ideas and critically examining the issues contained therein (Haslam-Odoardi, 2010). Tim demonstrated that he did this not only with published text, but with the 'text' of the Book Club discussion. As Gross (1993), Hollingworth (1942), and Silverman (1993) found (as cited in Grant, 2002), the field of gifted education recognizes that gifted students search for meaning. When Tim listened to his peers, he was actively mentally organizing and interpreting their ideas in order to make sense of them in his mind. By sharing his synthesis of ideas with the group, he was effectively doing a member check to determine whether he had heard his friends accurately.

"I see the opposite side.": Empathy for Readers and Characters

Perhaps due to his tendency to be a deep listener and synthesizer of ideas, Tim had the ability to consider multiple perspectives of an event or topic and tended to defend an idea no one else had considered even if it was not necessarily the side he was on. Dooley (1993) found that gifted readers in particular use reading as insight into text as well as their lives. In addition, they tend to interact with text through personal

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[3737] This is not to say that all children don't have the capacity to think in big picture ways. Rather, researchers have found that gifted children in particular tend to emphasize the greater context before the parts rather than the other way around. I certainly acknowledge the complex work all types of learners do when thinking about text.

identification (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986). Tim regularly used Book Club as an opportunity to push himself and his group members to identify and empathize with characters and each other in order to be cognizant of diversity of thought.

Tim appreciated learning situations in which various ideas are shared and group discussions are encouraged: "And when they put us in groups to learn, that's much better because you get other people's ideas" (Interview, 8/30/13). He found this to be particularly important in reading: "If you miss something, a book club, there's prob- there might be someone who's like, oh, you didn't notice that? Well I noticed something like- and they explain" (Book Club 1, 9/6/13). Iser (1978) theorized that no text can possibly provide every detail, so the reader must infer to fill in these gaps. Not only can a fellow reader provide alternate ways to fill in the gaps, but they can remind one of particular aspects of the text. "You know, you notice little things that someone else might have noticed, and you're like yeah, okay, wow. I forgot about that. Just a little detail could be important" (Interview, 8/30/13). Thus, collaborative book discussions are not just about filling in the gaps, but can bring to the surface features of the text one may have ignored or not fully considered independently. Shared meaning is built in ways that are not possible independently (Eeds and Wells, 1989). Tim felt that it is part of the teacher's job to push the group to consider multiple viewpoints if they are not brought up naturally:

> Tim: …if anyone were to bring up a pretty good point, like, why would you do that? Well, people are like, why would you do that from the start, even? Why would you even start that? It's going to change everyone's opinion. Well, not everyone's. It's going to sway your opinion to thinking from all sides. And that's a good job of the teacher's, 'cause if we stay on one side, we're not going to get both views of the thing.

Sara: So you're saying the teacher should really- if multiple viewpoints are not being shared, push the group to consider-

Tim: Yeah, like in Civil War, the north was like, slavery is wrong. Did any of them ever consider that the south guys were farmers, and they- and the north ruled all the- pretty much the banks, and they weren't letting some of the south people do some of their things? No. They probably didn't, 'cause there was no one to say, well, look at their side. And that was what happens usually. There's two sides, and you can't- and then there's the people who are- don't- aren't agree, and then there's probably one person who can't change anyone's opinion. But they have that good point of, well, look at their side, and then look at your side. Now tell me, who do you think's wrong in this situation? (Interview, 12/17/13)

The use of text which helps the reader understand himself or others is especially

important for the gifted learner (Dooley, 1993). For Tim, being able to "get both views

of the thing" was a vital component not just of comprehension but of citizenship and

school was a place where this work should occur.

Tim particularly empathized with characters who may not traditionally receive

much compassion: "Make sure both sides of the discussion are viewed, and that it's not

just he was right to do this. He was right to push the villain in a volcano. No. Like,

wow. The villain has a family or something" (Interview, 12/17/13). Tim defended Dr.

Schultz when Ludwig called him mean: "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. He's just doing his

job" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). In this way, Tim was able to imagine the perspectives of

all characters, not just those who are more likeable by the reader, and use these

understandings to comprehend the complexity of the decisions that are made and actions

of the characters. Iser would describe this action as adopting a 'wandering viewpoint' in

which the reader "focuses not only on varying characters and what they know compared

to what the narrator is telling us, but also wanders back and forth between the memories

of what has already been read and the reading of the moment, revising these memories as new information is added while reading" (Sipe, 2008, p. 55). Tim's focus constantly shifted not only between the viewpoints of different characters, but between past and current readings, memories and the present. Since this was a second read of the novel for Tim, he had the advantage of knowing the outcome of the plot. This information positioned him almost as an omniscient reader, one that supported his empathetic viewpoint.

Tim demonstrated empathy not just in discussions about text, but in life. Tim perceived differences in the way that instruction occurred between in the gifted support classroom and those in his regular education class in regards to consideration of multiple perspectives. While he acknowledged that there was a good amount of partner work and sharing in his homeroom, overall "in the regular classroom, they're trying to get you to learn one point. [In gifted support], we're trying to view every different point of the say, triangle of what we're learning…taking a view from either side" (Interview, 12/17/13). Even in a group reading event, Reading Olympics, Tim noted a lack of emphasis on multiple perspectives:

> I'm reading *George Washington's Spy* right now for Reading Olympics, and there's the casual, why would anyone want to be- to write a report on what it would be like to lead the life of a Loyalist? I mean, they were wrong. Well, that's something- like we look at both sides of that. And that's like, this is just an example. If we were give something like that, we would be able to choose. Would we be a Rebel or a Loyalist? Looking at either side, and even the people who didn't choose a side in the in-between, well, most of your average people, oh, I just want to be a Rebel because they were awesome. They won the war. (Interview, 12/17/13)

Tim observed that most of his classmates perceived just one perspective in a given story, fictional or historical, while his gifted peers pushed themselves to consider each of the many views that may exist. He demonstrated what Kincheloe would call a "healthy and creative skepticism" (2005, p. 16-17) in which students are active creators of meaning and think critically about information. He not only evaluated the characters' actions, but independently applied critical reading skills to consider real world problems (Dooley, 1993). Thus, his strength in empathetic reading supported and was supported by the empathy he had in the real world.

Tim's tendency to consider multiple perspectives is evident from his contributions to Book Club sessions. In *Ungifted,* Donovan's family has just been informed that he is not actually gifted, and the students were discussing the various family members' reactions. While MS and Markus believed that Donovan's father isn't surprised that he is ungifted, Tim asserted himself to point out another possibility: "I see the opposite side. He's pointing out that none of them was especially gifted. It would have been nice if you had been. Not eh, it doesn't matter. None of them were, so bloodline, bloodline, bloodline" (Book Club 7, 10/18/13). Here, he specifically referenced the fact that he was sharing an alternative view to that of the group. He also put himself in the shoes of Donovan's father, considering the motivation behind his words and actions and even putting words in his mouth to 'perform' the father's possible responses to Donovan, an example of Sipe's expressive engagement (2002). In another session, May expressed her disappointment and surprise in The Daniels, Donovan's two best friends, when they take Tin Man out during the dance, ultimately leading to his destruction. Tim provided an

alternate way of approaching the situation, using his knowledge of The Daniels' past

actions to inform his thinking:

> May: In the beginning, they always never stay. Like, they like to watch
> him get in trouble, but they never stay for the consequences, and
> always Donovan only gets in trouble.
> Ludwig: Donovan doesn't care, so it doesn't really make a big difference.
> Tim: What can you expect from the guys who tried to get Donovan to
> skip out on detention, then ran away, instead of just watching.
> Didn't get in trouble for whatever they did in between, didn't get
> in trouble for the whole Jonathan shouting over the loudspeakers.
> I- well, of course, I finished the book, but no way was I going to
> think they wouldn't touch the robot. You show a bunch of
> troublemaking eighth graders a robot and what are they going to
> do?

Tim empathized with The Daniels, not because he agreed with their actions, but because

he was able to put himself in their shoes and predict what actions would make sense

based on what we know about their personalities and past choices. He also considered

what would be expected from "a bunch of troublemaking eighth graders," using the

stereotypes of that group to inform his ideas. Tim's ability to empathize with characters

who may be considered difficult to feel sorry for shows his willingness to set aside his

own personal values to put himself in the place of characters who are very different than

he. Sharing this in the social setting of Book Club provided other readers with a

perspective they may not have considered otherwise.

Generative Conflict

While the students in the book club generally were able to empathize with

characters and each other, gifted learners tend to be passionate beings, which can lead to

great gains as well as difficulties (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012).

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Although gifted education has focused on the development of cognitive abilities, Roeper emphasizes the additional need for concern with the individual's "responsible membership in the world community" (as cited in Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012). Thus, gifted support instruction should include a focus on the ability of the students to cope with challenges and criticism, including that of one's ideas, since this may distinguish who will continue to develop their talents and who will not. Additionally, Abrami et al (2008) found that teaching critical thinking in schools results in the ability to engage in purposeful, self-regulatory judgment about topics in today's complex world.   Because gifted children tend to have a need to maintain a "definite purpose: the preservation of a social order, a class, a race, a community of knowledge" (Margolin, 1994, p. 3 as cited in Grant, 2002), when their ideas about how the world works do not coincide with those of another, conflict can occur. However, the ways in which this group interacted generally acted as generative conflict which was productive in nature. In effect, gifted learners utilize effective questioning techniques which push each other to think more deeply about their statements and ideas (Noyce, 1977). When process modifications suggested for gifted readers such as critical and creative reading (Dooley, 1993) are put into practice, conflict is inevitable due to the individualized interpretations and divergent nature of creative thought involved in such structures. The gifted reader's ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate complex ideas and well as the tendency to have an evaluative approach to both themselves and others (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986) also means that there is more opportunity for differences in ideas about text which may prompt conflict, for reading "has become more than simple word

decoding; reading has become an interactive process of different knowledge sources within the reader and within the print." (Wingenbach, 1983, p. 9). Thus, since each reader has different knowledge sources, there are potentially as many interpretations of the text as there are readers.

MS described himself as someone who generally likes to "be the backstage person. Do all the work, throw all the credit away." (Interview, 8/29/13). Yet in the smaller group Book Club situation, MS was a frequent participant and did not shy away from passionate conversation. At the same time, MS reserved his participation for times when he felt that he could provide an alternative perspective rather than restate someone's idea:

> Sara: Okay. So now we'll talk about book club a little bit. So what role do you feel that you usually take on during book club? Like what type of a participant do you tend to be?
> MS: It depends on the topic. Sometimes I completely agree with the person who's made a statement. Or I disagree. But usually I just feel I'm one [another] kid.
> Sara: Okay. And why do you think you kind of take that on? Why are there some topics where you feel really strongly-
> MS: Well, I wouldn't say I feel super strongly about something. It's just that my view on that- agree or disagree, I tend to have both on an equal standards.
> Sara: So you often participate- when you're speaking, it's often to either agree with someone or give an alternate viewpoint.
> MS: Mmhm. Yeah. I usually am the, like- I respond to somebody else instead of being the person to say something.
> Sara: To start off the conversation.
> MS: Mmhm.

MS's tendency to have "both on an equal standards" allowed him to be an alternative voice in the conversation. Even if he didn't necessarily feel passionate about the topic,

he felt it necessary to provide that alternate view. Rather than determine the topic of the conversation, he preferred to contribute to the established focus.

> Sara: Why do you think- why do you think that tends to be, that you are kind of a builder?
> MS: Well, I usually have- in this builder, what do you call that again?
> Sara: Role?
> MS: Metaphor or whatever, well, I think I have a lot of blocks, but some people have a base.
> Sara: Oh.
> MS: So I usually don't have that big based, but I have a lot of strong blocks that I can add on to the-

When I introduced the term 'builder' to name what type of role MS was describing, he expanded on this term to help explain his role. As a conversation builder, he had many blocks (ideas) as opposed to the solid base other members use to introduce a conversation topic. Just as important, MS helped to build a complete structure by adding "a lot of strong blocks" to the base laid down by others. MS was careful about how he added these blocks:

> Sara: Now when a book club member voices an opinion that you disagree with, what do you do?
> MS: Well, I don't like boom, to make them feel bad, so I kind of indirectly say that I disagree. I don't say, I disagree. Dah dah dah dah. But I go like, something else that indirectly- I mean, the other person can see that. It's just kind of essential, but it's not direct.

MS was cognizant of the feelings of others and wanted to express his disagreement in a respectful way. To that end, he attempted to "indirectly say" that he disagreed. This was evident in the following exchange: "I would like to respond [to Tim]. I agree with what he said, but then I don't think that teacher- I know teachers are important. They're very important. But I don't think they're necessary" (Book Club 14, 12/17/13). By beginning with "I would like to respond" he was formally entering into a dialogue about another

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members' idea. He validated Tim's idea and then gently introduced his alternate thinking

from there. May and Tim add on to the conversation to push back against MS's ideas:

> Tim: Something needs to teach you.
> May: But if you- if it grows, you need to learn more. You can't just learn more without a teacher.
> MS: Well Leonardo Da Vinci.
> May: A book could be a teacher, anything it's still-
> MS: Leonardo Da Vinci, he didn't have any- like a teacher in mechanics and stuff like that. Yeah, art, he had a teacher, but then in other things, he just bought books and kept learning.
> Tim: That's a teacher.
> MS: So-
> Sara: So perhaps we can expand the definition-
> MS: A book-
> Sara: -of a teacher.
> Tim: A definition of a teacher isn't a person. It can be a thing-
> MS: Yeah, he kind of like self-taught.
> Tim: I don't like to call Google a thing, as a teacher. I think it's just straight hard facts. A teacher will let you branch out your thinking-
> May: They will give you worksheets to expand your learning.

The group's disagreement over the definition of a teacher encouraged debate that has

implications for instruction. While they agreed that students should have the goal of

constantly learning more, they had different ideas about how one might do so. MS saw

being self-taught through technology and text resources an independent endeavor, while

Tim and May considered those non-human resources to be teachers. Later, though, Tim

qualified his definition of a teacher. Google should not be considered a teacher since it

consists of "just straight hard facts," but a teacher "will let you branch out your thinking."

This nuancing may not have occurred without a social exchange. Next, participants

continued to complicate the idea of teachers as inanimate objects.

> MS: …if you're self-teaching yourself, like you read a book and then try to analyze it yourself, I don't really see-
> Tim: The book is the teacher in that case.

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> May: Yeah, but it still is the teacher.
>
> MS: Right, but the book can't interact with you. You have to interact with yourself. Like a teacher, like Miss Tilles, can interact with us. I'm- I'm saying like somebody else. Because you can self-teach yourself.
>
> May: But you're still teaching. Someone's still like teaching you.

For MS, the difference seemed to be the ability for a teacher to interact with the students while the others focused whether the resource provided the opportunity to gain information or skill. May, Tim, and MS engaged in generative conflict which resulted in a deeper understanding of the definition and necessity of a teacher. Although the conversation did not end in complete agreement, the thinking was productive in pushing their thinking. What is interesting is that the group was not in as much disagreement as I believe they thought. They all agreed that teachers are vital to education, but they debated what counts as a teacher as well as context in which they are necessary. By challenging each other's ideas, they prompted each other to think more critically about their initial ideas, better articulate those concepts, and revise their stances.

Participants' personalities and areas of passion influenced the ways in which they initiated and engaged in conflict. For example, Ludwig's strong beliefs about text consistently extended to his participation style in Book Club. He reported that he enjoyed Book Club because he not only loved to read but "also like[s] arguing" (Interview, 8/30/13). He described his involvement in book club as varied depending how passionate he was about the subject matter:

> It depends what the- sometimes the topic is not kind of- the topic is not my stuff- it's like a little different from what I'm really good at, so then I might take more of a back burner, kind of. It's just- I talk a little less during the discussion. Sometimes- like especially with the racial- like that one, that was kind of in my way- like it was my thing, so I was- I talked- I started a lot of the topics, and I was active, really active, during that book club. (Interview, 12/11/13)

When he disagreed with a fellow Book Club member, he was not shy about voicing his opinion. Instead, he "usually contradict[s] it with an example" because "that's the strongest way to disprove somebody" (Interview, 12/11/13).

Ludwig was not always so direct in his disagreement though and was very conscious of being respectful while he shared his alternate views. During Book Club 10 we were discussing the informational reading which focused on culture and giftedness. At first Ludwig was quite open and direct about his opinion of the readings: "I really don't agree with a lot of these charts that- they're just stereotypical" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13). He went on to be the most active participant in the discussion. However, Ludwig did not want his views to overpower anyone else's opinions:

> Ludwig: This whole time we've been talking about religion.
> Sara: But that's okay.
> Tim: Religion's a fun thing to talk about.
> Ludwig: But it's also very touchy topic, so I tried to be careful. I hope I've not hurt
> anybody's feelings, which I don't think I have.

Clearly, by using language like "I tried to be careful" and "I hope I've not hurt anybody's feelings," Ludwig communicated a strong desire to remain respectful and open to the opinions of others while expressing his own beliefs.

Active reading

Gifted readers thrive when given the opportunity to read critically (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dooley, 1993; Noyce, 1977). They respond best to instruction that is more loosely structured in order to allow readers to engage in investigative study of

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topics and issues that interest them from the text (Robinson, 1986). Study participants did exactly that, using Book Club to explore the lines of thought that most intrigued them. In this section, I will illustrate the ways in which participants questioned problematic aspects of the text and built theories about character motivation and plot.

Questioning and Clarifying

Gifted readers in particular use effective reading strategies to comprehend text, tending to reread, infer, analyze text structure, and evaluate more fluently and often than average readers (Fehrenbach, 1991). Although gifted readers typically use top-down processing (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986) to consider the text more holistically, there were instances when participants seemed stuck on what I considered to be minute details in the text. They appeared to be unable to move on until they had reconciled the issue. In these cases, participants used text evidence and logical thinking in collaborative ways to infer the answers to their questions.

One example occurred early on in our discussion of *Ungifted* when the group became quite focused on determining the size of the Academy for Scholastic Distinction. They wondered about class size and how many students attended the school as a whole. May theorized that there are not many teachers since they all get together to discuss Donovan. Additionally, Oz not only is a homeroom teacher but runs the robotics club as well. If teachers are leading more than one subject, May inferred, there must be a small number of them. The group was not even sure what grades attended the school. Although Ludwig cited the book mentioning that middle school students required human

growth and development, May wasn't sure that excluded elementary or high school grade levels from ASD itself. Perhaps those other grades are still in the school, but that course is required only at the middle school level. When trying to determine how many kids attended ASD, Ludwig imagined that the school would be quite full since it is "a whole new school… and they really cannot waste a single space" (Book Club 3, 9/20/13). May agreed that there must be many more kids that we know of in the school since "Donovan only listed the kids he knew…He's not listing everyone." MS provided further argument, pointing out that if the author listed everyone's name it would "just make it too boring." The group went back and forth about grade levels, class size, and number of teachers until May seemed to settle the confusion:

> Okay. I'm going to put an end to all this middle school stuff, how it's a middle school, because Abigail said that Noah- no, not Noah. Donovan was in her elementary school when she was a little kid, and that means that she definitely wasn't in the academy when she was a little kid because Donovan was in an academy, so obviously, the academy was a middle school. (Book Club 3, 9/20/13)

These readers seemed to fixate on details that did not affect the greater meaning of the text. Margolin contends that "behind gifted child knowledge there is a definite purpose: the preservation of a social order, a class, a race, a community of knowledge" (1994, p. 3 as cited in Grant, 2002). Understanding the specific context of the book almost acts as a framework for understanding the greater whole. Unless they can set these questions to rest, however minute to me, they may be unable to fully attend to the big picture of the text.

Theory Building and Wonderings

While gifted readers tend to voraciously plow through books, their tendency to go "directly from visual features to meaning" (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986) allows them to spend time on deeper thinking about the text rather than decoding. They crave and thrive in an environment which supports both critical and creative reading (Dooley, 1993). In a social setting, the reader is engaged and encouraged to think deeply about text. Instead of hurrying through the book, he or she grapples with the ideas that live in the heart of the text. The book club in my study provided just such a setting.

