A Dissertation

entitled

Good Teachers Are Made and Not Just Born: Gifted and Talented Teachers’ Perspectives of Effective Teaching and Teacher Needs

by

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The perspectives of teacher effectiveness held by teachers of the gifted have not received much attention in the literature. This dissertation explores the perspectives of teachers of the gifted in relation to how they perceive competencies and characteristics of teacher effectiveness compared to NAGC—CEC recommended standards of teacher education, how their reported and observed teaching practices relate to the standards and various models of teacher effectiveness, and what support needs they perceive. I compared these issues between cases based on educational level, type of gifted program, and region. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews in person with nine teachers of the gifted from Northern Ohio and Southeast Michigan using a case study approach. I analyzed the data using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software using coding methods. Nine themes emerged, which I discuss in depth: time flies, money talks, uncertainty about expectations, practice is more meaningful than theory, unexpected opportunities, additional roles, teacher evaluation, personality characteristics are more important than academic competencies, and Ohio versus Michigan.
I dedicate this dissertation to myself. Without my perseverance, focus, intelligence, strength, and independence as an international student studying abroad, this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you Laila!
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Chapter One

Introduction

At the 2012 59th annual convention of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) in Denver, Colorado, the role of teachers, their professional development, and their effectiveness in gifted education was a hot topic among some of the presenters. Robinson, Clinkenbeard, Siegel, and VanTassel-Baska (2012) in particular gave an eye-opening presentation that deepened my interest in the topic of gifted teacher effectiveness. In their presentation, they used case studies from the Malleable Minds program for the purpose of professional development to spur group discussion of what makes an effective teacher. Unfortunately, it is all too common for society to ignore the role of effective teachers of the gifted as they get pushed and pulled by forces from above and below. They must simultaneously give attention towards student needs and the demands of administrators, state standards, and national trends, all while funding has tended to decrease.

During the summer just prior to my experience at the NAGC conference, I had the privilege of attending the 12th edition of the Asia Pacific Conference on Giftedness in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; however, I was dismayed that teachers and their education, training, and professional development were not a big part of the conversation. While speakers presented about the need to develop gifted education programs for the benefit of Gifted and Talented (GT) students throughout the Middle East and Far East regions, I found very little discussion about how teachers and their needs and qualities fit in that picture. Yet through conversations with other attendees and later with colleagues in the US, teachers communicated their sense of a lack of support and attention. It is this
background experience that has led me to believe the point of view of teachers of the gifted cannot be ignored because the success and effectiveness of GT education depends on them. Teacher effectiveness, competencies, training, and professional development in gifted education is poorly defined, inconsistent from state to state, and lacking in attention and support at local, state, and national levels. Moreover, teachers’ perceptions and perspectives on the definition of teacher effectiveness and their needs in striving to become effective teachers have not received much attention in the literature and policy, despite the firsthand experience and insight they are able to provide. This dissertation aims to investigate the perceptions and experiences of teachers of the gifted in order to shed light on how they define effectiveness, how they evaluate the emerging NAGC-CEC standards, and what professional development and support needs they perceive are unmet.

**Background of the Problem**

My experience and beliefs along with those of my colleagues have begun to be confirmed by the literature, but currently not much research has focused attention on professional development of teachers of the gifted in the US and how it overlaps with teacher effectiveness. Understandably, GT students and their needs receive the most attention in the field. In fact, it is difficult to read any gifted research without encountering some mention of the persistent myth that gifted students will be successful on their own because of their giftedness (e.g., Moon, 2009). Usually, the purpose of countering this myth is to introduce the needs gifted students have, which must be met for effective gifted education (Moon, 2009). While it is important to emphasize these student needs, the question arises of *who* will meet the students’ needs. The answer, of course, is
teachers of the gifted, so the next logical step is addressing what teachers need in order to effectively teach GT students. In Darling-Hammond’s (2006) words, “One of the most damaging myths prevailing in American education is the notion that good teachers are born and not made” (p. ix).

A few recent studies, such as Berman, Schultz, and Weber (2012), have addressed the issue of effective general education teachers with accurate perceptions of giftedness as a central component of meeting gifted students’ needs and countering persistent myths such as the resilience of gifted individuals even without encouraging conditions. However, it is not only general education teachers with GT students in their courses who might need attention, but also GT teachers themselves who may possess qualities that are counterproductive for GT students and who may harbor misperceptions of what giftedness is. Therefore, it is important to focus on GT teachers and their perceptions of and attitudes towards giftedness and effective teaching.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of support and standards for education and training of teachers of the gifted. According to the NAGC (2011) *State of the states* report, 21 states have no standards specific for GT teachers and 12 states have varying degrees of minimal requirements for GT teachers. With standards and expectations for teachers of the gifted varying greatly from state to state and with questionable support from communities and administrators, teachers of the gifted are in danger of being overlooked.

The investment in teachers of the gifted is worthwhile and can arguably pay off in terms of economic, social, and cultural progress as gifted students become gifted leaders (Ziegler, Stoeger, & Vialle, 2012; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). Directing resources towards effective teachers who support
and guide GT individuals can help elevate GT students to their highest potential and attain competitive levels of achievement. Presumably, these teachers need to be trained because educating gifted students is not as simple as some believe; as educators of the gifted repeatedly argue, teaching gifted students requires careful attention, differentiated instruction skills, and knowledge of giftedness, among other qualities (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002).

Statement of Problem

In the current state of gifted education, there are five major interrelated problems related to teachers of the gifted that this dissertation attempts to investigate:

1. There is a general lack and inconsistency of mandated standards/requirements for gifted education, including teacher training and certification; currently only 21 states mandate the preparation of teachers in the gifted area (NAGC, 2011).

2. At the same time as standards and mandates are inconsistent, there is a call for more teacher accountability (Welsh, 2011).

3. Little research has been conducted in GT teachers’ preparation, professional development, and training related to standards since the 1990s (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007).

4. Multiple definitions of teacher effectiveness and competency exist in research and policy (e.g., Cullingford, 1995; Stronge, 2002; Welsh, 2011)

5. In the research that does exist, the GT teachers’ perceptions and beliefs about teaching effectiveness have been the least investigated in the US, although international studies have been conducted, including China (Chan, 2001; Cheung
and Hui, 2011), Australia (Plunkett & Kronborg, 2011), Israel (Eilam & Vidergor, 2011), and Iran (Kalbasi, et all. 2012).

6. With a history of inconsistent standards, competencies, and requirements while current trends move towards more mandates and greater GT teacher accountability, it is easy to lose sight of the needs of GT teachers as they encounter pressure from policies, accrediting bodies, and standards above and from student needs' below. Holding GT teachers to standards of effectiveness and accountability is necessary and beneficial to the field, but it is imperative that their education, administrative support, and professional development needs are met as well. However, from the practitioner perspective, the needs and perceptions of GT teachers are often ignored. As Cullingford (1995) has argued, measures of teacher effectiveness and needs “can become a more complex and useful means of profiling an individual’s progress provided that the competencies are defined and acknowledged by the teacher himself [sic]” (xiv). Thus, investigating the perspectives of teachers of the gifted is imperative as the states and nation as a whole move towards the reform of teacher education in the gifted field.

**Significance of the Problem**

Effective GT teachers with proper education and training (as well as support from policymakers and administrators) are better able to help GT students reach their potential. However, poorly supported GT teachers with less attention and education likely lack the tools, skills, and knowledge to adequately meet GT student needs. In the worst case, gifted students may as well be left to their own devices if they have GT teachers who lack
the qualities of an effective teacher. As the wide consensus in GT research agrees, GT students cannot be left on their own and still be expected to reach their optimum level of achievement (Moon, 2009). The same truism applies to GT teachers: they cannot be left to their own devices if they are expected to meet the GT students’ needs and at the same time meet the standards of effectiveness. As the NAGC (2008) stated quite clearly, “There is no question that well-trained teachers are essential for student learning” and teacher training makes a difference (para. 1). In summary, the significance of the problem is as follows:

- Greater demand is being placed on teachers to teach gifted students effectively.
- The success and effectiveness of GT education depends on the _teachers of the gifted_ who are the ones applying the standards, knowledge, and skills into practice.
- The perspective of teachers of the gifted can reveal gaps between research, policy, and practice on one hand and one the other hand the ways in which they align.

However, there is a gap in the literature regarding GT teachers’ perceived needs and their point of view on what makes an effective teacher.

**Theoretical Framework/Conceptual Model**

One commonly used conceptual model in the field of teacher effectiveness, including for teachers of the gifted, is the competency model. However, the validity, definitions, and criteria of the competency model are too varied, problematic, and flawed to serve as a theoretical framework, although it does inform this study to some degree. Various teacher competency models have been developed and, although they share
common philosophical foundations and methodological approaches to measuring teacher effectiveness, they vary on certain terms, criteria, and categorization of competencies (see Chan, 2001; Feldhusen, 1997; Vialle & Tischler, 2005; Whitlock & DuCette, 1989).

However, the competency model suffers from many flaws that problematize its use. It has been criticized as being overly simplistic and crude (Cullingford, 1995). Additionally, Welsh (2011) has claimed that measuring teacher effectiveness based on competencies suffers from multiple definitions of what identifies an effective teacher, with focus varying between student achievement, the classroom experience, and/or students’ social and emotional development. Other disagreement in the literature exists regarding what competencies make up the model, whether skills are the same as or separate from competencies, what competencies are most important, and how the competencies can be further conceptualized into categories. For instance, in his study of Chinese gifted students’ ratings of the importance of various gifted teacher competencies, Chan (2011) cited 25 characteristics and 14 competencies. He further narrowed the 25 characteristics into four dimensions (individuality orientation, change orientation, regulated working orientation, and achieving orientation) and the 14 competencies into two categories (specific teaching skills and global-consultative skills). However, empirical data supporting one conceptualization versus another is still inconclusive. Moreover, the relative importance of education and training versus previously held beliefs and attitudes towards giftedness is debatable.

Still, even though teacher competencies are problematic, they remain useful for evaluating teacher effectiveness. To strengthen the validity and usefulness, though, teachers’ perspectives of the criteria and expectations must be elicited. As Cullingford
(1995) has argued, the usefulness of competency models depends on whether the competencies are defined and acknowledged by the teachers themselves. Unfortunately, few teacher competency studies address the point of view of the teachers themselves, even though they are the central component of education. A few sources have explored GT teachers’ perspective of competency and effectiveness from around the world—including China (Chan, 2001; Cheung and Hui, 2011), Australia (Plunkett & Kronborg, 2011), Israel (Eilam & Vidergor, 2011), and Iran (Kalbasi et al., 2012)—but apparently no recent study of GT teachers’ perspectives of competencies and effectiveness in the US have been conducted. As evaluation of the effectiveness of GT teaching based on competencies and standards increases, input from GT teachers is essential in terms of how they define effectiveness and what needs they perceive towards achieving effectiveness.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore GT teachers’ perspectives on what defines effective teaching, what qualities of effectiveness they practice, and what needs they perceive must be met in order to reach the level of an effective GT teacher. As a subset of this major purpose, this study also aims to determine whether these perspectives and practices vary depending on variations in state mandates and standards. Three major research questions address this purpose, and within each major research question are minor research questions as follows:

**Major research question 1:** How do GT teachers perceive the *competencies of effective teachers*?
1. How do GT-teacher-perceived competencies compare with NAGC – CEC standards?
   a. Which perceived competencies and skills align with NAGC – CEC standards?
   b. Which perceived competencies and skills do not align with NAGC – CEC standards?

2. How do GT-teacher-perceived competencies compare with the various models of competency in the literature?
   a. Which competency model do the teachers’ perceptions support?
   b. Are there any perceived competencies not included in any of the research?

3. Do perceived competencies differ between the GT teachers by:
   a. The GT teachers’ educational level (bachelor, master, or doctoral degree)?
   b. The type of gifted education program used (e.g., enrichment, acceleration, pull-out, self-pacing, and cluster grouping programs)?
   c. The GT teachers’ regions (Ohio versus Michigan) with varying standards?

**Major research question 2:** Do the teaching practices of teachers of the gifted align with:

1. The NAGC – CEC standards?
2. The other competencies (personality-social, cognitive-intelligence, knowledge of giftedness, & teaching skills)?
3. Their own perceptions of the competencies?

**Major research question 3:** What support needs do teachers of the gifted perceive as necessary to become effective teachers?
1. What are the various categories of support needs GT teachers identify?
   a. What are the perceived educational, training/professional development, and administrative support needs to become effective GT teachers among this population?
   b. What other categories of needs do GT teachers perceive (e.g., technological resources, teaching materials, community/family support, clear communication)?

2. Do the perceived support needs differ between the different GT teachers by:
   a. The GT teachers’ educational level (bachelor, master, or doctoral degree)?
   b. The type of gifted education program used (e.g., enrichment, acceleration, pull-out, self-pacing, and cluster grouping programs)?
   c. The GT teachers’ region (Ohio versus Michigan)?

**Methodological Approach**

To answer the above research questions, this dissertation used qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Specifically, the qualitative method used is the case study approach. I aimed for seven to 10 teachers of the gifted for the cases who meet the criteria explained below and ended up with eight. The population from which these cases will be drawn will be public school districts in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan. The recruitment steps and case selection criteria are outlined below:

- **Initial school contact:** I contacted 34 gifted program coordinators (23 in Northern Ohio and 11 in Southeast Michigan) for permission to recruit their GT teachers.
- **Background questionnaire:** I sent a brief 12-item background questionnaire of their level of education and their certification status by email.
• **Selection criteria:** I narrowed down my cases based on nonrandom, stratified purposeful sampling with a goal of maximum variation to narrow the cases down to at least one case for every category of education and training, region, and program type (e.g., certified, not certified, bachelor degree, master degree; Ohio and Michigan; pull-out, self-contained, cluster grouping program).

• **Consent:** After choosing the cases to interview and observe, I visited the cases in person and had them sign and date the consent form.

Following these steps and the application of the criteria, the goal was to have the cases represent a variety of education/training levels, gifted program types, and regions.

Data collection occurred both in and out of the context of the classroom setting and included a questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations to answer the research questions. The background questionnaire, which gathered basic demographic information (e.g., age, education, training, years of experience, type of program, region, etc.), helped answer the first major research question (1.3.a-c).

To answer the rest of major research question one (1.1.a-b & 1.2.a-c) and all of question three (3.1.a-b & 3.2.a-c), I used data collected from interviews. These were two hours of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that revolved around teacher perceptions of effective GT teaching, their level of education/training, and the amount of professional support they receive.

Finally, to answer the major research question two (2.1-3), I utilized classroom observations. These observations were conducted in two separate sessions of 2–3-hour classroom observations per participant for close participants and for participants further away I conducted one daylong observation session.
**Definition of Terms**

*Teacher Effectiveness*: Is the general quality that is describing teachers who consistently achieve positive student outcomes (which could include grades, appreciation of learning, achievements, ratings, and even immeasurable qualities). The teacher who possesses this quality is an effective teacher. Other similar terms used in the literature include exemplary teaching (VanTassel-Baska, MacFarlane, & Feng, 2008), outstanding teachers (Whitlock & DuCette, 1989), ideal teacher qualities (David, 2011).

*Competencies*: Competencies are the specific measurable qualities and behaviors of teacher effectiveness. The definition of competencies as applied to professions varies depending on the researchers’ perspective, but the definition used in this dissertation is inclusive of all cognitive ability, personality characteristics, and pedagogical knowledge a teacher possesses and demonstrates. This definition is distinct from Chan (2001), Chan (2011), and Cheung and Hui (2011), in that they distinguish between competencies and characteristics as separate concepts, whereas the definition used here includes characteristics as a sub-construct below the overall term *competency*.

*Cognitive characteristics*: Characterize the ability to think at varying levels, and includes critical thinking, problem solving skills, metacognition, IQ, etc. Although this term is used and discussed in the literature, it is not a part of the methodology of the current dissertation study.

*Personal/social characteristics*: Includes the attitudes and behaviors the teacher presents in interaction with gifted students.
Pedagogical characteristics: Includes both knowledge of giftedness (e.g., philosophy, socio-emotional needs, methods) and teaching skills (e.g., differentiated instruction, grouping, independent learning)

Teachers of the Gifted (or GT Teachers): The terms teachers of the gifted and GT (gifted and talented) teachers are used as the noun to identify the population in question instead of gifted teachers to avoid confusion with teachers who are gifted (possess giftedness). However, as an adjectival phrase modifying another term (e.g., gifted teacher competencies), the term gifted teacher is used.

Summary

As more emphasis on establishing common definitions and standards of GT teacher effectiveness throughout the US increases, it is important to keep some attention on teachers’ perspectives. Specifically, how do GT teachers’ define and conceptualize effectiveness, how do the perceptions compare to national standards, and what needs do GT teachers perceive in pursuit of achieving effectiveness? This study will address these issues from a practitioner-centered perspective in relation to current NAGC–CEC standards and the major competency models in the literature through a qualitative research approach based on interviews of current GT teachers in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan.

Towards this purpose, the layout of the rest of the dissertation is divided into four more chapters in addition to this introduction. Chapter II is the literature review and gathers the major findings regarding competency models, gifted education standards, teacher and student perspectives of teacher effectiveness, and the professional development needs of teachers of the gifted. Chapter III explains the methodology of the
study, including IRB approval, participant consent, interview and observation data
collection methods, instrumentation, sampling methods and rationale, and data analysis
methods. Chapter IV presents the results of the study, including descriptive statistics and
demographics, with in-depth emphasis on the qualitative themes and comparisons
between them. Specifically, comparisons are made between teachers’ perceptions versus
standards, teachers’ perceptions versus research on competency models, and teachers’
perceptions versus observations on their practice as teachers. Chapter V discusses the
results in the context of the current literature. This final chapter also discloses the
limitations of the findings, considers the policy and programming implications, and
draws the major conclusions of the dissertation.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Teacher effectiveness and how to reach the level of an effective teacher are fundamental components of education, and yet there is not much reliable research on the topic. Disagreement about definitions, measurements, competencies, and needs is the rule more than the exception. Still, some consensus exists, particularly in the value of training and professional development. The major topics addressed in the review of the literature are: the definition of effectiveness; standards of effectiveness; competencies of effective teachers; benefits of education and training; and education, training, and professional development needs.

Definition of Effectiveness

The definition of teacher effectiveness is hard to pin down, a problem whose complexity was pointed out as early as the 1960s by Ellena (1964) and reiterated by Hamachek (1975). Moreover, there are various ways researchers and administrators have measured teacher effectiveness, ranging from student achievement to supervisor evaluations, to perspectives of other stakeholders (e.g., students, other administrators, etc.) (Stronge, 2002).

One way to identify and measure effectiveness is through the use of lists of competencies. However, as a way of measuring effectiveness, competencies lists and models have their critics. Cullingford (1995) criticized competency lists as being too simplistic and crude even though they are somewhat useful. Welsh (2011) also noted the difficulty in measuring teacher effectiveness, whether through standardized tests, observations, or simulations. Khatena (1982) critiqued such lists based on the claim that
the most of the teachers’ competencies reflect the authors’ opinion more than empirical research findings.

Even though critics such as Cullingford (1995) and others highlight the weaknesses of defining effectiveness in terms of competency lists and models, at the same time it is valuable to do so. While it is true that effectiveness extends beyond such lists, in order to identify and measure teacher effectiveness, lists of competencies are very useful (which Cullingford even admits). In addition to acknowledging that effectiveness is more than a sum of competencies, it is also the case that “Isolating the characteristics and competencies unique to effective teachers of the gifted is a challenge” (Croft, 2003, p. 560). Still, competency lists and models have a substantial amount of research investigating their usefulness. Thus, it is important to consider the value and usefulness of competency models and lists despite their obvious weaknesses.

One school of thought in listing the measurable elements of teacher effectiveness distinguishes between competencies and characteristics. In this definition, competencies include pedagogy, knowledge, and skills while characteristics describe the personal, social, and behavioral aspects of the teacher. Scholars following this framework include Croft (2003), Chan (2001; 2011), and Cheung and Hui (2011). Chan (2011) further divided the competencies and characteristics into even smaller categories. He divided competencies into the following two categories: specific teaching skills and global-consultative skills. Additionally, he divided characteristics into four categories: individuality orientation, a change orientation, a regulated working orientation, and an achieving orientation.
Another school of thought combines both pedagogical and personal/social dimensions as competencies. Influential scholars taking this approach include Whitlock & DuCette (1989), who developed a competency model with 12 competencies composed of mostly personality characteristics with some teaching skills and content knowledge.

The third school of thought in isolating competencies of teacher effectiveness can be considered the three-dimensional approach. This conceptualization divides effectiveness into three characteristics: personal, cognitive, and pedagogical. The major proponents of this model include Vialle and Tischler (2005) as well as Eilam and Vidergor (2011). One can find a similar model in the cross-cultural analysis of teacher effectiveness conducted by VanTassel-Baska, MacFarlane, and Feng (2008). As for VanTassel-Baska et al., they divided teacher effectiveness in to three qualities: content knowledge, personality, and instruction. Notably missing from these three qualities is the cognitive dimension, included by other scholars, and also notable is the division of pedagogy into two separate components: content knowledge and instruction. In a third variation of this three-dimensional approach, Mills (2003) explored the teachers’ background (including education, training, and pedagogical knowledge) and a combination of cognitive and personality styles (as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory).

In 1994, the NAGC published its own list of competencies teachers of the gifted should possess. Overall, this position paper stated teachers of the gifted should possess the following competencies that all effective general teachers should possess as well: openness, curiosity, and enthusiasm (NAGC, 1994). In addition to these general competencies, the NAGC recommended the following distinct competencies teachers of
the gifted should possess:

- Knowledge of and value for the source and nature giftedness, including creativity
- Knowledge and understanding of the cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics, needs
- Knowledge of and access to advanced content and ideas.
- Ability to develop a differentiated curriculum
- Ability to create a safe and challenging learning environment.

What is most notable about the NAGC recommended competencies is that the ones it considers necessary for effective teachers in general are personal-social characteristics while those competencies specific to teachers of the gifted are pedagogical knowledge and skills.

**Standards**

Concurrently developing with the trend of using competencies as measures of effectiveness for teachers of the gifted is the growing trend towards implementing national standards and indicators for teachers of the gifted. Recently, in response to a perceived need to standardize gifted education throughout the US, the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted (TAG) Division (CEC-TAG) created a set of 10 recommended standards and 70 indicators, which was officially adopted by National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in 2006 (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The 10 standards focus on the knowledge and skills teachers of the gifted should meet and demonstrate, or in other words, the pedagogical competencies. These recommended standards are: (1) Foundations, (2) Development and Characteristics of
Learners, (3) Individual Learning Differences, (4) Instructional Strategies, (5) Learning Environments and Social Interactions, (6) Language and Communication, (7) Instructional Planning, (8) Assessment, (9) Professional and Ethical Practice, and (10) Collaboration. Unfortunately, these standards are currently only recommendations and do not yet have any direct authority or influence over state standards.

Gifted education standards are important because they define the knowledge and skills teachers need to be effective (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Explaining the broad value of teacher education standards like those created by the NAGC–CEC collaboration, VanTassel-Baska and Johnsen (2007) stated:

Teacher standards for gifted education are a necessary feature of ensuring that the top learners in our society are adequately identified and nurtured in the context of school settings. To ensure equity and systematic talent search and programming, it is essential that teachers are educated in the relevant theory, research, pedagogy, and management techniques important to developing and sustaining classroom-based opportunities to learn for these students. (p. 182)

As this statement emphasizes, the key elements of teacher education standards are the teachers’ knowledge (including theory and research) and pedagogy (including classroom management skills and curriculum design). There is another element worth considering not mentioned in the standards because of the controversy in measurement and difficulty in defining, which are personality characteristics. Together, the path of personal background, pre-service education and training, and professional reflection all help prepare the teacher for his or her profession (Graffam, 2006).
However, not many states are officially requiring training and certification/licensures standards, and any growth in requirements and standardization is slow. Between 1990-1995, the number of states with some kind of gifted education training requirements for certification/endorsement increased from 24-27 states (Karnes & Whorton, 1996). However, as of 2007, only 18 states mandate preparation of teachers in the gifted field (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). That number has since increased to 21 states (NAGC, 2011). The lower number of mandates currently compared to the mid-1990s is surprising, but is likely due to changing national standards and criteria for “highly qualified” teachers mandated by No Child Left Behind (S. Johnsen, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Seven states have written competencies (aside from endorsement or certification standards) for teachers in GT programs: Alaska, Massachusetts, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Tennessee, and Virginia (NAGC, 2011). Thus, only these seven state standards have a direct connection with competencies as a way of measuring teacher effectiveness.

In addition to investigating what standards for teachers of the gifted are in place and where, it is also imperative to consider what standards exist for general education teachers who have gifted students in their classrooms. Although such standards are even more rare than for teachers specifically designated as teachers of the gifted, they do exist in some states and have been recommended for further application by experts in the field. In particular, VanTassel-Baska and Johnsen (2007) have recommended adopting new standards for gifted training even for teachers in the general subjects if they have any gifted students in their classrooms. These standards are based on work from NCATE/NAGC/CEC–TAG collaboration. VanTassel-Baska and Johnsen contend that in
areas without mandates, an alternative option for standards is the inclusion of an undergraduate teaching education program for pre-service general education. In a later publication, VanTassel-Baska and Robinson (2008) re-emphasized that pre-service teacher candidates should be trained according to the NAGC–CEC teacher preparation standards if they teach in classrooms with identified GT students. However, as Berman, Schultz, and Weber (2012) pointed out, while general education GT training is recommended in the standards, it is more an assumption than a reality.