In her study of a librarian's book discussions with gifted readers, Haslam-Odoardi (2010) found that gifted readers need complex plots that lead the reader to suppose and theorize, one that allows the reader to study the author's techniques in developing characters and plot. Tim was just such an active reader. He read with his body, his heart, and his mind. Even though Tim had already read *Ungifted* and knew how it ended, he responded to and discussed the book as if it was his first read. In the book, Donovan had just been given the retest and passed with flying colors, so Miss Bevalaqua is interviewing his classmates to determine who cheated for him. While the group threw ideas around, Tim quietly jotted in his notebook:

Tim:	I have three suspects. The main gifted kids who are mentioned, Noah, Abigail, and Chloe?
Sara:	So they're on your suspect list?
Markus:	I think Kevin and JC, also.
Tim:	And here's what I wrote. Who cheated for Donovan? Was it Noah, because he might know that he might be able to be kicked out? Was it- fine. I right away Xed out Chloe-
Markus:	Oh, yeah, that's a good idea.
Tim:	Chloe wouldn't lie. She most likely wouldn't cheat for Donovan.
Sara:	So she was originally on your list.

Tim:	I believe her. She is kind of the most honest person, I would think.
May:	She is the one who suggested it to Donovan.
[overlapping talk]	
Markus:	But she says in the interview, are you asking- are you asking me to rat out on my friends?
Tim:	Yeah, rat out my friends.
Markus:	You said-
[overlapping talk]	
Markus:	-we did it.
Sapphire:	Well, she doesn't want to rat on her friends.
May:	I wonder what happens when they say all that. They only record half of it.
Tim:	-or Abigail, 'cause she really wants to win against Cold Spring Harbor, and Donovan drives the best.
Markus:	No.
Sara:	Even though she kind of can't stand him.
Tim:	Not at all.
Sara:	So what are you thinking right now?
Markus:	Noah or Abigail.
Sara:	Noah or Abigail?
Tim:	Mostly Noah.
MS:	I say Noah. Always.
Markus:	I say- I say it's a whole group thing-
May:	Even Abigail.
Markus:	-I think-
Tim:	Of course, I've read the book, so anything I say- (Book 5, 10/4/13)

So while he acknowledged that he already knew who cheated for Donovan, he actively reread the text along with the other book club members, collecting text evidence in his notebook in regards to the culpability of each character and eliminating suspects as additional information is revealed. In the following session, he again referred to the cheating mystery, commenting "I'm really confused…on who did it" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). He kept up the façade of discovering the culprit alongside the others although we all knew he was already aware of who cheated. One explanation for this is that he may have been playing along as a way to keep himself interested and engaged in a book he had already read. Another possibility could be a genuine interest in collecting clues in

a deliberate way, something he did not do during his first read. Halsted (2009) documented the tendency of gifted students to enjoy complexity and even create it; here, Tim challenged himself to gather information about who helped Donovan cheat, almost designing a game for himself. Additionally, he used what he knew about the characters' traits to make judgments about their guilt or innocence. Thus, his theories were informed not only by reasoning, but by text evidence. His actions align with Wingenbach's context-related strategies of inference and use of information about the story as well as the meaning-related strategy of hypothesis/anticipation (1983). As Tim attended to clues left behind by the author and weaved them with his schema and personal interpretations about how humans behave based on their personalities and past behavior, he consciously processed the text to theorize.

Not only did Tim develop theories about people's motivations and actions in books, but he carried this work over to his theories about real life. When the group noticed that Donovan's IQ is higher than Katie's, Tim hypothesized that it "could be he gets in enough trouble to know- I can expect this. Now how can I get my way out of this" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). Donovan can rely on his many past experiences with getting into trouble to problem solve his way out of such situations, which according to Tim, has an effect on his IQ. While discussing the assumptions their non-identified classmates had about the gifted program and gifted students, Tim theorized that these assumptions exist because the human mind "can be so easily bended to believe one thing…like tricked…It just becomes a big stereotypic that if you're in the MG group, you're nerds, skinny, not good at sports. You're super nerd, all that. No. You're not.

You're not always" (BC 13, p. 6-7). Tim used his beliefs about how the human mind

works to process the motivation behind what he considered his peers' invalid

assumptions.

> Yet while Tim resisted stereotypes of giftedness, he held his own assumptions:
>
> Sara: Might another myth about gifted students be that they always want to
>   be learning, or that they always enjoy learning?
> Ludwig: No.
> May: Well, no.
> Tim: Now, now, now. I think everyone wants to keep on learning. But like-
> Sara: But it's not specific to gifted students.
> Tim: But no one- no one likes to show off, oh, I'll keep- I want to keep
>   learning about this.
> May: Look at me. I want to learn.
> Tim: I want to learn about this.
> Ludwig: I'm a rockstar.
> Tim: No one sits hours on end reading a dictionary. (Book Club 13, 12/9/13)

Tim's theories sometimes seemed to contradict one another, possibly because he

continued to develop his ideas throughout book club. Since gifted readers tend to

anticipate meaning based on visual cues, organizational patterns, and syntax (Catron &

Wingenbach, 1986), Tim's theories necessarily changed as he moved farther along in the

text.

> While he could be insistent and passionate about his ideas, Tim also remained

open to conflicting thoughts and was well aware when he had not yet made a decision

about his opinion on a topic. He regularly wondered aloud about text and appeared to use

conversation as a vehicle for solidifying his ideas. This was especially true during our

discussions about informational text concerning the causes of giftedness and whether it is

innate or can be developed over time:

> Tim: What I responded to that, I remember this now is I thought, is there a such thing as born giftedness?
>
> Sara: Like is it even a thing?
>
> Tim: Is it a thing, or is it grown? Or is it just- there's- you have the people who pay a lot of attention to class, and they learn. They want to learn, and that gets them gifted, and-but there are those people who are like, I don't want to go to school. And they're going to end up not probably being gifted.
>
> Sara: Okay.
>
> Tim: Unless you get throw into Donovan's situation. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

Tim was consciously theory-building about the nature and cause of giftedness. He used the novel as a specific context through which to consider these ideas. He considered multiple possibilities for the path one's life might take based on the levels of effort put forth in school and the environments in which one is placed while resisting the complete disregard for the prospect of innate giftedness. He went on to contemplate how innate intelligence might be possible:

> 'Cause like, but then again, where does that start, and who was born with that originally, and who was born from that- like is it coincidence or like family thing that just randomly two people in the same family got to be president. (Book Club 11, 11/18/13)

Tim used his knowledge of American history and his personal experience with heredity (he previously shared that both he and his father could cross one eye at will while this gene 'skipped' over his siblings) to actively think through the idea of intelligence as part of one's genetic makeup. In this example, his previous ideas about genetics conflicted with his confusion about where those genetic lines begin. Through this conversation, and even merely through the act of stating his ideas aloud, Tim created understanding for himself. Catron and Wingenbach (1986) documented the tendency for gifted readers to interpret the text using personal experiences and purpose. Here, Tim's knowledge of American history and personal experiences with hereditary abilities affected the manner

in which he comprehended the text. Additionally, his tendency to show intense curiosity

about intellectual questions is consistent with the gifted learner (Halsted, 2009).

Throughout the study, Tim returned to the idea of the connection between genetics and

intelligence, incorporating new readings and experiences to continually build his theory

of giftedness.

While Tim combined personal experience with text to explore complex concepts,

Ludwig also saw the text as an opportunity for interaction rather than a passive reception

of ideas. He built theories about character motivation and the plot structure of *Ungifted*

using text evidence and his own schema for how books work. Ludwig first theorized

about Dr. Schultz, the superintendent, commenting that "Schultz might soften up…I'm

not sure, but Schultz usually that's the way of stories and like the bad person is the-…No,

the soft- they soften up just a little bit…Like so Schultz might realize that he was wrong

in treating Donovan [poorly]" (Book Club 6, 10/11/13). Despite the fact that there was

no evidence in the text that Schultz would "soften up," Ludwig felt secure enough in his

knowledge of storyline to make that prediction. He went on to extrapolate from this idea

to theorize about Abigail:

> Ludwig: If Schultz changes, then do you think there's another person that changes
> the attitude? Because there was one person that didn't like Donovan in the
> Academy, and she really stood out.
> Students ((in unison)): Abigail.
> Ludwig: A lot of people didn't like Donovan, but there was one person that stood
> out, and I think she might also change, and I have a strong feeling that my
> predictions are correct because Schultz most likely is probably going to
> change. (Book Club 6, 10/11/13)

Ludwig applied his theory about Schultz to Abigail, another villainous character in the

novel. He also theorized about Donovan's character during our discussion on the

negative labels that others place upon him:

Sara: So how do you think that affects him? That these are the words
that are used to describe him?
Ludwig: It doesn't affect him. That's the problem.
Sara: It does not affect him?
Ludwig: No. He doesn't really care.
MS: That's the problem.
Ludwig: He's happy about it.

Although it may be naïve to think that terms like "trouble-maker," "reckless," and "gifted

as a caterpillar" would not affect Donovan at all, Ludwig did base his theory on the text.

By observing that Donovan is "happy" about the labels, Ludwig was, in fact,

contradicting his own comment that Donovan is not affected. Rather, Donovan is

embracing the labels and putting a spin on them in order to feel good about them.

Metaphorically Speaking

Researchers have documented the ability of gifted readers to use higher-order

thinking skills, comprehensively synthesize concepts, and recognize unusual relationships

between ideas (Reis et al, 2004). These advanced processing abilities combined with

advanced language skills result in the readers' use of language in complex and

descriptive ways. The use of metaphors as a vehicle for expressing understanding and

synthesis of ideas aligns with Renzulli's Creativity Ring, as they indicate a sense of

humor, ability to form relationships among concepts, and divergent thinking

(Vosslamber, 2002). Participants applied their developed language and processing

abilities to embed metaphorical talk into Book Club. While some students regularly used

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metaphors and other comparative language as a way of communicating their ideas, all

members created complex metaphors as a culminating activity for the study.

Thinking and Communicating in Metaphor

MS frequently used metaphorical language to communicate his ideas. Rather than

an extended comparison, he tended to embed symbolic language into his speech. For

example, MS was describing how he was on his best behavior at school and added a

metaphor to better explain his thinking:

Sara:	Now how does the way that you see yourself compare to the way that you feel like you're supposed to be in school?
MS:	Well, usually I'm on my super duper best behavior at school. At home, I need time to just let the other part of me go. You know. Just like, relax.
Sara:	Okay. So you feel like the relax part doesn't belong here?
MS:	Yes.
Sara:	And you make sure that it-
MS:	Stays put in its cage.

By keeping the relaxed part of himself "in a cage" he invoked visions of a wild creature

who needed to be kept behind bars and out of sight. The metaphor made it clear that MS

understood a model student as one who acts in certain ways and that there was no place

for alternate behavior in the school setting. For MS, relaxing was not an option at school.

Rather, he needed to be at his best at all times in that context.

MS also used metaphor to describe the pressure he felt when in a competitive

situation with peers.

MS:	- like spelling bee. I'm completely terrified. Because if I make one mistake, everybody's going to jump up and then talk about it for like thirty hours.
Sara:	Whereas if somebody else did that-
MS:	Then it's like, okay, sure. Yeah.

> Sara: Hm. That's one of the things that we're going to think about over the next few months, is those expectations that are put on us and how we feel about them, so I'm glad you're bringing that up.
>
> MS: Especially if somebody at my level- like for example, maybe Ludwig or Markus, they- if we face off-
>
> Sara: Then it's high stakes.
>
> MS: Yes. High stakes.
>
> Sara: Okay.
>
> MS: It's like war with aces.

If the spelling bee came down to MS and one of the other gifted students, MS imagined all attention and anticipation to be dependent on moves of the two "aces." In this case, MS uses the term "ace" to refer to the card with the highest value. In the game of war, if two aces were up against each other, stakes would be as high as possible because the two cards involved have the highest value in the deck. In MS's metaphor, he, Ludwig, and Markus were aces because they were the most accomplished spellers in the class. The implication is that, as the best spellers, they have the highest value. If the competition would come down to them, classmates would be waiting with baited breath as each voiced the given word letter by letter. Even the term "face off" brings up visions of intense hockey players locking eyes as they wait for the puck to drop. Rather than friendly competition, the language MS used to describe how he anticipated the spelling bee to play out demonstrated his anxiety over what he foresaw to be a high stakes event.

MS used metaphorical language to describe Book Club and gifted readers as well. He felt that gifted readers are able to "squeeze all the juice out of" a book as they not only understand the basic plot of a text but search for deeper meaning through individual reflection and shared conversation. He appreciated the collaborative nature of Book Club

and used the metaphor first of overlapping hands and then a Venn Diagram to describe

the ways in which Book Club supported readers in building shared meaning of the text:

> You have a better understanding because say I think so and so about so and so
> book. Somebody thinks a similar thing, and they kind of overlap. Like, this is one
> person's idea. This is another person's idea. They go like this. This person learns
> about this edge of that hand, and that person learns about this edge of that area. So
> they kind of overlap. It's kind of like a Venn diagram. Like the extra sides, this
> side can learn about that, and that side can learn about this. Extra, leftover. So
> slowly you kind of open your knowledge level, and it kind of grows and grows.
> (Interview, 8/29/13)

As with a Venn Diagram, the section where the circles overlap represented the shared

understanding of the text. The isolated parts of the circle were the differences in

interpretation. However, MS made the point that, in Book Club, readers shared what was

in the isolated sections of their Venn Diagrams and that, by doing so, the overlapping

section grew while the outside part of the circle diminished. Similarly, Bleich (1976)

believed that discussing literature allows us to share our subjectivity, leading to

intersubjectivity. We may or may not change our ideas as a result, but at least we become

aware of alternate subjectivities. MS also used metaphorical language to describe his

idea of the teacher's role in Book Club: "It's kind of, like, say there's a bunch of holes in

a board. Each one is a separate perspective. And teachers are kind of standing behind

the boards. They can go and they can put their eye into those holes, wherever they

want…" (Interview, 8/29/13). The teacher should be able to put themselves in the place

of each of the Book Club members, characters, and imagined readers of the text and "put

their eye into those holes" in order to push the group to consider alternate perspectives.

In addition, the teacher should act as a fellow reader and Book Club member, able to

"defend their ideas" and "lift it up when they need to and block it when they need to."

> MS: So like, say one person opposes the other idea. They throw out something that bangs at this guy. This guy could just throw it back.
> Sara: But the teacher should be able to be one of those people as well.
> MS: Yes. One of those people who can just lift it up when they need to and block it when they need to. So.

By throwing out, lifting, and blocking, we are putting our ideas out to the group and

defending against challenges of others.

During Book Club 11, the group was discussing the idea of high intelligence as a

random gift. The idea of winning the lottery was brought up:

> Tim: There's like- some people say there's like tons of worlds pretty much, and we're all lucky that in this world, we're all in this room. And we got randomly gifted. There could be one where none of us are here, and you don't have a job.
> Sara: And so it's luck.
> Tim: I don't think of it-
> MS: Yeah.
> Sara: We're born with it?
> Tim: We're born with it, and we're lucky. It's-
> MS: It's like hitting a jackpot.
> Tim: -a gift.

By comparing giftedness with winning the jackpot, the group explored the idea of

giftedness not as something that is earned, but truly as a gift that one lucks into. Next,

the group extended the metaphor to think about the various outcomes of winning the

lottery.

> Sara: And so if we've won that jackpot, is it really our responsibility-
> May: To keep it going.
> Sara: -being lucky enough to win that jackpot, to actually do something with it?
> Tim: To use it.
> Markus: If you- if you buy a lottery ticket and it's the winner, you could just tear it up and throw it in the trash. But that would be very, very, very sad.

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Tim: Or, you could take the money. There's tons of things you could do with the money. There's tons of things you could go with your giftedness. Like, yeah. There's a lot of-

MS: You can give- you can give most of the money away to charity, and the way you can do that in this term, you could like- you could make yourself a successful person so that-

Sara: And give back.

MS: -you give back the world-

Sara: To the community?

MS: Like if you believe in God, then you'd think that God gave you that gifted ability, then you give it back by helping everybody else, and you take off some load.

If one were to just tear up the winning lottery ticket (or fail to develop or use their skills and intelligence), an opportunity would be lost. The group then considered the possible choices one might make in using the winnings for material gains, giving to charity, or developing a successful life for one's self. Similarly, a gift in a particular area could be wasted, used for personal gain, or used to contribute to society.

When the same idea could have been expressed in a more straightforward manner, why does the group use figurative language? When asked directly why he thought he often used metaphor to describe his ideas, MS had the following to say:

> Well, it's just the way our brains work. I think sometimes we're tired of being direct because we've done that since we were younger. Like regular kids here, they probably started off with direct things later than us, so we've had a longer time with it. We're bored of it. We try to challenge our minds to think of things that are kind of metaphors. (Interview, 12/13/13)

While it would be possible for MS to use more simplistic language, he wanted to push himself to think in more abstract, complex ways

.

Using Metaphors to Define and Describe Giftedness

As I recorded my observations in my research journal weekly, I realized that participants were using metaphorical language throughout Book Club. Recognizing this tendency and supported by the research on gifted readers' advanced ability to process and synthesize ideas (Reis et al, 2004; Vosslamber, 2002), I asked participants to write a metaphor for giftedness as a culminating activity using any of the readings and their journals to influence their thinking. I wanted to build upon the participants' strengths as well as interests. In this way, even though I directed the assignment it was informed by their learning identities and habits. My goal was also to prompt participants to incorporate everything they had learned and experienced during the study into a succinct statement illustrating their beliefs about giftedness as it stood at that moment. The chart below describes the metaphors they shared.

Participant	Metaphor	Explanation
Tim	Giftedness is like a flower. It must bloom.	Water = teacher Soil = subject area/topic Sunlight = interest
Markus	Giftedness is like growing a sapling.	Sapling = ability Soil = interest (the root of it, once you have interest you can grow the sapling) Rain/water = exposure/nurturing
MS	Giftedness is a gold medal.	Ability is only part of the equation. You must keep practicing to earn and maintain accomplishments.
Sapphire	Giftedness is like making lemonade.	Ingredients = innate ability, educational opportunity, and interest Sugar = interest (it finds cracks, makes it that much sweeter/better) Too much lemon and not enough sugar (or too much sugar and not enough lemon) ruins the lemonade just as all ability and no

		interest, or no ability but lots of interest, would not equate to giftedness
Ludwig	Giftedness is being better at something than your society.	Being better than the average person in one's society- whether it be at sports, academics, etc.
May	Giftedness is like a book.	The reader is blind at the beginning but they gather more and more information as they read. When a learner begins a class they might not know much about the topic, but they learn the more they are in class. Even in the gifted program, we must continue to learn. Even at the end of a "chapter" we are not finished the story.

Table 4.1: Metaphors for giftedness

Each student had a chance to explain his or her metaphor which was followed by a brief discussion before the next person shared. Except for Ludwig's, all other metaphors involved a combination of a prescribed element (which symbolized innate ability) and environmental influence (nature and exposure). In other words, for these students giftedness was not genetically determined, but the result of a complex interaction of biology and experience. May described it this way:

> Sara: Okay. So what do you think the metaphors we thought of say about what we- how we view giftedness, whether we think it's nature or nurture that gets you gifted?
>
> May: I think- a lot of us did like- I think most of us, all of us- like we still have to learn. Just because you're gifted doesn't mean bam, I'm done. I'm not learning any more. I'm already achieved this goal. That's it. I just go to the gifted program. I just play some games. Sure, it's just learning, but still, you have to like- still, we learned all these habits of mind. We know the really big word metacognition. We know what it means. And sure, we've done a few awesome stuff. But it still. It's like learning. We still have to learn. You don't just stop at one point and don't go on.
>
> Sara: So you still need to add different ingredients. You still need to have the sun and the soil and the water. You still need to keep that gold medal on, so it's not-
>
> MS: It'd be like the defending champion.

These students were not overconfident in their abilities and they did not take their

intelligence for granted. Rather, they believed in the importance of constant effort and

continued pursuit of knowledge. They recognized the ways in which innate ability can

wither with a lack of opportunity and, conversely, how powerful educational experiences

can support someone in making incredible gains. Participants used metaphors not only to

clarify and delineate their own thinking, but to communicate those abstract ideas with

others. Additionally, metaphors that were shared earlier in the study were taken up by

others in the group and modified based on individual differences in thinking. Thus, the

development of one's ideas about giftedness became a social rather than solitary practice.

Complicating Giftedness Identification through Metaphor: The Pencil Sort

It was our eighth week of Book Club and the group was discussing our first

selection of informational text. The compilation of readings provided an overview of the

history of gifted education in America that the students used to continue their

understanding of the novel *Ungifted*. The students were having a lively discussion on the

conditions that would warrant one attending a school specifically for gifted students like

the Academy for Scholastic Distinction in the novel. After listening to the group discuss

the differing levels of giftedness and the various need for enrichment one might have,

Tim shared the way in which he was interpreting the discussion using a visual he created.
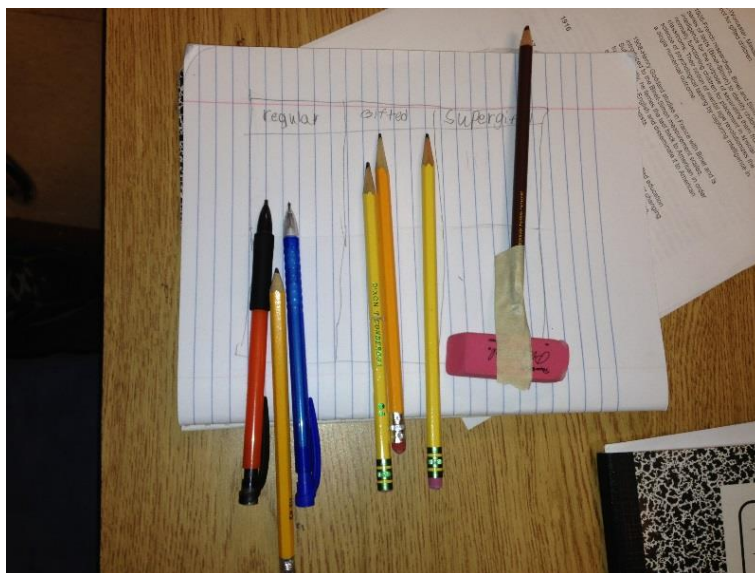
Figure 4.2: Pencil metaphor

Tim: One thing I'm really feeling, like, I'm picking up is it feels like we're sort of rating people on what they are like. I hear- I know- like I've done three columns. Regular people, gifted and super gifted-

Sara: Okay

Tim: Super gifted would be-

Markus: Noah.

Ludwig: Abigail, Noah, and Chloe.

Tim: I'm trying to add people here. I'm adding fast. I'm not going to write this down yet, but super gifted would be, you're great at, like, three or so-

Sara: Most of the subjects.

Tim: -main-

Sara: Multiple subjects?

Tim: Multiple subjects… I just- the main idea I hear every time I see this is, wow, it seems like they're rating people here. Like on their scale. Like should they go to an academy? Yes. Not really. Should they go to academy? Eh.

Tim defined his labels of Regular, Gifted, and Super Gifted based on the number of

subject areas at which one excels which, in turn, affects what types of enrichment one

would require. The group chimed in, suggesting characters from the novel and their

place in the sort. However, rather than place the names of characters in each section, Tim

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illustrated his point by sorting pencils. He described the process of assessing each pencil

based on the size and quality of its eraser, the criteria by which he judged each pencil.

> Okay, this one, oh, wow, it's got a good eraser, and eh, it's not the best with the
> eraser, so it should go there in the –ish regular or so. I think that could go there,
> too. That could be gifted. Like I'm saying the erasers are kinda the brain here.
> This is a pen, so, it'll just not count. Average…So I guess when people- like when
> I first pulled this whole thing out, people started saying, oh, that person's like that.
> That person's like this character. So the Daniels. Donovan after a while in the
> academy. ((pointing to particular pencils))

The 'brain,' or one's intellect, was represented by the eraser. By using the metaphor of

sorting pencils by their erasers, we saw that the sort was based on arguably arbitrary

criteria. Tim chose to sort the pencils based on their erasers, but Markus pointed out that

the eraser criteria was just one way to sort the pencils, just as IQ is merely one way of

sorting people.

> Markus: And another thing I wanted to say is this is Tim's way of rating
> them, by erasers. But there are also different ways to rate it.
> Ludwig: Yeah, with pencils.
> Sara: Okay. So talk about that.
> Markus: You could rate it by the sharpness. So this one is super sharp.

Markus went on to resort the pencils, this time on the basis of the sharpness of

their lead. The fact that the very same pencil that was labeled as Super Gifted using the

eraser criteria was now considered Regular using the lead criteria demonstrated the

profound implications of carefully defining the criteria we use to sort students and

identify them as gifted. When we talk about giftedness, it is important to know what

criteria is being used in order to make a valid comparison. Otherwise, what might be

labeled as gifted in one school may not be comparable to another. The criteria we use

also demonstrates what we value as a 'gift.' Are we judging by standardized test scores?

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Classroom performance? Musical accomplishment? How do we decide what criteria to use? The students listed IQ, Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking (a reading level assessment), and PSSAs as criteria for identifying academic giftedness in our school. In his demonstration, Tim felt that the eraser was a better way to judge the pencils since it remained more stable than the sharpness of the lead, but the students were unsure about whether the gifted criteria they listed for people were stable or fluid factors.

Furthermore, the sort was purely relative. Certain pencils were only placed in the Super Gifted section by having a better eraser than the others. What if none of the pencils had a new eraser? Would the Super Gifted section remain empty? Or would the cleanest or largest of the available pencils go into that category? This is something we need to consider as we think about how gifted identification varies across schools. As Markus noted, "if [at ASD] all classes have enrichment and are gifted, then I expect that their standards for getting into the gifted program are super duper, super duper high" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13). What counts as gifted in the context of a school dedicated to gifted learners might not be the same as what counts as gifted in a typical elementary or middle school.

May took the metaphor a step further, pushing us to consider how we identify gifted students in the first place:

Sara: If what we- if the criteria that we use to sort people, if there's different criteria that could be used, why do we use the criteria that we do?
May: Well, I'm just going to say something. Take for instance, you're sorting through your desk. And you're looking for a pencil. You- if you take a pencil that has a dull tip, no eraser, you would just obviously toss it back in.
Markus: Yeah.

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> May: And you would reach in, let's say you find a mechanical pencil that is brand new, and you just got it at the school store, then you would take that, because you're like oh, this is- you don't really know-
>
> Markus: Has a good eraser.
>
> May: -why. You just feel like, oh, it looks cool, it's fine. But then you would leave all the ones with like no eraser, dull tip.
>
> …
>
> Markus: Let's say that all pencils, when looking for giftedness, they always look for the sharp point. If someone has a huge eraser, they don't really care.
>
> Sara: Whereas perhaps, in another culture, they're looking for huge erasers.
>
> Ludwig: They're both good things.

Here, May and Markus touched on issues of identification. Focusing on one single piece of criteria to identify giftedness necessarily results in ignoring others who don't fit that mold. Next, I pushed the group to consider further the implications of the metaphor in regards to one's ability to develop giftedness.

> Sara: Now here's my question, though, 'cause there was one like that [a dull pencil], and Markus, you went over and sharpened it.
>
> Markus: Yeah.
>
> Sara: So if we compare that to a person, if at first under certain criteria they are not, they would not have been sorted into the gifted category, can something be changed-
>
> Markus: They can-
>
> Sara: -so that they now are in the gifted category.
>
> MS: Yes. Like they can undergo excessive tutoring.

Thus, Markus and MS demonstrated their belief that ability can change over time through prolonged practice with and exposure to skills. Intelligence is not set in stone, but is malleable based on experience.

Conclusion

The dialogic classroom shifts away from the traditional roles of teacher and student in order to dismantle asymmetrical power structures and promote democratic

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behavior (Brantmeier, n.d.). True collaborative, meaningful dialogue takes time that, unfortunately, not all educational environments have the luxury of having: time to establish a trusting environment, time to explore issues deeply, and time to reflect. The agency and power demonstrated by these Book Club members is a testament to their ability to "lay claim to their educational experience" (Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012, p. 481). They questioned themselves and the text and actively built theories that went beyond the text to inform their thinking about their lives. More than their words, though, the most exciting social practice they engaged in was action. Participants' moves to shape the direction of their literacy experience and the results of those moves demonstrates the power of embedding the social into the literacy classroom.

CHAPTER 5:
Crystallizing Gifted Identity: Intersections of Culture, Race, and Language

Academic achievement is the result of a myriad of factors, including but not limited to language use, educational opportunities, and cognitive functioning. Students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds contribute to their life experiences and are therefore an influence on their success in school. While only one student in Book Club was Caucasian and the other five members were extremely connected to and proud of their cultural heritages, it took reading informational text explicitly focused on the intersection of culture and giftedness to prompt discussion about these issues. The students' strong belief in the power of educational experiences and opportunity both enabled and complicated their thoughts on how culture affects one's giftedness.

This chapter will focus on the ways in which culture, ethnicity, and language complicate the ways in which participants understood intelligence and giftedness. First, I will review bodies of literature that informed the work. Then I will demonstrate how participants used text to consider issues of educational opportunity, intelligence, and giftedness.

Cultural Perspectives on Literacy and Giftedness

Social Capital as a Way of Viewing Immigrant Literacies

Social networks provide a more nuanced perspective on immigrant literacies than one that relies solely on English language acquisition. Considering the intricate ways social networks impact a child's academic success complicates the deficit view of the

English Language Learner and demonstrates the ways in which one's relationships within and outside of the family can support school achievement. Sociologist, theorist, and researcher James Coleman introduced the concept of social capital as a way to represent the relations among people that make achievement possible (Coleman, 1988). I find it particularly helpful in appreciating the complexity of immigrant literacies.

Children come to school with a wealth of resources irrespective of their language use. The concept of social capital seeks to explain differences in school performance by "viewing family and community relations that surround children as forms of investments that yield payoffs in school" (Bankston III, 2004, p.176). Coleman identified three forms of social capital: reciprocity, information channels, and social norms (Kao, 2004), each of which influence the ways in which immigrants respond to the school expectations. Reciprocity describes the obligation one feels to return a favor to someone in the community. Because they tend to be somewhat alienated from the majority, immigrants have less access to the obligation and expectations of reciprocity in the mainstream culture. However, among other same-ethnic immigrants this obligation is intensified, strengthening their bonds within the group. While immigrants tend to have less access to information channels about topics like effective schools and teachers and how to apply for college, the relationships they have within their cultural groups facilitates the dissemination of information about the educational system. Finally, immigrant groups tend to have strong social networks that manage norms, such as respect for elders, cooperation, and an acceptance of authority, through rewards and sanctions (Bankston III, 2004). These networks extend beyond the family and, subsequently, individuals

throughout the network reinforce expected behavior. All three forms of social capital positively affect student outcomes.

Immigrant families can provide social capital to their children in a variety of ways independent[38] from the physical and human capital they possess. For instance, parents can spend quality time with them encouraging activities that support educational achievement. Many Chinese and Korean communities, for example, offer *kumon* schools, after-school, non-remedial classes that provide instruction in reading and math (Kao, 2004). Immigrant parents might also emphasize the sacrifices they made in order to provide educational and political benefits for their children. These behaviors are not only taught, but practiced. For example, Markose and Hellsten's 2009 study of the home literacy practices of migrant families in Australia found that behaviors taught at home by the Chun family, such as sitting quietly at the dining room table to complete assignments without expressing frustration or laughing, supported the learning behaviors expected at school. Thus, immigrant youth's strong social networks allow them to reap greater benefits from the capital they have (Kao, 2004).

Immigrant and minority students are expected to adapt to the culture of the majority, a culture that is sometimes very different from their own. However, considering the ways in which the home culture can act as social capital emphasizes the benefits that come from participation in social networks (Noguera, 2004). Parent

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[38] I acknowledge that attendance at after school activities and even spending quality time with a child assumes a certain level of financial security. For example, some extra-curricular activities charge a registration fee or a parent may not be able to spend evenings with his/her child due to a work schedule. We can also think about the extended networks (e.g. grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors) that are often involved in communicating norms to children.

involvement, interactive styles, beliefs, and practices can have a profound impact on achievement in school since mainstream educational achievement depends on the extent to which students are successful in attaining knowledge as defined by the institutions they attend (Markose & Hellsten, 2009). Although inspired by home-country traditions, social norms are not merely replicated but occur in response to the challenges of the immigration and relocation experience (Bankston III, 2004) and can be maintained and spread throughout a group. In this way, social capital can compensate for a lack of language experience and provide learners with support through relationships[39].

The Model Minority

Social networks influence the ways in which immigrant and minority groups adapt to the dominant culture. In the past, social progress was considered inevitable for immigrant groups that successfully assimilated to American society. However, this generalization was based on European immigrants (Noguera, 2004). As immigration increased by the 1970s and issues of race became difficult to ignore, researchers began to investigate the connections between race and education. The concept of the Model Minority, although a stereotype and myth, can be used as a lens to critically consider the ways in which social networks affect the experiences of minority groups.

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[39] At the same time, the social networks that can act as a support for school achievement can have negative impacts as well. For example, they may prompt separation from native-born peers or strain relationships between parents and American born children. Consequently, social networks can support academic success while putting strains on relationships. Please see the discussion on the Model Minority for further complication of the ways in which immigrant and minority groups are stereotyped. The experiences of minority groups are extremely diverse so although notions like social networks and the Model Minority can provide one perspective of the immigrant experience they continue to simplify the lived experiences of varied individuals.

Ogbu uses the notion of voluntary and involuntary minorities to contend that differences in achievement levels are due to minority groups' perceptions about future opportunities and schooling (Ogbu, 1987). Involuntary minorities such as African Americans, American Indians, and Puerto Ricans do not believe that social mobility is possible and therefore push back against the majority that conquered their people by consciously resisting the dominant culture. However, voluntary minorities have chosen to immigrate to the United States in pursuit of a better life which leads them to see themselves as guests in the host country (Lee, 1994) and be able to accommodate to the dominant culture without assimilating and losing their home language and culture (Wing, 2007). Voluntary minorities are more likely to see education as a means to upward mobility in their new country rather than as "part of the system that once oppressed their ancestors" (Marinari, 2005, p. 378)[40]. For Ogbu, the reason for immigration has a strong impact on a group's ability to establish themselves in their new country.

Asians have been shown to be among the voluntary minorities whose members are more likely to achieve success in the United States in regards to academics, economics, family stability, and low crime involvement (Chou, 2008). Known as the Model Minority, Asians have become the prototype for immigrants who can succeed in

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[40] Others have challenged Ogbu's voluntary/involuntary binary. Researchers including Valenzuela (1999), Betti (2003), and Foley (1989, 1990) contend that Ogbu's theory ignores the influences of class, race, and gender in school achievement and mobility (as cited in Foley 2004). Such a claim reinforces stereotypes that band entire ethnic and cultural groups as one with shared educational attitudes and achievement levels (Lee, 1994). Theorists have also problematized his argument that involuntary immigrants need to be more like voluntary immigrants, persevering and seeing upward mobility as a goal rather than a mark of cultural loss. Foley (2004), for example, points out that Ogbu's own experiences as an African-American cause him to emphasize what his people have lost as a culture due to their enslavement yet never voiced reflexivity about his bias. As a result, he is criticized for being a deficit thinker. In addition, although Ogbu makes recommendations for policy, they seem to be informed by academia rather than experience in policy-making.

becoming accepted through hard work, perseverance, and "quite accommodation" (Park, 2011, p. 621). Researchers have described the advantages Asians have over other immigrant groups. Due to the history of British and US colonialism in Asia, many of these immigrants already speak and read English, putting them at a great advantage in school over other immigrant groups. They also hold social capital that supports success in American schools as their parents tend to develop "an almost desperate faith in schooling" (Wing, 2007, p. 479) as the sole hope for their children's futures. While schools expand or limit the range of American identities for immigrants and students constantly construct those identities in part as a response to the context of school, immigrant communities 'police' each other as a way that strengthens the model minority identity. For example, pressure from peers and other members of the immigrant community may compel students to conform to the model image through reward, punishment, gossip, and other social sanctions.

Although 'Model Minority' sounds like a compliment, it remains a racial stereotype and therefore carries negative implications. Since academic success is not uniform among Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype pits Asian Americans against each other (Park, 2011). For example, in Wing's 2007 interviews with six Asian American students complicated the picture of what it means to be an Asian American. The students expressed a sense of isolation within their school context. They all identified with other Asian students and felt solidarity with their Asian peers but also resentment when others viewed them as a single homogeneous group. Additionally, Marinari (2005) found that Korean students were considered a group while white students

were viewed as individuals, not representatives of their entire race[41]. Thus, 'model minority' suggests simultaneously a sense of superiority and inferiority. While Asian Americans are considered superior to other immigrant groups in their ability to be Americanized, they remain marginalized from the white majority.

Stacey J. Lee (1994) has also complicated the concept of the Model Minority, demonstrating that Asian identity and attitudes towards education are not fixed, but respond to school, family, and community experiences. Her ethnographic study on Asian American high school students revealed that students grouped themselves into four distinct groups: Koreans, Asian, Asian new wave, and Asian American, each with a distinctive perspective on schooling. Koreans generally sought to distance themselves from other Asians in an effort to identify with Whites, a move influenced by their parents' view that adopting the American culture was critical for success. However, they were encouraged to maintain their Korean culture at home and within the Korean community. While this group's actions might correlate with the Model Minority, others demonstrated a range of behaviors. Lee documented low achieving Asians who, although they worked hard and appeared to be diligent students, refused extra help because of the cultural belief that Asians did not talk about their problems and that revealing failure would bring shame to one's family. Asian new wavers, on the other hand, actively rebelled against the educational system as a way of demonstrating their belief that school

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[41] While Asians were marginalized because of their race during World War II, 'culture' has become a way of discussing race "without explicitly using racialized terms" (Marinari, 2005, p. 384), developing into a form of contemporary racism (Chou, 2008). Mica Pollock uses the term 'colormuteness' to describe the phenomenon in which stakeholders in school systems resist using racialized language to talk about racial achievement disparities (Pollock, 2001). In an effort to avoid discussion how race might come into play, the resulting silence only reinforces racial patterns in achievement.

was not a necessity for success. This group tended to brag about their academic difficulties and attempt to get by with the least amount of work. Finally, the self-identified Asian Americans worked hard and were high achievers. However, they were outspoken and their goal was to use academic success to fight racism through careers in law, journalism, and ethnic studies. Lee's work evidences the oversimplification of the concept of the Model Minority, demonstrating the complexity of the immigrant experience.

While Ogbu's voluntary/involuntary immigrant theory and the Model Minority concept provide frameworks through which to view immigrant literacies, they are limited in their inability to acknowledge the complexity of the immigrant experience and identity and are both stereotypes and myths. The Asian American experience is extremely diverse. The reasons for a child's immigration and their belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group is simply not enough to determine their academic achievement. Rather, theorists, researchers, and educators alike must recognize the powerful influence of lived experiences.

Implications for Gifted Education

Academic success is part of broader social and cultural processes and must be seen as such. The U.S. Department of Education defines giftedness in part by stating that "children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment…" (as cited in Milner & Ford, 2007, p. 170). Thus, while the definition is one of talent development and the focus is on

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potential, cultural factors can hinder teachers' judgments and decisions about including immigrant and minority students in gifted programs (Milner & Ford, 2007). Marinari (2005) contends that educators should look beyond cultural explanations for success and failure to consider the ways in which school systems "affect the constantly shifting terrain of racial formation" (p. 396). Teachers must become open to identifying students who deviate from traditional ways of thinking, learning, and communicating rather than concentrating on those students who best replicate the norms of the dominate ideology.

Consequently, educators need to seriously consider how intelligence (and giftedness) are acquired, documented, and measured. If we define culture as "the characteristics of a person that are developed through formal and informal experiences, knowledge disposition, skills, and ways of knowing and understanding that are informed by race…, ethnicity…, identity…, class…, sexuality, and gender" (Milner & Ford, 2007, p. 167), then we must accept that differences in culture between students and teachers might mask giftedness. Teachers must consider the physical, psychological, and social spaces in which their students live and learn as these spaces have an influence in shaping one's identity and reality; what works in an affluent suburban school may not in an inner-city context. And, as Ladson-Billings asserts, immigrant and minority students must be empowered to challenge the system that positions them as unauthentic Americans (as cited in Park, 2011).

How might social capital and the model minority stereotype intersect with the school system and gifted education? First, theories with a one-dimensional analysis of race and culture reinforce the concept that race and intelligence are linked. Rather,

culture is not static, but an evolving entity comprised of identity, class, economic status, gender, religion, and so on. This is especially true for immigrant groups who maintain aspects of their culture while responding to the immigrant experience. Considering social capital illuminates the multiple factors that are involved in a student's academic success including the alignment (or lack thereof) between one's culture and the norms of the school system and the networks that support groups with a shared cultural background. Educators must consider the ways in which the differences between a child's cultural background and that of the mainstream culture may mask his giftedness in order to ensure that school systems are meeting the educational needs of all children.