**Competencies of Effective Teachers**

In order to synthesize the results from the literature on what defines and effective teacher, it is necessary to review the topic from three perspectives: competencies of all teachers, competencies of general teachers with gifted students, and competencies of teachers of the gifted. While in general all types of teachers share many of the same characteristics and qualities that can be used to define the competencies of an effective teacher, there are distinctions between each type that are worth highlighting. Table 1 displays a summary of the types of competencies included in major studies about teacher effectiveness from 1968-2012. The literature on teacher competencies relevant to this dissertation can be divided into three subtopics: Competencies of all effective teachers, competencies of effective general teachers with gifted students, and competencies of effective teachers of the gifted. Overall, the literature across these subtopics shows significant overlap between what effective teaching competencies are for all three types of teachers. Perhaps the only distinction is in the amount of knowledge of GT theory, GT student needs, and GT pedagogy a GT teacher needs to be effective compared to general teachers.
Competencies of All Effective Teachers

In some ways, competencies and competency models overlap with standards and in other ways not. In particular, competencies tend to emphasize personality and social qualities in addition to the pedagogical knowledge and skills. Overall, qualities of effective teachers roughly fall into three categories: personality qualities (including attitude), knowledge (including content and pedagogy), and skills (including classroom management and lesson differentiation). Despite the difficulty of defining effectiveness, Stronge (2002) argued effective teachers all do the following: recognize complexity, communicate clearly, and serve conscientiously. Moreover, Stronge claimed while teachers’ backgrounds and processes are important, the “ultimate proof” is student results (i.e., grades, test scores, graduations, acceptance to universities, student evaluations) (p. 65).
### Table 1

**Summary of Teacher Competencies Addressed by the Literature from 1968 to 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Personality-Social</th>
<th>Cognitive-Intelligence</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Teaching Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalbasi et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Aware of students background, learning styles, interest</td>
<td>Metacognition, problem solving, creativity, critical thinking</td>
<td>Gifted traits and needs, identification, contributions of educators, curriculum models.</td>
<td>Develop skills in students, strategies managing classroom, grouping, independent learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheung et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Attitude toward multicultural education</td>
<td></td>
<td>Global strategies of general philosophy and methods, group process and research, students’ needs</td>
<td>teaching skills, creativity, problem solving, and questioning,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David (2011)</td>
<td>Positive attitude toward gifted students</td>
<td>Intelligent, creative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Methodology, develop materials, facilitation, group teaching, organization, systematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chan (2001)</td>
<td>Recognize individual, lead toward learning, Aware of culture differences, Openness, flexible, Self-confidence, enthusiastic, respect students perspective, self-image, responsible</td>
<td>Critical thinking skills, creativity, problem solving</td>
<td>nature and needs of giftedness, identifying, consulting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feldhusen (1997)</td>
<td>Flexible, cultural interest, respect individual differences.</td>
<td>Highly-intelligent, creative</td>
<td>giftedness and pedagogical strategies.</td>
<td>Independent learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitlock &amp; DuCette (1989)</td>
<td>Enthusiasm, self-confidence, empathy, openness, motivating students, advocate</td>
<td></td>
<td>The role of gifted educators, program supports of the gifted education</td>
<td>Facilitations, applying knowledge, student-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamachek (1975)</td>
<td>Sense of humor, fair, empathetic, democratic leadership, relate easily to students, open, spontaneous, adaptable, self-confident, trustworthy, healthy self-acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of subject matter and related areas</td>
<td>Student-centered, personalized teaching, experimental, questioning skills, examination procedures, teaching style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maker (1975)</td>
<td>Respect individual</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>Knowledge of subject area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop (1968)</td>
<td>Maturity, experienced</td>
<td>Highly intelligent</td>
<td>Achievement oriented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cullingford (1995) discussed and analyzed teacher effectiveness in great depth in his book. He claimed good teachers are teachers who can achieve: a shared working atmosphere; an awareness of students’ needs; a well-organized, purposeful classroom; and a celebration of successes. He further noted that characteristics of effective teachers that achieve this positive learning atmosphere include qualities such as integrity, learning, organization, communication and humor. In contrast, Cullingford argues that the minority of teachers who are not effective lack self-awareness and are defensive.

From the perspective of students, a few large-scale studies found similar characteristics were important to the students surveyed. Knowledge of the content, ability to explain clearly, and enthusiasm were among the most important. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (1997) surveyed 1,000 students who were asked to identify the best and worst teacher characteristics, and found the five top characteristics of good teachers were: a sense of humor, the ability to make class interesting, a possession of knowledge of the subjects, the ability to explain things clearly, and a willingness to spend time helping students. Ferguson and Womack (1993), in a slight contrast, emphasized the importance of knowledge and coursework based on 266 pre-service teachers’ responses to a Likert-type scale of teacher effectiveness. Based on written reflections and discussions of teachers whom 210 undergraduate students considered to be each of his or her favorite, Gourneau (2005) found the five frequently discussed attitudes were: kindness of the teacher, willingness to share the responsibility, sincere sensitivity to the students’ diversity, motivation to provide meaningful learning experiences for all students, an enthusiasm for stimulating the students’ creativity.
Competencies of Effective General Teachers with Gifted Students

Inclusive education practices are common in the current education systems throughout the US, so one often finds diverse students in the same classroom, including gifted students. Because of this, many general teachers have gifted students, but the competencies of such teachers as they concern gifted students have not received much attention in the literature. The NAGC, though, has identified this gap and has stated their position in support of the competencies and standards for pre-service teachers as proposed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC).

These INTASC teaching standards are as follows:

- Knowledge of subject matter and how to make it accessible to students
- Understanding how to foster learning and development
- Ability to create learning experiences adapted to the needs of diverse learners
- Use of teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, problem solving, and high levels of performance
- Ability to create a positive and purposeful learning environment
- Knowledge of how to promote effective communication and collaboration in the classroom
- Ability to plan instruction based on subject matter and student needs
- Application of curriculum goals and community context
- Understanding of and skill in using a wide variety of assessment strategies
- Ability to reflect on, evaluate and improve teaching and learning
- Ability to collaborate with colleagues and parents to support student learning
These standards and competencies clearly emphasize pedagogical knowledge and skills, but not personal-social characteristics.

**Competencies of Effective Teachers of the Gifted**

Typically, most of the qualities of effective teachers of the gifted are similar to qualities of effectiveness in all teachers. As Mills (2003) stated, “it is generally acknowledged that identifying the characteristics and competencies unique to effective teachers of the gifted is a challenge” (p. 560). Thus, the findings about teachers of the gifted show very little uniqueness. One of the few studies that investigated unique characteristics of teachers of the gifted compared to general education teachers was Hong, Greene, and Hartzell (2011). They found teachers in gifted programs reported more sophisticated epistemological beliefs and higher learning-goal oriented and lower performance-goal oriented instruction than general education teachers.

Research on characteristics of teachers of the gifted indicated teacher personality-social relationship qualities are more important for effectiveness than knowledge and intelligence. Applying the Myers- Type Inventory scale to teachers of the gifted and gifted students, Mills (2003) found the personality of teachers of the gifted was in many ways similar to the personality types of the gifted students. Additionally, she claimed personality and cognitive styles played a role in teacher effectiveness in teaching gifted students. Feldhusen (1997) also claimed that most teachers of the gifted and the gifted students themselves share similar competencies, based on his review of the previous literature. Eilam and Vidergor’s (2011) study from the Israeli students perspective showed that all gifted students valued the personal and cognitive dimensions more than they valued the pedagogical dimension, consistent with recent research of Mills.
Likewise, in a much older study, Bishop’s (1968) results showed teachers in the identified group were found to be highly intelligent and to possess more positive personal-social characteristics.

A few studies, such as David (2008), emphasized attitude as the most important quality, while Mills (2003) emphasized the thinking process and level of teachers. Renzulli (1992) concluded from a review of the literature that among the characteristics necessary in gifted students, the most important characteristics included “advanced competency in the area of area of specialization, the ability to apply knowledge to solve real-life problems, flexibility, openness, high energy, a commitment to excellence, and the ability to convey a passion for the subject matter” (as cited in Mills, 2003, p. 273). Bishop (1968), in what Mills (2003) considers one of the more rigorous studies in the topic of qualities of gifted teachers, concluded exemplary gifted teachers exhibited “superior intelligence, greater literary and cultural interests, and higher achievement needs” (as cited in Mills, 2003, p. 273). Feldhusen (1997) examined the competencies of successful teachers of gifted students based on several previous studies and found that the most important qualities were skills in teaching, thinking, problem solving and creativity; interaction with students; use of appropriate motivational methods; guidance of student-directed activities; and facilitation of independent research.

**Teachers’ perspectives.** In his review of literature concerning empirical research on the qualities of effective teachers from 1968-1993, Heath (1997) found that out of the literature, only a small number focused on teacher opinions. Feldhusen (1977) was one of the earliest studies to explore the opinions of teachers towards gifted education programs and effectiveness. Moreover, none of the studies asked teachers to rate other teachers.
Heath also noted that most of the studies failed to examine the traits more precisely and instead covered only broadly defined domains. Even more problematic, only one of the studies measured student outcomes based on teacher qualities. Bangel, Enerson, Capobianco (2006) investigated the teachers’ perspective on different training programs and experiences. Similarly, Hansen and Feldhusen (1994) studied teachers’ perspectives on training, comparing them to students’ perspectives as well. Teachers in both Bangel et al. and Hansen and Feldhusen found the training improved their teaching effectiveness. In a study of Iranian teachers, Kalbasi, Nasr, Abedi, and Mirshajafrai (2012) found that the teachers perceived the training on competencies valuable, although the least valuable competency for these teachers was the theoretical foundations of giftedness.

**Students’ perspectives.** Some studies have analyzed gifted students’ perspectives on what qualities of teachers of the gifted are important to them. Like the competencies studied from other perspectives, these qualities and characteristics important to students related to personal characteristics, knowledge, and cognitive skills. Tirri (2008) summarized the empirical research on the topic and reported that gifted students tended to value personal/social traits more than intellectual ability. Maddux, Samples-Lachmann, and Cummings (1985), in their study of 98 (grades 7-9) from upper-middle socioeconomic statues who responded to Students’ Perception Of Teachers–English (SPOT-E) scales (original scale in Hebrew) found that students preferred personal and social characteristics of their teachers over cognitive and classroom management qualities.

However, Tirri’s (2008) literature review identified one exception to the widely agreed upon importance of personality and social qualities. The notable exception of an
Israeli study by Milgram (1979), which found intelligence is most important characteristics in teachers of the gifted. He found that all children, regardless of their intelligence, gender, and grade level, reported that teacher intelligence was more important than personal-social qualities or creative characteristics. This result cannot be generalized to all findings because this study is outdated and focused on a specific culture. As David (2011) argued, perhaps intellectual abilities of gifted teachers has been particularly closely studied in Israel because there, the requirements for gifted teachers are among the lowest in the world so “it has been hard for many gifted students to be taught by some of the less intelligent teachers” (p. 71). Contrary to other Israeli studies, Shoshana (2007) found a preference for social qualities of teachers over academic ones, which was even stronger among more religious students. It is worth noting, though, that preference for one does not exclude the importance of the other. One might reasonably assume that a teacher with both positive social/personal traits and high intellectual abilities would be most preferable. Clark (1983) summarized the apparent relationship between personality and intelligence in relation to effectiveness, and concluded “A teacher does not need to be highly intelligent to work effectively with the gifted learner, but that teacher should definitely value intelligence, understand its implications, and know how to nurture it.” (p. 371). In other words, both intellectual and personal-social characteristics are considered important, but perhaps the latter is more important.

**Education and Training**

The benefit of teacher training and professional development on the student achievement outcomes is well-supported in the literature. Mills (2003) remarked, “it is widely accepted that teachers need formal training with a strong emphasis on
methodology courses that leads to certification to be considered component, capable teachers” (p. 279). Hawk, Coble, and Swanson (1985), Darling-Hammond (2000), and Darling-Hammond Berry, and Thoreson (2001) shared similar results of the positive relationship between certification and teacher performance and effectiveness on students’ achievement.

**Education and Training among General Teachers**

Hawk et al. compared the differences between certified and non-certified mathematics teachers at the middle school and high school levels based on students’ standardized test results and observations (36 teachers; 826 students). Findings indicated that students’ achievement was greater for students taught by certified teachers in the field. Moreover, certified teachers highly scored on organizing and implanting on instruction as well as content knowledge. In contrast, teacher experience and earned degree did not affect students’ achievement or teacher performance, showing the importance of continual certification requirements as a mechanism to ensure qualified classroom teachers. In a larger scale study, Darling-Hammond (2000) surveyed the policies of 50 states in addition to state case study analyses, the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS), and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to examines the teacher qualifications that related to student achievement across states. The major findings indicated a correlation between teacher preparation and certification to students’ achievement.

However, the benefit of training is not without its critics. Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) concluded there is little evidence that training and certification is systematically related to student achievement despite the pervasive belief, basing their conclusion on the
lack of correlation between the certification status of 2,098 math teachers and 1,371 science teachers with 12th grade students’ standardized test scores. Darling-Hammond et al. criticized Goldhaber and Brewer’s methods and conclusion, pointing out that the subset of teachers defined as not credentialed or emergency credentialed actually have qualifications resembling those of teachers with standard certification. Using the same data, Darling-Hammond et al. showed those who have more training appeared to produce more positive student achievements. They concluded certification is still important, and none of Goldhaber and Brewer’s evidence adequately and validly counters it.

Like the literature for teachers in general, in the gifted field there is wide support for the benefits teacher training imparts on gifted students. Hansen and Feldhusen (1994), for instance, found training improved classroom environment and teaching skills from the students’ and teachers’ perspectives. According to McCoach and Siegle (2007), from the teachers’ own perspectives, training improves self-confidence. Not all training programs are created equal, though, so the benefits of some may be greater than others. Bangel et al. (2006) found training programs for teachers of the gifted were more effective with both background coursework and experiential practicums, indicating the importance of hands-on experience to complement content knowledge. Based on positive findings from the literature, the NAGC (2008) has taken the official stance that training for teachers of the gifted is a necessity.

**Education and Training among Teachers of the Gifted**

Very few empirical studies have focused on the qualities of general education in-service or pre-service teachers who have gifted students in their courses, and the ones that do exist have findings that disagree and methods that are questionable. Using qualitative
methods Berman et al. (2012) investigated how general education in-service and pre-service candidates perceived GT students before and after a semester-long course on socio-emotional needs of GT students. They found previously held beliefs of GT students persisted even after the course, showing preconceptions are difficult to reduce despite educational courses designed to eliminate common myths about GT students, i.e. that they will be fine on their own without funding and support. However, Stephens (2009) arrived at preliminary results from an ongoing study that contradicts with Berman et al. Stephens tentatively concluded teachers demonstrated some growth in their overall knowledge of giftedness and increased awareness of those characteristics often associated with gifted students. A qualitative analysis of their writings and drawings revealed increased empathy for and understanding of such students. Unfortunately, neither study explained their methodology very clearly, especially concerning how they analyzed the data. Stephens included no explanation of analysis methods at all, while Berman et al. briefly explained their analysis as using a “clumping” method, but no further explanation or reference to other sources to explain how the clumping method works and, specifically, how it affects the ranking of the responses in their results. Moreover, with only one course used in each sample, there is a great amount of potential variability of results because of the course design or how well it is taught. Based on the disagreement, the impact of gifted coursework and training on the perceptions of general teachers with gifted students is inconclusive.

Another possible reason for the disagreement between Berman et al. (2012) and Stephens (2009) is the difference in self-awareness demanded in each of the methods for these two studies. Cullingford (1995) argued in his book on teacher effectiveness that one
of the major differences between effective and ineffective teachers is self-awareness, specifically an awareness of student needs. Whereas Berman et al. only asked its participants to respond to an eight-item, open-ended pre- and post-course questionnaire, Stephens used a four-item questionnaire in addition to a drawing and reflective writings throughout the course. The difference between these data collection methods is that Stephens’ methods elicited more in-depth information that asked the participants to be more reflective and self-aware. If Cullingford’s claim is correct, then perhaps it points to the need to include rich and reflective data that asks for self-awareness from teachers.

Hansen and Feldhusen (1994) showed by comparing trained and untrained teachers of gifted students that teachers trained in gifted education exhibited better teaching skills with a more positive class climate than untrained teachers. They concluded that teacher training does make a significant difference in gifted education quality. In addition to the impact of education and training on the classroom climate, it also appears to impact self-confidence. Macoach (2007) examined several possible predictors of gifted teachers’ attitudes towards giftedness, such training and experience in special/gifted education and self-perception as gifted. The results showed that “teachers who receive training in gifted education hold higher perceptions of themselves as gifted” (p. 246).

Multiple studies have found teacher training improves self-confidence in teaching skills and abilities, especially for new or unfamiliar curricula. For example, Peterson and Lorimer (2012) conducted a longitudinal study using mixed methods examining teachers’ perspectives of the implementation of a new affective [sic] curriculum designed to meet social/emotional needs of gifted students, and found the teachers’ comfort and confidence
with the new curriculum took a year to increase. In other words, the teachers expressed the need to have preparation and practice in order to feel comfortable with the curriculum. Teachers in McCoach and Siegle’s (2007) study reported training improved their self-confidence. Starko and Schack (1989) also found the teachers’ perceived self-efficacy and perceived importance of particular strategies increased with both classroom experience and specialized experience with gifted students, based on an investigation of 10 specific strategies designed to meet the needs of gifted students. Starko and Schack found the results were similar regardless of the type of teacher, which included 167 pre-service teachers, 85 in-service, and 57 teachers of the gifted. Not all training is the same, though. Findings from both Joyce and Showers (1980) and Tomlinson (1986) indicated that hands-on activities, experiential and simulation learning, and practice were necessary in combination with modeling and lectures according to self-reports and synthesis from over 200 previous studies.

**Problems with Education, Training, and Professional Development**

Despite a general consensus in the literature and from practitioners in the field about the benefit of training, unfortunately, in Winebrenner’s (2002) estimation, there exists a lack of such teacher training, particularly in differentiated instruction that addresses the varied needs of gifted students, which indicates a reluctance to facilitate the needs of gifted students. The NAGC (2008) reinforces the existence of this lack nationwide, and stated “There is no question that well-trained teachers are essential for student learning. High quality instruction demands that teachers are aware of and are able to respond to their students' unique qualities and characteristics” (para. 1). But a lack of training does not mean teachers do not desire more. In fact, Kalbais, Nasr, Abedi and
Mirshajafrai (2012) found middle school teachers had highly significant desire for professional development in 28 competencies, which related to cognitive, social and emotional needs of gifted students.

Demonstrating the lack of widespread and consistent teacher training in the gifted field, the NAGC compiled state-level statistics and found while 34 states require that gifted students be identified and 29 require that services be provided—only six—Alabama, Connecticut, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, and Washington—mandate at the state level that regular classroom teachers receive training in gifted education (NAGC, 2008). In Ohio, general education teachers are not required to have any additional training for gifted teachers, but all teachers of core academic subjects must meet the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirement. The HQT requires teachers to: (a) have at least a bachelor’s degree; (b) have a certificate/license that is appropriate to the grade and subject they are teaching; and (c) demonstrate their subject area expertise in the core academic subjects they teach. In addition, gifted intervention specialists who work with an identified gifted population must hold an intervention specialist license, valid in the state of Ohio, which teachers can earn through either endorsement and/or initial licensure (www.ode.state.oh.us). In Michigan, the requirements appear to be more relaxed. Therefore, the responsibility is with the school districts and administration to hire and ensure the competence of gifted teachers through varying requirements and standards of licensure/certification, professional development, collaboration, and assessment (NAGC, 2008).
Summary

Training for teachers of the gifted has been widely argued and shown to benefit teacher effectiveness. Improvements in self-efficacy and confidence as a result of training are especially supported by the empirical findings. Perhaps not coincidentally, self-efficacy and confidence are two frequently cited personal-social characteristics of effective teachers (Chan, 2001; Hamachek, 1975; Whitlock & DuCette, 1989). The other competencies of effective teachers are related to cognitive ability and pedagogical skills and knowledge. Cognitive ability is not within the scope of this study because for the most part it is not and will not likely be incorporated in teacher standards and requirements, so the cognitive component can be placed aside. Pedagogical skills and knowledge, however, are very important to the literature and to this dissertation because it is the one competency that is unique to teachers of the gifted, whereas many of the personal-social competencies apply to all teachers. Moreover, the pedagogical dimension, including both knowledge and skills, is the main focus of the proposed NAGC–CEC standards.

Pedagogy can only be learned through education, training, and professional development, which further supports the value of one’s educational background. Towards the goal of fostering effective teachers, hands-on lessons, practice, experiential learning, and simulations are repeatedly shown to be the most important elements of education and training, in conjunction with some amount of lectures and teacher modeling. All of these findings make all the more troubling the fact that training and educational background is inconsistent and sometimes non-existent in the gifted education standards of various U.S. states.
Chapter Three

Methodology

To answer the research questions stated in Chapter 1, this dissertation used qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Specifically, I used a case study approach of nine teachers of the gifted in Northern Ohio and Southeast Michigan.

Research Design

The qualitative methods of this dissertation followed a case study approach. Case studies are appropriate when the population in question has unique experiences that cannot be best described in terms of norms and standards (Creswell, 2011). The experiences of those in gifted education are unique and can be highly variable. Therefore, the rich and deep information that can be gathered through a case study approach has more explanatory power than quantitative methods. As Graffam (2006) observed, for such reasons “case study methodology is often used in gifted education,” although, interestingly, teacher cases are not as common as student cases (p. 120).

According to Creswell (2011), a case study is “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system,” which can include an activity, event, or program (p. 465). The present case study was an in-depth exploration of teacher effectiveness and gifted education needs from the teachers’ perspective. The cases were bounded by the fact that they are all gifted programs in the same the general region, but the cases were unbounded in terms of a specific school site or classroom. As Creswell further remarked, case studies are similar to ethnographies (an can even be considered a type of ethnography) in that they describe an in-depth analysis of a unique population; however, a case study differs from other ethnographies since it focuses on individuals rather than a group dynamic. In
keeping with the case study design, this dissertation studied individual teachers separate from each other and who are only linked to one another by their role in gifted programs.

More specifically, this research followed the approach of an instrumental case study, since it focuses on “illuminating a particular issue” (Creswell, 2011, p. 465). Precisely, the design applied a multiple instrumental case study approach (also called collective case study), because it involved investigating the relationship between themes within multiple cases and an issue (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

*Multiple Instrumental Case Study Design*

**Cases**

The cases for this dissertation were drawn from a population of teachers of the gifted who teach in school districts in Northern Ohio (NO) and Southeast Michigan (SEM), specifically the Greater Cleveland, Greater Toledo, and Greater Detroit areas. The goal was to only select from public schools, but Michigan only has a few public
gifted programs and those that exist either did not respond or refused to participate. So all the Ohio schools were public gifted programs while the Michigan programs were private.

I contacted nine gifted program coordinators in Ohio and 11 in Michigan. The nine Ohio gifted program coordinators administered in 23 school districts in Ohio and the 11 coordinators administered only 11 programs in Michigan. In addition to the public and private difference between the states, the coordinators of the Ohio gifted programs were part of large associations, while the Michigan coordinators only represented individual schools.

From this population, I selected nine teachers of the gifted as cases for analysis: three from Northeast Ohio, four from Northwest Ohio, and three from Southeast Michigan. The number of cases exceeds what Creswell (1998) recommended for case studies. According to Cresswell, one to four cases provide adequate saturation of information. However, nine cases are appropriate in this study because of the wide variability in gifted education programs, as noted in the literature (see NAGC, 2008; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007).

To gather this number of cases, the selection process started with approval from the University of Toledo’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). I then contacted teachers of the gifted and directors of gifted programs by email representing 34 different schools, 23 in Ohio and 11 in Michigan. The purpose of the initial email was to begin generating interest and to recruit potential participants. The recruitment email included a Letter of Interest (Appendix A) that described the purpose, description, risks, and benefits of the study and requested a response of either “Yes, I am interested” or “No, I am not interested.” This initial recruitment generated interest among 15 participants.
After the IRB approved up to 10 case studies with stamped adult consent forms (Appendix B), I emailed the interested candidates from the previous stage in the recruitment process. In this second email correspondence, I sent a background questionnaire to determine the level of education/training, type of gifted program, and region of all the interested candidates (Appendix E) the background questionnaire provided information to filter the teachers using selection criteria.

I narrowed down my pool of candidates using selection criteria. The selection criteria used nonrandom, stratified purposeful sampling to narrow the cases down to represent a maximum variation of every category of education, region, and program type (e.g., certified, not certified, bachelor degree, master degree; Ohio and Michigan; pull-out, cluster grouping program). Maximum variation is a sampling method in qualitative research that selects a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest in order to discover central themes, core elements, and/or shared dimensions across a diverse sample while simultaneously providing the opportunity to document unique or diverse variations (Patton, 2001). Often this strategy involves a matrix where each criterion on the matrix is as different as possible from all other criteria (Patton, 2001). See Figure 2 for the maximum variation sampling matrix for this study. As Figure 2 shows, if I recruited one case for each criterion on the matrix, there would be 16 cases; however, for a case study, such a number of cases is unusually high and sacrifices depth of analysis. Therefore, I considered approximately half of this number of cases acceptable because they represented a range of teacher backgrounds and teaching environments.
Matrix of Types of Potential Cases by Criteria

After narrowing down the candidates, I contacted them again by email. In this third email correspondence, I expressed my appreciation for their interest and stated my intention to schedule meeting times for interviews and observations. In these emails, I requested additional contact information from the teachers to make it easier to conduct scheduling and other reasons for contact.

Once I applied all of these screening steps and selection criteria, I scheduled meetings with each individual participant, during which I gave them the consent form to sign. In most cases, I conducted interviews during this meeting as well. At this point, I also scheduled future meetings for interviews and observations. In some cases, I had one long interview session, while for others I schedule two separate interview sessions. These differences are reported in the Results section.
Data Collection

Following the recruitment of cases and the background questionnaire, I collected data through two additional methods: interviews and observations. I conducted these data collection methods both in and out of the context of the classroom setting, depending on the teacher’s preferences. Again, these differences are reported in the Results section.

Background questionnaire. The background questionnaire helped narrow down the group of cases and it also addressed the answer part of the first major research question (RQ 1.3.a-c), which asks about the GT teachers’ educational level (bachelor, master, or doctoral degree), type of gifted education program used (e.g., enrichment, acceleration, pull-out, self-pacing, and cluster grouping programs), and regions in which they teach. This provided the background and demographic variables for comparison purposes. (See Appendix E)

Interviews

To answer the major research questions one (RQ 1.1.a-b & 1.2.a-c) and three (RQ 3.1.a-b & 3.2.a-c), I used one to two interview sessions. The total length of the interviews ranged from one-and-a-half to two hours per case. These interviews addressed the research questions concerning the perceived competencies of teachers (RQ 1) and the perceived needs of teachers of the gifted (RQ 3). The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions that revolved around teacher perceptions of effective GT teaching, their level of education/training, and the amount of professional support they felt and receive. The basic interview questions were modified from those used by VanTassell, MacFarlane, and Feng (2008), but because the interviews were somewhat conversational, the interview questions only provided a rough guideline and were not be
followed strictly (Appendix C). I recorded the interview sessions with permission from the participants. Then, I transcribed the audio recording to text in order to upload the interview to the Atlas.ti software for analysis.

Observations

To answer the major research question two (RQ 2.1-3), I used classroom observations. RQ 2 asks about the degree to which the teachers’ practices align with the standards, competency models, and their personal beliefs. Therefore, classroom observations provided evidence of the teaching practices of the cases. I conducted these classroom observations during two three-hour classroom observation sessions per participant. The instrumentation I used to standardize the observations for more reliability was a rubric based on the skill indicators of the 10 NAGC–CEC standards, but not the knowledge indicators (38 out of 70 indicators) and also based on a modified gifted teacher observation rubric used at the William and Mary Classroom Observation Scales (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2003) (Appendix F). In order to meet school protocol for observing in a classroom, I underwent a background check for schools that required it.

Researcher as Instrument

I conducted the data collection from an active observer-interviewer-interpretivist role. As the observer, interviewer, and interpreter researching from a constructivist perspective, I am aware of the influence my presence may have had on the participants and the environment as well as the influence my prior perspectives had on the analysis. This perspective helped to understand the context of the classroom as lived experience and the researcher as an interpretivist who seeks to make sense out of social interaction and gain thick description (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992). In my interpretivist role, my
preconceptions as an advocate for the gifted education field inevitably influenced my interpretations. As much as possible, I disclosed my point-of-view in the Results and Discussion chapters.

Additionally, as Peshkin and Glesne (1992) explain, “Interviewing is complex act” and the nature of interaction will change depending on the location and time (p. 76). As a result of this nature of the research, the interviews and observations varied depending on the context and relationships/rapport established. In other words, the semi-structured, open-ended questions followed different conversation threads based on the responses of the participant. Whenever possible, I acknowledged these differences from one setting to another in the Results section so that the reader is made aware of any important variance.

**Data Analysis**

For the purposes of explaining the methodology of this dissertation, data analysis is under a separate heading, but with this qualitative research, data collection and data analysis were conducted concurrently. To analyze the data, I used coding methods with the assistance of Atlas.ti, a qualitative data management and analysis software program. Using the recordings, I transcribed the interviews with the help of research assistant into Word documents (.docx) or rich text format (.rtf) to be able to upload them to the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software. I redacted all identifying information in the transcripts. I also sent the interview transcripts to the cases so they could correct or clarify any points. After changes and then final approval from the cases, I uploaded the transcripts to Atlas.ti.
Once uploaded on Atlas.ti, I started the coding process. Coding is a process of qualitative data analysis that starts with a multitude of concrete quotes, words, images, symbols, moments, etc. grouped into categories and finally merged into general themes (Creswell, 2007). In general, coding schemata often involves three steps in the overall process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 1998). In my research, during the open coding step, I developed the initial categories of information about the perspectives the teachers of the gifted have towards standards, teacher effectiveness, and needs. In the axial coding step (sometimes called mapping), I assembled the data and categories into coding paradigms (also known as logical diagrams or maps), addressing dimensions such as central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, context, and consequences. In other words, axial coding maps the relationship between qualitative data and categories. Finally, in selective coding, I identified the storyline or pattern that links the findings together, hopefully leading to a hypothesis that can be presented for future research.

It is reasonable to expect the amount of data collected in this research fit within the range of coding elements found in most qualitative research studies in education, which usually generate about 80-100 codes, organized into 15-20 categories, and eventually synthesized into five to seven major concepts or themes (Creswell, 2007; Lichtman, 2006). Tentatively, I compared the themes gathered from the qualitative data in terms of:

- Perceptions versus standards
- Perceptions versus research (competency models)
- Perceptions versus practice
• Perceived needs versus standards

These tentative comparisons of themes underwent some changes, additions, and/or subtractions as more data was collected. Furthermore, the data analysis included within-case and between-case analyses for each of the themes and comparisons between themes.

Clearly, the layers of data, information, codes, categories, themes, comparisons, and schematic relationships can get very complicated, so I used a qualitative data analysis software program to help manage the wealth of rich data and relationships between them. I qualitatively analyzed the data with the aid of the Atlas.ti software. The purpose of the Atlas.ti software is to assist researchers as they organize multiple sets of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. It offered a variety of tools that help researchers in the qualitative data analysis process. Instead of the traditional way of highlighting, cutting, pasting, and writing notes on physical documents and other media, this software allowed me to input data from a variety of sources and a wide range of file formats to facilitate the analysis, synthesis, and general manipulation of the data in a virtual workstation. Additionally, I had support interpreting the data with a co-researcher who has a master’s degree in education, whose perspective helped corroborate the findings.

In my analysis of the qualitative data using the Atlas.ti software, I followed a series of steps similar to recommendations from Creswell (2007). In this process, I

1. Uploaded documents (.rtf or .docx)

2. Created a map of the coding scheme for each of the three research questions with the following divisions and subdivisions:

   a. Teacher effectiveness (RQ 1): Competency, Characteristics, Standards, Definition, and Miscellaneous
b. Practice (RQ 2): Individual learner, Teacher evaluation, Planning strategies, Lesson plans, Student achievement, Learning environment, Communication, and Miscellaneous


3. Hand-coded on printed copies of the transcripts based on the above scheme.

4. Electronically linked codes to quotations in each of case transcripts on the Atlas.ti program.

5. Created memos to add additional notes on tentative thoughts and connections within and between cases (e.g., similarities, differences, and contradictions).

6. Combined codes and memos into larger themes and patterns.

The advantages of using this computer software to analyze data are numerous. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) claimed that the advantage of using computer software analysis is to save time, relieve drudgery, force organization and planning, and encourage systematic work. The software since Glesne and Peshkin first made that claim has only become more powerful and easy to use. With Atlas.ti in particular, the ease with which the researcher can systematically categorize, annotate, retrieve, search, and navigate within and across documents and categories reduces the amount of time and effort involved and allows for stronger, more robust, and a higher saturation of data. The analysis of all of these layers of codes and themes between and within cases is visually represented in Figure 3.
Figure 3

Data Analysis Process

Quotes

Once the themes emerged from the data, I identified quotes that supported those themes. When quoted, however, I eliminated sounds and words that were unimportant to the meaning of the response, such as “um,” “like,” “uh,” and “you know what I mean?” These sounds, words, and phrases are eliminated without ellipses (…) because they would fill up the quotes and are not important to mention.
Summary

The methodology of this dissertation follows the multiple instrumental case study approach with nine teacher cases from Northern Ohio and Southeast Michigan. Through interviews and observations, I collected data on the teachers’ perceptions of teacher effectiveness, needs, and practices. Analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software, I arrived at a map of codes that led to the emergence of main themes. I report and discuss the profiles of the cases, summaries of the interviews and observations, codes, quotes, memos, and themes in the following two chapters.
Chapter Four

Results

Chapter four presents the results of the study, including a summary of the overall cases by criteria and a descriptive profile of each case included a profile of me as the researcher. I include a brief profile about myself as a researcher alongside the profiles of each case in order to disclose my experiences and preconceptions. This chapter also includes a summary of the common codes, memos, and themes that emerged in the analysis. As stated in the methods chapter, the goal for selecting the cases was maximum variation based on key criteria (license, degree, program, and region). Table 2 presents the nine cases and the criteria that applies for each.

Table 2

Summary of the Cases by Various Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Case 3</th>
<th>Case 4</th>
<th>Case 5</th>
<th>Case 6</th>
<th>Case 7</th>
<th>Case 8</th>
<th>Case 9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>License Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endorsement</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Highest Degree</td>
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<td>Master’s</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s</td>
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<td>Program Type</td>
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<td>Self-contained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrichment</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pull-out</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region</td>
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<td>NE Ohio</td>
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<td>NW Ohio</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE Michigan</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even though the goal was to get as much of a range as possible, most of the cases have an intervention specialist license, attained a master’s degree, work in a pull-out gifted program, and are in Northwest Ohio. All of the Ohio gifted programs are in public school systems with both gifted and non-gifted students, but the Michigan programs are in private schools dedicated only to gifted students. The goal was to only target public gifted programs, but Michigan only has small number of public gifted programs.

**Researcher Profile**

I have a Master of Education in Curriculum and Teaching as well as a Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction. Early in my doctoral program, I began to pursue a specialization in gifted education, but I did not end up meeting all the requirements to have that additional credential on my doctoral degree. However, I took six courses in the gifted education field, participated in gifted education summer camps, and conducted my dissertation research in the gifted education field. Additionally, I have one year of teaching experience in the US teaching Arabic as a second language in a charter schools as part of an optional practical training experience. I am a member of the NAGC and I have attended two NAGC conferences, two OAGC conferences, and one MAGC conference. Additionally, I presented my research from the gifted summer camp experience at the 12th Annual Asian-Pacific Conference on Giftedness in Dubai, UAE. Prior to my observations included in this dissertation, I have experience observing four gifted classrooms for assignments in my doctoral program.

**Case 1**

Case 1 has a master’s degree in gifted education and while in her master’s program, she earned the endorsement to be able to teach gifted students. She has taught
for 17 years, mostly in elementary and middle school in different subjects such as math, sciences, language arts and social studies. She has been teaching gifted classes for six years in math and language arts. She previously taught enrichment, acceleration, and cluster grouping types of gifted programs. Currently, she is teaching inclusion gifted programs for 7th grade math and pull-out gifted programs for 5th and 6th grade math language arts. She emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving in her curricula. She has actively attended professional development programs in the state of Ohio. For example, at the time of her interview, she had said she planned on presenting in the 2014 OAGC conference (although I do not know if she did so or not). She said she is always looking for workshops in differentiation for development purpose.

**The Program**

This case teaches in two types of gifted programs: one that follows a pull-out program that focuses in math and language arts and another that is a gifted inclusion math course. She provides a total of four hours of service per a week and one-hour everyday. The programs by grades are as follows:

- 5th grade (math & language arts; pull-out)
- 6th grade (math & language arts; pull-out)
- 7th grade (math only; inclusion)

Students in this pullout program do not have to do the work they missed in their regular classroom or make up for assignment when they are in gifted classroom. So, students will not penalized for being in gifted program.

Students in this pullout program are pulled from their classroom daily in different subjects through the whole week. For example, the 5th grade gifted students’ schedule is
as follows: Mon Block 1, Tue block 2, Wed block 3 etc. Therefore, in block 1 students
skip the social studies class and on Tue, they miss the science, and so on. This is same as
language arts. The program serves students who score highly in math and highly in
cognitive measures. This program emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, and
creativity.

**Interview Overall Tone and Trends**

Case 1 had very confident responses that were often contradictory. Because of
that, she came across as overconfident. Additionally, there were miscommunication
issues throughout the interview, which she rarely asked to clarify. She seemed to assume
she understood without checking to make sure. For instance, when asked to define
teaching competency, she did not answer the question and offered a tangential response.
Later on she addressed the definition of teaching competency when not directly asked.
These issues made conducting and analyzing her interview problematic.

**Observation**

As noted in the program section, Case 1 teaches in two different types of gifted
programs: pull-out and inclusion. The observed learning environment for both programs
is presented first, followed by the instructional practices for both types of program.

**Learning environment.** The pull-out classroom learning environment was a
typical classroom with chairs around a semi-circle of three desks that served as a
workstation. There were various supplies around the room at separate tables, stations,
bookshelves, and plastic storage tubs. The classroom had three dry-erase whiteboards.
There was some technology available, such as projectors, a television, and a computer
station with three laptops. However, it was a small room, which made it hard to fit 15 to
16 students who have to move to different stations. Most of the students go out in the hall to work with partners because not enough space was available. As a result, it was hard for me to observe the interaction between the teacher and students because some of them went in and out of the class to work as group.

The inclusion classroom was the math classroom with eight gifted students included among the 18 students in all. The learning environment was mostly empty because the class was in the standardized test preparation mode. Unlike the pull-out classroom which had a circle of chairs and tables, the arrangement in this classroom was traditional, with chairs and desks facing the front of the room.

**Instructional practices.** In my observation of the pull-out program, I witnessed good examples of classroom management, respectful relationships, friendly behavior, flexibility, active engagement, and lessons based on students’ interests and relevance to their lives.

Overall, in the pull-out program, she was positive and fairly effective during the interactions and instructions, but constantly repeated the standards to the students and reminded them about the upcoming tests, why they were doing what they’re doing, and what was to be expected on the test.

In the inclusion classroom, there was a potential for team teaching; however, team teaching did not occur as well as it could have (I did not witness it). I was expecting to see a lack of collaborative teaching because the gifted teacher mentioned in her interview that she felt like she was just a helper. She walked around and helped the students solve math problems as a tutor more than a teacher. Table 3 presents some examples of positive instruction from Case 1.
Table 3

*Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>Used phrases with a countdown for them to pay attention or to pack up their stuff and get ready: <em>Quiet and ready in 3, Quiet and ready in 2, Quiet and ready in 1.</em> Used whenever students have to be in the chair facing her and ready to work as a whole class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful relationships</td>
<td>Reminded the students of “the role of respectful listeners” not laughing because you will be up next, not playing with any devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Laughed with students and used positive words and phrases, such as thank you sir, absolutely, honey, great job, awesome, and high five for right answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Students were so excited to present their rap songs in class. She was open to students enthusiastic and also, gave them extra time to who might need to practices more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>Walked between students make sure that they are doing the activity and asked them questions. One student was doing mounting math problem and he said it’s hard. She helped them by asking question to think about and try this way, it might help you It is hard not impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant activities</td>
<td>Assigned students to create rap songs using math measurements and present it to class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Her strategy was to ask them leading questions to help them think through the problems. She also helped them remember keywords and show their mastery level on how to solve any problem in the test. She encouraged students to take time and think more and applied different skills in one problem.

She told me she actively participated in the planning more than in classroom. That was clear to me observing. She was not actually teaching because they were reviewing for the test and also because it was not her classroom. It was the math teacher’s classroom and she was the main teacher. The math teacher had the students the entire
year, so the students built a relationship with the math teacher more than the gifted teacher.

Case 2

Case 2 has a bachelor degree and at the time of the study was working towards her master’s degree in gifted education. She teaches different grade levels (1-8) and is licensed to teach gifted (K-12 gifted intervention specialist). Also, she teaches a variety of subject matters (math, science, language arts and social studies). She has a total eight years of teaching and six years of teaching experience in gifted education. She is working in two schools in the same district. She has previously taught in different gifted programs (enrichment, acceleration, pull-out, self- pacing, and cluster grouping); however, the type of gifted program she currently teaches at follows pull-out style. Also, she does an enrichment pullout program for a group of high-achieving but non-gifted students. She has been somewhat active in some professional development events provided by the Ohio state, such as the OAGC conference. However, she is not very active in international or national conferences.

The Program

She teaches in a pull-out program involving 225 classroom minutes per student per week. This program does all minutes in one day (3.5 hrs) per grade. She teaches 3rd and 4th grade in a combined class and teaches 5th grade. She incorporates critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving in her gifted curricula. This GT teacher teaches at two different schools. The students come from different classrooms.
Interview Overall Tone and Trends

This interview occurred at a coffee shop at Case 2’s request. Unfortunately, the coffee shop was crowded and noisy. I requested to change the interview location, but she declined out of convenience. The table where we sat was very close to another table with loud customers. The background noise of the various machines working at the same was also loud. Even the recording was kind of difficult to hear and transcribe. Overall, the setting was distracting and inconvenient.

Case 2 was shy and quiet in her responses. She was extremely careful with her responses to the point of nervousness. She also seemed easily confused. She often said, “I don’t know,” “It is hard to say,” and “You make this difficult,” and she even asked, “Do you have a specific definition for the competency you are looking for?” Likewise, when asked about her favorite author, she said Renzulli, but was unable to identify the concept, model, or aspect she gained from Renzulli. Additionally, she felt insecure about critiquing or redefining anything from other experts in the fields. She repeatedly questioned the confidentiality, privacy, and methods of the study despite signing the consent form and being fully informed and assured multiple times. She was extremely nervous about any of her responses being tied to her personally. Like Case 1, Case 2 also struggled with issues of miscommunication about the recommended standards for gifted teacher education.

Observation

The observation for Case 2 included two sessions of two hours each. This section summarizes the results of the observation divided into learning environment and instructional practices.
**Learning environment.** Case 2 had one of the worst learning environments of all the cases. Her program was located in an elementary school basement. The space in the basement was a large open area divided by bulletin boards that only provided partial barriers that did not reach the ceiling. These divisions created three separate spaces that were occupied by the gifted program, a special education class, and a reading program. An art classroom was nearby, also in the basement, and students attending the art class had to walk through the open area where these three makeshift rooms were located. As a result of this setup, noise and distractions were constant during my observation. Moreover, the windows were very small and the ceiling leaked, creating a wet, dim, and stuffy environment.

**Instructional practices.** In my observation of the pull-out program, I witnessed examples of clear communication, good personal relations, flexibility, emphasis on individual learners, active engagement, classroom management, and a variety of instructional strategies.

Case 2’s behavior during my observation indicated her nervousness about the observation. She frequently checked on me, what I would be reporting, and whether I would include identifying information about her or her students (despite the guarantee and explanation in the consent form). She also gave me excuses for her lessons, saying that she did not normally teach the way she was teaching, but she had to use more direct and traditional instruction because they missed a lot of days due to the weather and had to catch up. In my observation, she was worried over nothing because she demonstrated good teaching skills. Table 4 presents good examples of her teaching practices.
Table 4

Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear communication</td>
<td>She fully introduced me to the students and my role as a classroom researcher there, so she respected their intelligence and their right to know what was going on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good personal relations</td>
<td>She shared stories about her son and encouraged students to share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>For a word activity, the teacher’s method involved students writing their idea of the definition of a word and the students voted on the best by raising their hands. One student suggested that they should individually write a percentage of how confident they are of their definition instead so that they do not simply follow whoever raised their hand first (teacher agreed it was a good suggestion and said next time she will try it).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learners</td>
<td>When students were focused, she let them work alone; when students wanted to share, she encouraged others to listen; and when a student struggled, she asked another student to help, give a hint, and provide suggestions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>She moved around the classroom to constantly check on different students, so much so that one student remarked that she doesn’t need a desk because she never sits down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Used hand symbols and said, “students, listen and look” to gain attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied instruction</td>
<td>Helped brainstorm, used prompts, asked good questions, and constantly reminded them to follow a problem solving strategy (list alternatives, prioritize, choose and test, evaluate, return to alternatives if needed).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 3

Case 3 is the highest educated gifted educator out of all the cases, with a PhD.

Additionally, she has her gifted endorsement. She is licensed to teach the early childhood, middle childhood and adolescent/young adult in language arts. She has 12 years of experience teaching in general and five years of teaching in gifted education in four school districts. She has had teaching assignments in the following areas: regular education classroom teacher, specialist in gifted and talented education, reading
interventionist, cluster grouping teacher for English as second language learners, and students with special educational needs. Moreover, she is designated as a Master Teacher through the Ohio Department of Education. She has been a Javits gifted education facilitator and enrichment summer camp instructor. She has taught for three years in the gifted Grades 6, 7, and 8 in language arts. Her primary role is a gifted coordinator for four schools and consultant for eight districts. Additionally, she currently co-teaches in an enrichment program once a month in Northeast Ohio. She has previous experience teaching in acceleration and cluster grouping programs. She has actively participated in a wide variety of professional development locally and nationally. She has also published multiple articles on gifted education in scholarly journals.

The Program

This case coordinates gifted education at an educational service center that provides gifted services to different school districts in Northeast Ohio. The programs she teaches and coordinates emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. This center serves four schools. The school provides gifted enrichment service once a month for gifted students who were identified. Because they were tested in December 2013 and start the program in February until May, teachers did not have regular meeting. Its often, for this reason, Teacher did not have a strong relationship with students, did not know the students very well and what their abilities are. So GT planned the day for all students, all different level, and interest. No grading system applied. Students actively participated in different activities for one day every month to starch their abilities and being challenged and competent.
Interview Overall Tone and Trends

Like Case 2, Case 3 also occurred at a coffee shop, but a different one that was not very busy and had a quiet space. The space was at the end of the coffee shop and was very private, away from the noise of the machines and the other customers. Overall, the interview space was comfortable.

Case 3 explored concepts and topics easily and in great depth. She was comfortable discussing and analyzing concepts from multiple angles. Moreover, when she felt she might be misunderstanding something, she had no problem double-checking to make sure she understood. Even though she was comfortable dissecting concepts and synthesizing disparate ideas in her interview, when it came to discussing students, her descriptions were vague and removed. It was clear she lacked recent experience with gifted students.

Observation

My observation of Case 3 occurred in one session all day long. Case 3 is typically a gifted coordinator and only meets with students and leads classroom activities once every three months. The rest of the time, one of the gifted teachers she coordinates leads the classes.

Learning environment. The environment in which I observed Case 3 was a big classroom in a high school. The classroom was arranged in a traditional way with tables and chairs facing the front board. There were no posters, computers, or any supplies. This room was usually used for meetings and conferences. It was considered a fun day for the 5th grade students, being in different school, doing different things, being active learner,
and having different social interactions than usual. She even took them outside to be free and creative in their learning and in order to refresh their mind after the hard work in the previous activities.

**Instructional practices.** In my observation of Case 3, I saw her using higher-level thinking skills in her instructional strategies, being actively engaged during activities, and promoting good research strategies. It was clear that she knew her pedagogical competencies well and practiced them. Her lessons were very well designed. Table 5 displays some of the good examples of her instructional practices.

Table 5

*Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional strategies</td>
<td>Applied higher-level thinking through an effort to integrate engineering concepts, in which students participated in a design lab popularly known as the marshmallow challenge. The student-centered goals were to: introduce topics of engineering using a joint lecture and hands-on approach; generate interest in engineering; encourage creative thought and problem solving when presented with constraints; and help students understand the role of failure in design and the value of prototyping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>Walked between students and communicate with students during activates and lunch time and used encouragement phrases like awesome, great job, proud of all of you, and you worked really hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research strategies</td>
<td>Using a rubric, the students had to evaluate different websites. Little did they know that all of the websites were hoax websites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite have well-designed lessons, I did not observe much personal interaction, engagement, or individual learning strategies with Case 3. The likely reason for the lack of interaction was because she did not know these students very well. It was clear her relationship with them is distant and infrequent.
Case 4

Case 4 has a master’s degree in reading and language arts education and earned a gifted endorsement to be able to teach gifted students. She started teaching 1998. She has a total of 16 years of teaching experience and six years of working with gifted students. She currently teaches in a self-contained middle school program, as well as enrichment in social studies and acceleration in language arts and math. She teaches in the Northeast Ohio region. She has attending some professional development programs, such as workshops in the school district.