Book Club Members Talk about Ethnicity, Religion, and Language

"Definitely India because they're number one.": *Cultural Pride*

Book Club members had an incredible amount of pride in their cultural heritage. This pride was evident in the frequency of cultural references in our conversations, the amount of knowledge students held about their cultural backgrounds, and students' participation in school and community cultural events. Participants' cultural backgrounds not only instilled pride in the students, but informed their beliefs about knowledge, intelligence, and giftedness.

MS was incredibly connected to and proud of his Indian heritage and was an active member of his culture. When asked where his favorite place would be, he emphatically answered India "because they're number one. A lot of people are exactly like me. I fit in more" (Interview, 8/29/13). He energetically described their traditions,

from the holidays to simple acts like putting ketchup on pizza, and appreciated that "we have the same interests because there's some things Indians do that none other- no other place in the world" (Interview, 8/29/13). Although he acknowledged that traditions like Holi and the Festival of Lights are celebrated in other places around the world "it's more Indianized there." MS consistently shared his knowledge about Indian culture with passion.

MS was also knowledgeable about the caste system and its effect on Indian life and opportunities. He was part of the Brahmin group, the priests, who are known as the "ultimate sources of knowledge. So they learn those things, and they really pride themselves on knowledge" (Interview, 8/29/13). Thus, for MS and his family, education was the top priority. After he went on to describe the other three castes, the Kshatriyas who defend the kingdom, the Vaisyas (merchants of the city), and the Sudras (servants), MS discussed his feelings on the extent to which the caste system continues to impact the daily lives of Indians:

> MS: It's not like- now it's not like, if you're part of this group, you look down on, but it still exists. Not in a bad way, but it's still going to be there.
> Sara: It's still there. So do you think that you would be gifted if you were not born into that group?
> MS: Yeah, sure, why not? Because I don't think it really impacts it much. Like if everybody in my, like, bloodline was- started from another group, I mean, sure, why not? I don't think it really affects much...But I'm just saying, like, way back then, the Brahmans, when it was like a big thing-
> Sara: Like a very strict system?
> MS: A very strict system, then most of the Brahmans were like education [   ]. I think that's just a coincidence, but then, some people view it as not a coincidence. But I'm pretty sure it's just a coincidence.
> Sara: Okay. Well, do you know, like traditionally, certain castes would have more opportunities than others for education, right?
> MS: Because I think the people who are looked down on, they probably felt like they couldn't have those opportunities. They were there- those

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opportunities were there, but they might have looked upon it as a closed door." (Interview, 12/13/13)

MS believed that giftedness is primarily nurtured rather than innate, so his idea that his giftedness is not dependent on the caste he was born into correlates with that belief. However, by stating that the Brahmans' emphasis on education was a "coincidence," MS failed to make the connection that the values his family had instilled in him and the opportunities that his parents have provided for him in order to support his education may have stemmed from the long-standing value in education and the pursuit of knowledge that his ancestors, as part of the Brahman caste, have had. To illustrate, MS referred to members of lower castes as having opportunities available to them but looking "upon it as a closed door." Once again, he failed to recognize the powerful implications that the caste system has had on the opportunities to which various groups actually had access.

According to MS, in Indian culture, academics are valued as the way to achieve in life. MS described the ways in which Indians value certain subjects over others:

> Definitely if I was going academic, math and science are basically the only two things that really matter in India...Mostly. Go to ninety-five percent of the people and ask them what their top two- what their teachers wanted them to learn most in school. They'll definitely, almost definitely put math and science on their top two...I don't know, but in places like India, Singapore, people pride themselves on knowing math. If you come to America, go to a lot of the people, they'll say they can read really well. Literature and English-Like, they- a lot of the kids, maybe even here, I don't know, will probably learn the alphabet before learning the number system. In India-...And then there's not a one-two-three song. ...If you go to India, probably they will teach the number system before English. Because one, in India, you can't really pride yourself upon language. ...There're like more than thirty languages in India. Only people in your state are going to understand you. (Interview, 8/29/13)

For MS, math and science act as a common language for a people who are linguistically diverse. He contrasted this with the United States, which focuses primarily on the

language arts, even citing the types of songs we teach toddlers as evidence for the way in which we value language. Thus, math and science is a way to unite the Indian people across different languages.

MS also described the differences in classroom structure and pacing between India and the United States. "There's like forty kids in a class in India, so there's no gifted program. But definitely, the regular program is super accelerated" (Interview, 8/29/13). MS shared that, because Indians are so focused on academics and coursework is more challenging than in the United States, it is not uncommon for students to procure a tutor to ensure that they can rise to the challenge that is provided in class:

> MS: [Teachers are] very focused. Yeah. In India, the classrooms, there's no gifted program. But the regular class teaching is like, I would put it halfway between [MG class] and halfway between regular class. So it's- like the everybody's more challenged. So also there's like way more tutoring there, like so if you are struggling-
> Markus: Yeah, they'd give you tutoring.
> MS: Yeah. Your parents will get you a tutor, and then you catch up.
> Sara: Okay.
> MS: And then it's like, they go at a way faster pace than America. (Book Club 5, 10/4/13)

The teaching style is more traditional, "where you go there, you learn, done" and "teachers aren't exactly mean there. But they're not exactly like super kind" (Book Club 5, 10/4/13). Markus described the teaching style, which his parents experienced, as "very strict and you can't have fun while learning" (Interview, 8/29/13). Rather than focusing on sports like many Americans, Markus shared that his "mom always says that Indians- or Asians, Chinese, or Indian, they usually focus on the art of like the education…Most of my friends that I know…do some kind of extra learning by themselves" (Interview, 12/13/13). Students are focused on their twelfth grade annual exams and "everybody will

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get a tutor in twelfth grade just so they can score just as much as they possibly can"

(Book Club 5, 10/4/13). The fact that there is no separate gifted program does not appear

to affect the students because the general curriculum provides a higher level of challenge

for all students: "I'm saying, like, the regular fourth grade curriculum, in this country,

they would probably do that in sixth grade" (Interview, 8/29/13). Thus, school is a top

priority and seen as the vehicle to success.

An emphasis on competition is also evident in the Indian culture. MS himself

observed that "sometimes, here, they tend to lower the standards. And competition is so

discouraged in these kind of places. But in China, India, Singapore, those kind of places,

like, that competition is what is going to reward you in life" (Interview, 8/29/13). He

went on to describe how vital competition is to the economic market:

MS: The ultimate end is competition. Because say, like, give Apple and
Microsoft. Their heads keep banging.
Sara: And they progress.
MS: And they progress to out- what do you call-
Sara: Outdo?
MS: Outdo the other one. And so, those companies have so much drive
to be higher.

MS's parents had frequently asked me about various competitions in which I could enter

him and shared that they valued the experience of competing in such events early on in

life in order to gain experience with competition, something children will deal with as an

adult on a regular basis. This desire aligns with the traditional Indian emphasis on

competition that MS discussed.

MS assumed that learners have choices concerning the ways in which culture

affects them. This assumption stemmed, in part, from his beliefs about the definition of

culture itself. During Book Club we are discussing the difference between ethnicity and culture:

> Sara: German, Irish, Italian, and often ethnicity and culture kind of
> overlap, but not necessarily. Because ethnicity is something that is- that
> you're born with, but culture is more the-
> MS: What you choose.
> Sara: Behaviors. Tradition.
> MS: That you choose to follow your culture or not.

For MS, ethnicity is innate, but culture is a conscious decision one makes. Although on the surface this statement makes sense, MS did not consider the complex ways in which our culture is embedded in our lives. During a Book Club discussion on what the group found to be a minimalist view of identity groups and their typical values, MS signaled the complexity of our identities: "It's like a bunch, a huge Venn Diagram with a bunch of different circles" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13). Thus, MS was not just an Indian. But he was male, middle class, bilingual, and a first born American among other things. As Leander and Zacher (2007) emphasize, identity shifts in different contexts and people have more than one sense of self. It is nearly impossible to disengage from all the forces that cause us to behave the way we do. MS's comments demonstrated the sense of agency he had over his beliefs, values, and actions and the power he felt over his life path.

"Are you more spiritual or religious?": The Influence of Spirituality

Like MS, Ludwig was proud of his Indian heritage. However, he emphasized the spiritual aspects of his culture and consistently demonstrated his belief in the value of spirituality as a way to understand the world as well as make decisions about one's

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actions. By valuing spirituality more than structural power like political leadership,

Ludwig's beliefs influenced who and what he found important in regards to intelligence

and achievement.

Ludwig identified his culture in one word, Hinduism. His Indian background was

extremely important to him and he weaved it into academic and social conversations in

our classroom. He described his culture as one that is based on spiritual ideas. In

preparation for a Book Club discussion centered on informational text about culture and

giftedness, Ludwig and MS began their conversation while the rest of us were still

writing around the room. They referred to this private discussion when May

distinguished between religion and spirituality:

> Ludwig: Because me- MS and me were just conversing, quiet, as the-
> during quiet reflection. Are you more spiritual or- um- religious
> more than one- and he said spiritual. I agree.
> Sara: Rather than religious?
> Ludwig: Markus, you're probably also spiritual, right?
> MS: Well, it kind of depends.
> May: Well take this for instance.
> MS: Because we don't, the religion itself half spiritual thaan [the
> religion itself is half spiritual]. It's kind of like that.
> Ludwig: Yeah but we are more spiritual than respecting people with-
> social status.

Ludwig identified spirituality as a foundational aspect of his Hindu culture and looked to

MS and Markus for validation as fellow Hindus. He set up a dichotomy between those

with social status and those with spirituality. For Ludwig, spirituality and religion are not

synonymous, although MS did not see them as disparate either. Later in the same

session, Ludwig returned to the idea of cultural values:

> Ludwig: I'm only good at- I'm probably going to value more- I'm not- if-
> I would probably value priests in a temple. Like they usually are

more important than your president or prime minister, but here in the case- in America, more- your head of your church or Barack Obama. Who's going to be held- well, probably Barack Obama, for a lot of us. But in more Hinduism, it's more you value- it's not like- you would- Barack Obama is the top, pretty much the highest position in our-

Tim: Top dog.

May: Country.

Ludwig: -world, pretty much.

Tim: Country, right?

Markus: No, world. Even world. Even the world. The United States is very strong.

May: Yeah.

Ludwig: Yeah, very, very strong. It's the strongest country in the world.

MS: I saw something-

Ludwig: The president is-

MS: -article on Yahoo-

[overlapping talk]

Ludwig: Yeah, 'cause he's telling most powerful man in the world right now, okay?

MS: I think he's second.

Ludwig: But we would value one of our own temple priests that we know very- or, even my grandparents. Somebody like that who have had a lot of years with- what do you say- they have a lot of years of experience, and they have a lot of knowledge. If I could pick living with one of them, I'd probably pick my grandparents over Barack Obama. First of all, I know them better. They're probably more knowledgeable of what I- my religion, and yeah, so.

Ludwig set up the scenario of making a choice between putting greater value on President Obama or one's local priest or grandparent. He inferred that most Americans would choose the President since mainstream American culture values those with power and juxtaposed this line of thinking with his own culture. As a Hindu, although he certainly respected the President, he ultimately placed more value on someone who has knowledge and experience that is commensurate with his own culture and with whom he is better acquainted.

"I have a lot of relatives there.": Family and Community Ties

Like MS, Ludwig, and Markus, May and Sapphire had many relatives living in their home countries. May's favorite place to be was China since she could visit her family. She enjoyed the culture because they are "mostly relaxed. They're not too busy" (Interview, 8/30/13) and appreciated the food and accessibility. "There's a lot of people like live near each other, and they have a lot of people who know each other, and it's easy to walk around" (Interview, 8/30/13). She found that the differences in housing promoted a sense of community that supports the cultural values of family.

Both May and Sapphire, whose parents are from Singapore, were cognizant of the value their families place on education as well as the connection between that value and the cultures from which they came. May shared that her parents "were pretty smart" and attributed this to the fact that her culture is very focused on grades. Growing up, she understood that "bad grades weren't exactly bad but weren't exactly good. So then you would be kind of not forced, but like inspired to get good grades…I want to get good grades because inside, I feel like I do want good grades" (Interview, 12/18/13). Sapphire also saw a clear connection between her Singaporean culture and her educational beliefs and habits. She shared that her parents were "very strong in math, and they had a very high score in like the world thingys" (Interview, 12/16/13) due to the emphasis on schooling in Singapore. Since our school district began using Singapore Math in the elementary schools, Sapphire felt she was really benefitting from her parents experience with that high level approach.

Although both May and Sapphire had a strong connection with their Asian

cultures, they were not focused completely on their heritage. Sapphire was frustrated by

her inability to take art lessons or go to camps in the summer since her family used this

time to visit her relatives in Singapore. In addition, her parents tried to expose her to the

many cultures around the world so that when she gets older, "we can live like together at-

like the cultures merging together" (Interview, 9/6/13).

The Effect of Bilingualism on Giftedness

Although five out of six participants were at least partially bilingual, no one ever

specifically referenced their bilingualism during Book Club. Sapphire attended Chinese

school on the weekends to learn Mandarin, a skill that her parents emphasized as

important since China is growing and becoming more influential in the world. They

worried that she would not be able to communicate when they are there. Ludwig and MS

spoke the same second language, what was actually for them their first language, Tamil.

When they were particularly passionate about a topic or were in a heated debate, their

accents thickened and they often switched to their "mother tongue" to continue their

conversation. When asked directly how he thought his bilingualism impacted his

intelligence, Ludwig saw little connection:

> A little, not- well, not too much because I can talk to other people in different
> languages, especially MS, so we both talk together in- so I can kind of
> communicate better with him, so he speaks to me in that language, and I will
> reply with English because I'm not that good at my language....I'm not great at
> speaking it. I'm still getting the hang of it....Yeah, because I actually learned
> English only in preschool, like- [something] before, probably. I only could speak
> my other tongue for so long.

Speaking in Tamil allowed Ludwig and MS to better communicate, even though Ludwig often replied in English. In fact, he thought that bilingualism was "just kinda like a cool skill. It just- it does help you, and it's a really good skill to have, 'cause especially when- if you travel, so you know Spanish and you travel to Mexico, you might be able to learn more from the people there" (Interview, 12/11/13). Using Tamil served another purpose, though:

> Yeah...I can communicate with him better because we know that-...It's kind of the comfort that nobody else can hear- know what you're saying, so if you're talking about something and people are like listening, and they're like, whoa, is that like twentieth grade math or something? Well, we don't actually talk like that, but that's not exactly the comfortable feeling that you get, so- (Interview, 12/11/13)

Speaking in Tamil provided a layer of privacy for Ludwig and MS when they discussed advanced academic ideas, thus protecting them from the judgment of their peers. Since Ludwig believed that he was "not great at speaking" Tamil, better communication then may mean the ability to speak freely without fear of a negative reaction from those around them.

MS, however, viewed bilingualism as a way to think differently about ideas, an act that literally "changes the way your brain thinks." When specifically asked in the final interview about whether and how his bilingualism interacted with his giftedness, MS had the following to say:

> Well, I think sometimes, it creates creativity because you can think about things in two different languages, and in two different languages, they might mean slightly different things, so then- say Ludwig and I. We speak the same second language, I guess you could call it. So we can interact on a different level, I guess you'd say, than the monolingual...-it changes the way your brain thinks. Not works. But like thinks, because if you- say you have- you know three languages. You can think about the same thing in three different ways. So that kind of helps out. (Interview, 12/13/13)

For MS, language shifts allow us to consider concepts in slightly different ways. Therefore, someone who has access to multiple languages would be at an advantage because they have various angles from which to consider an idea.

Granada describes how code switching indicates the ability to manipulate language (Castellano & Diaz, 2002), a documented strength for gifted learners. Additionally, Peal and Lambert's code-switching hypothesis (as cited in Castellano & Diaz, 2002) explains that children's ability to speak in multiple languages encourages cognitive flexibility which resulted in the bilinguals in their study outperforming the monolinguals. Bilingualism has also been shown to result in increased executive functioning including self-regulation, ability to transfer learning in abstract ways, and convergent and divergent thinking (Gonzalez as cited in Castellano & Diaz, 2002). There is evidence to suggest that the qualities of creative individuals are the same characteristics of bilinguals as well, including risk taking, perseverance and focus, curiosity, openness to new experiences, high intrinsic motivation, and a willingness to confront antagonism (Tardiff & Sternberg, 1988 as cited in Robisheaux & Banbury; Castellano & Diaz, 2002). Thus, creativity and bilingualism nurture each other.

So why are the students in this group identified as gifted while many other bilinguals are overlooked? First, more specific descriptive terms need to be used in order to delineate what type of bilingualism is present. Cummins (1984, as cited in Castellano & Diaz, 2002) describes incipient bilingualism as minimal ability in a second language, while those who are more capable but depend heavily on one language over another are referred to as dominant bilinguals. Balanced bilingualism is the most advanced level and

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refer to individuals who have equally developed competency in both languages. MS and Ludwig were balanced bilinguals who, although they were not as competent writing in Tamil, were able to use both languages for cognitive functions. Sapphire, May, and Markus were dominant bilingual as they could speak Chinese or Hindi conversationally but only put these skills into practice in certain contexts. In addition, all five bilinguals were fluent in English, as were their parents, and only three had a detectable, mild accent. In these cases, bilingualism was an additive benefit to the students. Since they were all conversationally and academically fluent in English and had grown up using English in various settings, language was not a barrier in standardized intelligence tests. Rather, their ability to interact and think in a second language only diversified the ways in which they were able to consider ideas.

"I've just been American in my life": Whiteness and Gifted Identity

Homedale Elementary made it a point to celebrate the cultural heritages of its students, most evident being an annual Heritage Night including food and information booths, a fashion show, and traditional dance performances. During both these celebrations and classroom discussions, students whose parents immigrated to this country (or students who themselves are immigrants) were easily able to identify and describe their cultural heritage. These students were the most vocal and participatory during these times. However, throughout my teaching career I have observed my White students struggle with this. They might be able to share that they are Irish or German, but they are aware of very little cultural information beyond perhaps one traditional dish.

While these students are sometimes generations removed from their family's home country, another explanation stems from theories of racism and whiteness. Tatum (1994) uses Janet Helms' model of white racial identity development to explain that many Whites do not see their racial category as significant. She calls this the "'what whiteness?" view.' Tatum contends that by failing to acknowledge the prominence of skin color in American society Whites also fail to acknowledge that racism exists. The "'what whiteness?" view' is a helpful lens to use in considering Tim's discussion of culture.

While five out of six Book Club members could be considered minorities[42], Tim was the sole white student in Book Club. When asked specifically to describe his culture, he provided a much different response than the other five Book Club members (Interview, 8/30/13):

> Sara: So how would you describe your culture?
> Tim: Culture, uh, I'm American. My grandmother's a bit Polish, so we, yeah. That's what I would say.

While the other members discussed at length the countries from which their families immigrated, the language they spoke at home, and the differences between their family's customs and values and those of mainstream America, Tim struggled to understand the question and describe his culture.

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[42] The students are minorities based on their ethnic and racial backgrounds. However, due to their status as middle and upper middle class citizens, for example, they may be considered at times part of mainstream America. In addition, the sole white student might be considered a minority within the group itself as the only student not of color. For the purposes of this study, I will use the term minority to refer to racial and ethnic minorities in the United States while I acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of my students' identities, some of which may position them as part of the majority. For further discussion on the complicated nature of the term 'minority,' see the section *Generalizations: "I'm not going to say they're racist…"*

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Yet throughout the study, Tim referred both explicitly and implicitly to his family's influence on his development, academically and more broadly defined. As the son of two teachers, Tim commented that his parents think education is "great. They got their jobs from it, and they love it" (Interview, 8/30/13). He shared that they made it clear to their children that "you've got to pay attention in school or you're not going to do much good in life" (Interview, 8/30/13). He also acknowledged that his parents had always encouraged him to participate in extracurricular activities, saying "There's a lot of things that I want to sign up for, and my mom and dad have always been like, sure, go ahead" (Interview, 8/30/13). It was also evident from his words and participation style that Tim was surrounded by popular culture at home. He was well-versed in topics of music, video games, film, and traditional sayings. His family took a cross-country road trip over the summer and regularly participated in activities around the community which enriched their lives with varied experiences.

Additionally, Tim was influenced by his family's faith and regular attendance at church. During a discussion on what groups actually make up the majority in different contexts, Ludwig considered who the authors of an informational text are referring to when they talk about the "majority." He inferred that that the authors had Christians in mind and Tim concurred: "Yeah, I can say that when I got to church there's a good amount of people there" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13). Later in the session, the group discussed the difference between religion and spirituality. Tim pushed the group to consider the intersection between religion and spirituality, adding "…there is the part of the other type of church- like, Jesus walking on water, or beholding into a fish or making

a guy lifted up…There is spiritual powers in that…" (Book Club 13, 12/9/13). It is clear

through his knowledge of the Bible and observations of church attendance that his faith

was a consistent part of his family life.

As Anzaldua writes "I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back"

(2007, p. 43), yet Tim either failed to make the connection between the values and

traditions embedded in his family life and that of culture or was, as sole White student in

the group, reluctant to discuss his cultural and/or ethnic identity. What makes students

think that *culture* insinuates a recent immigrant or minority? Milner and Ford (2007)

define culture as a dynamic term that goes beyond ethnicity and race to encompass

identity, class, economic status, sexuality, and gender. Formal and informal experiences

influence an individual in forming and reforming characteristics throughout one's life.

Had Tim expanded his view of culture to include a broader concept of what culture might

entail, he would have recognized the wide range of influences in his life as his cultural

background.

Even in the Final Interview (12/17/13), after Book Club sessions devoted

specifically to readings and discussion on culture, Tim was very brief in his answer to

questions of culture, failing to verbalize the rich culture his family truly has:

Sara:	So how do you think that your culture has impacted the fact that you're labeled as gifted? So, you know, you were born here in America.
Tim:	I was born here. [ ]
Sara:	In this community.
Tim:	Yeah, in this community. I've just been American in my life. My parents have.
Sara:	So do you think that affects-
Tim:	I think some of my grandparents-
Sara:	-that you're gifted?

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Tim: -has come here. I don't think it affects it at all.

In this excerpt, Tim not only provided a brief description of his culture, but shared that he did not feel that his culture affected his giftedness. He reiterated this belief later in the interview when asked specifically about the influence of his parents' jobs as teachers on his giftedness. "I don't think it's affected my giftedness at all" (Interview, 12/17/13). At the same time, Tim provided examples of situations that supported his view that experiences and exposure is necessary in order to spark interest in a topic which will lead to education and development of skill. During a discussion on the necessity of exposure to ideas, he used *The Little Mermaid*'s Ariel as an example; by seeing human objects, she was inspired to learn more about life outside of the sea (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). Thus, Tim seemed to hold strongly to two seemingly contradictory ideas: his belief that culture does not affect one's giftedness and that of the importance of exposure to experiences in order to inspire action and development of knowledge. What he did not do is connect the two ideas. While he acknowledged that family can provide the experiences necessary to inspire knowledge and skill, he did not see a family's culture as the source of those experiences. Might Tim's lack of defining his culture be related to his belief that his culture does not affect his giftedness?

The influence of the family

Traditionally, family background has been considered a major factor in school achievement. However, the term is too general and encompasses at least three types of capital: financial, human, and social (Coleman, 1988). First I will describe the ways in

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which the influence of the family is discussed in the literature on giftedness. Then I will use Coleman's expanded definition of family background to complicate the more traditional perspective.

Families of children with high IQs tend to have high standards for education and expect academic achievement from their children (Friedman & Rogers, 1998). To that end, they consistently check homework, are aware of curricular demands, and work to provide extra practice for their children in regards to academics. These families are also active in seeking out intellectual and cultural activities for the entire family to participate in. They value conformity to conventional values which causes parents to pressure their children to follow directions at school and do well academically. At the same time, students with high IQs tend to come from families who are child-centered and spend quality time together, resulting in a close bond between family members and the development of resilience. In contrast, families of creatively gifted students tend to value independence and nurture the ability to think and operate independently in ways that differ from traditional society. Parents seem to have a more unconventional parenting style and emphasize the importance of varied thought and feeling rather than conformity.

Coleman's (1988) description of the three types of capital that make up family background is helpful in complicating the perspective from literature on giftedness. He contends that there are at least three components to family background: financial capital, human capital, and social capital. Financial capital is measured by a family's income and provides physical resources that support academic achievement. Human capital includes parents' education level while social capital consists of the relations between family

members. Social capital is necessary in order for children to benefit from any human capital their parents have. Parents must be physically present and provide attention to the children. Yet these are generalizations and are not inclusive of all families of children with academic success or high IQs. Neither is it accurate to say that all families who have high academic expectations, spend quality time together, and have conventional values produce children with high IQs. Coleman's theory does, however, emphasize the influences of family on achievement beyond socioeconomics and parents' educational background. While key in breaking down assumptions about the direct relationship between family wealth and intelligence, educators must keep in mind the interconnected nature of financial, human, and social capital. A family's financial situation may affect their ability to be physically present or provide certain opportunities for their children. In addition, standardized measures of intelligence are confounded by language and cultural biases. Therefore, while elements of family background may correlate with high IQ, because IQ may not even be a valid measure of intelligence, the correlation does not imply that family background causes intelligence. Rather, family background causes the conditions that do or do not align with mainstream definitions of intelligence.

"I definitely would not be in the MG program if not for my mom.": Family Influence on Book Club Members

Although a generalization, the description of the family of a child with a high IQ correlated with that of all six participants. Both MS's parents were highly involved in his education, attending all parent-teacher conferences and open houses and sending and responding to teacher emails frequently. They sought out extra-curricular opportunities

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for MS such as Envirothon, Reading Olympics, and Science Fair. They encouraged him to participate in non-academic areas as well and supported him with gymnastics, cricket, and chess. When I passed along information about local events that I thought might be interesting to my students, MS and his family often attended. Beyond this, MS believed his giftedness was due heavily to the efforts of his mother: "I definitely would not be in the MG program if not for my mom. She didn't- doesn't- still doesn't have a job because she chose not to work and instead she sat with me and taught me so many things" (Interview, 8/29/13). He felt thankful that his mother could put all her efforts on his particular needs since "she knows exactly what I'm struggling with" (Interview, 8/29/13). She focused particularly on math, pressuring him to use the online component of the math curriculum for extra practice and study for about forty minutes before school and an hour after school. Although MS felt weighed down by the high expectations of his parents, he also appreciated their good intentions and believed that they were for his own benefit and that he would see the results of their labors: "I think that definitely helps because sometimes it's on the same level that we do here at MG. Sometimes it's more something like that. We'll, sometimes when it's on the same level, it's kind of like enrichment. And sometimes it helps push me even farther, than- even farther" (Interview, 12/13/13). Thus, although sometimes the work his parents assigned him was basic, at other times they pushed him to challenge his thinking and use his skills to solve higher order thinking problems.

Like MS, Ludwig's family highly valued academics and emphasized to Ludwig the need to respect his teachers and put in his best effort in school. An only child, Ludwig recognized his mother's influence on his academic ability:

> My mom, from a young age, she made me do Singapore math... Textbooks, yeah. So in kindergarten and all- and the school, it was a Montessori school, so started doing like two-digit by one-digit multiplication by kindergarten, and then with that, the Singapore math, that like- that gave me the problem-solving skills and more operations like division and stuff was hardest to learn, so my mom kept making me do the problems and do the problems. Set of nine- there was nine problems on a page, and I did it once, and most of them were wrong. She erased the whole thing, made me do it again like ten or fifteen times 'til I got it, so finally, yeah...So I did division by first grade. (Interview, 8/30/13).

Ludwig's mother surrounded him with educational experiences, especially relating to math. She placed him in a Montessori pre-school/kindergarten in which the educational philosophy and structure supported learning at one's individual pace. In addition, both his Montessori school and his mother taught him using Singapore math, a very language based, challenging math program that is heavily based on problem-solving rather than rote computation. The fact that his mom required him to redo problems repeatedly until he mastered them is another indication of her dedication and desire to impress upon Ludwig values of hard work and persistence. He attributed some of that dedication to academics to his family's culture:

> Yeah. So culture- you're- we respect books, and so- we- that's not making a big impact, but we focus a lot on academics, so that- 'cause my mom used to buy me Singapore math books. So we focused a lot on academics, so that's why now, I guess, I'm pretty much in the gifted program. That's the reason. (Interview, 12/11/13)

It is puzzling that Ludwig did not consider his culture's respect for books as "making a big impact," but he acknowledged his culture's emphasis on academics in general. In

fact, he directly attributed his giftedness to the intense focus on academics he experienced

while growing up. Perhaps Ludwig's parents provided so many academic experiences

outside of school because they felt that the school system is not challenging enough:

> Sometimes they think it's a little too easy. So they should like ramp it up a good
> bit...They- sometimes they tell me, like, they tell this is really simple. And I really
> know how they feel because you always start- especially when you had the
> Pearson for math, you always start with place value and you went like two place
> values higher every grade, and you can tell that my parents think that it's really
> easy and that's not the way to really do it. (Interview, 8/30/13)

Ludwig commiserated with his parents when they observed that coursework was not

demanding. His example from the Pearson math resource illustrated his frustration with

curriculum that spirals year to year, only minimally building on each skill. His parents'

philosophy that "that's not the way to really do it" was extended to the ways in which

they supplemented Ludwig's educational experiences.

May, Sapphire, and Markus also acknowledged the influence of their families,

and especially their moms, in supporting their academic development. May's parents

encouraged her when she was stuck on a math problem but also provided extra

worksheets when the content did not appear to be challenging enough. Sapphire's

parents had a similar approach and assigned her pages from a workbook daily from

kindergarten on. She observed them debating over which electives her older brother

should take in high school with the ultimate goal of preparation for college in mind,

voicing their view that "you need to go to school because it's very hard for you to get

jobs and stuff if you don't go to school" (Interview, 9/6/13). The most influential action

they described, though, was their parents' emphasis on the importance of continued

challenge. Five out of six of the Book Club members participated in some sort of formal

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academic work outside of school, whether it be Kumon, Chinese school, or organized extra work on subject-specific materials. All six participated in extra-curricular activities including chess, gymnastics, music lessons, and Scouts. Although they failed to discuss the topic more deeply, both May and Sapphire brought up the idea that some families might not be able to provide such opportunities for their children even though they greatly value education. As Sapphire stated, sometimes "the parent wanted to do well, but they had their own work…Then they both might be at work, and then they might not be able to help you…But they want to" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). May concurred, sharing that even if a parent is physically present with their child, they might not "have time to pay attention to [their] needs" (Book Club 11, 11/18/13). These issues of a family's inability to academically support their children in certain ways were somewhat foreign to these students, but they did attempt to understand such dynamics.

Critical Considerations

The Contextual Nature of Giftedness

Book Club members believed that giftedness varies around the world, but were fuzzy on what exactly that meant. Sapphire drew on her early elementary experiences in California to consider how another state made different identification and curricular decisions that our own in regards to giftedness. Markus used the fact that his parents did not have gifted programs in their schools in India to support his thinking that schools only provide for the types of giftedness that "they really know how to treat" (Interview, 12/13/13). Drawing on her reading of *The Gifted Kid's Survival Guide* (Galbraith, 2009),

May inferred that different provisions for giftedness implies how much value a society puts on giftedness. While all participants thought definitions, identification, and services would differ depending on context, they used Book Club to explore what that might mean in practice as well as the reasons behind those differences.

MS acknowledged that different cultures may value certain types of giftedness over others and that that belief might have an effect on the identification process, school design, and life opportunities. In some ways, he thought giftedness was the same everywhere because it meant "excelling at something." However, the specifics of that could look very different depending on the context: "But then some people view that differently. In some countries, they tend- like, I guess, they tend to view gifted as something else, whereas here, we view it as something else…Here, like academics mostly. Maybe in some other country, if you're really skilled at like, I don't know, flying an airplane" (Interview, 12/13/13). Phillipson and McCann (2007) describe the ways in which conceptions of giftedness tend to be Euro-American, but emphasize that "inherent in any conception of giftedness is the particular way of looking at the world and of thinking" (p. xi). When asked about whether the expectations people in the United States have of gifted learners would be the same throughout the world, MS had the following to say:

> MS: Probably a lot of places. A lot of places, they would, but some places, I think they wouldn't- that everybody- I don't know. I've heard of this communism kind of thing.
> Sara: Communism?
> MS: Yeah.
> Sara: Mmhm.
> MS: Yeah, like everybody gets paid the same amount of money whatever they do.

Sara: So in a place like that, you're thinking that gifted learners-
    MS: You wouldn't be rewarded much. It's not going to help you much
           in life.

Here, MS used his awareness of different types of societies to consider the ways in which

the economic structure of a culture affects the motivation for a gifted student to achieve.

Interesting here is that MS had discussed at length his belief that giftedness should not be

used for economic or selfish reasons but to procure a job which can be used to help

others. Yet here MS seemed to focus on the monetary outcomes of achievement. Later,

he considered the cultural values of a society and how they might affect giftedness:

> Well, I guess Indians, at least the Indians I know, they tend to really want
> education a lot more because they think that's the way to go in the long run,
> which I also agree with. And because I was brought up that way. And then some
> other people might think, well, kind of, I don't know. Be in the moment, try to
> enjoy whatever you have. (Interview, 12/13/13)

As Phillipson and McCann point out, "inherent in any conception of giftedness is the

particular way of look at the world and of thinking. Different conceptions of giftedness,

therefore, imply different ways of looking at the world and different ways of thinking"

(2007, p. xi). MS demonstrated here that the traditionally Indian way of looking at the

world with the goal of progressing throughout the educational system is inherently

different from that of living in the moment. Thus, each life philosophy would imply a

different definition of giftedness based on the values held by that group.

    The ways in which we define giftedness impact the identification process we use

and the instructional mechanisms we embed into the schools in order to meet the needs of

the gifted learner. MS recognized that the needs of the gifted learner are dependent on

the ways in which we define giftedness and that the educational opportunities provided

should correlate with the specific strengths and levels of the student. Consequently, MS did not believe that he would be identified as gifted in any school throughout the country or the world and that that would be appropriate based on his individual profile: "Gifted anywhere? Definitely not, because if I went to ASD, I guess I might be able to cope, but then, say there was a school ten times harder than ASD. No way. Like everybody- if the worst student was two hundred IQ, I could not" (Interview, 12/13/13). Thus, for MS, giftedness does not have a single definition nor is there a single educational program to meet the needs of all gifted learners.

Perhaps because Tim did not have a clear definition of what his family's culture consisted of, he did not realize how intertwined his culture was with his giftedness. Markose and Hellsten (2009) demonstrated that parent involvement, interactive styles, beliefs, and practices have been found to impact school achievement. As Tim's parents' values and actions aligned with those of the mainstream, he was supported in developing the intellectual and behavioral styles valued by the school system. As a middle class white student whose family values education and enriching experiences, Tim had a great deal of social capital (Bankston III, 2004). As Nieto (1999) stresses, learning can be fostered or hindered by many influences, including school conditions and climate, attitudes and beliefs of educators, cultural capital, and cultural differences that influence learning.

While Tim had a strong belief that there are many types of giftedness, he was unsure about how this would manifest itself around the world. "Yeah, maybe in a couple places, it's…changed. Maybe there's like, in a couple places, some people like change it

somehow. I'm not really sure how that could go down…" (Interview. 8/30/13). He was

also reticent to make judgments about particular areas of the world, acknowledging that

although he thinks giftedness can be different from person to person, "…not place to

place, 'cause that's sort of racial[43]," yet Tim acknowledged that giftedness can depend on

"what you expect from [someone]" (Interview, 8/30/13). In regards to identification of

giftedness, Tim felt that IQ tests do not appropriately identify all types of giftedness:

> Like, why do we have to have the IQ thing? Why can't we just, if we're good at
> something, that's not IQ. That's just being really good at it, and IQ usually refers
> to smarts. A lot of people have skills in other things that don't involve smarts, and
> they get a good life off doing those things. Why do we have IQ tests? Why can't
> we just take a test that doesn't measure an IQ, and if we're really good at
> something, we can get in… (Interview, 12/17/13)

As Sternberg acknowledged (Phillipson & McCann, 2007), there are certain aspects of

intelligence that are universal across cultures, common processes such as the ability to

recognize a problem, determine appropriate resources to solve the problem, set up

strategies, and evaluate solutions. However, the contexts in which these processes are

applied vary greatly by culture and individual areas of focus. For example, the

challenges a child in a remote African village would face would be very different from

those of a suburban American child. Unfortunately, the processes *and* structures that

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[43] In the Model Minority section, I discussed Lee's concept of colormuteness as the way schools avoid using racial terms in an effort to circumvent engaging in conversation about race. Perhaps as a White student in a group of minorities referring to non-Whites around the world, Tim was colormute in this case. As Pollock (2001) points out, "framing achievement publicly in racial terms seems evidence of 'racism' itself" (p.2). Tim specifically avoided using any language that he thought would indicate racism. As DiAngelo and Sensoy (2014) contend, the elimination of racial talk in an effort to maintain a safe environment may in fact prevent us from "self-knowledge and social insight" (p.127). They found that White students can assume unity with peers of Color and avoid using racial terms that explicitly break that unity. Tim's reticence to speak not only in racial terms but use language that might even hint at racism demonstrated his desire to be an ally with his non-White peers or at least retain a feeling of unity with them.

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identify make up intelligence are assumed to be the same in all cultures and therefore a

single test, the IQ test, is typically assumed to accurately identify giftedness regardless of

the culture from which a child comes. Thus, IQ testing becomes an arbitrary measure of

intelligence chosen to represent what is truly just one type of intelligence rather than

approaching students with an additive view which acknowledges various forms of

knowledge (Nieto, 1999).

> At the end of the study Tim's fleshed out his ideas a bit more:

> Like there's different types of giftedness all over the world, but that not like, in one country, they're really good at math. In one country, they're great at science. In one country, they're great at language arts. In one country, they all grow up to be historian. No, they all- I don't mean it like that. I mean, every person is capable of having a gift. Just some people choose not to. (Interview, 12/17/13)

Thus, Tim retained his belief that there are multiple ways of being gifted and that these

are all possibilities across the world. However, he also held on to the idea that giftedness

is a *choice* one makes.

Generalizations: "I'm not going to say they're racist…"

Ludwig had a passionate reaction to the informational readings on culture and

giftedness. The students were given excerpts from six texts along with focus questions

for thought: *What do culture and ethnicity have to do with giftedness? Who is being*

noticed? Who is being ignored? While some of the readings discussed more generally

the ways in which different theorists have thought culture and intelligence to intersect, a

selection from Ford and Harris III (1999) presented a brief overview of the traditional

values of a particular culture along with a chart contrasting them with those of traditional

American society. One is depicted below while the others can be found in Appendix.

The authors also constructed a chart that compared the minority values to those of

mainstream America, seen below.

Figure 5.2 Comparative Framework of the Preferred Learning Styles of Minority and White Students

White Students	*Minority Students*
Abstract thinkers	Concrete thinkers
Deductive thinkers	Inductive thinkers
Field-independent learners	Field-independent learners, contextual and situational learners
Individualistic, independent learner	Interdependent, social, cooperative learners
Require/prefer less structure, direction	Require/prefer more structure, direction, specificity
Seek academic meaning	Seek relevance—personal meaning and significance
Kinesthetic learners	Kinesthetic & tactile learners
Verbal, auditory	Visual, spatial

Sources: Boykin (1994); Irvine & York (1995); Saracho & Gerstl (1992); Shade (1994); Shade, Kelly, & Oberg (1997)
Note: These characteristics are to be used as a "framework" or guideline for understanding diverse cultural groups and targeting their needs and strengths.

Table 5.1: Ford and Harris III's Comparative Framework of the Preferred Learning Styles of Minority and White Students (1999, p.75)

Figure 1.5 Comparative Framework: Asian American and White American Values and Traditions

Traditional Asian American Values	**Traditional White American Values**
Confucian ethic—strong work ethic centered on effort and persistence	Protestant work ethic—Strong work ethic centered on ability and personal characteristics
Academic orientation— status by effort	Academic orientation—status by ability
Family honor and tradition	Individualistic
Past, tradition	Future, change
Nonaggressive, cooperation	Aggressive, competition
Multilingual	Monolingual
Mutual interdependence, collectiveness, group welfare, public conscience	Independence, self-reliance, individuality, privacy
Harmony with nature	Mastery of nature
Conformity, correctness, obedience to adult authority and elders	Challenge, question adult authority

Table 5.2 Ford and Harris III's Comparative Framework: Asian American and White American Values and Traditions (1999, p.10)

Ludwig felt strongly about the validity of those charts:

> So all these charts, they're- I'm not going to say they're-race- I'm not going to
> start- I'm not going to say that they're racist because they're not, first of all. But
> they're not actually- well, first of all, if you go to page sixteen, verbal and
> auditory and visual and spatial- I'm actually both verbal and auditory and visual
> spatial. But I don't even know what to say. (Book Club 10, 11/11/13)

It was important to Ludwig that he was not labeling the charts as racist, and in fact he

stated that he didn't believe that they were. Yet when he described his thoughts about

them, he clearly identified generalizations and assumptions that he felt were

oversimplifications[44].