The Program

She emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving in her curricula. Her program is self-contained, meaning all subjects are taught to the same group of gifted students in the same classroom, every day, all year long. Case 4 highly emphasized her preference for self-contained gifted programs for gifted students compared to pull-out or enrichment.

Interview Overall Tone and Trends

The interview occurred in Case 4’s classroom. The location was quiet and private, free from any interruptions. Case 4 had trouble recalling specific names, events, policies, and concepts. For instance, she struggled for about five minutes to think of her favorite author’s name, listing other names that she does not mean and looking through her bookshelf until I had to intervene and suggest the right name, Jim DeLisle. Likewise, she could not remember one of her favorite professors’ names and struggled to recall details of the gifted policy of her school. She was also very narrow and singular-minded in her
responses. She related most questions to her bad past experiences in pull-out gifted programs in order to highlight the benefits of her self-contained classroom. As a result, her data became saturated and repetitive very quickly. However, she ended strongly and emotionally when she made her point about making sure gifted students are not ignored in policies, funding, and appropriate assessment.

**Observation**

*Learning environment.* Overall, I did not see or have any negative observations about the learning environment. The arrangement of chairs and tables followed a typical classroom design with parallel rows facing the two white boards and the smart board. There were various supplies around the room at separate tables, stations, bookshelves, and cabinets. Each student had lockers for their personal belonging. On one of the whiteboards, the teacher put a self-evaluation chart for students to rate their self-beliefs about their ability in the subject and skills for the unit. In addition to the smart board, technology included a projector, the teacher’s computer, and five desktop computers at a station. The room was a good size for the number of students, which allowed them to have move easily in free space, and big windows provided natural light and scenery.

*Instructional practices.* Case 4’s lessons in my observation were very structured and full of work. As a result, she was not very open or flexible in her tightly packed schedule. However, she did exhibit some positive teaching practices such as classroom management, active engagement, and challenging instructional strategies, shown in Table 6.
Table 6

**Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>Small talk, disruptions, lack of attention, until teacher finally said “five” and held up open hand to get attention (must be her code for “be quiet”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>Teacher used words of encouragement (e.g., great job, you’re improving, you need to focus more, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional strategies</td>
<td>Encouraged students to think of different ways to write something in their stories, and offered comments such as, I’m seeing a lot of ‘I was,’ and ‘one day.’ Try using the specific date to introduce the memory and make it more attractive/unique. She also distributed a list of vivid adjectives and made words like “awesome” off limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Participated with the students during the card game and had fun doing it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Case 4 demonstrated some positive classroom management skills, overall she came across as overly strict and unsympathetic. For example, one third-grade girl tried to ask for a prize as a reward for a job well done, but the teacher said told her learning was its own reward. While this could be interpreted as a good message, she said it with a mean tone and it seems like a message that would be more appropriate for older students.

**Case 5**

Case 5 graduated with a Bachelor of Education in Communications and a Master of Education in Gifted Education. She is licensed as an intervention specialist. She has been teaching language arts since 1993. She has a total of 21 years of teaching experience and six years of working with gifted students. She currently teaches in a middle school enrichment program in language arts in Northwest Ohio. She has actively attended professional development in the Ohio, such as OAGC conferences and several workshop and training programs.
The Program

All students identified gifted and/or talented according to the state eligibility criteria are eligible for gifted services and cannot be excluded by any subjective criteria such as teacher recommendations. All students including those who are culturally diverse, economically disadvantaged, have a disability or have limited English Proficiency have equal access to services provided. Parents have an opportunity to appeal any decision about the placement of a student in any program for the receipt of services.

She incorporates critical thinking and problem solving in her gifted curricula. The gifted and talented language arts blocks serve students in Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. These students qualify through multi-factored testing on nationally normed, standardized achievement tests and are identified gifted in the superior cognitive ability area and/or specific academic ability area in reading. Everyday language art enrichment for 70 minutes per day for 7th and 8th grade gifted students.

Interview Overall Tone and Trends

Case 5 was very open and outgoing in her responses. Her language arts expertise was clear in her responses, because she was clear, concise, and sophisticated in her expression of ideas. She explained how she has high expectations for herself, her students, her colleagues, and her student teachers. She was confident in most of her responses; however, she expressed some concern about what I was looking for, so I had to assure her there is no right or wrong answer to the questions. She analyzed and critiqued the teacher evaluation system very well and exposed some valid limitations and problems. One of her biggest points was the importance of first-hand experience in becoming an effective teacher. She started off the interview energetic, clear, and well
expressed, but by the end of the interview, she lost focus and clarity. Her final responses started to ramble, repeat, and fail to make clear points. This occurred even though the interviews occurred in two separate sessions.

**Observation**

I conducted observations with Case 5 over two separate courses. One of the days was a typical instructional day and the other observation involved the students presenting their work from a project. One of the classes was seventh graders and other one was eighth.

**Learning environment.** Overall, I did not see anything negative about the learning environment. In fact, it was probably the best learning environment I observed. The classroom chairs were arranged in separate learning stations made of four desks in which students faced each other. The classroom was well supplied with materials and technology. It had various supplies around the room at the various stations. There were whiteboards around the room divided into sections with goals and objectives of the day and standard and directions for students to follow. The technology included a smart board, projector, a television, an Apple TV box connected to the projector, two speakers, free WiFi access, and iPads for each student. The room was decorated nicely with posters and words of encouragement as well as pictures of the students. The class size was large enough for students to move around comfortably. There was a positive energy to the room because of the good lighting and the large windows overlooking an outdoor garden and field, providing a natural setting and sunlight.

**Instructional practices.** Case 5 exhibited positive practices in my observation that included classroom management, respectfulness, friendliness, active engagement,
and expertise in her content area. She went above and beyond the expectations of a
teacher when it came to showing respect for each individual. Table 7 shows some of the
teachers' good instructional practices.

Table 7

*Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>At the end of one day, a student got upset about not being called on for an rewarding activity for a few weeks; Case 5 listened to him even though he was rude about it and finally said at the end, “I love you, J---, no matter what. Have a great day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectfulness</td>
<td>She gathered the students’ attention by calling them “ladies and gentlemen” and she stood in front of the door for every class block and shook each student’s hand one-by-one, greeting each by name individually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>She laughed with the students, shared stories, and used polite, respectful, and positive words such as thank you sir, absolutely, honey, great job, awesome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>She walked between students make sure that they are doing the activity and asked them questions. One student was doing mounting math problem and he said it’s hard. She helped them by asking question to think about and try this way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content area instruction</td>
<td>She introduced the elements of literature using the book <em>A Night to Remember</em> by Walter Lord, demonstrating expertise in the field throughout the instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 5 demonstrated effective instructional techniques in both observations, one in which
she led the lesson and the other in which the students presented. She also showed mastery of content and utilized technology effectively without letting the technology dominate the class. It is difficult to think of a weakness in Case 5’s practices, whether in terms of her personality characteristics or pedagogical competency.
Case 6

Case 6 has a master’s degree in gifted education and received her gifted education endorsement as part of that program. She has been teaching for 19 years total and is licensed to teach math, science, language arts, and social studies in middle childhood education. All of her teaching experience has been in Northwest Ohio. For the last 12 years, she has taught gifted students: 10 years in a private school and the past two years in a public school gifted program. She reported that she was never identified as gifted, but her two sons were identified, which got her interested in gifted education. She has gained professional development experiences at NAGC and OAGC conferences as well as some local workshops in math and science education.

The Program

The curriculum of her gifted program has focused on problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity. The program is a pull-out format, which occurs one day a week for 120 minutes per group. She teaches four separate groups: 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade, and 7th grade. She co-teaches these students with another gifted teacher, who has them for 120 more minutes. So the students have 240 minutes of gifted instruction per week. Additionally, she occasionally works with the 2nd and 3rd grade teachers to provide some enrichment activities for the identified students. At her previous private school, she gained experience teaching gifted students using an enrichment program.

Interview Overall Tone and Trends

The school administration and the teacher in this case were extremely concerned about the methods and purpose of the study. I met with the gifted coordinator twice and the superintendent once in order to discuss whom I would observe, what I would report,
and why I was conducting the study. Additionally, the recorder during the interview malfunctioned and I had to follow up on some questions. For these reasons, Case 6 was reserved and careful about what she said or did.

In the interview itself, Case 6 was uncertain about her responses and frequently asked, “what was the question?” and “is this what you mean?” She also struggled with explaining her teaching methods and how gifted standards fit into her approach. Finally, she rushed the last section of the interview, which was about needs, and did not want to reschedule. So we talked for less than 10 minutes about a topic that the other cases discussed for 30 minutes.

Case 6 was not fully present in the interview, meaning she did not fully listen to the questions, interrupted questions, missed the point, presumed, and jumped back to earlier points suddenly. It was as if her mind was somewhere else. She was obviously in a hurry to finish, so that might be part of it as well.

**Observations**

The observations for Case 6 occurred on two different days. The first day was a class of third graders and the second day was a class of fifth graders. Each observation was about one-and-a-half hours, for a total of three hours of observation.

**Learning environment.** The classroom chairs were arranged in a semi-circle of six desks with the students facing the board. There were various supplies around the room at separate stations. There were big boxes with files of students work organized by the grade level. Whiteboards with clipart and core values were all around the room. Additionally, there was technology such as a smart board, television, DVD, recorder, projector, two computers, and a printer. There was a carpet in the middle to sit on the
floor in a circle and talk. Moreover, there were toys and funny stickers for more creative and playful activities. The classroom had pictures of students with their names, and posters with encouraging pictures and words. The size of the class was excellent and the students had free space to move easily. Also, like Case 5 there was good lighting and a large window that overlooked a garden.

**Instructional practices.** Case 6 was a good classroom manager and communicator, and demonstrated friendliness, lessons that encouraged independent learning, and organization skills. Table 8 presents a few examples of the good teaching practices I observed.

Table 8

*Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 6*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>She smiled frequently to show her approval and she encouraged the students to behave modestly, especially when they sit down in the discussion circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Introduce me to the class as a doctor from the University of Toledo and started their thinking about education and how being doctor is not for medical doctors only. Students were excited to talk about UT and their parents going to UT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>Teacher and students sharing personal stories about their meal, eating habits and rules and being with families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
<td>Had an independent writing assignment that included writing a super paragraph, which is like “building a tasty sandwich with three distinct parts.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>Teacher had four tables with papers and worksheets divided by class in front of the board, and as a result, the students were very organized, too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Case 6’s practices were mostly positive, I did notice that she seemed to excel more with the younger students (Grade 3) than the older students (Grade 5). She was friendlier and more enthusiastic with the third graders, while she was more serious and strict with
the fifth graders. Perhaps she wanted to treat the fifth grades as adults and encourage their maturity to develop; regardless, I perceived a clear difference for whatever reason.

Case 7

Case 7 has a master’s degree in educational administration and an elementary educational license from her bachelor’s degree. However, she does not have any formal education in gifted education, including no gifted teaching endorsement or intervention specialist license. She teaches at a private school for gifted students in Michigan, which she attended when she was identified as gifted as a child. She has a total of 15 years of teaching experience and 13 years of teaching gifted students. Her first two years of non-gifted teaching experience was in Alaska. She has taught math, science, language arts, social studies, fine arts/music and physical education. Currently she teaches the group of students considered pre-high school students, which is 6th grade to 8th. She has attended a variety of professional development events, such as the NAGC, MAGC, and ISACS. However, she reported that she has not gone often in recent years because she found the content repetitive.

The Program

The school Case 7 teaches at is designed only for gifted students, so it can be considered similar to the self-contained classroom program. The curriculum includes math, science, language arts, social studies, fine arts/music and physical education courses, with a specific focus on critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving strategies in the courses. The school is only funded by tuition from students and does not receive state or federal funds. Case 7 said they considered taking vouchers from the state when they were made available for charter schools, but they decided not to so they would
not have to follow the state standards and requirements. The school and the program is considered non-traditional, so according to Case 7 they do not believe the standards apply to them.

**Interview Overall Tone and Trends**

Case 7 portrayed herself, her knowledge, and her abilities extremely positively but she was critical of others. For example, she believed she had nothing to gain from professional development: she found it repetitive and she said she could learn more from teaching in the classroom. She also struggled to explain what she learned from her bachelor degree and how it helped her in the classroom. She had a difficult time discussing standards because the school she teaches at does not follow them. However, she did state that it should be a standard that the teachers of the gifted should possess giftedness themselves.

**Observation**

I observed Case 7 during one day for four hours. During my visit, I also sat with the school’s director, who explained the school’s history, mission, approach to learning, and some problems associated with the enrollment and funding. I also explained my study to her before starting the classroom observation. The class I observed was the same class for the entire day, comprising 14 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.

**Learning environment.** The learning environment for Case 7 was adequate, but nowhere near ideal. In general, it did not feel like a classroom because each student had individual workstations, and these stations were not traditional desks but more like booths or cubicles. The teacher explained the purpose behind this style is to help the students stay focused with fewer distractions in order to get their work done. The
building itself was very small and was mostly an open floor plan with very few rooms, very few teachers, and a lot of clutter. The classroom I observed was small, but big enough for the 14 students. There were a total of three classrooms in the school including the one I observed. The school also had a library in the corner of the open area of the building and one bathroom for the entire school. Technology was lacking; for example, there were computers for research and programming but no internet connection.

**Instructional practices.** The program was totally different from the previous examples. It looked more like a tutoring program than a class because the teacher was sitting at her desk while the students worked individually, and then if they had any questions, comments, or difficulties, they would come to her for help. The teacher gave the students a planner checklist that included all the activities and assignments they had to complete by the end of the day. On the plus side, this style encouraged individual and self-guided learning, but on the negative side, it meant the students did not interact or collaborate much.

While independent learning was strong and frequently observed in Case 7, there was not much interaction between students except during breaks. All the work was done individually and I did not observe any group projects or teamwork. As a result, the class operated more like a workplace than a school, in which the students completed tasks like employees and the teacher monitored progress like a manager. The opportunity to develop socioemotional skills was therefore lacking in my observation. Table 9 shows the good teaching qualities observed.
Table 9

Examples of Positive Observed Practices from Case 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>Case 7 engaged students in monitoring their learning using planner checklists with activities and assignments to complete by the end of the day. She checked the progress three times: early, in the middle, and at the end to make sure all the boxes were checked and completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>She had a table in the middle of the room with snack so that the students could take breaks throughout the day and chat with her about both their classwork and personal topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>The teacher walked around the room and gave instructions to each individual student at their desk, asking them challenging questions such as did you read the directions carefully, did you think about the problem, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
<td>Provided opportunities to explore their areas of interest by letting them play chess against each other, work on art, or read as long as the main assignments on the checklist were being completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of technology</td>
<td>Created basic computer programs through trial-and-error and research from print resources, but did not use the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>She occasionally gave the students words of encouragement, such as awesome and great job, and sometimes used sweet terms of endearment such as sweetie and honey.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 8 & 9

Cases 8 & 9 are couple and both working in school at a partner. Case 8 refers to the husband and Case 9 refers to the wife. Because they are a couple, colleagues, and they interviewed together, their themes, quotes, and overall interview tone are discussed together. However, their backgrounds are presented separately.

Case 8 has a bachelor’s degree in history and a masters’s degree in adult collective negations. He is the only male case in this study. He is 64 years old, has been teaching for 42 years, and has been at his current gifted school for 32 years. In the past 32 years, he taught the lower school science course for 17 years, and is currently teaching social science in the middle school for the gifted for the past 15 years. He started teaching
at his current gifted school because of an unexpected opportunity; he was fired from his public school teaching job and a husband of a friend who worked at the school told him about an employment opportunity. He started by teaching at a science summer camp for the school and they hired him full-time afterwards. However, he does not have any educational background, license, or endorsement in gifted education.

In addition to being a teacher, Case 8 has had a variety of different roles. He has been the middle school director, alumni relations director, a teacher union representative, and the current teacher team leader at his school. He has attended or participated in a number of professional development activities, such as the NAGC conference, National Association of Independent Schools, Association of Independent Michigan Schools, and “too many” local workshops “to mention.”

Case 9 has 41 years of experience teaching gifted students at the same school as Case 8. For her bachelor degree, she dual majored in elementary education and English. Additionally, she received her endorsement in science education. Before starting at her current school, she came from

“A very activity-based science community when I was learning to teach it was an experimental teaching program and an experimental school before here. (Case 9) She has taught science at the gifted school for the majority of her time there. Like her husband, she has had multiple roles a teacher, administrator, and team leader. Currently, she teaches science at the lower school.

Program

The gifted school is self-contained and serves gifted students from pre-K through 12th grade, ages 3 to 18. The gifted students are not strictly defined but their acceptance is
based on a committee decision that decides whether they are a good fit for the school. The school uses a variety of criteria to make this decision, including IQ scores, recommendations, school records, interviews. Once accepted, they are placed based on the previous information plus writing samples and a variety of tasks to see what their thought processes are. The program emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. In contrast, the program minimizes rote learning and memorizing tasks. Student achievement is important, but the socioemotional needs of the students is prioritized at the school. Grades are given, but not emphasized and widely shared. Decisions about the school come from broad collaboration involving teachers, administrators, current students, and alumni. The organizational structure is a “flattened hierarchy” according to Case 8, and the learning environment is one of a “community of learners.” The total number of students is around 550, each grade has between 45 to 60 students, and each class has about 15 students.

The curriculum is open-ended. Students are empowered to design their own course load. However, it is not a free-for-all. They have provided a 4-year plan to justify why they want to take certain classes. There are no policies or rules about the curriculum, but the teachers and administrators will sit with the students to discuss what they will probably need to achieve their goals. For example, what do colleges need? What will certain occupations need? As a result, Case 8 said the students feel, “they are given the power to run their education.” They called the style of the school a “growth model” (Case 8). Case 9 added that growth model means, “It’s a journey…particular skills may not be in place until 8th grade. It may not be fully in place until 10th grade. But we’re watching the growth and the internal development.”
The school was founded 1941 by a married couple who immigrated from Germany. At first they wanted to form a school for all students that promoted independent learning and critical thinking to avoid the kind of mentality that led to the Nazi Germany society they ran away from. As a result, the focused their curriculum on the whole child, academic, social, and emotional. Soon the focus shifted to gifted students in particular who thrived in their learning environment. According to Case 8, their central mission was to prevent another holocaust by facilitating the learning development of gifted children into independent, self-guided, and critical thinking adults and potential future leaders.

**Overall Interview Tone and Trends**

The interview was different to begin with because it involved two teachers at the same time who also happened to be a couple. I did not expect this and was not informed, but I decided it would be useful to get an additional perspective after I got the additional case’s signed consent. The responses from the two overlapped a lot and they even finished each other’s sentences and corrected mistakes. However, it is not clear if there responses might have differed if they were separate.

These two cases were able to discuss the whole system of their school in a clear and logical way. They tied together the students’ needs as a whole person to teacher effectiveness, school system, administrative support, theoretical foundation, and real world application. There responses harmonized well and provided a balanced result of information from general points to specific examples. The humorous and thoughtful interaction and back-and-forth dialogue created a positive interview environment. There was some but very little miscommunication. Their focus was on teachers and it was clear
that they had come to the interview prepared by knowing the purpose of this study and were eager to discuss their experiences from a variety of points of view. They did not worry much about what I was looking for. They did not assume that they knew what I meant in the interview; if it was confusing, they asked. For example, Case 8 asked, “do you have something in mind” when trying to understand what I meant by competency. Finally, their behavior in the interviewed reinforced what they claimed to believe in, namely that they are willing to admit when they are wrong and are interested in figuring things out more than having ready answers. As a result, they practically anticipated my questions before I asked them and did not depend on me to tell them what to say. It was a fluid conversation that still hit all the main questions and points.

**Observation**

For the observation in this school, I only observed Case 8 and not Case 9. In fact, Case 8 is the one who I recruited for the study and only added Case 9 at the last minute when I came for the interview. Additionally, at the time of the observation, Case 9 was busy at meetings and afterwards had a test to administer to the students. So while I included Case 9 in the interview, she was not included in the observation. The observation of Case 8 occurred in his social studies classroom over the course of four hours covering three different blocks of seventh grade students. Each class had between 10 and 15 students.

**Learning environment.** The learning environment for Case 8 was crowded, messy, and cluttered. While the school as fairly large, the number of students practically exceeded the maximum capacity. Interestingly, Case 8 did not mention the problems with space and crowding in his interview, which suggests he was focused more on positive
and constructive perspectives of teaching students rather than complaining about the negative side of the learning environment. The classes had 12 to 15 students, but were only big enough for about 10 students and would be over the limits if the number reached beyond 15. The class was cluttered with tables, chairs, carts, the computer station, bulletin boards, white boards, and projection screens, and papers were posted on the boards in a messy way. There was even a broken popcorn machine in the room.

**Instructional practices.** I observed Case 8 practicing open discussion, active engagement, illustrative teaching, real world application, and friendliness in his social studies lessons for three blocks. He was very enthusiastic and energetic in the way he told the story of the War of 1812 and analyzed the dynamic of the war from multiple perspectives. Table 10 displays some positive practices and examples from Case 8.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Observed Practice</strong></th>
<th><strong>Example</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open discussion</td>
<td>Case 8 opened the class up to discussion about war in U.S. history and valued all sides of the debates, whether critical or supportive of the US. He guided the discussion without dominating it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged</td>
<td>Case 8 was the most enthusiastic and engaged in his instruction, and illustrated the various alliances in the War of 1812 between former enemies by having two students play fight and then Case 8 came in and joined the fight, asking the students if I join the fight, how will that affect the dynamic of the war?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative teaching</td>
<td>Demonstrated the power of being united by showing how one pen can be bent and broken easily, but a group pens are strong and do not bend or break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real world application</td>
<td>Even though he was teaching history, Case 8 used leading questions to get students to think about how the War of 1812 affected the US and continues to relate to life today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>Asked the students to refer to him by his first name and not treat him like an authority figure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Case 8 was energetic and enthusiastic, he was disorganized and messy. Even though the room was small and cluttered already because of space limitations, Case 8 contributed to the messiness by his disorganized decorations, table layout, and hesitance to get rid of useless junk, such as the broken popcorn machine.

**Ranking of Standards**

When asked to rank the NAGC—CEC recommended standards for the education of gifted teachers (Johnsen & VanTassel-Baska, 2007) based on their perspective of which has the most value, the cases struggled. In particular, the standard of “ethical and professional practice” gave most the cases a problem. Their view is that this standard should pervade their entire practice and is part of who they are. In a way, it goes without saying, so they found it difficult to rank. Other than that difficult standard, in general the highest ranked standard was “instructional planning,” because the cases felt that all teachers need to excel at that and every other standard builds towards that. Along with the difficult-to-rank “ethical and professional practice,” the lowest ranked standard was “foundations,” which represented the history, theories, models, and concepts of gifted education. Assessment was highly variable and some cases repeatedly moved it higher and lower in ranking because they saw both the value and the problems with assessment. Table 3 presents the ranking of these standards for all cases.
Table 11

*Ranking of NAGC—CEC Recommended Standards for the Education of Gifted Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Case 3</th>
<th>Case 4</th>
<th>Case 5</th>
<th>Case 6</th>
<th>Case 7</th>
<th>Case 8</th>
<th>Case 9</th>
<th>Avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instructional Planning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning Envir.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instr. Strategies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dev. &amp; Chara. Learner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Individual Differences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Language &amp; Comm.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prof. &amp; Ethical Practice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Codes

I used Atlas.ti to put codes into the transcripts and observation notes based on the coding map in Chapter 3 (Appendix G). Each code is tied to a quoted excerpt from the documents for each case. The three main branches of the coding map related to the research questions: teacher effectiveness (concepts and research) (RQ1 “How do public school GT teachers perceive the competencies of effective teachers?”), practices (RQ2 “Do the teaching practices of teachers of the gifted align with the recommended standards and their perceptions of the competencies”), and needs (support and education) (RQ3 “What support needs do public school teachers of the gifted perceive as necessary to become effective teachers?”).

Teacher Effectiveness Concepts

In order to answer part of RQ1, I labeled quotes from the transcripts with codes related to teacher effectiveness concepts whenever the case discussed this topic. Within this code are the sub-codes competencies, characteristics, standards, definitions, and miscellaneous. Table 4 presents the summary of the number of positive, negative, and neutral mentions of each code in the nine cases.

Table 12

*The Positive and Negative References to the Concepts of Teacher Effectiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>221</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among these codes, the cases were the most positive about the concept of characteristics. Teacher characteristics differ from competencies in that characteristics define who one is whereas competencies define what one does and are can learn to do. For example, Case 4 gave an example of two favorite teachers, one who had characteristics she loved and another that had competencies that helped her grow as a student. Case 4 explained that ideally, an effective teacher has both good characteristics and strong teacher competencies, but in her experience she had one favorite caring teacher that made her feel good and inspired her to be a teacher through her characteristics and a favorite challenging teacher that promoted her learning even though she had a tough personality. However, she also cautioned that among gifted students, a lack of academic competency means the gifted students will “eat you alive.”