> Ludwig: Yeah, so now seek academic meaning. Seek relevance. I'm kind
>   of in the middle, there, too. Require prefer less structure, direction.
>   I'm actually in mainly like the White category.
> Sara: Okay, so, although you would be labeled as a minority student-
> Ludwig: They shouldn't even make this chart.
> Sara: -you feel like- you feel like it's not-
> MS: Accurate for-
> Sara: It's oversimplifying-

As Ludwig attempted to place himself on the chart, he realized that as an Indian, he

would be considered a minority, yet his learning styles just as often correlated with those

attributed to Whites or even somewhere "in the middle." He also troubled the term

minority:

> Ludwig: And first of all, I'm not a minority student-
> MS: Yes.
> Ludwig: There's more Indians than Americans right now. Much more
>   Indians.
> Sara: So even calling-
> MS: Yes.
> Sara: -someone of color a minority might not be-
> MS: Exactly.

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[44] The previous section concerning The Model Minority complicates the use of racial groups to explain and
compare immigrant literacy practices.

Sara: -a valid-

Ludwig was astute in his troubling of the term minority. If minority referred to the group

with smaller numbers, mustn't the group the term referenced shift over time as population

changed? MS added on to Ludwig's concerns by considering the negative connotations

of the term.

> MS: My question was, one thing I asked was, why did they call it
> minority culture? Get the impression that whoever wrote that thought that
> minority cultures are inferior.
> Ludwig: But the cultures are kind of- cultures are kind of like-
> May: They're all important, though.
> Ludwig: There are more-
> MS: Yeah, calling someone minor-
> Ludwig: -Christians than Hindus, and most Hindus are darker, and they
> might be saying kind of culture-wise, so there might be more
> Christians than- there are definitely more Christians, so they might
> be calling Christians- the- kind of the major, because they're-
> Sara: The majority?
> Ludwig: -yeah-
> Tim: Yeah, I can say that when go to church-
> Ludwig: Yeah.
> Tim: -there's a good amount of people there.
> Ludwig: 'Cause I go to- I'm not a Christian. I'm a Hindu, but if you say it
> by minority and white students, basically they're saying white students
> and darker students, that is a complete fail.

MS considered an alternate meaning of 'minority,' taking the word part *minor* versus

major to point out the negative connotation the word has taken on over time. Rather than

an objective reference to the number of people from a particular culture, minority and

majority have come to suggest inferiority and superiority respectively. Ludwig then

considered whether the chart was truly describing race or culture. By simplifying the

chart to compare White to Minority many groups were, in essence, combined into one for

purposes of comparison, and "that is a complete fail."

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Ludwig: But if they did it by culture, instead of saying white students,
    say, uh, Christianity or Judaism or-
Sara: So being more specific in what they mean by that?
MS: That kind of thing.
Ludwig: And then for minority students- instead of minority students,
    they put Hindus, no, Muslims would be in the majority. The
    Confucianism, right? Those would be majority, then.
May: But they talk about-
Ludwig: So depending on how you put these, if you put it by-
MS: Are you saying-
Ludwig: -skin, which right now, that's what they're doing-
Sara: Right.
Ludwig: -we might be the minority, but when you put it by culture, then
    we might be the majority, so.
Sara: Okay, so, you're saying that skin color does not necessarily equal
    culture.
Ludwig: Culture, yeah.

Ludwig emphasized that the ways one labels a person determines whether they are part of

the majority or minority. Similar to how Tim illustrated the relative nature of giftedness

by sorting pencils first by eraser and then by lead tip, Ludwig demonstrated how the ways

in which we categorize people are complex and therefore the labels tentative.

Ludwig: There's so many- one African American- even Barack Obama.
    Take him. He- his- if you look him up on Wikipedia, his religion, it's
    listed as Christian.
Sara: Okay.
Tim: Huh.
Ludwig: Yes. That's true.
Sara: So his religion would-
Ludwig: And a lot of-
Sara: -put him in the majority, you're saying?
Ludwig: -South Americans, even a lot of- some Chinese people are- they
    have been converted over-
Tim: I didn't know.
Ludwig: -some time to Christian, the family itself, so- in Christianity
    itself, you might have very dark people, very dark skin, then you might
    have, like a lighter skin, kind of. Well, not complete like- like real white
    skin, but kind of like-
Markus: Tan.
Ludwig: -tan, yeah, tan, like South Americans, same as, or the- near the

Equator, where there's a lot of sun. Some kind of tanner- tan people. And a lot of them have been converted. And then finally there might be white people. They have all- they have been- they have come from Britain, so they must have come- Britain, the main thing was Christianity, so they might have come and become- and so in Christianity itself, you have all different colors of skin. Which is really not the way to categorize this. It's not the way-

For Ludwig, skin color did not signify culture. He provided Barack Obama as an example of someone whose skin color would identify him as a minority but whose religion would put him in the majority. By referencing South Americans and Chinese who have converted to Christianity, he demonstrated that religion can be completely separate from race, ethnicity, and nationality. To build on that idea, MS used a Venn diagram to describe the complex ways in which our many labels intersect:

Sara: So we are- we each simultaneously are in all these different groups.
Ludwig: Exactly. Because first of all-
Sara: Some of which are the majority. Some of which are the minority.
MS: It's like-
Ludwig: 'Cause you can also say-
MS: -a bunch- a huge-
Ludwig: Dark students-
MS: -Venn diagram with a bunch of different circles.
Ludwig: -focus on- focus on academics. You cannot say that. But you can say Asians, say- because- yeah, Asians can- Asians focus on academics.
Sara: Okay, so let's talk about this. In the following-
Ludwig: And Chinese people, they're not really dark. You cannot tell them like Hindus or like those people, you cannot- they're completely different skin colors because-
Sara: So in some of the following pages, the charts are a little bit more specific because it says, traditional American Indian culture values versus traditional white American cultural values.
Ludwig: I think this is the better way-
Sara: And it's African Americans-
Ludwig: -to categorize this.
Sara: Rather than that first one?
May: And then over here on the second-
Sara: You feel like the first one was way too broad. You can't even-
Ludwig: It's not even- it might not be broad, but it's not the correct-

Sara: Okay.
Ludwig: -way to categorize. You should categorize it by Asians and west-
           kind of the west, say, Americans.
May: If you go to- yeah, also if you go to-
Ludwig: Britain, that kind of thing.

Ludwig continued to trouble the notion of color as a way to categorize and describe

groups of people as too inaccurate a process. Instead, he favored grouping by culture (ie.

Asian, American, British) as a more specific and precise method of identifying

generalizations in values and habits.

Sapphire brought up an important point about the labeling of the chart and its

implications. The headings are labeled Traditional Values. The terminology of

"traditional" in itself illustrated a generalization of a culture so the descriptions could not

be used as a blanket statement of all members of that cultural group. She used the chart

describing Asian American values, a cultural group to which she is a member, to explain:

> I just wanted to say that if you go to page twenty, it's like the chart about the
> Asian American values, and then [   ] but then it says, on the last one, conformity,
> correctness, obedience to adult authority and elders, but I think that this- these
> articles are a bit outdated because on other charts, like this, it has stuff like- like
> it's starting to get more- it's not very modern, like, because these days, a lot of the
> cultures are starting to get more- I want to say, like, American, kind of- (Book
> Club 10, 11/11/13)

Sapphire pointed out that the values listed in the chart are more traditional Asian values

and that as generations are born in the United States and become more "American," they

move away from their traditional culture towards a more blended one. May compared

values to a pyramid tower of blocks to illustrate Sapphire's idea. While someone with

traditional values might have religious blocks in every level of the tower, a more

'Americanized' individual would have religion in the base level but it would get weaker

higher in the tower. May, Sapphire, and Ludwig each troubled the ways in which the text

simplifies such complex issues.

"It always refers back to this classroom.": Who Gets to be Gifted?

Whereas Ludwig's definition of giftedness was encompassing of many areas and

skills from the arts to academics to leadership to athletics, he acknowledged that "if

somebody says something about gifted, it always refers back to this classroom, who's

here, so it's usually the society actually defines gifted as similarly as schools do-

academic giftedness" (Interview, 12/11/13). Society has an "unwritten law" (Book Club

12, 12/3/13) in which they determine what behaviors and abilities, and therefore people,

are valued. Because of this dynamic, Ludwig believed that the gifted identification

process in American schools prioritizes certain learners over others:

> Okay. Prioritize certain learners over others. Technically, it has to be a yes, because especially when you're taking the test to get into the gifted program, sometimes the test itself is not your style of learning, so you can be ruled out just because of that, but you're actually really gifted…You should first ask the person how they learn or how they take a test, their favorite way, and then administer the test in that way. And then find out what their IQ is. You cannot just give a standard test for everybody because the people who actually learn that way- it's nice for them, but it's not nice for others. It's unfair. (Interview, 12/11/13)

Ludwig acknowledged the fact that intelligence tests favor certain people over others. An

advantage is given to those who have learning styles and educational backgrounds that

mirror those in the test. May considered the ways in which language may enhance or

limit one's performance on such tests. For example, if she were to take an English test in

China, she would appear to be extremely advanced when she might "just [be] really good

this subject because of the fact that I learned it already" (Book Club 10, 11/11/13).

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Conversely, there are many individuals and cultural groups who may be just as gifted but in ways not measured by traditional intelligence tests.

One reason for that is the incredible history of prejudice and oppression in (and outside) America. The reading on models of giftedness (Book Club 9, 11/1/13) included not only modern instructional models but theories of giftedness including the biological, sociological, and psychological views. Ludwig was particularly taken aback by Francis Galton's biological theory of giftedness:

Ludwig: -hope I'm not going to get in trouble for this. So I had that a genius might be born rather than made tends to lend support to racist and sexist ideas. I think that's very true. It just- since- especially since women never got an opportunity to learn before. If you follow Francis Galton's idea, you'd be saying a lot of women now only deep down.

Sara: Okay, so, in the sociological view, it's saying that it's criticizing the biological view, right? Because the biological view says you're born with it or not, right?

May: It's not like-

Ludwig: I get-

May: -your gender means you're smart.

Ludwig: -is sociological view-

May: Your family is smart, so you must be smart.

Sara: Exactly.

May: It's actually just like, you have it, you have it.

MS: Well-

Ludwig: So that's the same that- it's really not fair, like, Cheryl Sandburg is this CEO of Facebook, right?

Markus: No. Mark Zuckerburg.

Ludwig: No, he's not CEO.

Markus: He really is. Happened recently?

Ludwig: I don't think so. So she gets a multi-billion dollar company, and she's the head of it, so it's such a popular name, Facebook.

May: What does that have to do with this?

Ludwig: It's a social- commonplace. It's such a massive company, so there's a woman leading that, and you cannot trace them- their family down, and-

Markus: There'd be no shame.

Ludwig: -that if you go down the generations-

Student: You can't go on Facebook dot com and judge her because of her

ancestors.

Ludwig: -say great-grandmother or something or even great-great-grandmother, that'd be better. Say that they were brilliant, they were educated, you cannot say that.

While Francis Galton theorized that ability is natural and based on biological inheritance (Friedman & Rogers, 1998), Ludwig provided Facebook COO Cheryl Sandburg as an example of an incredibly able, accomplished woman who would be unable to trace her family lineage to other successful women far into the past not because of their lack of ability, but due to the lack of opportunities afforded to women at that time in history. He provided another example of how people of particular races were not given educational opportunities through time:

Ludwig: Even- let's say- also- example of another one is African American people. A lot of them- a lot of them that came here as slaves, their family, I think probably, a couple- many African American people here originated from families that were bonded with slavery. And now they're- Barack Obama, for instance. They- he is- he is the head of the most powerful country on the earth. He has the highest- he probably has the highest position of any person on the earth right now.

May: Really?

Tim: I guess. I-

Sara: Well, so, let me ask you this, Ludwig. So what you're saying is-

Ludwig: I disagree. I disagree completely.

Sara: Okay, the woman that you're talking about that is now the CEO of Facebook, obviously is very accomplished.

Ludwig: Yes.

Sara: Right? So a few hundred years ago, there were no women heading huge companies, right?

Tim: Duh.

Ludwig: Yeah.

Sara: And now there are. So does that mean that women have gotten more intelligent?

Tim: No.

Markus: Just 'cause we started to accept that everyone is the same. They can do a lot more things.

Ludwig: And also, over time, I think women have been educated more and that's led to- you cannot completely disagree with what's in here.

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May: Well, yeah, 'cause back then, they wouldn't let you-
Ludwig: But you can mostly-
May: -get educated.
Sara: So there's a difference between intelligence and education.
Ludwig: Yeah.
Markus: And some people didn't- they just believed- oh, woman can't do
           that. They're too-
MS: Only some people-
May: Work inside.
MS: Some poor- like, poor, meaning like I feel bad for them-
Sara: Right.
MS: -who are not like-
Sara: Not money-poor.
MS: Not money-poor. Those people who have that innate intelligence,
           they have that intelligence but then they're not given a good education, so
           they can't blossom that.

Ludwig, MS, Markus, and May emphasized the importance of education and opportunity in determining one's intelligence, ability, and success in life. They also recognized that the fact that most of the inventors they read about in their social studies text were men was not because women were not able, but that they were not given opportunities or recognition. Past oppression based on race and gender caused women and African-Americans in particular to be excluded from meeting their full potential and only over generations have "we started to accept that everyone is the same" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13). Because, as social scientists contend, those who are successful early have more of a likelihood of being successful later on (Friedman & Rogers, 1998), institutional racism and gender bias continue to be embedded in our school systems and will take time to be completely eliminated. May pointed out that even when opportunities are available, some people might feel pressured to fulfill certain roles "to keep the tradition in your family" (Book Club 9, 11/1/13).

Thus, the oppression of certain groups and cultures is not completely in the past. Even during the time of study, Ludwig felt that his native language was not welcome in school. "I think in school you're supposed to act more like not using your native tongue and like trying to be more American, like using your American accent and stuff like that" (Interview, 8/30/13). In a world in which technology allows us to communicate and travel around the globe easily, we continue to encourage sameness in explicit and implicit ways.

Conclusion

Theories that simplify the definition and influence of culture strengthen the idea that intelligence and race are innately linked (Noguera, 2004). Rather, the influence of culture on one's intelligence is intricately tied to issues of language, economics, and societal expectations. While at times it appears that these students were conscious of the ways in which assumptions about cultural groups affect gifted identification and programming, their actions also seemed to coincide with those of the model minority stereotype of success through hard work and perseverance. Milner and Ford (2007) emphasize the importance of considering the physical, psychological, and social spaces in which one lives when thinking about how one's culture emerges. As middle to upper middle class suburban students, these children lived simultaneously in multiple worlds, resulting in complex, multi-faceted identities influenced by not only their family's culture, but that of the greater community. Additional work needs to be done in order to support these students in critically examining issues of culture, ethnicity, and language in

ways that will increase awareness of the privileges they enjoy and break down

assumptions about the nature of giftedness.

CHAPTER SIX:
Findings and Implications

My observations as a classroom teacher led me to this study and, likewise, my experiences as a qualitative researcher strengthened my belief in the power and necessity of work that encourages students to be reflective, informed, and critical about their worlds. The results discussed in the previous chapters demonstrated the importance of engaging children in the use of text and dialogue to consider the tensions that exist in their worlds, both immediate and far-reaching. This chapter will summarize the findings of the study and provide implications for teaching and research.

Summary of Findings

Participants

Students used Book Club as a space to form and reform their identities, especially in regards to their label as academically gifted, and critically consider the implications of that label. By basing reflection and discussion off of a fictional text with strong characters to whom gifted learners can relate, students were able to consider their own positions within family, peer, and school contexts, supporting them in understanding both themselves and others (Dooley, 1993; Haslam-Odoardi, 2010) while informational text provided the research and historical perspectives that allowed participants to understand the greater context of gifted education. Participants had a strong belief in the power of hard work and effort; although they acknowledged that biology is a factor in one's intelligence, they felt that experience and determination could overcome any genetic

factor. Specifically, they viewed genetics as an opportunity for, not guarantee of, giftedness, as evidenced explicitly by their statements and implicitly by the metaphors they designed. This belief in a causal relationship between effort and intelligence only amplified the pressure the students' felt to seek perfection in all areas of their lives. If the students were in control of their achievement through hard work and dedication, what was stopping them from perfection other than themselves? As a result, book clubs such as this are necessary so that students are able to process collaboratively the various ways in which one might manage expectations from peers, families, and teachers.

Yet the relationship between dedication and intelligence is more complex than the group described. Although they troubled the idea that certain cultural, ethnic, or gender groups are biologically more able than others, these students have yet to critically reflect on the more subtle ways that the educational system works against minority groups. Perhaps due in part to the fact that five out of six participants were ethnic minorities themselves, participants especially held firm to the belief that minorities are capable without being conscious of the fact that other aspects of their identities may place them at an advantage in the system, overpowering the systemic discrimination they may have endured due to their minority status. They acknowledged the ways in which their families' values and actions influenced their intellectual abilities but only grazed the surface of considering the myriad of other factors including the implications of socioeconomic class on the experiences a family is able to provide their children, including how life circumstances may affect one's motivation, interest, and opportunity (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012). Additional work surrounding this

topic including reading and discussion centered on the American school system, school funding, and educational malnourishment would bring these issues to the forefront.

Yet the work students did was meaningful and multi-faceted. In a dialogic space structured much differently from their typical reading classes, students engaged in dialogue that went far beyond the superficial to demonstrate, and perhaps develop, agency. They acted as sounding boards for each other, resulting in validation as well as generative conflict. Students used the space to participate in creative reading, applying new insights and using the text as a springboard for imaginative thinking (Catron & Wingenbach, 1986; Dooley, 1993). This was not merely a group for reviewing text nor was it solely an opportunity for self-reflection. Rather, Book Club became a transformative space in which members intertwined text, dialogue, and thought in complex and recursive ways to prompt new conceptualizations and, ultimately, action[45].

Teacher Researcher

This particular Book Club transformed the way I think about teaching, learning, and the act of researching. While I had facilitated similar reading groups for about five years prior to this study, this group was unique in two important ways. First, the group had been together for a full year and had already formed a community of readers and thinkers. Little instruction on community building or complex conversation about text was necessary prior to the start of the novel discussions. In fact, this particular group

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[45] Because the study concluded and the participants moved on to middle school, I have no way of knowing the long-term impact of this work. It is my hope that participants will use their experiences in Book Club for action, both internally (further reflection, identity work, and feelings of self-worth and agency) and externally (in regards to their interactions with peers and adults, how they deal with social situations, etc.).

included the most advanced readers I had in my twelve years of teaching. This prompted me to grow as a reader and learner myself as I considered alternate methods of pushing my students' thinking in ways that capitalized on their strengths yet expanded their thinking about text. Second, this was the first time I used the Book Club forum as a formal research context. While Book Club had always been a space of comfort for me, a place where I felt more of a fellow participant rather than authority figure and I remained open to letting the students shape the way conversation developed, the element of research added a layer of formality that affected me in ways I didn't expect. It complicated my role in the group and influenced my participation in meaningful ways.

The role of teacher-researcher is splendidly and frustratingly complex. As discussed in Chapter 2, I relished the insider status that researching my own classroom provided me, yet it presented its unique challenges as well. Most significantly, I struggled with issues of power throughout the study. As I described the research to my students, answered their questions, and elicited their assent, I attempted to communicate that it was completely acceptable for them to choose not to participate in the study. However, I questioned my ability to do so, unable to ignore the power inherent in my position as their teacher. When three out of six participants signed the assent form immediately, I found myself encouraging them to take it home and think about it before turning it in. They refused, saying they knew they wanted to participate so they would rather just turn it in then. Looking back, I wonder whether it was even my place to try to persuade them to take more time with their decision. In an effort to put more of the

power in their hands, did I reinforce the power I held as their teacher? Who am I to know better how they should make their decision?

My dual role as teacher-researcher also complicated the frequency and nature of my participation. While I typically try to participate minimally but authentically, I found that in this Book Club I purposefully restricted my contributions to the conversations due to the desire to limit the effect of my own thoughts and opinions on the data. I wanted to ensure that the students' voices were at the forefront, but in the process I silenced my own. When I did contribute, I often shared my thinking when it was still very much in process, when I was almost thinking aloud rather than sharing a fully formed idea. In this way, I hoped to model mulling over an idea and demonstrate that even adults don't have all the answers. Yet when I had a strong opinion or felt more settled on my perspective, I kept quiet for fear that I would shape participants' thinking. Looking back, I realize that the very benefit of dialogue about text is the way readers build shared meaning. I very purposefully excluded myself from that conversation.

I included the students in the decision making process whenever possible. For example, although I provided a focus question each week they were not required to write or discuss it; it served as an optional starting point only. In addition, for the most part the students decided who would start off the conversation and contribute their ideas. While we read *Ungifted* the students also decided how many chapters to read each week. Since I had to pull together the informational text from various resources, I was in control of the amount of text during the second half of the study. However, the texts I chose were greatly influenced by topics that emerged from our Book Club sessions. For example,

when the students wondered about IQ, I pulled informational text about the history and purposes of the IQ test. Participants' talk also influenced the culminating tasks we completed. For instance, when I realized that the students often spoke in metaphor to explain their ideas, I asked them to write a metaphor for giftedness to illustrate their thinking at the end of the study.

Beyond involving students in the decision making process for Book Club, I wanted them to feel that they held some power over the research itself. Consent is not a single event, but occurs throughout a study. When I shared transcripts of the interviews and offered students the opportunity to revise their thinking I not only validated my data and allowed participants to have control over their words but provided my students a window into the research process. Additionally, based on their interest, I arranged for students to 'meet' our transcriptionist, Heather, via Skype. In all of these ways, I attempted to dismantle the traditional structures of power between teacher and student, researcher and researched. While I in no way believe that this was purely participatory research, I do feel that I made every effort to involve my students within the framework of teacher research.

Conducting not only research, but *this* research, has affected me profoundly and will forever change the way that I view literacy teaching and learning. While I enjoyed the process immensely I also realized how much I value my position as an elementary teacher. So while I certainly wish to keep one foot in the world of the academy, I plan to keep my other foot grounded firmly in the K-12 school system. In this capacity, I believe that I, along with other teacher-researchers, can truly work within and against the system.

In the subsequent sections, I will outline the ways in which my findings intersect with and make suggestions for policy, practice, and future research.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Programming for the Academically Gifted

While it is widely accepted that gifted programs should provide for the advanced academic needs of the learner, experts in the field also suggest that instruction must include social-emotional work that supports students in understanding themselves and their place in the school system (Grant, 2002; Renzulli, 2012; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007; Zuo & Cramond, 2001). Not only would this mean educating the child holistically, but such an approach would result in higher achievement as well (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012). A strong sense of identity and belonging coupled with positive learning behaviors results in higher performance. Participants demonstrated a need for this type of instruction. They used Book Club as a space to consider the complex dynamics of their social world and form and reform their place in the school system.

This work would not have been possible without a community of dialogue. Fecho, Coombs, and McAuley (2012) argue for the establishment of a critical dialogue in literacy classrooms, claiming that a "failure to do so will result in yet another generation of students, and an ever-growing number of teachers, who will perceive school more as a place for serving time and less as a nexus of making meaning of the lives they co-construct" (p. 477) while Noble, Subotnik, and Arnold (1999, as cited in Zuo &

Cramond, 2001) posit that self-knowledge is a key component of exceptional achievement. Purposeful reflection and collaborative discussion support both self-knowledge and meaning making. Roeper (1996, p. 18 as cited in Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012 p. 180) goes beyond knowledge of self to emphasize the importance of gifted education that focuses on not only the individual but "his/her responsible membership in the world community." Participants grappled with the notion of responsibility to use one's gifts for the greater good. They felt the weight of the world on their shoulders and it should be part of the gifted support teacher's job to support students in understanding and responding to this pressure. As a group positioned as different from their peers with unique characteristics and social-emotional issues (Grant, 2002), it is imperative that gifted learners be exposed to instruction that prompts them to consciously consider the world's structures of power, knowledge, and inequality (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). For gifted readers, the use of literature is a natural context for this work.

Dialogue as a Democratic Practice in Literacy Classrooms

By opening up a space for dialogue surrounding literature, I supported participants' engagement in thoughtful discussion that empowered them to be mindful of themselves and others (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). This model shifts the roles of teachers and students, builds a community of practice in which all voices are valued, and increases participatory engagement. Participants appreciated the opportunity to shape the conversation in authentic ways rather than follow a script laid out by the teacher, an idea

all six students shared during interviews. In dialogue, critical consideration of text results in a process that is just as valuable as the product (Wile, 2000). Listening and responding to alternate viewpoints may increase comprehension of text, but the greater value is in the opportunity to transact with literature collaboratively in ways that make us conscious of the oppression in the world. As Bohm states, "dialogue is something more of a common participation in which we are not playing a game against each other but with each other" (1996, p. 7 as cited in Scholl, 2010). Thus, structures of power are dismantled. Curricular structures must have at their center students' questions and teachers' ability to "meddle, model, and mold" (Scholl, 2010) these questions to blend student interest with desired outcomes. When space is made for student voice, the conversation broadens and inhibits domination of individuals or groups. Time should be made in literacy classrooms for such dialogue.

When students are asked to participate in dialogue about text through methods such as Socratic Circles, it is important to remember that these structures enact democratic goals but do not necessarily address social hierarchies (North, 2009). This structure is aligned with Western middle class expectations for behavior and thus do not support the learning and communication styles of all students. Nor does it guarantee students will critically consider issues of power and inequity. For example, although participants pushed back against stereotypes about minority groups and their lack of representation in gifted programs, they failed to consider fully other factors in gifted identification such as socioeconomic class and language barriers. However, the use of dialogue does disrupt the traditional role of the authoritarian teacher and broaden the

range of voices acknowledged as valid. Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991, as cited in Squires & Bliss, 2004) assert that there is a clear relationship between elementary teachers' beliefs about reading comprehension and their classroom practices. While structuring literacy instruction around student dialogue is an important step towards a more democratic classroom, teachers are "high-status participants who set the tone and direction for many literacy events and so the nature of teacher talk is particularly important" (Short et al., 1999, p. 377).   Opening up space for student voice encourages learners to take on leadership roles, challenges them to think deeply about core societal issues, and demonstrates the teacher's belief that their ideas are valid.

The Role of the Teacher

Teachers need to consider the ways in which class structure and materials support dialogue surrounding literature. For example, they must carefully select texts that lend themselves to discussion about societal issues (McCall, 2010). Teachers should move beyond the assigned roles of traditional literature circles[46] to authentic dialogue, yet that does not mean the class is free of structure or teacher guidance. For instance, larger classes may need to be broken up into smaller groups in order to facilitate engagement (Gose, 2009) and teachers may need to model response during read aloud and guided oral discussion (Long & Gove, 2003-4). In addition, community norms should be established so that members can safely participate.

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[46] While the use of assigned roles like those set forth by Harvey Daniels (1994) have their place, especially in direct instruction on the multiple ways readers can respond to text, the purpose of the dialogic literacy classroom is to open up a space for students to respond in varied and authentic ways.

While dialogue positions the teacher as member of the collaborative group, he or she still has the responsibility to guide the students towards the goal of meaningful discussion (McCall, 2010). We cannot expect our young readers to be able to engage in such difficult work independently. Therefore, the teacher must be ready to intervene in discussions, whether to validate, acknowledge, or push students' thinking (Gose 2009; McCall, 2010; Rosenblatt, 1982). Gose (2009) identified the following Socratic strategies teachers can use to deepen conversation:

- Ask probing questions about the ideas and issues being discussed;

- Ask expansive questions about the relationships among ideas;

- Utilize the devil's advocate role and other comic relief;

- Spend time on group maintenance and the group process; and

- Take advantage of positions and roles taken on by others in the discussion.

These strategies keep students at the center by building on their ideas and guiding discussion to expand on them. Fostering such dialogue is not an easy endeavor. Subsequently, teachers should participate in professional development including viewing and debriefing videos of literature dialogues, reading about questioning techniques, and using self-evaluation templates (Mills & Jennings, 2011). Above all, teachers should support students in analysis, critical reading, and understanding while maintaining structures that keep student voice as the foundation for comprehension.

Implication for Research

Issues of Validity and Generalizability

One of the limitations of this study is that, for the purposes of the research, I was able to work with only six participants over the course of four months. Identity is fluid and complex (Moje et al, 2009), and in no way do I mean to claim that in such a short amount of time were we able to fully explore ourselves and our positions within the school system; understanding is a process. Assuming that the students were able or willing to be completely open with their thoughts and feelings would also be presumptuous of me. Yes, I believe that I had a close, trusting relationship with the participants, but I was still their teacher and a researcher and the book club's small group setting, while intimate, was not completely risk-free. Revealing ideas to one's self, let alone others, can be terrifying at times so I cannot assume participants' made full disclosure. Additionally, I have no way of knowing what the long-term effects of our work together might have upon the students' lives. A long-term or follow up study would be necessary to better understand these concepts.

The Belief in Meritocracy

Of interest is the contrast between the feelings shared by participants in Hertzog's study (2003), discussed in Chapter 1, and my own. While Hertzog found that the college students he interviewed had a sense of injustice that they had access to a better K-12 education than their peers, the students in my study shared the belief that they "earned" gifted support services and therefore did not feel guilty about receiving special treatment

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and increased opportunities. Rather, they saw the privileges they received as a fair reward for their hard work and dedication. What caused these differences in perception? Might participants' feelings change over time?

Additionally, I cannot assume that the ideas of these six students represent those of all gifted fifth graders; the results are context dependent (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Thus, similar research with gifted students from various socioeconomic, geographic, or educational contexts would provide a richer description of the experiences of the gifted elementary learner. Especially compelling would be work with gifted students from lower socio-economic classes or non-English speaking immigrants. These groups may have very different beliefs concerning the connection between effort and intelligence. My participants' belief in meritocracy was of course influenced in part by their positions as middle to upper middle class students whose parents are willing and *able* to support them with school work as well as provide them with a range of extra-curricular opportunities. How might a lack of finances or a difference in language affect a gifted student's beliefs in the causes of giftedness? How would those circumstances influence one's position as a gifted learner? Research with diverse groups of gifted students would work towards answering these questions.

Thinking in Binaries

Throughout the study, participants pushed back against gifted stereotypes while thinking in and reinforcing other binaries. For example, students actively resisted the idea of the gifted student as antithesis of the jock, as homework lover, teacher's pet, and

athletic failure. Markus complained about his peers' assumption that he enjoyed doing nightly homework while Tim pushed back against the assumptions peers have about the MG classroom: "…everyone comes up with their own version of it. Which is mostly us working. We're geniuses. No. It's not true. And I hate it" (Book Club 12/9/13, p. 19). Yet, when asked to draw a typical gifted student, five out of six students included stereotypical aspects including glasses, a bowtie, or a scrawny body type. Thus, despite their resistance to the stereotypes, at times participants seemed to reinforce the very assumptions they challenged.

Binary thinking was not limited to the concept of the gifted student. Participants applied binaries to characters in text as well, mainly in their clear delineation between good and bad characters. Similar to their views on gifted students, participants complicated the idea of the villain in narrative text in a way that seemed to break down the good/bad binary. They pushed each other to consider Voldemort's perspective, for example, emphasizing that Voldemort does not consider himself evil. Likewise, Dr. Schultz, superintendent in *Ungifted*, was only doing his job when he attempted to track down Donovan and punish him. Yet during conversation, they regularly referred to 'good' or 'bad guys' and even called Miss Bevalaqua the "Voldemort of the academy" (Book Club 10/4/13, p. 18). While at times the use of such binaries seems to support students in understanding how narratives work, they also simplify the nuanced ways in which people- both in text and in life- change and develop over time and in response to various contexts.

Additional research should focus on the tendency of students to rely on binaries to describe both lived and text worlds. In my study, students were more likely to resist binary though when the context was closer to their own lives, such as when they considered the ways their peers treated them when they returned from the gifted support classroom. However, when the topic was more global students seemed less likely to think consciously and critically about the polarized ways they characterized people as group members. Additional research might reveal the ways in which the use of binaries both aids and impedes one's understanding of both text and life.

The Expanded Role of the Transcriptionist

Further work should also occur to explore the possibilities of the expanded role of the transcriptionist. As discussed in Chapter 2, Heather Hurst was more than a transcriptionist to me. Although we began our work traditionally, her role shifted and she began act as a sort of co-researcher. As she returned transcripts to me, we found ourselves having unplanned collaborative conversations about the data and, as such, Heather provided the perspective of a not-so-outsider which in turn influenced my planning and thinking. We realized that although her impulse was to try to remain a neutral, uninterested party[47], our common educational backgrounds and personal relationship increased her interest in the study. While our roles were certainly

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[47] Transcription is traditionally considered a menial and time-consuming task and is often relegated to someone in a "lesser" role- a research assistant, graduate student, or outside service. Yet the process of transcription is now being recognized as a way for the researcher to get to know the data and participate in initial analysis (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998). The process as well as the product is valuable.

imbalanced, Heather knew my data intimately[48] and since she completed transcriptions during the data collection process her work was instrumental in allowing the data to help me shape the remainder of the study. Re-imagining the role of the transcriptionist would enhance the work of qualitative researchers in transformational ways.

In addition, researchers should consider the ways in which transcription affects the data itself. Transcription is traditionally assumed to be an authoritative text, one that precisely captures what participants have orally shared (Tilley & Powick, 2002). However, this positivist approach ignores the identity of the transcriptionist and assumes that it is possible for him or her to remain objective. Even when provided with a protocol, transcriptionists make decisions about how to represent the data, which in turn affect the researcher's interpretation and analysis. Furthermore, participants in my study were well aware of the disembodied other through the audio recorder. In fact, they established the routine of greeting her by name as soon as the recorder began and were sure not to "say anything fabulous" (Book Club 8, 10/25/13) until the recorder was on and Dr. Hurst was listening. We even had a Skype session at the end of the study so that participants could 'meet' her. How did the knowledge that their words were being not only recorded but transcribed, analyzed, and quoted in a dissertation influence the students' levels of participation as well as what they chose to share? In the weeks following the conclusion of the study, I observed an increase in off-task behavior and shorter, less complex conversations during Book Club and I attribute that to the students'

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[48] I realized during analysis that Heather knew my data better than anyone. No one else, even my committee members, had read my entire set of data.

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perception of Book Club as a more relaxed, less accountable environment. Further

research is necessary in order to determine to what extent and in what ways the presence

of an audio or video recorder and the knowledge of transcription affect students'

participation in dialogue within a study.

Implications for Society

Societal Shifts

Based on my research, major shifts must occur in society in regards to the ways in

which we classify students and consequently how individuals are treated at an individual

and systemic level. Data throughout the study revealed that students had conflicted

feelings about the gifted label. While they were proud of their abilities, they felt pressure

to live up to the assumptions that their parents, teachers, and peers had based on that

label. Although participants acknowledged various aspects of their identities, it was as if

the gifted designation overshadowed many of the other roles these students played at

home and school and in the community.

Arthur Kleinman's concept of social suffering can help us understand the ways in

which students respond to these dynamics. Kleinman (1997) describes social suffering as

the human consequences of and responses to social problems that are influenced by

institutional power. In this case, participants experienced mental, emotional, and

sometimes physical stress in response to the comments and actions of others. In addition,

they responded to others through various coping mechanisms[49]. When we choose to label students- gifted or otherwise- we publically declare their identity. While this label may allow for appropriate educational opportunities for students, it may also serve as a detriment to one's social-emotional identity. Thus, shifts in the systems that identify and provide for gifted students as well as in society as a whole need to occur in order for real transformations in the ways in which these students are treated.

Conclusion

Our students are deep, passionate, wide-awake beings who both are influenced by and influence the world around them. Using dialogue and text allows them to better understand the complex ways in which their abilities, passions, learning behaviors, and beliefs intersect with the expectations others have of them and how these expectations are shaped by historical and cultural forces. Due the label publically attached to them, gifted students in particular need to consider who they are as learners, thereby supporting these students in having agency over their learning as well as helping educators understand how to better meet their academic and social-emotional needs. Weaving identity work with a critical look at the many influences on the social constructs of giftedness will increase students' awareness of not only themselves, but the unique contributions every individual has to offer. As Sapphire noted, giftedness has many faces:

> Well, especially with the myth that…gifted kids have the bow ties, the baggy clothes, the glasses- like really thick glasses and all that, I think that might…have happened in the past, but it's not happening now. It's definitely not. But these

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[49] Refer to the Actions and Reactions section in Chapter 3 for discussion on the ways in which students responded to the expectations of others.

days, if you just look at them, it's like- they're just normal. It's like, they look exactly the same as everybody else. (Interview, 12/16/13)

Giftedness is all around us if we are only open enough to recognize it. Literature and

dialogue can act as a vehicle for exploring the giftedness in every student.

Appendix A

Slideshow Presentation

Slide 1

Welcome to Socratic Circle!

Slide 2

What is a book club and why do we have it?

What does "Socratic" mean?

How does it work?

How does it help us as readers?

Slide 3

What does a Socratic Circle look like?

<u>Before reading</u>- Miss Tilles does a brief intro, Readers preview the text

<u>During reading</u>- *What does it look like to prepare for book club?

<u>After reading</u>- Sometimes Miss Tilles will provide an initial question for discussion. Other times another book club member will start us off. Use your notes to support your conversation. At the end of the circle, identify a *Keeper Question* you'd like to continue thinking about.

<u>Finally...</u>- We will reflect on our Socratic Circle. What went well? What might we work on for next time? Decide what to read for next time.

Slide 4

What is research and why is Miss Tilles doing it?

-a systematic way to gather information and use it to make decisions
-final step to my education

What will it look like? Why us?
Student Assent

Slide 5

What does it mean to be gifted?

<u>To Do:</u>
Notebooks
What should we read for next week?
Letters of Assent

GORDON KORMAN

Letter of Assent

You're Invited!

Dear Students:

As many of you know, I love learning so much that I attend school at night! After many years of hard work, I am coming to the end of my doctoral degree. This includes completing a research study that will help me and others learn more about teaching, reading, and writing.

I would like to invite you to join me in my research study. As a teacher, I learn so much from you- my students- and spending each day with you makes me think about lots of things. Right now, I keep wondering…

➢ How do kids feel about being gifted? What does that mean to them?
➢ How does being in a book club help kids understand and think about text, especially when that text is about giftedness or difference?
➢ How does someone's ethnicity and culture influence whether they are identified as gifted in school?
➢ What is my part in helping my students think about these things?

<u>What will we do?</u>

From September through December, our weekly book clubs will focus on the above questions. We will read a novel and informational pieces together and maybe even additional novels or pictures books. I will also interview you one-on-one at the beginning and end of the study to learn more about your thinking. I will use my iPad and an audio-recorder to record our book clubs and interviews so that my colleague can later write down what we've said. It would be too hard to write it all down as we talk! I will also collect reading responses or visual work we create during book club.

<u>How will this help us?</u>

When we read, write, think, and talk it helps us understand who we are and how to make choices that help us achieve our goals. Book clubs help us better understand text and learn from the understanding of others. Your participation in this study will also help me be a better teacher. As I learn more about you and how you experience being a gifted student, I can help make changes that will benefit you and other gifted students in the future.

What if I don't want to be in the study?

That's okay! You will still fully participate in our book club. However, I will make sure that you do not appear in the video, your words are not transcribed, and you are not interviewed.

Will people know I am in the study? Will they know which words are mine?

Yes and no- I will use pseudonyms (change your name) when I transcribe our book clubs and interviews. However, other kids in the group might recognize who you are after the conversations are typed up. As always, we will all agree to be respectful of the other book club members' privacy and not share anything outside of the group without each other's consent. My advisor and my colleague who will help with transcription will also agree to keep things confidential.

I look forward to getting started!

Miss Tilles

Statement of Assent

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions I had, and I have received answers to my satisfaction. I agree to be a part of this study.