Case 8 explained that they would prefer to start with a teacher with good characteristics because they can build and acquire the competencies, but it is impossible to teach personality. Case 8 said, “we … focus on getting a teacher with these things [pointing at list of characteristics] and then they can learn these things [competencies and standards]. … I would really focus on getting good people and then they could learn these.” And Case 9 added to her husband’s perspective by saying “yeah, all that stuff was helpful, but if we would've had that stuff without a safe place to learn, to be this way, or to actually be that way a lot before we came [to their current school], then we wouldn't've been as effective. We would’ve been technicians as opposed to artists” (emphasis added).

The results of the discussions of standards were the most mixed among the perspectives of the cases because this topic was influenced by miscommunication,
uncertainty, and difficulty for the cases to rank. Only Case 3 had a strong understanding of the NAGC—CEC recommended standards for gifted teacher education. The rest of the cases confused it with standards for gifted students, such as the common core standards. Additionally, all the cases had a difficulty ranking the standards in terms of importance in their opinion and perspective.

**Teacher Effectiveness Research**

Whenever the cases mentioned their research experience, I coded it by type of research. However, the cases did not go into much depth in these experiences, so I could not code them by positive, negative, or neutral perspective on it. As a result, Table 5 only presents a count of the number of times the cases mentioned each type of research.

Table 13

*The Number of References to Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 4 shows, the most common type of research experience among the teachers was master’s thesis research, which makes sense considering the highest level of education for most of the cases was a master’s degree. Only one case mentioned the dissertation and published articles, which was Case 3. She had the highest education and most research experience in the gifted education field. The miscellaneous types of research included informal research, action research, and classroom/school-based research.
Practice

I coded references to classroom practices in the interviews and I also analyzed my observation of their classrooms to answer the second research question. Table 6 shows the sub-codes that fit beneath the practice code.

Table 14

The Positive and Negative References to Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning strategies</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learner</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher evaluation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom behaviors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional roles</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most positive perspective on practices in terms of total number of positive references was the individual learner and in terms of percentage was lesson plans. This shows that the cases valued the needs of individual students when they planned their lessons. The emphasis on individual learning in lesson plans among the cases included differentiation approaches, socioemotional needs of students, and awareness of the background of each student. Case 2 explained the importance of knowing the individual learning style of each of her students when she creates her lessons:

I think it’s really important to look at each child individual—that’s what I do mostly. You can take ideas, theories from each, but it really comes down to each
child and what their needs are. So all theories are important, but the needs of individual child come first, especially in gifted because of the different levels. You may have highly gifted student in math or highly in reading, but they usually need more in some area. So, to find where they are, what things need to learn, is more important to me. So I use that to think through.

In other words, Case 2 uses the individual students as her starting point for planning her lessons and making her teaching strategy, not theories or models. Many of the cases shared this emphasis on daily practice over theory, which is discussed in more depth later.

In contrast, the most negative attitudes towards the practice of effective teaching were related to teacher evaluation. In general, the cases supported the concept of evaluating teachers for effectiveness, but they disagreed strongly with currents ways of doing it and pointed out many flaws and limitations of the evaluation systems. From the coordinator’s perspective, Case 3 acknowledged that teacher evaluations can be overwhelming and from a teacher’s perspective, Case 5 said teacher evaluations stressed her out and made her consider quitting.

Case 3 described what she sees on a regular basis with the gifted teachers she supervises and coordinates during teacher evaluation time:

I think that they [teacher evaluations] overwhelm the teachers. That's exactly what I see because excellent teachers who I know are excellent teachers and doing amazing things are some of the most overwhelmed. And it's because they want to be the best, and they see everything else coming at them. So I think with those teachers my job is to say, ‘You’re doing an awesome job. You're doing everything
you can. Continue to do it. Don't get stressed out and don't get burned out.’

Because so many teachers quit when they feel that there's just way too many things now.

Case 3 explained even further that narrow-focused evaluations such as checklists promote the wrong idea of teacher effectiveness. She claimed that bad teachers can simply say they met the checklist items and be effective whereas good teachers might miss some checklist points even though they are clearly effective teachers in her opinion.

**Needs**

To answer RQ3, I coded all the references the teachers made to needs they have in their practice. In general, these are needs that either help or hinder their ability to be an effective teacher. The two main sub-codes under needs are support and education. Support was further divided into school, teacher, administrator, government, and parent support. Most of those codes for needs have even more subdivisions, but they are not reported or discussed in depth (Appendix J for the entire list and map of all the levels of codes). Under the education sub-code are the following sub-sub-codes: PhD, master’s degree, bachelor’s degree, license/endorsement, and professional development. Any codes that did not fit in these codes are coded under “miscellaneous.”

The most positive needs out of all the support needs were administrative support needs. *Positive needs* means these are needs that teachers are general satisfied with as indicated through the interview. Administrative support needs included principal, gifted coordinator, superintendent, and school board. All the teachers found some positive qualities to discuss about the administration. Even when some teachers criticized aspects of administration, the always had more positive comments than negative. In general, the
teachers were pleased with their administrators. Table 15 shows the results of these codes in terms of total numbers and percentages as well as positive, negative, and neutral references to the codes.

Table 15

The Positive and Negative References to the Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Pos</th>
<th>Neg</th>
<th>Neut</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lic./End.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Dev.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the most negative needs, that is to say unmet needs, were governmental needs. Governmental support needs included codes for state policy, state funding, federal policy, and federal funding. In fact, the cases were overwhelmingly negative, with 50 coded references to poor government support constituting about 94% of all references to government. This is an almost unanimous negative attitude towards government, an all-around alarming fact. Based on the comments from the cases, the teachers feel pressure in opposite directions from the policy end and the funding end. In other words, as the policies demand that teachers do more, the funding gets continually cut. In the words of Case 3, “There are constantly new federal mandates that are
unsupported. So the more demands we put on the teacher, the more overwhelmed they become with no time for the professional development, no time for the resources to get more of the materials, but we're expecting them to do more.” Put simply, they feel they are expected to do more with less.

Some cases claimed the reason the government seems to be cutting funding for gifted education while expecting more is based on the commonly held myth that gifted students will be fine no matter what on their own. As Case 4 explained, “there's still the mentality that gifted kids will be fine. That if you had a classroom full of kids, and you would have to pass the OEA [referring to standardized tests from the Ohio Educational Association], the gifted kids are going to pass them.” Later on, she warned the government and policymakers: “Don't ignore these kids. There's that policy that gifted kids need to be identified, not served. I think that should be gone. I know teachers cost money, but these are the kids who are capable of anything.” In other words, she, like many cases, perceived a lack of support and funding for gifted education justified by the myth that they will succeed.

Under the educational needs, the most positive experience in terms of percentages was PhD while the most negative was bachelor. However, there was only one case that had a PhD experience, which was a positive experience (Case 3). The experience with bachelor degrees was negative in 57% of references to it. Case 5 pointed out some flaws in the undergraduate educational experience for teachers in the past that seem to have improved in more recent years. Telling a story about her aunt, she said, “…in the old days, before that, students would not go into the classroom until they were student teaching, and there is a very different world between the practice of teaching and learning
about teaching. And so I know I have an aunt in particular who got into the classroom and said, ‘This is not for me,’ and it was too late to change her mind to do anything else.”

In her own experience, she did not think the methods courses were useful when she went to school. She said, “I will say that when I did it, our methods was not something that was beneficial because they brought in kids, 10 or 12 kids, in the afternoon and we taught lessons to them in this very false environment.” However, later on she said that the system for students in education has improved for both methods and student teaching, explaining, “And now the methods experience, they come into the classroom to do that. So I think that’s something that has changed because I served as the cooperating teacher with students. So I know their process has changed.”

Professional development educational experiences were also generally positive, with the highest percentage of positive references with more than one total reference (unlike the PhD experience, which only had one reference). In general, the cases have loved their professional development experiences when they have had a chance to do them; however, because of cuts in funding, many of the negative references deal with the fact that the teachers have had fewer and fewer chances to attend or participated in professional development opportunities. For example, Case 6 compared her professional development experiences at a private school for highly gifted and talented students with her current experience at a public school with a gifted program. She said she does not do much professional development in the public school because

We, we pay for that out of our pocket for that, yeah. And… I mean, sometimes they’ll tell us, ‘oh, this is coming up,’ but a lot of times that’s for our general ed. teachers, that wouldn’t be something that I would go to.
However, when she was at the private school, professional development was supported. She explained that on …the professional development end? That was outstanding at [the private school]. I mean, I went to the NAGC Conference in Atlanta, and they paid for everything for me, including my hotel stay. I’ve gone to different conferences; they’re really big on promoting professional development. They will call people in; they will have you interact with other school districts. So, they were really good on that end.

The difference between these two professional development experiences comes down to the different funding systems for the two schools. The public school district she is currently at is in an urban area and has modest funding from taxes while the private school is funded by tuitions and endowments from wealthy and well-educated families. The tuition from parents to send their children to the private school depends on the school keeping a good reputation with high-quality teachers and instruction. As a result, the private school is very invested in professional development opportunities for its teachers.

Memos

In order to develop themes, I started with notes of my thoughts as I coded the transcripts, called memos in the Atlas.ti program. I then grouped memos into memo families based on common content. Thirteen memo families emerged, as displayed in Table 16 with the number of related memos and quotes as well as to whom among the cases the memos relate. As the Table 16 shows, the most commonly occurring memos were data problems, practice, and needs. The least frequent memo was critical.
Table 16

The Number of Memos, Quotes, and Relevant Cases by Memo Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Memos</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Relevant Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contradictions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data problems</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Background</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4, 5, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2, 4, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data problems family refers to any of the issues with the quality of the data, such as miscommunication, off topic responses, vague explanations, and missing data.

All the cases had some problem with the data, especially when it came to discussions of the standards. I had trouble explaining that the standards I asked them about were recommended (not yet implemented) and were for gifted teacher education (not gifted education standards for students). I noticed this problem early on and tried to correct it in later cases, but the problem persisted. Additionally, most of the teachers had a strong tendency to want to talk about students, not teachers.

Practice and needs frequently came up in the interviews because they are part of the teachers’ everyday experiences. Practice refers to any discussion about teaching methods, learning environment, teacher evaluation, and planning strategies. Needs refers to the perception that the teacher cannot do something because of a lack of support, funding, resources, time, or facilities.
Even among the few critical discussions, they were mostly critical of external factors such as problems with the programs, teacher evaluation, and standardized tests. Very few cases critically reflected on their own practice. Cases 8 and 9 criticized some of their practices, but they had each other to point out some good and bad points in their practices.

**Michigan Association of Gifted Children Conference**

One of the results of this study was the lack of participation from Michigan teachers of the gifted. Initially, I wanted almost equal numbers of Ohio and Michigan teachers to compare perspectives. However, I only found three participants at two Michigan schools willing to participate, and they were private schools, unlike the Ohio schools, which were all public. I contacted 15 schools in Michigan compared to 20 in Ohio, but only interviewed three compared to six Ohioans. This difference in interest and willingness to participate is a piece of evidence worth comparing between the two states.

Noticing the lack of participation from Michigan, I decided to attend a conference hosted by the Michigan Association for Gifted Children (MAGC) at Michigan State University in Lansing, Michigan on October 11, 2014. The purpose of attending was to try to recruit more teachers, learn about the state of gifted education in Michigan, and ask questions about why there is a lack of interest and participation in gifted education research.

At the MAGC conference, I talked to parents, teachers, advocates, scholars, and lawmakers and asked them about gifted education in Michigan. I received a similar answer from all perspectives: there is a lack of governmental support for gifted education in Michigan, including in policy, funding, and service. The points presented by the
speakers at the MAGC conference and the issues shared by the students in the panel
discussions are discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

**Summary**

The cases represented a variety of educational, licensure, and program experience
backgrounds as well as three different regions in two different states. While the majority
of the cases are currently at public schools, three of the cases are at private schools and
one case had experience with both. The interviews occurred in either in coffee shops or in
the teachers’ schools. The coffee shops were not as good as an interview environment as
the schools were because they tended to be loud and crowded. In contrast, the schools
were generally more quiet and private. There were a few interruptions from colleagues,
students, and bells at the school, but they were minor in comparison to the distractions at
the coffee shops. As a result, the interviews at the schools were easier to transcribe.

The overall tone of most of the interviews was a feeling of hesitance, uncertainty,
and uncomfortable. The teachers took a while to warm up and open up because I needed
to build some trust and a positive rapport. Most of the cases eventually felt comfortable,
but Cases 2 and 6 seemed nervous and closed throughout the entire interview,
observation, and follow-up processes. Also, the cases very comfortable discussing their
needs (especially funding needs) but were not comfortable discussing major concepts,
authors, and philosophies in gifted education.

Three codes emerged from the data that related to the three major research
questions: teacher effectiveness (concepts and research), practices, and needs (support
and education). The most codes and sub-codes were related to the needs of the teachers.
The most positive code in the teacher effectiveness concepts was the characteristics of
effective teachers. The most positive practice codes were about the individual learner and lesson plans, most likely because individual learning needs influence their lesson plans more than any other kind of model, theory, or approach. Finally, the most positive need was administrative support needs. The most negative practice code was teacher evaluation with most cases claiming the current method is flawed because of its narrow focus and short-term approach. Finally, the most negative need was the governmental support needs, in which teachers felt pressured by the policies to do more while they received less and less funding.

The analysis of my memos further revealed a lot of data problems because of uncertainty, nervousness, and contradictory statements from the participants as well as miscommunication because of my lack of clarity in certain questions, especially regarding the standards for the education of gifted teachers. The memos also supported the coding findings regarding the frequency of references to the needs and practices of teachers of the gifted. Repeatedly throughout the interviews, the cases frequently mentioned the idea that practice is more important than the theory in terms of teacher effectiveness, practice, and needs, especially educational needs.
Chapter Five

Discussion

This chapter begins with a disclosure of my perspective and preconceptions, followed by an in depth discussion of the themes, and ending with the limitations, conclusions, implications, recommendations, and limitations. As the literature has shown, very few studies have analyzed the effectiveness of teachers of the gifted from the perspective of teachers (Heath, 1997; Bangel et al., 2006). This dissertation has addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the perspectives of teachers of the gifted in order to better understand teacher effectiveness and the practices and needs required for effectiveness. The results showed that the least important standard from the perspective of the teachers was theoretical foundations, teachers perceive characteristics in a more positive way than competencies, teacher evaluations are very negative and problematic, and the biggest needs was governmental support, especially funding.

Researcher Perspective

Before I explore the themes from the interviews and observations, I must first disclose my perspective as a researcher. The predisposition, background, and biases of researchers “will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484). As an international researcher studying education at the master’s and doctoral levels, I found myself eager to learn about theories and theorists and apply them to my teaching experiences. With this background, I hold similar expectations for teachers who have a similar level of education, particularly a graduate degree.
Additionally, having spent a substantial amount of my time in my doctoral program studying the gifted education field, I have developed a passion for improving the field in general in order to benefit gifted students in particular. In pursuit of this, I find myself paying attention to problems and gaps in the field, whether they are found in the government, school districts, institutions of higher education, or administration. Everyone can play a role in this improvement process, and teachers of the gifted are no exception. As a result of this belief, I have high expectations for all of the people who can affect gifted education, which shows in my analysis of the themes. I expect teachers who devote their lives to educating gifted students to want to study and implement the theories and models in order to determine what works and why.

In a study such as this that has as its goal defining, understanding, and evaluating teacher effectiveness, I have a preconceived notion about what teacher effectiveness means. To me, teacher effectiveness is a value related to how well teachers teach their students. In order to be effective, they must meet and exceed standards. The more they exceed standards, the more effective they become. Therefore, I expect the teachers in this study to at least meet the minimum NAGC–CEC standards for teachers of the gifted as proposed by Johnsen and Van-Tassel Baska (2007). One of these standards is Foundations, which covers the fundamental history, theories, and authors of the field. Because this is a basic standard that scholars in the field deem important for teachers to demonstrate, then I assume the typical teacher in the field should meet it.

**Themes**

From the results, nine major themes and ten subthemes emerged. The themes that emerged are as follows:
• Time Flies

• Money Talks
  o Doing more with less
  o Funding affects facilities
  o Private versus public funding
  o Gifted students are worth the investment

• Uncertainty about Expectations

• Practice Is More Meaningful than Theory

• Unexpected Opportunities

• Additional Roles

• Teacher Evaluation
  o Evaluation systems
  o The need to consider long-term student achievement
  o Lack of reflection: self-evaluation

• Personality Characteristics Are More Important than Academic Competencies
  o Like/caring versus respect/challenging
  o Learnable versus innate qualities
  o Gifted teachers of the gifted

• Ohio Versus Michigan

These nine themes and ten subthemes are discussed in relation to the literature, interview data, classroom observations, and findings from the 2014 Michigan Association of Gifted Children (MAGC) Conference.
**Time Flies**

One of the major themes that emerged from the interviews was the concept of time limitations. Along with money, time was one of the most frequently discussed topics and observed needs. Money was included in the codes in terms federal and state funding, but time was not included in any of the codes. In retrospect, it is obvious why time is important, but originally it was not a major part of the framework, interview questions, or coding schema. In at least seven of the nine cases, they used time limitations as an explanation for why they could not be as effective as they wanted. The cases claimed they did not have enough time for planning, finding resources, organizing, collaborating, getting to know their students individually, and reflecting. Basically, in general they have to focus on the basic lessons and activities and feel like they cannot go above and beyond because of time limitations.

In the observations, I observed the teachers changing or postponing lessons and other plans because of running out of time. In the interviews, Cases 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 all discussed the issue of time throughout the interview despite the fact I never asked them about it directly. For example, Case 1 stated,

> Honestly, I think I would need more time, which I think I do not have much of. I need more time for planning, finding resources, getting things together, and helping other teachers. There is just not enough time in the day. I’m the only gifted teacher and I work with the entire school district.

This quote shows the high demand and expectations placed on the teacher based on her role as the only gifted teacher for the district. According to her, the lack of time negatively affects planning, resources, and preparation. Even though officially Case 1 is a
gifted teacher only, she unofficially fulfills multiple roles such as gifted coordinator for the district and gifted consultant for the other general education teachers.

In addition to the lack of time affecting planning, locating resources, and other preparation, some of the cases mentioned the negative effect it has on collaboration. Case 1 above said she needs more time for “helping other teachers.” Similarly, Case 5 fondly remembered the collaboration and discussions between teachers in graduate school that does not occur enough in day-to-day teaching in her experience. She said,

I also was felt that it [the graduate school experience] was invaluable—that almost all of them were current teachers, some were going straight through from undergrad to graduate school, but some but many of them were current teachers. So we were sharing things we were doing in the classroom, which was just invaluable. We never get enough time to do that as educators.

The issue of time also limits how much the teachers can focus on students as individuals. I asked Case 5, “So you care more about their potential than who they are?” She responded, “Eh, it shouldn’t be, but it often is—that I just want to get them where they can go. And it’s such a short time in that class every day. If they give me another half an hour—.” She did not complete the statement, but it was clear that she meant she could get to know her students better if there were more time in the day. Case 6 did not explicitly mention time as an issue, but she did explain how her only meeting with students one day per week in her program forced her to focus on covering the curriculum rather than allowing her students to explore more freely and independently.

In addition to teachers not getting to know their students, the short time frames means that students do not get to know each other well. Case 2 claimed,
Time is a big factor because I have the kids once a week for the 3 hours a day and I’ll not see them for the whole week. So separated time is a fact. Also, I think in our school district, they do not have cluster grouping at all…. Keeping them more would be a good thing to consider.

The effect of teachers and students getting to know each other better is hard to measure, but these teachers believe being together longer would be beneficial to their relationships with each other. Case 2 also said,

Problems like pull out for another things or schedule change or taking the gifted time a way. It’s only one day they allow to be together and do different things or for skipped days, school activity, they are taking the gifted time, kids having special time for different time and subject.

When asked about their reflection or journaling practices, a few cases used the lack of time as their rationalization for not reflecting. Case 6 said, she did not do “a whole lot of journaling, because I was working full time, and like I said I had to boys, so I didn’t really find a whole lot of time.”

Case 3 and 7 were the exceptions to this common theme. Case 3 had a unique position as a gifted consultant and coordinator more than a teacher. Although Case 3 taught gifted students in the past and monthly visits the classes she supervises and leads some lessons and activities, her current position is not primarily that of a teacher of the gifted. As a result, Case 3 probably has had plenty of time for planning, organizing, collaborating, and reflecting on her practice and her teachers’ practices because she does not have the day-to-day demand of teaching students. The only facet that Case 3 clearly did not have time for is getting to know her students individually. First of all, she only
met them once a month and second of all, in my observation she did not know them or their names very well.

Somewhat different from Case 3, Case 7 did not mention time as an issue because her entire school is focused on gifted education, she attended the school herself as a child, and her parents are founders and administrators for the school. Time was not an issue because she has more of it than most of the other teachers and perhaps because she did not feel comfortable critiquing the program. Having a school devoted only to gifted students does make time less of an issue. Like Case 7, Cases 8 and 9 work together at a gifted school and did not discuss time as an issue very much. However, Case 8 did mention that “everything takes so much time,” when referencing the fact that they had a lot of reports they just completed in addition to being teachers. Similarly, his wife, Case 9, claimed, “we don't have enough staff, nor time in the day, nor funding to do all the things we really would like to do.” In this case, they already do more than the cases, but because they have big aspirations, there is always more that they would like to do if they had time.

In conclusion, there is never and will never be enough time in the day for teachers of the gifted to do everything they want to do. Time is a resource that perishes immediately, so no matter what and no matter who, we all share that complaint about life, career, and our effectiveness within the time constraints we face.

Money Talks

Along with time, money came up in the interviews with all the teachers because, of course, money affects the availability and quality of every other resource and facility. As Case 3 stated, “Time and money would go a long way” to benefit gifted education.
Positive discussions of funding were rare; most of the cases complained about the lack of funding. The public and private school teachers did not differ in this regard.

As Case 5 said, the funding problem is “huge.” Case 2 went into depth into the problems associated with funding. At her school, a lack of funding affected her facilities, materials, and resources. At the time of the interview, she had to share a basement space that was noisy, wet, and stuffy.

Funding has been always an issue every year. We do not know for sure if we will get funding or have the program for next year or not. We always feel like we are on edge and wondering if the class will be cut. Largely, that is happening every year.

Case 1 has observed that the money problem is not getting better; in fact, it is getting worse:

They [the state representatives] keep taking the funding from us. Me, personally, I feel the most support comes directly from the district, state a little a less, nationally less.

Case 1 also noted how funding is unfairly tied directly to standardized test scores rather than needs of the gifted students. She said, “If the test scores are not good, we will not get funding from the states. The focus should be in their needs more, but gifted they can hold and do fine.”

It is tough, because everybody is trying to increase test scores. Gifted students do not necessarily need their test scores to increase. So, they are not the area they are trying to throw money at and help them to improve. They are doing fine. They will be okay.
The idea that gifted students are doing fine and will be okay is what Case 2 thinks state and federal lawmakers believe, but she does not believe that is the case.

Even though state and federal funding is low and getting lower, Case 1 feels supported by her school district as much as possible. For example, they funded her master’s degree education. However, Case 6 feels a lack of financial support at all levels, including the district level. She said, “A lot of it is funding, and a lot of it is, um…it’s where the district itself lies.” She explained that because of the demographics and socioeconomic level of many of her students, they lack funding in the district and the students lack resources such as computers at home. She could not help but compare her experience to other districts, bemoaning the fact that you go to some school districts, and they’re either providing the computers for all the kids, or, all the kids already have computers at home. So… so it’s a little bit different.

The discrepancy between funding at public districts in different areas is a direct result of most funding coming from local property taxes and not state or federal funding. There is not much of a financial equalizer from district to district to level the playing field.

Case 3 also noticed funds are getting lowers, but she looked the positive side of it as a challenge and not just an obstacle. She said, I think that funds are very tight. I’ve even noticed that difference in my career as consulting that I used to be able to take teachers out for a full day, we'd sit together, they'd have subs in their classroom. And we would go through that planning process. This year, in almost all my districts, the charge has been: do it
during the day, do it during their planning. … We don't have the funds for it anymore. … So I think that we have to use what we can and get in when we can.

It is clear from this quote that Case 3 has a different perspective than the other cases because she is more of a coordinator and consultant than a teacher.

Explaining some of the background of the funding problem at the state level, Case 3 explained that even thought the gifted operating standards are under review in Ohio, “gifted remains unfunded and un-mandated. The only mandate is to identify.” Likewise, Case 3 noted a similar problem at the federal level, stating “I think there needs to be resource support. There are constantly new federal mandates that are unsupported.” Case 4 gave a similar explanation and criticized it even further, “There's that policy [in Ohio] that gifted kids need to be identified, not served. I think that should be gone.”

Case 5 went into even more depth of what she understands to be the case of gifted funding in Ohio:

And when we come back to Ohio doesn’t require it [gifted education]. They also took it out as a line item in the big budget a couple of years ago. … and the explanation there was, the political speak of course you get was, that we aren’t losing any money because it’s all still there, but the superintendent has to choose to spend it that way. So it is there, and we didn’t lose anything because our district chose to maintain. And the law does say that they have to maintain where they were, but there’s no real room for growth.