Signature of Student _____ Date _____

Name of Student (Please print)
_____

Appendix C

Weekly Readings and Focus Questions

Book Club # Date	Text	Focus Question(s)
Book Club 1 9/6/13	Letter of Assent	
Book Club 2 9/13/13	*Ungifted* (1-31)	
Book Club 3 9/20/13	*Ungifted* (32-100)	*What labels are used to describe *Donovan*? *What labels are used to describe *you*? *How do these labels affect us?
Book Club 4 9/27/13	*Ungifted* (101-147)	*Draw/describe a gifted person- I think a gifted person looks like this:
Book Club 5 10/4/13	*Ungifted* (148-201)	*What are the different aspects of a good education?
Book Club 6 10/11/13	*Ungifted* (202-247)	*What gifts are emerging for Donovan?
Book Club 7 10/18/13	*Ungifted* (248-end)	*What do their reactions say about how they view Donovan? Does one's giftedness depend on whether others view them that way? *Do we get to *decide* where we belong? Or is it out of our control?
Book Club 8 10/25/13	History and purposes of gifted education in the US Selections and adaptations from: -www.nagc.org -www.giftedjourney.com -Friedman & Rogers, 1998 -Ford & Harris, 1999 -Castellano & Diaz, 2002 -Phillipson & McCann, 2007 -*The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide*	*How does the history of gifted education in American influence what gifted programs are like today? *What do you feel should be the purpose(s) of gifted education programs?
Book Club 9 11/1/13	Models of giftedness, IQ and intelligence measures Adaptations from: -Phillipson & McCann, 2007 -Friedman & Rogers, 1998	*What does the information on IQ make you think about the characters in *Ungifted*? *Do you think IQ is an accurate way to measure someone's intelligence?
Book Club 10 11/11/13	Cultural influences/perspectives Adaptations from: -Phillipson & McCann, 2007 -Ambrose, Sternberg, & Sriraman, 2012 -Friedman & Rogers, 1998 -Ford & Harris, 1999	*What does culture and ethnicity have to do with giftedness? *Who is being noticed? Who is being ignored?

Book Club 11 **11/18/13**	Sources of giftedness, responsibility, and success Adaptations from: -Ambrose, Sternberg, & Sriraman, 2012 -Friedman & Rogers, 1998 -Book Club #2 -Book Club #4 - Book Club #5	*What makes a person gifted? *How do we become gifted? *Are we gifted forever? *Does being gifted guarantee success? *If you have a gift, must you use it?
Nov. 25	***THANKSGIVING BREAK***	
Book Club 12 **12/3/13**	Choice novels: *The Giver* *Gathering Blue* *The Dark is Rising* *A Wrinkle in Time* *Maniac Magee* *The View From Saturday*	*What is the relationship between difference and giftedness? *How do others react to someone who is different? *How do those who are different interact with the majority?
Book Club 13 **12/9/13**	Myths, negatives, and inequities surrounding giftedness -Selections from: -Book Club #3 -Book Club #4 -Summary of trends in Initial Interviews	*What are some myths about gifted kids? *What are some negatives about being gifted? *What are some inequities between gifted programs and regular education?
Book Club 14 **12/17/13**	Metaphors for giftedness and designing our own gifted program -Selections and adaptations from: -Ambrose, Sternberg, & Sriraman, 2012	*What metaphors can be used to describe giftedness? *What would your ideal gifted program look like?

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

Date and Time:	
Brief description of activity:	
Descriptive Notes	**Reflective Notes**

Appendix E

Initial Interview Protocol

Topic Domain: Identities

RQ1: What issues of identity do students consider when they transact with text surrounding themes of giftedness and difference?

- How would you describe yourself?
- How would you describe yourself within your family?
- How would you describe yourself at school?
- What are you like as a student?
- What are you like as a reader?
- You are in the gifted program. What makes you gifted? What do you like about being gifted? What don't you like about being gifted?
- What are your favorite aspects of school?
- What would you say are your greatest strengths- in school and out? Challenges?
- What is most important for people to know about you?
- Where is your favorite place to be? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you felt like you weren't living up to someone's expectations. Describe that to me.
    - Who was it?
    - What were you doing?
    - How did it make you feel?
    - What did you do about it?
- Tell me about a time when you felt like you didn't fit in. What happened? How do you feel about it? What (if anything) did you do?
- How does the way you see yourself compare to the way that you are "supposed" to be in school?
- If you could change anything about school, what would it be?
- What activities do you do, but wish you didn't? Why do you do them?
- What activities do you wish you could do, but don't? Why don't you do them?
- What does this school think it means to be gifted? What would teachers expect to notice about gifted learners? What would your classmates notice about gifted learners?

Topic Domain: Literacy as a Social Practice

RQ2: What are the social practices that this group engages in during book club?

- What do you like about book club?
- What would you change about book club?
- How do you think talking about a book with others affects your understanding of the book?

Topic Domain: Culture, Literacy, and Giftedness

RQ3: How does the label of giftedness intersect with students' ethnic and cultural identities?

- How would you describe your culture?
- What do your parents think about school? What do they do or say to let you know how they feel about the importance of school?
- How do you think your family has helped you succeed in school?
- What do you think your family could change to help you succeed more in school?
- Earlier you talked about what people at this school expect of gifted learners. Do you think these expectations are true of every school/family/place in the world? Why or why not?

Topic domain: The Role of the Teacher

RQ4: What is the gifted support teacher's role in this work?

- If you could give the teacher directions for how they should participate in book club, what would they be?
- In a perfect world, what part would the teacher play in book club?

Final Interview Protocol

Topic Domain: Identities

RQ1: What issues of identity do students consider when they transact with text surrounding themes of giftedness and difference?

- What does it mean to be gifted, to you (ie. What is your definition of giftedness)? Are there other ways to be gifted?
- Is there a difference between how you define giftedness and how schools define it? Why do you think that is?
- What do you think is important for people to know about gifted learners?
- What are some assumptions people have about you? About gifted learners in general?
- What are some of the positives about being gifted? Negatives?
- We talked a lot about the pressure we feel being gifted- pressure from other kids, parents, teachers, and ourselves. Talk to me about that.
- What do being gifted and being different have to do with one another?
- What does a gifted reader do when reading text that might be different from the typical reader? How should they be taught in school because of that?
- What is your learning style? Explain to me how your brain works.
- Some people think gifted programs prioritize certain learners over others. How do you feel about this statement?
- When a classmate asks you what you do in MG, what do you say?
- Fill in the blank: MG is where I ____.
- What do you think about IQ as the way that schools identify gifted learners?

Topic Domain: Literacy as a Social Practice

RQ2: What are the social practices that this group engages in during book club?

- What role do you think you usually take on during book club (ie. What type of participant are you)? Why do you think that is?
- When a book club member voices an opinion that you disagree with, what do you do?
- I noticed that in book club we often use metaphors to describe what we are talking about. Why do you think that is?

- What things do you do or think about during book club that you wouldn't if you were just reading a book on your own? Why do you think that is?
- How does what we do in book club compare to how you respond to books in your homeroom? Why do you think that is? Which do you prefer? Why?

Topic Domain: Culture, Literacy, and Giftedness

RQ3: How does the label of giftedness intersect with students' ethnic and cultural identities?

- Do you think people are born gifted? Why or why not?
- Do you think someone can learn to be gifted? Why or why not?
- Do you think giftedness is the same all over the world? Why or why not?
- How do you think your culture has impacted the fact that you are labeled as gifted? (Consider the reading we've done this year.)
- Do you think that you would be gifted no matter what school you attended? No matter what country you lived in?
- How do you think your bilingualism has any impact on your intellect? Why?
- You've talked about how you participate in academic activities outside of school (Kumon, extra practice at home, etc.). How do you think that impacts your giftedness?
- MS- You talked about your family's membership in the Brahman group and that the fact that education is number one is handed down. Do you think you would be gifted if you were not born into that group?
- Tim- You talked about that your parents are teachers. How do you think that has affected your giftedness?
- Sapphire, MS, Ludwig, Markus- You talked about how your parents have provided you with learning experiences outside of school (extra workbooks, Kumon, Singapore math, etc.). How do you think that has affected your giftedness?

Topic domain: The Role of the Teacher

RQ4: What is the gifted support teacher's role in this work?

- Have you ever participated in book club (or something similar) in another class? If no, why do you think that is?
- Fill in the blank: During book club, the teacher should ____.

- When the teacher shares an idea in book club, what do you think? Do you think it's probably the right one?
- Fill in the blank: It is the MG teacher's job to ____.

Topic domain: Participation in a Research Study

- What did you like about being in a research study?
- What would you change if you could?
- How did you feel that participating in this study benefited you?
- What do you think others might learn from what we've done together?
- You really welcomed Dr. Hurst into our group even though she wasn't here in the room with us. Why did you feel the need to include her?

What else would you like to share about your participation in book club and the research study or giftedness in general?

Appendix G

Coding Spreadsheet Excerpts

TENSIONS: EXPLORING THE DEFINITIONS OF GIFTEDNESS

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT GIFTEDNESS?

definitions *(of giftedness, of learning/knowledge/intelligence)*

terminology

HOW DOES ONE BECOME GIFTED?

nature vs. nurture

identification *(process, measures)*

IQ *(how measure, validity, can it change)*

achievement *(what makes people successful)*

WHAT ISSUES SURROUND GIFTEDNESS FOR US?

inequity- MOVE TO INTER/REACTIONS???

purpose of school- MOVE TO INTER/REACTIONS???

value (what we and others value)

sort *(relativeness)*

assumptions *(about giftedness/gifted people)*

Text	Source (what, when)	Code(s)	Other connections

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT GIFTEDNESS?

Definitions:

Text	Source (what, when)	Code(s)	Other connections
MS: (describing characters from Harry Potter) They don't think their future lies in academic achievement.	BC3, pg 11	definition	
MS: I think Donovan thinks of it as a talent. May: My talent is getting in trouble.	BC3, pg 12	definition	
MS: He's not gifted when it comes to academics. TIM: They think he could have a gift somewhere. That-	BC3, pg 14	definition	
LUDWIG: They're not gifted. MAY: You don't know that.	BC4, pg 5	definition	
MARKUS: Because that prepares you for life. When you get a job, you have to really convince your boss that you know what you're doing. And you've got to really have some connection and be able to talk well, so social interaction and not being locked up in this building, just to teach you all the great stuff. You should also be put out a little bit.	BC5 pg 4	definition	Giftedness is NOT just smarts, but social interaction and communication

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Quote	Source	Code	Code
There are some people that have negatives to say. I really don't see that much of a negative except- especially in fourth grade, we were playing around the world, and if me and MS esp- both of us- everyone was like, you are going to win. And that puts so much- and usually we lost because of that. We- we were just like focusing so hard because of- and then we just kind of lost track.	Ludwig FI, pg 2	pressure	reaction
MAY: Okay. So like take this, for instance. Let's say you go on a website, like Donovan did. You want to look up your ancestors. What he found was just like, oh, my ancestors were exactly like me. Dumb, like stupid maybe. Like idiotic. That's all he thought about. Just because your ancestors were that way, you can- you can like change it. Like in MG, we watched a video of how she said like break out of the box of the expectations. Like if your parents are just like, oh, we were doctors or grandfathers are doctors, your great-great-grandfathers were doctors. Your great-great-grandmothers were doctors. And so we want you- let's say you're going to college. It's like we want you to go to med school. Like, and then you just don't want to. You don't want to be that, but they want you to, because they want to keep the tradition in your family. Maybe you just don't want to do it, so like, it doesn't mean just because your family has it, that you're actually going to do it.			expectations, nature vs. nurture
MS: And then she's like gifted, but then she wants to fit in, and she doesn't want like the pressure and stuff like that. *Referring to the book The Report Card*	BC9, pg 15-16	pressure	
Well, I was kind of upset and disappointed in myself, because I was like oh, come on. I can't live up to this. And everybody wants me to do it, and it's good for me. It's not like their benefit. It's my benefit.	BC11, pg 14	pressure	reject
The Pearson Successnet thing? My mom wanted me to do all the test preps. I got bored after three. I'm like, no. I've already learned this stuff. This is boring.	MS II, pg 6	pressure	
I think the positives really outnumber the negatives a lot, but there's one, I think I can think of, that if kids- if the teacher's already occupied, the other kids will always come to the gifted kids to kind of ask their question. Because they think we have the answer all the time, and in some cases, we don't, but also in some cases, we do, but then there's so many people asking us questions that we can't get on with our own work...	MS II, pg 13	pressure	
I would say for one that sometimes, they tend not to call on us during math class...Maybe because they know that we know the answer. They want to see if the other kids can figure it out. Like because they know sometimes they think that, if we have our hand up, it's like ninety-nine point nine percent sure that we have the right answer. We know what's going on. And so I for one. If I don't know the answer, I'm kind of hesitant I'm- even if I'm ninety percent sure about it, I won't raise my hand.	MS FI, pg 2; MS II, pg 9-10	pressure	expectations
Well, I think that MG does a really good job to help that. Like stronger readers might need a more challenging- like my mom, she's always asking me to get books from you because you have the more stronger books than just regular school library. So then she's always pressuring me to get that kind of book so that I can get a higher reading Lexile and all that stuff, so then, it's like, some people need more pressuring on the books or like stronger books, but then the teachers don't really recognize that. Like because like- Mr. Salerno, he has twenty-four students to look after. So then it's kind of hard to just focus on one. While other students, like you- you have like less students to focus on at one time.	Sapphire FI, pg 4	pressure	school design

Expectations (of us, of MG, reasons for)

Quote	Source	Code	
MAY: It disappointed me. I thought he'd be like one of the teachers who understood Donovan and stuff. But now he's-	BC3, pg 14	expectations	
SAPPHIRE: They might have been jealous.	BC4, pg 4	expectations	
MAY: They're just like, oh, you're special. Why should you get special privileges? You're like a nerd or something. ...They're just like, now we can show them what we feel and stuff.	BC4, pg 8	expectations	inequity
MAY: Like be a regular person and not be like, oh, Noah, why'd you get that wrong? You should be super smart. I expect you to be.	BC4, pg 14	expectations	
MAY: I just don't like how they take like- how they think they're like super-smart, but then if you like go to their school, I mean, it's not their fault they're smart.	BC6, pg 20	expectations	reject
TIM: There are good changes, like I have been writing comics on my fun time, like at Warwick, but sometimes, I draw in my textbook- not my textbook, my notebook...I have room to do- not in this one. I've tried not to. Unless it's just to prove my point. But recently I've been finding that whenever I accidentally leave one out on like a counter, they end up disappearing, and I'm pretty sure my mom keeps trashing them, trying to say, don't do this. Focus on your work.	BC7, pg 5	expectations	
MAY: But his teachers know- teachers know that he always gets it right, so they're just in the habit of giving him As and stuff. They don't really care. They're just like, oh, yeah.	BC7, pg 18	expectations	
MAY: We were all her coaches. Except for the Daniels, and they kept their mouths shut for a change. And then also, this one part where it was like, they- yeah, it was on two fifty-eight, on the pretty top with the shortest paragraph, it was, you could tell the two Daniels were pretty cowed by the whole adventure. So this is like business as usual for the gifted program, the taller one asked. I mean, do you do this kind of stuff a lot, it's kind of like there's like, oh, this is what the gifted- they thought it was like- they were just in luxury, eating sushi and having like soda and all those snacks and stuff, and you- like they're just going to see Katie have a baby.	BC7, pg 22	expectations	
MAY: I just thought like maybe it's just like, tests just do a poor job of measuring, but then it could just be like, the teacher being like, oh, you're from this culture. Look at this chart. Oh, you're expected to be very well. I'm just going to go like, give you these questions so you do well, or I give you really hard questions so you don't do well.	BC10, pg 25	expectations	culture
MARKUS: Well, in The Giver, it's not good to be different. ...MAY: They look down on them.	BC12, pg 17	expectations	
MARKUS: Yeah. They look- they look down if you're connected- if you are a person who has a difference. Like for example, if you were born less weight, then they might release you. Which I'm not going to give away what that is. But- and you go to elsewhere, and there are lots of- so but on when you turn twelve, they like to celebrate those differences because that's when you get a job.	BC12, pg 17	expectations	
MS: But also they probably- they might have feared for his safety and kept him in- at home. So that he couldn't accomplish his tasks, so maybe the other-	BC12, pg 19	expectations	

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Quote	Source	Embrace/Reject	Theme
I think that it's actually kind of okay to give priority to some kids because some kids really strive, really, really hard because they want that stuff to happen to them, so then it's like- it's great to let them have it and everything, but I'm thinking not too many times. Like because sometimes, if one kid gets too much attention, like say, Markus and MS, say they go to that agriculture thing like maybe once, and maybe they really like that a lot, so then they keep doing it- they keep to strive for other things like that, so then I'm kind of thinking, if they keep getting those things, then other kids might feel jealous and all that stuff, so then, I'm kind of thinking that, it's great to let some kids have those kind of privileges and everything, but I'm saying, they really have to work for it. And that they shouldn't get it very often, like occasional, yeah.	Sapphire FI, pg 5	embrace	
Pressure, it's kind of like, I come back there, and they're like, oh, you just missed out on everything. They kind of like emphasize everything to kind of make you feel a little unwanted or something. And I'm just like, well, I still had fun during core extension. Like try to like keep my stand. I don't want to like fall over, be like all mad, 'cause that's what they usually want you to feel...I think they do that 'cause they're maybe jealous 'cause they have no idea what's going on there. And they'd be like, oh, you're probably so arrogant 'cause you think you're so smart and all.	May FI, pg 2	embrace	expectations, agency
MS: I think it's fair because while we are people that need more pushing and more- I don't know what you call it- exercises-...-to push our potential to the best it can be.So here, we do that. You do that. And that's-...-good for us, and also, people who see it as like, it's a fun and games place, it can also serve as a motivation to learn for those other kids. *Goes on to explain that it is possible for anyone to join us if they work hard enough.*	BC13, pg 23	embrace	inequity
Reject:			
I don't know. Maybe because there is expectation, and if I- like spelling bee. I'm completely terrified. Because if I make one mistake, everybody's going to jump up and then talk about it for like thirty hours.	MS II, pg 3	reject	expectations
TIM: (sister calls him idiot) So I still don't like it, though, because it's not like jokingly. She's trying to make me feel bad....No, I don't like to think of myself- no one does. I would hope no one does.	BC3, pg 10	reject	
TIM: (ABOUT NOAH) He wanted to be an average person.	BC4, pg 11	reject	
(ABOUT NOAH) He wants to fit in.	BC4, pg 13	reject	
MAY: On page two thirty-two, on the kind of bottom, it was like, the Daniels kept trying to cheer me up. But their plans always involved doing something that would get me in trouble for their entertainment. One day, they brought a stink bomb for me to set off in the cafeteria. They were genuinely amazed when I said no. Believe me. It had nothing to do with following rules. I just wasn't that guy anymore.	BC6, pg 22	reject	
LUDWIG: I don't think, like if you take origami and don't do origami for the rest of your life, I don't- I doubt I'm going to do any better in my subjects than if I actually did origami. 'Cause it's actually something that I love to do, and it's- I'm not going to be happy. I might even do worse in my subjects if I don't do it.	BC7, pg 6	reject	

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Appendix H

Ford and Harris III's Comparative Frameworks

Figure 1.2 Comparative Framework: American Indian and White American Values and Traditions

Traditional American Indian Cultural Values	Traditional White American Cultural Values
Collective identity (tribal identity); anonymity	Individual identity
Cooperation, both social and familial	Competition
Nonaggressive	Aggressive
Nonmaterialistic; nature valued	Materialistic; things and possessions highly valued
Spiritual—religion is a way of life; respect persons with spiritual powers	Religion is one more institution; respect persons with social status
Maternalistic	Paternalistic
Nonverbal and verbal expressiveness	Verbal expressiveness
Bilingual	Monolingual
Seeks harmony, maintains traditions; present-time oriented	Seeks progress, change; future-oriented
Idealism	Realism

(Ford & Harris III, 1999, p.5)

Figure 1.3 Comparative Framework: African American and White American Values and Traditions

Traditional African American Values	Traditional White American Values
Extended family—strong family and fictive kinship bonds	Nuclear family
Spiritual	Religious
Cooperation; social-oriented; mutual interdependence; collectiveness	Competition; task-oriented; independence; individuality
Multilingual (Ebonics)	Monolingual
Situation oriented	Time oriented
High context communication; verbal and non-verbal	Low context communication; verbal
Obedience to elders	Obedience to authority

(Ford & Harris III, 1999, p.7)

Figure 1.4 Comparative Framework: Hispanic American and White American Values and Traditions

Traditional Hispanic American Values	Traditional White American Values
Family bonds	Individualistic
Relaxed/permissive child-rearing practices	Authoritative child-rearing practices
Interdependence cooperation; emphasis on social relations	Independence; competition; emphasis on task
Concrete thinking and learning experiences	Abstract thinking
Active learning	Passive learning
Social learning (pairs, small groups)	Individual, independent learning
Present-time orientation	Future orientation
Bilingual	Monolingual

(Ford & Harris III, 1999, p.9)

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