**Doing more with less.** While the funding has gone down, a few cases noted that the expectations on teachers of gone up. I call this theme, “doing more with less” because in general the cases express frustration with how teacher evaluations, governmental
polices, and standards place demands on teachers, but they have noticed decreasing amounts of funding. This trend has negatively affected professional development opportunities, availability of positions, and facilities. While funding and policies in private and public schools differ, teachers in both types of schools felt the pressure of being underfunded and having high expectations.

Case 3 said, “So the more demands we put on the teacher, the more overwhelmed they become with no time for the professional development, no time for the resources to get more of the materials, but we're expecting them to do more.” Case 6 also noted that “the state does not have funding to give for professional development.” Overall, the consensus seemed to be that gifted education is a lot of work. Case 5 explained the pressure the workload places on teachers of the gifted:

The big reason people don’t want to teach gifted is the workload. They feel like it’s a much bigger workload even though you have smaller classes. You have the parents, you have to do so much more work, to prepare for them is so much more work and they don’t want to do that. The people who left in our building that I told you used to be gifted teachers, that’s exactly how both of them said, “I’m done.” Because they said it’s just too much work.

The implication in this quote is that everyone expects more from gifted students and teachers, so teachers have to work extra hard to meet those expectations even with smaller classes.

Lack funding has led to cut positions, too. Case 4 explained how a lack of funding resulted in a loss of a gifted coordinator.
We used to have a gifted coordinator; she was amazing. She was in our classrooms once a month at least, more when I was newer. … That's gone. That's finance. I think the district didn't have the money when she retired to replace her. Because of tight money, the district has not replaced this position with an expert who can be as “amazing” as Case 4 believes her coordinator was. Instead, a non-expert on the school board has taken that role. Case 4 narrated, “So someone just said, ‘Oh, I'm this. I'll just be this, too.’ And they have that hat. …, but they don't have gifted experience.” Case 4 also noted how that gifted coordinator was able to allocate money for things like professional development and travel costs for conferences. With the loss of a gifted coordinator came a loss of additional funds that the coordinator worked to gather.

Case 5 added that teachers of the gifted are evaluated based on their ability to deliver instruction and get good test scores, but they are not supported in that. She complained,

You’re gonna make this part of our evaluations, but you’re not going to fund it and you’re not going to require it. I mean, let’s require it. Let’s say that all the students who are identified as gifted have to be in gifted. But if they say they have, then they have to fund it. It’s like special ed. And I always tell my kids, ‘you’re part of special ed.’ We’re all part of that umbrella, but there’s not the funding for it. It’s that; it really is.

**Funding affects facilities.** The neglected position of gifted education in the mind’s of policymakers and in the budgets of local, state, and federal governments is reflected physically in the types of poor facilities in which gifted programs are located.
Some of the programs were housed in makeshift rooms in basements, shared space with other classes, or had rooms too small for the number of students.

For instance, Case 1 was concerned with her classroom size and sharing space with other teachers. Part of the time, she had an inclusive-program in a very small room that looked like a former storage area rather than a regular classroom. The other part of the time, she worked as an enrichment-program gifted teacher, in which she assisted a math teacher in the same room. She had eight students in that class and she was responsible for designing tests, assignments, and lessons at a higher-order of thinking. When discussing the support she receives from administrators, she stated, “Everything I’ve asked for, I’ve always gotten, except the room. We just do not have enough space. Otherwise, I’d have a full-sized room.” In my observation, the room was too small for the number of students. It was even to the point that students could not move around very easily without distracting and bumping into each other. As a result, some students went out into the hallway to get work done with fewer distractions. When it came to her feelings about sharing space with another teacher in the enrichment program, she said

In those days and those classrooms, I feel like the teacher was teaching and I’m walking around and helping the students. I’m not feeling more effective because I’m not feeling like I’m a partner with the teacher. I feel more like, “are they paying attention? We are in this problem, stop playing with that.” I do not feel I’m very effective; I feel like a helper.

Whether in her small inclusive classroom or shared enrichment space, Case 1 felt like an afterthought.
The facilities for Case 2 were even worse than Case 1. In fact, the facilities were the worst of all the cases I observed. The gifted classroom was located in the basement of a two-story elementary school and consisted of a large space divided with partial barriers (that did not even reach the ceiling) into three separate spaces. A special education and a reading program occupied the other two sections. The barriers are made from wooden bulletin board lined side-by-side.

There was also an art classroom nearby in the basement, but closed off with an actual door. The open space in which the gifted classroom existed also served as a hallway where students walked through to get to the art room. The gifted classroom was at the very end of the open space in the basement near the stairwell.

As a result of this setup, noise and distractions were constant during my observation. The special education class was conducted at same time during my observation, students constantly walked through, sounds from the floor above reached the space, the art classroom was rambunctious, and loud heating and cooling ducts rumbled. Additionally, water leaked from the ceiling and down the walls and the windows were extremely small. As a result, there was no view and no fresh air.

In Case 2’s words, her poor facilities make her feel “kind of the push to the back.” She explained further

I do not have a regular classroom. In one school, I have my sharing space in the basement and this year I have the special education. If we have a lot of noise and interruptions, we are out of control, so that is a little challenging. But in other school, last year I was in the library. So, the space is a problem, and when the space is problem, [there is] a lot of give and take, even personally. But I do not
complain about it and I always tell my kids, well they know that we could take on a challenge in the way I can enforce the positive side. When they say, “why are we in the basement?” I told them, and they know, we can take on a challenge. And also, we do not have supplies and things that we can benefit from like the place and fresh air or even quiet area, but I take that as a challenge and pretend that we’re doing great things anyway. We can do it and try to make it laugh and joke.

This excerpt is very depressing because it presents a situation in which the teacher and students are clearly suffering from terrible facilities, but they try to put a positive spin on it. It is unacceptable for a teacher of the gifted to have to try to teach on top of dealing with distractions and, above all, keep a positive attitude towards everything. In light of the above point about increasing demands, policies, standards, and accountability, the story becomes even more distressing.

However, among the public schools in Ohio, Cases 3, 4, 5, and 6 had decent or even good facilities. Even though Case 4 had good facilities, she told a story about a GT teacher she knew from about 15 years ago who “was in a little shoebox classroom at the end of the hall.” She mentioned this fact as an offhand comment, but with the overall theme of poor facilities, this comment stood out.

Unfortunately, being in a little shoebox classroom seems to be more of the rule than the exception. Moreover, the range of facilities is wide and varied because most funding is based on the district, the wealth of the neighborhood, and the decisions voters make on tax levies. Sometimes funding also comes from grants, but those are rare and temporary. For example, Case 5 had some good equipment, such as an Apple TV, WiFi,
and iPads for every student, but some of those were grant funded. Even still, her facilities were good because of good district funding. In my observation, I saw a large classroom filled with technology such as the above mentioned equipment in addition to a smartboard and projector; comfortable seats such as two sofas, two rugs, and four bean bags in each corner of the room; various stations for learning, fun, and rewards; and a positive atmosphere created from the good lighting, big windows with a view of a garden, and fresh air. Overall, I did not see or have any negative about the learning environment and it was probably the best learning environment I observed.

As for the private schools in Michigan, Case 7’s school was poorer quality and smaller than Case 8 and 9’s school. The different tuition, enrollment, and management of budget affect the range in quality of these two schools. In the sense that the range of facility quality is varied and depends on the wealth of the students’ families, the situation is similar to public school. However, the exact way private and public schools are funded is different.

**Private versus public funding.** Case 6 had a unique position of working in both a public, currently, and private school for gifted and talented students. When she compared the funding, she said,

I think it’s funding for different things. So [the private school] is a tuition-based school. So you pay tuition to attend there. Our students [in the public school] pay a fee to be a part of the gifted program. They pay $35. That’s where a lot of our money for our bank goes to help us get our supplies. The state does not have funding to give for professional development. For [the public school] to send teachers for professional development. [In contrast, the private school] is
independent. They don’t want to spend, they really want to watch what they spend, because it’s all tuition; however, they have endorsements. They have an endowment fee, at [the private school], and that is how they are able to pay for the professional development. So it comes out of two different pots over there.

In other words, the different values of the private and public schools affect what gets funded and what does not.

Cases 7, 8, and 9 all live and teach in Michigan and all are at private schools for the gifted. The reason for this is Michigan actually has very few public gifted programs because their mandates and funding are even worse than Ohio’s. As a result, private schools for the gifted have emerged to fill the gap in public education.

Case 7 explained that their school gets most of their money from tuition paid by the students’ parents. They have considered some alternative methods for funding, such as federal vouchers, but have decided not to accept that because that money comes with additional demands. Case 7 described,

We talked about doing vouchers and things like that, but if we did that and we took federal money, we’d have to follow federal rules, and we don’t wanna be like teaching to the test. I mean that’s, that’s the main reason why we don’t accept, um, school vouchers or anything, ‘cause I remember it came up maybe ten years ago, when the voucher system started, that we could get more students if we accepted the vouchers, but then we realized that we would have to teach to the test and have the kids do all the testing, and then prove certain things, like do whatever the government said we had to do to get the funds, and usually it’s not something that’s conducive to gifted education, they’re at odds. So we didn’t want
to have to follow the government’s rules on what a school had to do because it wasn’t, um, it wasn’t in any way beneficial to the kids in their learning style. As a result of this decision, Case 7 has more control over what goes on in the classroom and how budget decisions are made than the public school teachers. She explained that the principal “doesn’t put a price limit on the things that we want to spend our money on, the school money… but she said if it’s …useful to your classroom, go ahead.”

Cases 8 and 9 were also at a private school (the same school), which they explained is tuition-based with some fundraising and endowments. Even with about $22,000 in full tuition per student for each of the schools, these cases still felt “we don't have enough staff nor … funding to do all the things we really would like to do.” Case 8 also claimed that they were not teachers for the money because “there is no money here.” However, it was clear to me that this school was able to do a lot more than the public schools I visited in Ohio. So like time, it seems money will never be enough no matter how much there is.

**Gifted students are worth the investment.** Financially, gifted education is underfunded; physically, small and poor facilities are common; and mentally, in the minds of most of the public citizens, all of this neglect is related to a persistent belief in the myth of giftedness: that gifted students will be fine on their own. Moreover, the neglect of investment in gifted education is caused by and leads to the further reinforcement of the myth of giftedness. While funding is being cut, many of the cases claimed that gifted students are a worthwhile investment opportunity that is being missed. As Case 4 noted in reference to a lack of funding, “there's still the mentality that gifted kids will be fine.” MAGC president Sherry Sparks (2014) also commented on the myth
of giftedness. She said the belief that the “cream rises to the top” is a popular myth, and gifted children require nurturing to grow into leaders and producers to bring our country to the highest level of global competition.

In fact, most of the cases took the opportunity during the final message to policymakers, teachers, communities, and so on to advocate for the value of gifted education as an investment. Case 4 exclaimed, “Don't ignore these kids. … I know teachers cost money, but these are the kids who are capable of anything.” Sparks (2014) made a similarly passionate plea for investment in gifted education:

In the climate of shrinking budgets, America’s investment in educational programs contains few to no mandates for gifted education. Financial investments in such programs have dwindled to nearly nothing… As a result, gifted children, across all socio-economic groups and from all backgrounds, in large part, remain unidentified, underdeveloped, and under-challenged.

The neglect of gifted students across the nation is unacceptable.

Some of the cases even worried about what they perceived as the worst-case scenarios of neglecting gifted students. In particular, the idea that gifted students have a lot of potential for good or for bad was common. At best, gifted students who are not supported through education will “fall through the cracks,” as Sparks (2014) highlighted. At worst, they may become the next Hitler, as Cases 8 and 9 claimed. The direction this potential may take depends on how well programs help them develop socioemotionally, in the beliefs of these cases. When we were talking about the role of parents, society, and everyone in general in the responsibility of gifted education, Case 5 lamented the fact that
…we love deal with the big-name celebrities, but we don’t want to deal with the big name infamous people who make history in different ways because they can’t handle their giftedness. Because they are destructive with their giftedness, and we’re creating that. And until we make it a priority, that’s not going to change.

When Case 5 stated, “we’re creating that,” she seems to be putting the responsibility on the shoulders of teachers, schools, governments, and society in general.

Case 5 was not the only one to worry about the destructive capabilities of gifted people and the responsibility of schools to help guide them into being constructive members of society. Cases 8 and 9 also addressed this fear and even took it further, attributing the potential for destructiveness to a lack of socioemotional development.

Case 8: But the fact is these kids if they used their brains not for good not to help society, that's…

Case 9: …not to have a conscience…

Case 8: that's dangerous.

Case 9: That moral compass is a real. So life here for our kids is not just a really rigorous academic…

Case 8: …which it is…

Case 9: …which it is, but it's a rigorous social and emotional [curriculum] as well.

This dialogue between Case 8 and 9 illustrates the way in which teachers at the school seamlessly discuss issues. These two cases claimed later on that their approach to resolving issues among faculty, staff, administrators, students, and parents is through dialogue, meetings, and general talking. That approach reinforces their claim that socioemotional development is a big part of their program. They explained further:
Case 9:… It sometimes looks messy because when kids make mistakes—and, oh my goodness kids make mistakes?—and they do something that really is hurtful or in some way not good for them or the others or the community, we don't say “detention.” We say, “let's sit down and talk.”

Case 8: A lot of talking here.

Case 8 explained that in order for this development through discussion to work, the teacher needs to be socioemotionally secure as well.

That takes an emotionally secure teacher to do that. You give up some of the control. And the kid gives up some of their [attitude of], "you're the adult, you decide." No, this is you too. And the parent has to be part of it. You don't just write a check and send your kid to school. You send your kid to school, you talk to the teacher, you trust the teacher, the teacher empowers the kid, the kid takes up their part of the responsibility. So everyone's sort of working together, as much as possible. And all this is idealistic. And it doesn't always happen every day at every thing. I would be lying to you to tell you this place works perfectly. It's a work in progress. It will be long after we're out of here there'll be somebody else struggling with some of these things.

Cases 8 and 9 talked about the socioemotional needs of gifted students in relation to the myth of giftedness and their extreme potentials more than any of the other cases.

Ultimately, they attribute the importance of this concept to their history, founders, and school mission:

This school's mission is to prevent Holocaust, because the founders had come from a school in Germany and had to get out of Germany [during the Holocaust
era]. Now, when I say that to people who have been here, they look at me like I'm crazy, but it's absolutely true that our job is not to prepare students to get into Harvard. Our job is not to prepare students. Our job is to help students find out who they are so they'll be less likely to follow orders to march people into gas chambers. … They come here to learn so they can make the world a better place. We're not working this hard for the money because there is no money here. We're this hard so the children that leave here will be strong empowered people that will make this place a lot better…. Why the [founders of the school] went to gifted is probably [because] Adolf Hitler was gifted. Now, would a [one of the founders] saved him? I don't know.

Referring to preventing another Adolf Hitler or Holocaust is probably an over-exaggeration of the destructive potential of gifted students, but the point Case 8 and 9 made is that gifted schools and teachers have the power to help shape the potential of gifted students towards positive, self-aware, progressive, and self-actualized members of society, who ultimately might become leaders and innovators in the global community. The payoff of investment in gifted education i in terms of economic, social, and cultural progress is widely supported in the literature (Ziegler, Stoeger, & Vialle, 2012; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). These authors all make the argument that gifted students become gifted leaders, so investing in giftedness is an investment in better leaders in the future who can help make the US continue to be competitive globally. As Sparks (2014) concluding remarks in her presentation asserted, America cannot afford to leave its gifted students’ potential to chance.
Uncertain about Expectations

One surprising finding was that some of the cases did not seem to have much of an awareness of what standards and expectations they are held to as teachers of the gifted. Many were ignorant of the NAGC—CEC recommended standards (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007), some were uncertain about the state and federal regulations, and one was even unfamiliar with the school policy. Because of my own background studying and analyzing standards and policies in the gifted field discussed in the first section of this chapter, I expected that teachers would have a similar level of interest in the political trends that affect their practice. Moreover, in my perspective, a teacher who is ignorant of federal, state, and school policies is like a pilot who is unaware of the weather and the Federal Aviation Administration rules. These are important conditions and trends that a practitioner should know.

When asked to describe her gifted program, Case 4 struggled to explain how the state standards and school policies worked at the time of the interview because she claimed they were changing.

The current state requirement is a 127 or higher on the IQ and I think—I'm trying to remember here because it's always changing—it's 95th [percentile] or above in either reading or math to be identified. In [her school district], I know we just changed it. It used to be they could have—ors, there were a bunch of ors. It was like you could actually be in the program if you had a 120, but you had to be in the 95th for both reading and math, or you could have a 125 but then you'd have to be in the 90th percent—and that's changing. It's going to go back to you have to have 125 and you have to be in the 90th percent. But that is not something that
has started yet. That was something we're developing. So, exactly when I first started the gifted program six years ago, my understanding of it then was you had to have a 127 IQ and you had to be in the 90th percentile or higher in reading and math. Then, when I got out of the program, new people took over, and some of those numbers fluctuated. I don't know the exact numbers now, but I do know they are more lenient than they were, and they're tightening them back up for the future.

One would expect that a teacher of the gifted would be informed of the changes and even be involved in the changes, so her difficulty to recall exact points was surprising.

Case 6 also struggled to explain some policies, in her case related to teacher evaluations. When I asked her about the evaluation system, she said,

That’s tricky because we’re going through all these changes right now in the state of Ohio where they’re just now starting to implement OTES, and this is the first year for it. … I don’t know what the future holds, because it is completely changing at this point, so I can’t really—. In fact, I have a meeting after school today, which is supposed to explain more on how it’s changing.

Like Case 4, Case 6 attributed her uncertainty to the changing policy. The question that remains is who is more responsible for this confusion. On one hand, teachers of the gifted should be active in these decisions and developments because they are in the middle of it and it affects their practice. On the other hand, if what the cases claim is true, the constant change in policy and the lack of explanation from policymakers and school administrators is at least partially to blame. It is difficult to fully blame teachers when every time they learn a new policy, they feel like they have to change again. In light of
the “do more with less” theme, why should teachers spend so much time learning the frequently changing policies when they are barely paid enough to simply teach?

Another trend in the gifted field that the cases were ignorant of was the NAGC—CEC recommended standards for the education of gifted teachers. For example, when asked if she was aware of these recommended standards, Case 3 said, “I don't look at these in particular, but absolutely I mean I think they're overarching in so many things that we look at.” This lack of awareness is not as surprising since it is only a recommendation at this point and not a mandate. Still, it would behoove them to keep up on topics and trends in the gifted field.

However, Case 1, 3, and 5 were good at explaining policies and standards at school, state, and federal levels. Case 3 explained how,

Right now, Ohio operating standards for gifted education are under review, and they have been for the entire last year. They should have been done last year and now we're under other issues within an ethics review with members, and still gifted remains unfunded and un-mandated. The only mandate is to identify.

Case 3 is able to explain the policies because of her role as a gifted coordinator and her involvement in organizations and advocacy groups. As she mentioned

I serve as the chair-elect for the Ohio Association for Gifted Children Coordinator Board and we are constantly advocating for the kids…. We are continually advocating for [more mandates than only identifying]. I am continually writing letters, going to meetings, going to board meetings, being present, representing other coordinators and students and parents and teachers in this state, that there has to be more mandates.
The problem with a lack of mandates in Ohio and Michigan is supported by the literature (NAGC, 2011).

Case 5 was able to give some insight into the Ohio standards and budget, pointing out that the only mandate is to identify and how the state removed gifted education “as a line item in the big budget a couple of years ago.” Case 5 seemed well-versed on the topic because she is active helping other teachers understand giftedness, monitoring students teachers, and she has “a great gifted coordinator. She really is an advocate for doing what’s right for the kids. She kind of goes into the ring for us to get what we need.”

In general, the amount of additional roles and interest in other positions seems to motivate the teachers to learn more about policies, budgets, and trends. Case 1, for example, has started to learn more about policies in gifted education because she has a goal to become a gifted coordinator. She explained,

We were using the gifted coordinator of Wood County and she is close to retirement, but when she does it, I will take over. But first, I have to have my Masters degree to become a gifted coordinator, and I just finished that…. I would like to the coordinator position, but I don’t want to leave teaching, so if I will take the position, I will become a part-time teacher and part-time coordinator.

While she did not talk much about the policy in the regular interview, she did provide a good explanation of policies when I visited her class for observation. She showed me a document called the Operating standard for identifying and serving gifted students for her school district, which outlined the maximum number of gifted students per class, the maximum overall caseload per gifted teacher, and the minimum number of minutes per week of contact time. The draft of this policy document was from September 2013, but
she explained to me that the school was in the process of revising it for the 2014-2015 year. Her ability to explain these policies was probably motivated by her promotion goals.

**Practice is More Meaningful Than Theory**

Most of the cases emphasized the value of practical experience when it comes to teaching more than any theory, model, or author. In fact, Case 1, Case 2, Case 4, and Case 6 all struggled to even recall names of influential theorists or theories. The cases also had an easier time recalling names of general education and childhood development theorists, such as Piaget, Gardner, and Bloom. While these theories apply to gifted students as well, there are many educational theories directed specifically at gifted students, but the cases rarely recalled them or related them to their practice. Most of all, the teachers could not connect their theories to their practice, such as planning strategies, activities, or classroom management approaches.

When asked to rank the NAGC—CEC recommend standards for the education of gifted teacher in order of their perceived importance in their practice (see Table 11 in chapter 4 about ranking standards), the cases ranked Theoretical Foundations second to last on average, with ethical and professional practice being lower only because the cases struggled to place that one anywhere since it pervades everything. This suggests that the concept of theoretical foundations is perceived as the least important from the perspective of these teachers. Case 5 even asked for more time to think about the standards, and based on her practice and beliefs, she still ranked Foundations last. These findings align with findings from the perspective of teachers of the gifted in Iran, in which the least
valuable competency was knowledge of the theoretical foundations of giftedness (Kalbasi et al., 2012).

For example, Case 4 – Jim DeLisle and socioemotional needs. When asked to name her favorite author in gifted education, she took about five minutes to recall his name, but it was not until I proposed the name DeLisle that she said, “Yes! Yes! DeLisle!” I only suggested DeLisle because she went around and around naming some general concepts he covered, such as socioemotional needs. She listed off names that she did not mean, such as not Renzulli, not Gardner, not Clark, and not Bloom. Then when I asked her to consider his ideas deeper in connection with effective teachers, she said

I don't about Jim DeLisle, but just taking the components of what he teaches about social and emotional needs and that, and you put it with some of these others, and then scaffolding and then having higher expectations. I think putting it all together, you have a more effective teacher than just picking one.

In a short time span, she listed seven unrelated names and concepts without exploring them in any depth, and then went back to telling stories about her experience. As the quote above shows, she referred to scaffolding as a buzzword but not as a deep concept from Vygotsky with substantial meaning. It seemed that the names like DeLisle were just books on shelf for Case 4 and not any kind of guide or influence on her practice.

Case in point, during my observation of Case 4, she demonstrated a lack of awareness of the socioemotional needs of one of her students. When asked to write about his memorable moment, the student experienced writer’s block. Case 4 stood close to the student and challenged him to think with a series of leading questions. I observed the students face get redder and redder, clearly exhibiting his frustration. However, Case 4
seemed unaware of this reaction and continued until the student burst into tears. When this happened, the teacher walked away and said that she would come back to talk with him later, with no attempt to comfort, console, or apologize to him.

Case 6 explained how theoretical foundations do not even play a part in her planning. As she thought her ranking of the recommended standards, she said

Foundation: this does not impact my planning. I don’t ever think about the foundations of gifted education when I’m planning. I think it’s more organic, or already embedded into how I’ve taught for so many years, that it is just not delivered. I just innately do it.

Instead of basing lessons and teaching strategies on theories or models, most of the cases expressed the idea that they base these practices on the particular students’ needs. Case 5 explained

Because I could do everything right according to the models, I could do everything that the theorists say is correct, but if I don’t get the results from the kids, I have to be able to modify that. I have to work with it, tweak it, make it my own, and make it that student’s own so that they actually get something out of it. And I think that’s where we go from being competent to being effective.

Case 2 gave a very similar explanation of her planning strategies in relation to theories and students’ needs. She explicitly said

I like to combine so many things. And I do not follow one model exactly because I think it’s really important to look at each child individual. That’s what I do mostly. You can take ideas, theories from each, but it really comes down to each
child and what their needs are. So all theories are important, but the needs of the individual child come first, especially in gifted because of the different levels.

With these beliefs about the lack of importance of theory in mind, most of the cases complained that their educational experience focused too much on theories and not enough on practice.

Case 3 was unique because she was able to speak easily about how she sees theories connecting to practice and she sees the value in some theories. However, she acknowledged that based on her experience as a coordinator, consultant working with teachers, and presenter at conferences, many teachers cannot easily connect philosophies and theories to practical experiences. She described how

…most of the people are just practical teachers, and so they have they practical experience of teaching, but they don't have that philosophical background, and so what I took from that is I could take whatever I was learning about in the university classroom and I could talk about it as a teacher, too, because I was teaching through that time to kind of intertwine the two.

Case 3’s observation aligns with the general impression from the cases I interviewed. It also aligns with some findings from the literature, such as Berman et al. (2012) who found that even after an entire class on socioemotional needs of gifted students, the master’s students still held preconceived notions and myths about gifted students, which shows that they did not conceptualize the theories and philosophies they learned. Finally, it aligns with other previous personal experiences I had. In most graduate education classes, concepts, theories, and philosophies are introduced by the professors, but it is up to the students to make the connections to practice, which they struggle with doing. For
example, when I was learning about perfectionism among gifted students, I led my own exploration into how this phenomenon operates in practice by asking the professor and other classmates if I could visit any of their classrooms to observe behaviors related to perfectionism. For many graduate students in education, they seem to expect the professor to make that connection between theory and practice for them, when in fact it is up to the student to draw the connection to the experience to test the theories validity in different situations.

For instance, I asked Case 4 “So whatever you learned at the university did not add much to your skill or ability as a teacher?” She replied,

No. Again: the kids, the classroom, the environment, knowing their families, where the bar needed to be, and my background of where I’ve been. And now having kids and having kids at a private gifted school, also adds to my drive as a teacher. But if there's a college professor [who added to my skill or ability], I can't point one out.

In other words, Case 4 claimed none of her college professors facilitated the connection between what is learned from books and the university setting to the actual classroom practice.

The emphasis on more practical educational experiences and professional development among the cases agrees with Mills (2003), who stated that teachers of the gifted need training with a strong emphasis on methodology courses. For example, Case 5 claimed that “The best thing that I think they [her undergraduate program professors] do with their education majors, or we did at that time, is we were in the classroom right away as freshman.” She went on to explain in more detail how that classroom experience
early on benefited her, whereas her aunt did not have the same classroom experience early in the program, so she discovered she did not enjoy teaching too late in the program.

Case 9 also promoted the benefits of early onsite training in actual schools based on her educational experience. She reported,

When I went through teacher training, it was a one-year urban education program where we were situated in the school every single day and our professors came to us and taught outside in the parking lot. So they were in and out of the school we were in. And it was within the context of being with children. And it was, theory didn't work unless it worked. And so we were comparing the theory to the everyday.

For her, the ability to test ideas in practice and examine methods regularly with real students helped her understand how theory and practice align.

Unfortunately, for both learning and practical purposes, gifted education is not a big part of undergraduate education. As Case 5 noted, for most undergraduate programs, there is only “one little paragraph in a special ed. class that tells us about giftedness.” Case 7 said almost the exact same thing, complaining how “gifted was covered for a half hour in my exceptional learners class in my entire teaching career, and that was it. That’s all we did. Half an hour. And it was like, four lines in the book.” These criticisms of the lack of a gifted focus in undergraduate education agrees with findings from Winebrenner (2002) and NAGC (2008), which has clearly shown that education and training in gifted education is deficient. As Berman et al. (2012) concluded in their study of the influence a gifted course,
Gifted child education currently lacks space and place in the general teacher education curriculum, even though federal law mandates teachers are competent and skilled in identifying and providing instructional strategies to service the needs of GT learners. (p. 24)

Education about gifted learners needs to be more than “one little paragraph,” “four lines,” or “a half hour” in a course. In fact, the findings of Berman et al. indicate that education about giftedness needs to be more than one entire course. They found, “one course focusing on the nature and needs of GT learners in a general teacher education program is woefully lacking in providing awareness about the nature and needs of GT learners in classroom settings” (p. 24). After their course, the general education teachers were only just beginning to understand characteristics of gifted learners and to criticize their own beliefs about gifted learners.

**Unexpected Opportunities**

When it comes to how the teachers ended up as teachers of the gifted, a common theme was that it was not planned but rather based on unexpected opportunities. The cases made their decisions to become teachers of the gifted based on job openings, wanting to learn more about giftedness because of their own children, or a college course on giftedness that unexpectedly interested them.

Case 1 did not start her college education with the plan to become a gifted teacher. She earned a bachelor in elementary education, but she moved to California from Ohio when she started her career and took advantage of an unexpected opportunity to teach gifted students there. She said,
I started in elementary education and we [she, her husband, and her children] moved to California [from Ohio]. In California I had the opportunity to teach in the gifted program. So I did it, and I enjoyed it. It was different in California; because of that most of my students were non-English-speaking student.

This experience affected the rest of her career. She enjoyed both aspects of that job: teaching ESL and teaching gifted students. So when she returned to Ohio, she took a job teaching ESL at a nearby university. After that, she had another unexpected opportunity. Her sister-in-law called her and told her about an opening at her current school in gifted education. Even though her degree was not in gifted education, she did have her prior experience in California, so she applied and got the job.

Case 3 started out as a regular teacher, but always felt she understood the highly intelligent and gifted students well. Thus, when an opportunity arose, she took it:

I started out as a regular teacher in a second grade classroom and then I moved on to a third grade classroom. When I was teaching the third graders, one of the parents was the coordinator of the gifted at the time, and she said, “we have an opening at the middle school, would you come up and teach gifted?” And so I had had gifted kids in my classroom, but I was not particularly certified in that or doing anything too different for them. However, I mean, I think that parents saw that I was working with their child well and doing that. So I think that gave me the confidence to think, “Okay, I can move up. I can do something with the middle schoolers. I can do the gifted part.” That's when I started to pursue my degree in that.
Perhaps being identified as gifted herself led her to choose the path when the opening appeared.

Case 8 also took advantage of an unexpected opportunity, but his chance occurred after he was fired from a previous job. He told me about how his friend referred him to the job:

My friend, whose husband worked here, she came and she said this is a great school. So I got a summer camp job here. That was in science, and I became the science teacher for seventeen years, lower school.

He never intended to be a teacher of the gifted, but he has spent almost two decades in the career because of a sudden opportunity. This type of story seemed to be quite common among the cases.

**Additional Roles**

This was not a code originally, but the interviews and observations confirmed that it was a common and important issue among the cases. I considered anything beyond teaching to be additional roles. These roles included being an unofficial coordinator and consultant, being parents of gifted children themselves, facilitating positive community relations, and being researchers.

As mentioned in the time and money theme, Case 1 fulfills both official and unofficial roles including teacher, coordinator, and consultant. She realized that she fulfills these duties without being recognized, so she said just earned a master’s degree in gifted education in order to fulfill her goal of becoming a gifted coordinator for her district. Although this district depends on a nearby gifted coordinator for help developing
their gifted program, Case 1 knows she bridges a lot of gaps in the coordination of the program and wants to make that role part of her position.

Case 3 is a full-time gifted coordinator, a part-time consultant, and an occasional teacher of the gifted. She also explained how she fulfills advocacy roles, such as being the chair-elect for the Ohio Association for Gifted Children Coordinator Board.

**Teacher Evaluation**

As Table 6 ("The Positive and Negative References to Practice") shows, most negative comments on teacher practice were related to teacher evaluation. In order to evaluate teacher effectiveness more fairly and accurately, the majority of the cases emphasized the need to evaluate teachers more broadly and over time. The cases acknowledged measuring teacher effectiveness is difficult and is even hard to define. The difficulty defining and measuring teacher effectiveness has been explored in depth by Ellena (1964), Hamachek (1975), Stronge (2002), and Welsh (2011). In particular, most of the teachers criticized the narrow and short-term focus of most teacher evaluation systems. Problems noted included that single observations could fall on a bad, non-representative day.

**Evaluation systems.** At the time of the interviews, the State of Ohio was in a period of transition into a new evaluation system: Ohio’s Teacher Evaluation System (OTES). This new system made some cases uneasy and others were not certain what to expect. Case 6 noted that the OTES system had just started the year before the interview, so she found it problematic but it was too early to tell how well it worked. She did state that it is based “more on student growth, and I don’t know… I don’t know what that looks like yet.”
One element of both old and new systems is value-added growth. One measure of added value is improvements in tests. The cases noted that using standardized test results to evaluate teachers place too much on students on a given day regardless of issues like test anxiety, a bad day, or a lack of a proper diet. Case 1 explained how other factors might affect standardized tests:

I do not like the standardized tests, honestly, because not all students do well on the test, and because it depends on the students that day, if it is a good or bad day to test. We had a perfect example: We had to test to identify whether the students were gifted or not in fourth grade in January of this year, when they came back from the Christmas Break. We had snow, and we missed the entire week of school that week we were supposed to come back. Then students were getting sick. We had almost a month were the students were home. They came back, and in the first day, we threw them in a high-stakes test. They are tired, not used to getting up in the morning, they’re probably running late, did not eat breakfast, and they are sick because of the weather. The scores were low. I only have 6 students identified. Normally, I have several more.

In this case, the weather affected the class time and the students’ health, which negatively affected their test scores. As a result, the teacher might be evaluated as less effective compared to a best-case scenario.

Moreover, with a demand to show growth or value added on tests, unfair pressures is put on gifted programs in particular to continually increase scores even when they are near the maximum already. Case 5 described how the push for constant growth is unrealistic:
They, according to the test, have to get at least a 401. To me that doesn’t make any sense because the year’s growth was in achieving the same score, because it was a year-harder test. So, we’re actually asking them to do more than a year’s growth in order for the teacher to be effective. So to me, I don’t think you need the additional [growth beyond the year’s growth]. I think if you get the 401, it’d be great; it’d be wonderful if we could grow. But if you can get a 400 on the 7th grade test and a 400 on the 8th grade, then you grew for a year. And I think that shows the accomplishment, that you’re accomplished.

Case 5 pointed here how maintaining constant growth is considered not good enough, while increasing growth is unfair.

When asked if she believed there was a way to measure teacher effectiveness, Case 5 expressed uncertainty and felt it is difficult. She asserted,

I think [teacher effectiveness] is really a difficult measure. I think that our Ohio evaluation process is proving that all over the place. I was told I’m not accomplished according to my evaluator. However, according to the State of Ohio, I am a master teacher. Those two should be the same. That should be in the same measure. And I’m having an evaluator say, “I believe you’re accomplished, but I’m not seeing here on paper.” So I think it is difficult to measure. I think when you look at just that number—I think it’s different for so many people.

Case 5’s main point is that two different systems for ranking teachers conflicted with each other, which shows either one or both are flawed in some way.
Not only is teacher effectiveness hard to reduce to a number, but teachers’ effectiveness may change over time. Case 3 claimed that she has seen some Teachers of the Year who, 10 years later, are no longer Teacher-of-the-Year material. She described

When there are scheduled observations for teachers, some of them are really good at going through their lesson plans and putting in all those key words and putting in all those things, and actually, when they get into the classroom, they can be really awesome--for one day. but we're talking about 180 days of instruction that needs to happen in a classroom, and so I think we need to be really careful not to say that ‘once a good teacher, always a good teacher.’

Case 6 pointed out another flaw with measuring teacher effectiveness. In her current program, she felt she did not work with her students frequently or over long enough time periods to make a measurable difference.

I think it’s difficult to decide if teacher effectiveness can be measured or not. In my case I only see the students one day a week this makes it difficult to determine effectiveness based on grades/test. I believe multiple classroom observations are the best to assess a teacher. However, even then they need to be assessed by someone who is trained.

Case 1 tried to see the benefit of evaluations systems, but even while giving some credit, she viewed the current system as flawed.

I do believe they are trying to make teachers better in the system, but I believe the system is set up to make the teachers fail. The way they rate the teachers, scores, everything goes down. Everything is set up for the teachers to fail. Not to fail, but not to do as well as they are.
However, Case 1 did not clarify what elements of the evaluation system lead to failure or sub-standard performance.

**The need to consider long-term student achievement.** Based on these criticisms, the main impressions that the teachers shared about evaluating teacher effectiveness are that it needs to occur over time and in different ways. The teachers recommended looking at long-term student achievement, such as how they do in high school, college, or career. They also recommended that classroom observations should occur over multiple visits and even across years to avoid unusual bad classes having a strong weight. Case 5 criticized it best:

One thing that I do that is very important in our profession of education is that so many of the things the kids come back, like I said, and you see that later. The first thing I say when a kid comes back is what didn’t I prepare you [for], what do I need to do more of, what did I overkill that you didn’t need? And we talk about that. And when they come back, I think, that’s when you are able to judge that effectiveness. Not whether they visit you, but that long-term data of: what happened later? I think it’s so hard to walk into a classroom because I think we can put on a dog-and-pony show and make ourselves look effective any time we want. But to measure true effectiveness of a teacher, you have to be looking at their outcome, which is the student. And that’s along down the line. For me it’s when they’re in high school. Or even college. For high school teachers, it’s college. It’s where they are later, so it’s very difficult, I think, to measure that effectiveness.
Case 5’s recommendation for evaluating teacher effectiveness is to still look at growth, but not from one year to the next, but also years later. For example, Case 1 told a story about her students receiving scholarships a few years after she had them. She reported, “I just found out Northwest Ohio gifted coordinators had four scholarships that they gave out this year and three of those scholarship went to three of my students.” It is unclear if an accomplishment like that would ever be reflected in the current teacher evaluation systems, but it obviously shows some degree of teacher effectiveness on Case 1’s part.

**Lack of reflection: self-evaluation.** I expected to hear more about the reflection and journaling practices of the cases, specifically related to how that influences their practice and development as effective teachers. I had this expectation because reflection practices have been recommended for teachers as far back as John Dewey (1933/1998) and has been promoted by educational experts ever since. In the gifted field, Annemarie Roeper promoted reflective practices in her books, such as *The “I” of the Beholder: A Guided Journey to the Essence of a Child* (Roeper, 2007), and articles, such as “Reflections from Annemarie Roeper: A Personal Statement of Philosophy of George and Annemarie Roeper” (Roeper, 1996). Perhaps my expectations are based on book knowledge more than practical knowledge, but the heavy emphasis on the value of self-reflection among the major names in the educational field have caused me to expect teachers to use this technique. Additionally, in my experience, most of my professors in both master’s and PhD programs have required reflection assignments. It is surprising to me that teachers learn about and use this practice in their education, but then fail to apply it to their practice as teachers.
The results showed that the cases in general did not have a formal reflection or journaling process. Some cases mentioned talking to spouses or colleagues, or making some notes in lesson plans, but none of them had a journal or notebook that included in-depths thoughts on what worked, what did not work and relating it to previous experiences, readings, and education. This missing piece might help explain the lack of connection between theory and practice.

Case 6 said her only reflection is talking with her husband. Reflection and journaling occurred in her university experience when professors assigned it, but she does not journal or regularly reflect in her own daily practice. Cases 8 and 9 said reflection is kind of part of the program and teacher evaluation, but it is not a formal process.

The benefit of reflection is its ability to improve self-awareness. As Cullingford (1995), ineffective teachers are those who lack self-awareness and are defensive. Case 8 and 9 shared a similar view that in order to be an effective teacher and survive criticism from oneself, students, colleagues, and administrators, they must be “emotionally secure” and not defensive.

**Characteristics Are More Important than Competencies**

In general, the cases expressed the belief that while both personality and academic competencies are important, personality has more value and cannot be taught. This perspective agrees with Tirri’s (2008) review of the literature, which also found that personality and social qualities have more influence on teacher effectiveness than intelligence.
Like/caring versus respect/challenging. One of the concepts related to this theme that a couple cases is like/caring versus respect/challenging. Case 3 told a story about her very first interview in her teaching career:

the question they asked me was, “Would you rather be liked or respected by your students?” And so fresh out of college, I'm trying to think, “Do I want to be liked or do I want to be respected? What's the right answer?” And so I said I want to be respected, because I wasn't sure. And so after the interview, the woman turned off the tape recorder. She said, “I'm gonna send you of to the next interview, but I want you to know something: in that question—whether you want the students to like you or respect you—the correct answer we're looking for in our district is we want them to like you. And I thought, what an awesome thing for—as a district—for them to know that for a kid to work hard, and to get anywhere, they need to like their teacher. And so I thought that's something that's stuck with me all along.

Case 3’s point, and apparently the point the interviewer wanted to make, is that students learn from teachers who they like. Even though both are important, given the choice, Case 3 now prefers teachers who prefer to be loved.

In a similar story, Case 4 describe two of her favorite teachers who had opposite personalities: one who was caring and the other who was challenging. She said the caring teacher “was my favorite teacher, because she just, she cared about every student. I wasn't her favorite student. Every student in her class meant that much to her.” However, she could not remember what she learned from that teacher. “I can't remember what I learned that year, so it couldn't have been that. But she cared. She genuinely made me feel like I
was important in her class.” That teacher made Case 4 want to become a teacher; her passion for teaching developed from the caring attitude she received from this teacher.

In contrast, the other favorite teacher was strict, but she learned a lot and improved her writing skills from that teacher. “One of the best teacher's I ever had was one of the meanest, in 12th grade writing. And she always wrote with a red pen all over my work, but the work I produced for her was the best work I ever have.” So while one inspired her passion, the other improved her skills.

**Learnable versus innate qualities.** Case 8 and 9 repeatedly claimed that a lot of content and pedagogy can be learned, but personality characteristics are innate qualities that are difficult to learn and change. Therefore, they look for teachers who are social and “emotionally secure.” Case 8 said that a teacher without those personality characteristics is a “technician as opposed to [an] artist.” In general, they are not cut out to be effective teachers of the gifted, as they illustrated with an example of a coach who felt threatened by gifted children because they questioned him and his authority. He was not meant to work with gifted children the because he did not have the “willingness to have a true healthy relationship with the kids—not a teacher-student relationship, well there is that, but there's a human-human relationship.”

Case 5 told a story about a man who was a student teacher for her who was brilliant in his subject area, but did not understand the students and their needs. He was not cut out for teaching because of that, according to Case 5. She said, “It’s in the delivery, because I’ve had some very, very smart people. [For example,] the man … who was a student teacher: he was brilliant. But he could not communicate with children. He could not help them to learn. And I’ve had some really great communicators who don’t
have the content to be able to teach it that you think, ‘Why are they teaching?’ Because they like hanging out with kids. You know, that they really enjoy them.”

Based on the literature and the cases, it seems an effective teacher has positive characteristics (attitude and personality) as well as strong competencies (academic skills, knowledge, and pedagogy). Figure 4 presents a range of combinations of positive and negative characteristics and strong and weak competencies.

Figure 4

*Perception of Teachers by Competencies and Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Personality Characteristics</th>
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<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
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<td>Students like and learn (most effective)</td>
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<td>Students like but do not learn</td>
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<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
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<td>Students dislike but learn</td>
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<td>Students dislike and do not learn (least effective)</td>
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<th>Competencies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strong</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
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Placing the qualities that qualify as a competency or characteristic can be based on Croft (2003), Chan (2001; 2011), and Cheung and Hui (2011).

**Gifted teachers of the gifted.** Many cases explained that intelligence is important to teach gifted students, but for the most part it is not important for the teacher to be gifted. Case 4 explained her reasoning why she believes intelligence and academic competency is important:

Because if you're not, they'll eat you alive. …Because…here, the parents, the students, they hold you to a higher [standard] of, “Well if you're going to teach my gifted child who knows this much, you had better know a lot more.”

However, she clarified that she does not mean teachers of the gifted have to be gifted. As she explained,

You don't have to be gifted to teach gifted kids. I'm not saying that. But you do have to know your curriculum and the level above your curriculum, because a lot of your students are going to come in already knowing your curriculum and go, “What more do you have?” Yeah. They want that.

So Case 4 emphasized that it is important to know the curriculum at higher levels so the students do not “eat you alive.” In contrast, while Case 6’s comments generally agree with Case 4, she went a step further and claimed that

Teachers, I don’t feel, should have all the answers. I’ve had a student who was a third grader that took algebra…. I might not know everything, and I have to know they’re different, and their learning style is different, and what they need is different, and be able to push them in that direction. So, I think that that definitely overlaps. As far as students taking the lead? I think it also goes along with
developing—wanting to develop lifelong learners. You want them to investigate and take the lead so that they, they always, want that, have that hunger, to want to learn, and do and know more.

So whereas Case 4 perceives not knowing something as a potential threat, Case 6 sees it as an opportunity to encourage students to discover and inquire on their own, with both student and teacher learning in the process. Such a process fosters lifelong learners in Case 6’s opinion. Cases 8 and 9 also claimed that teachers and students can always learn from each other, and so challenges to the teacher’s knowledge is not a threat. Teachers of the gifted have to be emotionally secure in that regard, Case 8 and 9 asserted.

These cases in general agree with the trend in the literature. In general, the literature has clearly shown that intelligence and the giftedness of teachers of the gifted is not the most important quality when compared to personality characteristics and pedagogical competencies. Only Milgram (1979) found intelligence to be the most important quality of teachers of the gifted based on the perspectives of the students. However, Milgram is an outdated study that comes from Israel, so there may be cultural differences that value intelligence more in Israel than the other areas in which similar studies have occurred. Clark (1983) summarized the apparent relationship between personality and intelligence in relation to effectiveness, and concluded “A teacher does not need to be highly intelligent to work effectively with the gifted learner, but that teacher should definitely value intelligence, understand its implications, and know how to nurture it” (p. 371). The concepts of lifelong learner, secure teachers, and students who are hungry for knowledge described by Cases 4, 6, 8, and 9 relates to Clark’s comment that the teacher should “definitely value intelligence…and nurture it.”
However, the one exception to this viewpoint from the cases was Case 7. She claimed to be gifted, along with her two sisters. Their giftedness, in fact, led her mother to decide that the regular schools were not serving her children well, so she founded a private school for the gifted, which is where Case 7 attended and now teaches. She emphasized the importance of being gifted as a teacher more than any of the other cases. For instance, when she made additions and modifications to the list of competencies in her interview, she added giftedness as a number one quality gifted teachers should possess. She asserted, “Sometimes I feel like the one characteristic that gifted teachers need to have is to be gifted themselves. Because then they really understand what it’s like.”

Even though only Case 7 highlighted being gifted as an important characteristic for effective teachers of the gifted, many cases made sure to emphasize their own perceived giftedness and the giftedness of their family members, whether officially identified or not. Case 3 was officially identified and briefly served, but voluntarily left the program because she did not like the teacher. Case 2 said she was identified but not served, while her “two old sons were identified as a gifted” and receive service.

Case 4 was identified and received service, but left the program because she did not like being pulled out and missing time with her classmates and doing fun educational activities. The symbol of this dissatisfaction with the program was represented by “missing penguins,” which was an assignment that she missed because of being pulled out that still bothers her until today. As she told the story,

I came back and there were penguins hanging all over the room, and I had been at the gifted program for the day. And I said, ‘Where's my penguin? What? Why,
why, why?’ And she said, ‘I'm sorry, you just didn't have time.’ So here's my favorite teacher, and I didn't get to make my penguin because I went to the gifted program!

Additionally, Case 4’s two children have been identified as gifted and her negative experience with the pull-out program led her to place them in a self-contained gifted program at a private school.

Case 5 claimed that her father, her sister, and herself are clearly gifted, but none of them were ever officially identified or served. However, she did explain some ways that they were informally served because of their higher abilities. Case 5 narrated how

There was one teacher …. it was a teacher and it was a mother, who would come in and pulled out four of us one day a week—so we were in 4th grade and 5th grade—and she would do these enrichment activities with us. And looking back, I’m certain it’s because she felt her son was. And getting challenged, because her son was one of the four, and they pulled us out to do these things, but they just didn’t, they didn’t do any of that when we were kids.

As for her father, Case 5 recalled hearing about him getting extra instruction because of his gifts. She remembered her father telling her that

They created a class for him and a classmate, kind of that same four person thing [that she experienced], except there were like three of them that would come in an hour before school started because the teacher was willing to teach them physics and it wasn’t taught in the school.

So even in some cases where gifted policies and services are not mandated, teachers, parents, and schools accommodate them.
Case 6 did not state anything about being gifted herself, but she said her two sons were. In fact, their giftedness influenced her career choices: “I became a GT teacher to better understand the needs of my own two children who are GT.” She later explained how having gifted children helps her identify with other parents of gifted children.

So while it is generally agreed upon that teachers of the gifted do not necessarily need to be gifted, it does seem to be the case that being gifted or being in a family with gifted members has an impact on who decides to be teachers of the gifted and how they understand giftedness, as well as help others to understand it.

**From the students’ perspectives.** One of the presentations I attended at the MAGC 2014 conference was a panel discussion with gifted students called *Growing up gifted: Students reflections in teaching, learning and being students panel forum.* In this interactive panel, gifted students to reflected on and expressed feelings about their lifelong experiences as gifted learners in their gifted school. One of the topics was the characteristics of effective teachers.

One of the students described the most effective teacher he had:

I think was because of the teaching style. Being a teacher is not just teaching students. Learning is two way street. You have to teach your students but also learn from them. It’s a symbiotic relationship. That’s fundamental of the way I think learning should be as whole of human searching for knowledge that we always learning. The moment you stop learning is the moment you truly die. … [My favorite teacher] pushed me in the right direction, but he would not give me too much. He would not give me the answer up front. I have to try things, learn by my self and that is really effective. I feel I learned four times more than if he
would have given me the answer straight up, which again is good. Because in the real world people will not feed you the answer as they would when you are younger, they will expect you adapt, be able to figure out your own problems that what adults do and this is what [his favorite teacher] prepared me well.

Another student gave a similar description of his opinion of an effective teacher. He started by expressing his feelings about the benefit of an effective teacher:

I think having effective teacher is the key to success of the students and not just gifted to ant students. Students need an effective teacher to truly succeed.

He continued to describe what the characteristics of teacher effectiveness look like:

An effective teacher is to be someone who is very passionate about the subject they are teaching. Somebody who have invested their interest in their students who have a sense of empathy, sense of who students are as individuals. That’s very unique opportunity in our school as class size is so small, but I would like to think that teachers can be still interested in their students even on a broader level.

These two students attended the two private schools where the Michigan cases worked. There perspectives show that they value teachers who guide and push students to learn more but do not give away answers, are passionate about the subject, and interested in their students. These qualities align with the qualities of teacher effectiveness listed by Gourneau (2005) based on students’ perspectives. He found the five frequently discussed attitudes were: kindness of the teacher, willingness to share the responsibility, sincere sensitivity to the students’ diversity, motivation to provide meaningful learning experiences for all students, and an enthusiasm for stimulating the students’ creativity. These qualities are also similar to the teachers’ perspectives discussed previously.
Ohio Versus Michigan

The Michigan Department of Education does not have a gifted and talented division; instead, it recently changed the division to “Talent Development” (michigan.gov/mde/). Michigan law does define gifted:

The ‘gifted and/or academically talented’ means elementary and/or secondary school students who may be considered to be (1) intellectually gifted, (2) outstanding in school achievement, and/or (3) those who have outstanding abilities in particular areas of human endeavor, including the arts and humanities.

(Michigan Comp. Laws § 388.1092)

However, beyond having a Talent Development division and a definition of giftedness, Michigan has no gifted mandates or funding.

As noted in the literature review, the NAGC publishes a *State of the states in gifted education* report every year. The 2011, 2012, and 2013 reports all state that Michigan has no gifted mandates for identification or service. The Davidson Institute for Talent Development (2015) listed Michigan as “Red Status,” meaning “Gifted programming is not mandated: no gifted funding is available.” In comparison, Ohio has a “Blue Status,” which means that gifted education is mandated and partially funded by the state.

Ultimately, in Michigan state policies, mandates, and funding is almost nonexistent for gifted education, talent development, and acceleration programs. Instead, it is up to local education agencies to determine. At the 2014 MAGC conference, State Representative Sam Singh gave a keynote speech about the current state of gifted education in Michigan. He stated that Michigan is behind in gifted education and
advocated for first to identify, but second to serve. He said Michigan must “identify to serve” and not just identify. Overall, he called for changes in legislation towards gifted education and emphasized the need for all concerned people to be vocal advocates so others begin to hear how gifted education is important and lacking in Michigan.

MAGC president Sherry Sparks (2014) made similar calls for improvement, legislation, and advocacy. She mentioned some new legislation that needs support to pass into law. For example, some bills on the floor at the time included *Seat Time Waivers* and the directive to show one year of academic growth to each calendar year, which she called a strict outcome, but flexible method. Emphasized need for all concerned people to be vocal advocates so others begin to hear how gifted education is important and lacking in MI.

The parents in Michigan who were present at the 2014 MAGC conference made a series of complaints related to the lack of services. Many complained that there are not enough public gifted programs. A parent noted that there is one public gifted program, but it is far from most her and that school only accepts and serves students in its district. As a result, they said their gifted children have very few and limited opportunities. Some private gifted programs exist, but they are expensive; most parents cannot afford to send their kids to them. Another parent said she has worked with local teachers to help educate and challenge her own gifted child at home, but has found it frustrating that she needs to do almost all the work. She made a plea that she needs more support.

In comparison, Ohio’s only mandate is to identify, but not to serve. Additionally, the budget for giftedness has been removed as a line item and is now up to the schools to decide. So while Ohio is ahead of Michigan, both have a lot of room to improve gifted
education. As a result of the policy and funding differences, the biggest difference between Michigan and Ohio I observed and heard from the interviews is consistency, or lack thereof. Ohio public schools, facilities, teachers, standards, and methods were consistent, fairly reliable, and widely available across the Northern regions in which I conducted the research. In contrast, Michigan public gifted schools are so rare that I could not even get one to participate; the only one I could find in the Southeastern region was Livonia Public Schools, and the administrators there refused to participate. The quality of facilities and standards were generally poorer in Michigan compared to Ohio.

The two schools that participated in Michigan were both tuition-based private schools, and both suffered from poor facilities. For example, in the school where Case 7 worked, the building was very small and was mostly an open floor plan with very few rooms, very few teachers, and a lot of clutter. The entire school shared one bathroom, three classrooms, and a library in the corner of the open area of the building. Technology was almost non-existent in the school were Case 7 worked (e.g., computer but no internet connection).

In comparison, Cases 8 and 9 worked in a larger building with generally better facilities, more rooms, separate campuses, and a higher number of resources and technology than Case 7. However, the school where Cases 8 and 9 worked also had more students, so they facilities were still not large enough for the student body. For example, the classroom I observed was only large enough to fit 10 students comfortably, in my estimation, but the class sizes ranged from 12 to 16. I cannot imagine how the room could work if class sizes any larger. Twenty students would exceed the capacity of these rooms. As it was, with 12 to 16 students, there was barely enough room to move; tables, chairs,
carts, the computer station, bulletin boards, white boards, and projection screens were all cluttered and messy.

In such an unregulated state like Michigan, gifted programs are rare and suffer from underfunding and lack of support. With no mandates and no funding, then gifted programs are all but ignored in Michigan public school. Some private individuals have personally identified this gap and have decided to close it with their own private schools, such as the schools in Cases 7, 8, and 9. However, support for gifted education in private schools depends on the beliefs of the founders and administrators. In contrast, when the state or federal governments mandate and fund gifted education, then public schools have to meet that expectation regardless of the beliefs of the founders or administrators. In other words, the support for gifted education in private schools is intrinsically motivated and can vary widely, while in a public school, such support is extrinsically required in a fairly consistent fashion. For this reason, in a more regulated state like Ohio, there are more demands and restrictions on teachers and programs that limit how experimental the methods can be, but at the same there is a more basic minimum standard that makes gifted education in the schools adequate in general.

**Conclusions**

Teacher effectiveness is difficult to define and measure. However, the general consensus among these nine cases seems to be that personality characteristics are more important to begin with, while competencies must be developed over time among teacher’s with positive personality characteristics to achieve the status of a highly effective teacher. A teacher with positive personality characteristics but weak competencies is likable but not challenging, while a teacher with negative characteristics
but strong competencies is not likable but is challenging. Because the cases described the characteristics as innate and the competencies as learnable, the general consensus was that an effective teacher begins with selecting those with likable and enthusiastic personality characteristics and then developing competencies through education, training, and experience.

Additionally, in my observation, the teaching practices of three of the teachers reflected highly effective teaching and aligned with what they claimed in about their practices in the interview. The rest of the teachers demonstrated practices that were not highly effective and in general did not support the claims the teachers made about being effective, focused on individual learning, aware of socioemotional needs, and having strong instructional planning skills.

However, the lack of effectiveness in the majority of cases seems to be the result of constraints caused by accountability demands, high-stakes testing, focus on standards, and poor funding to some degree. Both the teachers and I widely perceived a lack of support at the same time as increasing demands and expectations, which the teachers perceived as hindering their ability to be as effective as possible. The gifted programs in this study were relegated to basements, shared spaces, and small rooms with poor facilities, a lack of technology and other resources, and tight budgets for the classroom materials as well as for professional development.

**Perceptions: Research Question 1**

Teachers of the gifted perceive competencies as learnable traits whereas characteristics are more innate qualities that the teachers bring with them to the classroom. In general, most of the cases emphasized that characteristics are more
important in the selection of teachers of the gifted as they go through the education, student-teaching, training, hiring, and evaluation processes. These characteristics include openness to experience, flexibility, passion for learning, enthusiasm, motivational, curiosity, ability to guide rather than dictate, and emotional security/self-confidence. Only one case emphasized the importance of being gifted as a teacher of the gifted, but most of the cases identified themselves as gifted even though they did not emphasize that trait as important.

While competencies can be learned, they still are important in order to be an effective teacher. Competencies preferred by the cases include knowledge of the students’ backgrounds, needs, and learning styles; knowledge of their subject area; strong instructional planning strategies, such as differentiation; ability to assess students in different ways; and active in additional roles, such as coordinating, teaching other teachers, and advocating at the community and political levels.

Compared to the NAGC–CEC recommended standards, the teachers of the gifted in this study undervalued the foundations of giftedness and professional and ethical practices. Most of the cases stated that professional and ethical practices are part of all the other standards and not a standard in itself. Professional and ethical practices should also be part of who the teachers are as people anyway, so the perspective was that it is not anything particular to teacher effectiveness. As for foundations, the general consensus was that theory is differs from reality and so practical experiences help with being an effective teacher more than reading and studying all the histories, theories, and philosophies. Keeping with the overall focus on students first, the most preferred recommended standards were instructional planning, learning environment, instructional
strategies, development and characteristics of learners, and individual differences. Almost unanimously, the teachers in this study valued the narrow, specific, and immediate classroom and student needs, practices, and behaviors over the broad, general, and long-term theories, trends, and demands.

All of the competencies and characteristics discussed by the cases are already widely represented in the literature. While most of the previous studies have focused on students’ perspectives, this study focused on teachers’ perspectives. Interestingly, the students and teachers have similar perspectives on the characteristics and competencies that define effective teachers. The perspectives of these teachers agreed with Cullingford’s (1990) point that most competency checklists and other commonly used forms of teacher evaluation are overly simplistic, narrow-minded, and problematic. Additionally, Clark’s (1983) words summarize the perspectives of the teachers in regards to personality versus intelligence. That is, a teacher of the gifted does not have to be highly intelligent, but they have to understand, value, and nurture intelligence and learning. Even though both Cullingford’s and Clark’s works are older, their view of giftedness and teacher effectiveness still align with the current perspectives of teachers of the gifted.

The GT teachers’ perspectives were fairly similar overall, but they did differ between each other in regards to education level and current position. For example, the only case who had a PhD and worked as a coordinator and consultant in addition to teaching (Case 3) valued theoretical foundations and broad policy trends a great more than the other cases. Her education and additional roles seemed to help her frame her view from a broader perspective. In other words, she has been playing a larger role in
affecting broader trends in her district and state, so she perceived them as being more important. However, this broader perspective seems to have occurred at the cost of awareness of her particular students’ needs.

When comparing the perspectives of teachers based on the various types of gifted programs, a difference emerged between self-contained versus pull-out programs. The teachers of the gifted who worked in schools or self-contained classrooms designed entirely for gifted students and worked with those students all or almost of the time had a more positive and empowered view of gifted education. In contrast, the teachers who worked in pull-out or enrichment programs in which they shared classrooms and only had limited amounts of time with students felt more helpless and ineffective.

When comparing the teachers between Ohio and Michigan, it is difficult to arrive at any conclusions because the cases differed so much. All the Michigan teachers worked in private schools that catered only to gifted students. As far as the comparison between private versus public, the biggest difference in the perception of teacher effectiveness is the feeling of support, freedom, and flexibility that allows them to be effective. Most of the private school teachers felt they could be effective because they were empowered by the private-school funding and policy structure. However, the public school teachers felt their effectiveness was both hindered by the state and federal policies and simultaneously unsupported by the governmental funding. In other words, the public school teachers felt the system was burning the candle at both ends.

**Practices: Research Question 2**

The only NAGC—CEC recommended standards that were observable were individual learning differences, instructional strategies, learning environment, and
language and communication (see Appendix F for the Observation Rubric). Most of the other standards were difficult to observe in one or two classroom sessions. In these criteria, the cases all demonstrated some of the defining behaviors of the standards. The examples of good practices of the cases from Chapter 4 demonstrate the ways in which the teachers’ practices embodied the recommended standards.

All of the practices of the cases exhibited competencies and characteristics already fully represented in the standards and models for effective teachers. None of the practices added to the commonly used competencies.

The most frequently exhibited good practices included mastery of their content areas, friendly, individual learning, and respect. However, Cases 2, 3, 4, and 7 demonstrated weaknesses in their instructions about which they seemed to lack awareness. In their interviews, these cases highlighted importance competencies and characteristics that they did not demonstrate in practice. For example, Case 2 discussed the importance of students’ needs in depth, but her behavior with some students demonstrated that she was not sympathetic to their needs. Additionally, Case 3 emphasized the importance of knowing individual students, but she was distant from her own students. Case 4 mentioned the value of supporting the socioemotional needs of students, but when one of her students cried, she did not acknowledge how she contributed to the student’s tears and frustrations. Finally, Case 7 repeatedly highlighted who active and involved she is in the students’ learning, but in fact, her planner checklist did more work as a teacher than she did.

In general, the cases emphasized the value of good personality characteristics over competencies in the development of effective teaching, and their practices generally
reflected that. The teachers with enthusiastic, flexible, energetic, compassionate, respectful and friendly personality characteristics had more engaged students, more active and engaged learning environments, and fewer socioemotional breakdowns or crises from the students. In contrast, the teachers with negative personality characteristics, such as strictness and lack of compassion, had more difficult students and a few more emotional outbreaks from the students. Whether the students behaviors affected the teachers practices or vice versa (or other contributing factors) is impossible to say.

**Needs: Research Question 3**

All the cases expressed feelings of support from administrators, the school district, and parents. One of the exceptions to this was the lack of support for professional development. A general trend described by the cases is a decrease in professional development opportunities. It seems that in the past they were offered many more professional development opportunities along with the funding for registration, travel, and other expenses. Now, they have to participate in local or technology-based professional development, if at all, to save on costs. While the cases felt they received as much support as possible from their administrators, districts, and communities, they did note that budgets have become tight and the funding has dried up. They blamed this decrease in financial support on the state and federal governments more than their administrators and districts.

The perspective of all the cases in regards to governmental support was highly negative. Even Case 7, who was in a private school, noted that a major reason they refused financial vouchers is because then they would have had to accept and follow the
federal policies even if they disagreed with them. As previously mentioned, the teachers felt the government was hurting their practice in two ways: increasing expectations through policies and decreasing support through funding.

No clear differences emerged between the perspectives of support needs among cases with different educational levels. Regardless of educational level, the cases felt supported locally and not supported statewide and federally. However, some cases differed in their perceived needs depending on their program structure and the size of their district’s budget. With very little standardized financial support across the nation and within the states, the quality of gifted education programs varied greatly by district. With most funding occurring locally based on income taxes, wealthier districts have better resources and facilities than poorer districts. Therefore, some cases felt their technology, facility, and materials needs were satisfied and were even excellent, whereas other cases felt they had no room, no resources, and very little support. Likewise, these perspectives varied depending the type of program: teachers pull-out and enrichment programs felt more time and space constraints than self-contained programs. All the cases felt they could use more time, but the pull-out and enrichment teachers felt it more.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of the results and conclusions of this study that must be noted. The data in the interviews might have suffered from limited amounts of rapport, trust, and openness in some cases. For instance, the gifted programs in two of the school districts were part of a wider educational service center that had a protocol for research that I was unfamiliar with at first. The protocol required a background check and approval process that I went through after conducting some of my research. Even though
I retroactively got permission to use the information, the confusion and distrust at first created a more hesitant and secretive interview and observational environment. As a result, the cases might have been hesitant to share information, especially anything critical about their district, colleagues, or administrators. I tried to do my best to assure them that their confidentiality would be maintained and the results of the dissertation would be written with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity, I still felt some hesitancy and anxiety about sharing some information.

Another limitation was the problems recruiting teachers from Michigan. The Michigan teachers were the last to agree to participate and none of them were from public schools. With only two schools and three cases from Michigan, all private, it is difficult or even impossible to draw conclusions about the differences between the perspectives of Ohio and Michigan teachers of the gifted. By supplementing this lack of data with information from the MAGC conference and literature on Ohio versus Michigan, the only conclusion I was able to draw was that Michigan’s complete lack of policies and supports created a more variable landscape of gifted education, from very stellar private schools to very poor or nonexistent ones. Ohio, in contrast, had a more widespread and consistent occurrence of gifted education programs across the Northern region because of the existence of some identification mandates and, previously, a line item in the state budget for gifted education. With the removal of the line item in the budget as noted by Case 5, the decision to fund gifted education is now up to the districts, which will likely lead to more variable levels of quality, as seen in Michigan.

The data was also limited by the fact that only one of the cases was a male teacher of the gifted. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn based on gender differences. There
is no reason to suspect that male and females would differ in their perspective of teacher effectiveness in any substantial way, but it might be interesting to hear more from a male perspective. In terms of being fairly representative of the population and being able to transfer the findings to other similar cases, this problem would not likely limit transferability of these findings. This is because most of the teachers of the gifted in these regions are females anyway, and, furthermore, issues such as teacher evaluations, support, and the other topics covered in this dissertation do not vary by gender because they are broader issues.

A minor issue with the data was some background noises in some of the recordings that made transcription difficult at times and one case in which part of the recording was lost. However, nothing substantial seems to have been lost because the recordings were still understandable enough despite the noise distractions. Additionally, in the case of the lost recording, the case was helpful enough to answer the lost questions in a short written response by email, which was combined with the remaining notes and my memory of the interview. Finally, I minimized this issue by having the cases review the transcripts for clarity and accuracy.

Implications

Educational Implications

The perception that competencies are learnable traits whereas characteristics are more inherent qualities can inform how teacher education and training occurs. The teachers perceived having strong competencies as improving their classroom practices in terms of creating challenging and well-planned lessons, while having positive characteristics helps create an energetic and safe learning environment. Together, these
competencies and characteristics help create effective teachers of the gifted whom the students both like and learn from. This finding supports emphasizing more practical experiences in training and education for three reasons: (a) it will help weed out potential teachers who lack the personality characteristics of an effective teacher as early as possible (e.g., enthusiasm, self-awareness, self-confidence, sympathetic to students’ needs and perspectives); (b) it will help develop the learnable competencies through frequent practice (e.g., instructional planning, use of a variety of assessments, collaboration, etc.); and (c) it will help strengthen the connection between theory and practice. The teachers in this case study clearly indicated that they have trouble understanding how theory affects practice and they are focused on daily routines.

Similar to the practical implication of increasing the amount of real-world experience early on is the need to improve the connection and collaboration between universities and schools. The cases felt the professors they had and their higher education experience was distant from their teaching experiences. Professors need to be more available, involved, and inclusive of students. For example, professors need to visit schools more to observe both their current student teachers and practicing teachers who they had as students in the past. Additionally, gifted education professors should involve both their current students and local classroom teachers and students in their research. Even if professors do not interact with teachers directly, they should at least have regular meetings with administrators such as superintendents, principals, and gifted coordinators. Increased interaction can promote more advocacy, professional development workshops, and expert advising on major decisions concerning the gifted field.
Undergraduate education also needs to include more inclusion of giftedness in the courses. The cases and the literature showed that undergraduate education barely introduces students to gifted learners and the gifted field. None of the teachers of the gifted in this study had the opportunity to learn more about giftedness as undergraduates. No major or even minor in gifted education seems to exist in this region. As a result, there are teachers of the gifted with almost no background in gifted education until they get in the classroom or unless they get a gifted endorsement in their master's program, which is not required. It is possible that they may have some familiarity with gifted education if they have parents, siblings, or children with giftedness or they experienced it themselves, which was the case for many of the teachers in this study.

**Practical Implications**

Another way to increase the connection between theory and practice in the classroom is to encourage and formalize more reflective and journaling practices for teachers of the gifted. Regular reflection can increase self-awareness and give teachers the opportunity to connect their practices and experiences to what they have read and studied in books and their university classrooms.

These findings also suggest that there should be more expectations and support for teachers to take on additional roles, such as being active researchers and presenters in conferences and workshops and being advocates at the community and governmental levels. Of course, teachers of the gifted (like all teachers) are already stretched to their limits, so they would need additional time and money to do so. However, having additional roles seems increase the understanding of how theories and larger trends affect
daily practice. Furthermore, additional roles can help create more needed changes in the field.

A final practical implication is the need to focus on longer-term student achievement and multiple measurements for evaluation of teacher effectiveness. The cases and the literature suggest that a single instrument is not sufficient to determine teacher effectiveness. Teachers and school administrators need to be empowered to determine some of the best definitions and measures rather than or in addition to state and federal mandated measures. In other words, evaluation of teacher effectiveness needs to be a decentralized process in addition to being multi-faceted and longer-term.

**Government**

The results of the interviews and observations in this dissertation place a great deal of blame on state and federal governmental policies and funding. There is a dire need to increase funding, pay, and time for teachers of the gifted. In order to attract the most effective teachers, pay scales need to increase. Moreover, state and federal legislators need to increase the mandates for gifted education along with commensurate funding. One cannot be increased without the other. Governments should strive to increase involvement from schools and teachers in major policy decisions, as well. For instance, congressional hearings ought to be held investigating the needs and goals of gifted education at the federal and state levels.

**Recommendations**

Future researcher on the perspectives of teachers of the gifted is needed across the US. To my knowledge, the only previous studies about teachers’ perspectives on the effectiveness of teachers of the gifted have occurred in China, Israel, Australia, and Iran.
My dissertation expanded the research on teachers’ perspectives of effective teaching in the gifted field to the US, but only in Northern Ohio and Southeast Michigan. It would be interesting to conduct similar studies in states that have more mandates and fully fund gifted education, such as Oklahoma, Iowa, Mississippi, and Georgia according to the Davidson Institute (2015). A comparison of the perspectives of teachers across these different levels of support would indicate whether increased support influences teacher effectiveness.

For teachers, I recommend implementing reflections to increase self-awareness and to focus beyond day-to-day student needs into the area of teacher practices, theories, and social trends (e.g., government policies). Teachers also need to conduct more research in the field of gifted education (e.g., classroom-based and action research) in collaboration with professors and universities.

Based on these results, I recommend increased investment in gifted education at the governmental level; state and federal governments must fund more if possible, but definitely if expectations are raised in policies. Every policy change needs to be tied to funding plans, or else leave it up to the schools to make both the policy and funding decisions. The trend of increasing policies, standards, and expectations but decreasing funding is unacceptable. Federal funding and mandates are especially needed to even the field and increase consistency across the states. The current system depends too much on state and district funding, which creates too much disparity across the states. Gifted students and teachers of the gifted not fortunate enough to be born in a supported state or district are left to their own devices, and the literature shows that gifted students will not be fine on their own.
Summary

Gifted students, gifted teachers, and gifted education will not be fine left completely on their own. They need support and advocacy. Gifted teachers, after all, are made, not born. Even with some innate qualities of good teachers, adequate education, training, and support is needed to improve the learnable competencies and to avoid burning out good teachers with stricter policies and decreasing funding.
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Appendix A

Recruiting Email

Dear Teachers of the Gifted and Talented,

My name is Laila Abu Hassoun and I am a doctoral candidate pursing my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Toledo, with a focus in gifted education and teachers of the gifted. I'm in the process of collecting data and I need your help recruiting participants.

I received your contact information from Elizabeth. Hahn, Educational consultant for gifted supports & services office for Exceptional Children, who informed me you may be interested.

I have attached a letter of interest to this email, which explains my dissertation research project and asks for your level of interest. Please read it carefully and I wish to hear from you soon.

Thank You,
Appendix B

Consent Form

ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Good Teachers Are Made and Not Just Born: Gifted and Talented Teachers’ Perspectives of Effective Teaching and Teacher Needs

Principal Investigator: Leigh Chiarelott, Ph.D. Professor, 419-530-5213
Co-Investigator: Laila Abu Hassoun, Graduate student, 419-344-9159

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project entitled Good Teachers Are Made and Not Just Born: Gifted and Talented Teachers’ Perspectives of Effective Teaching and Teachers’ Needs, which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Leigh Chiarelott. The purpose of this study is to explore Gifted and Talented (GT) teachers’ perspectives on what defines effective teaching, what qualities of effectiveness they practice, and what needs they perceive must be met in order to reach the level of an effective GT teacher. As emphasis on establishing common definitions and standards of GT teacher effectiveness throughout the US increases, it is important to keep some attention on teachers’ perspectives. For this reason, this dissertation seeks participation from GT teachers.

Specifically, this study will focus on how do GT teachers’ define and conceptualize effectiveness, how do they compare to national standards, and what needs do GT teachers perceive in pursuit of achieving effectiveness. This study will address these issues from a practitioner-centered perspective in relation to current NCATE/NAGC standards through a qualitative research approach based on interviews of current GT teachers in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan.

Description of Procedures: This qualitative research study will take place at the University of Toledo (Ohio) and/or schools/education centers in Michigan and Ohio that are convenient for you, the participant. You will be asked to complete a 12-question background questionnaire, which will provide the background and demographic variable for comparison purposes and to meet the selection criteria. Afterwards, participants will take part in two to three 1-hour interviews, with the number of interviews depending on the need for follow-up questions as determined by the researcher. The interviews will be one-on-one sessions.

Judith Herb College of Education
3100 Gillham Hall, MS 914
Toledo, OH 43606
following a semi-structured format with open-ended questions that revolve around teacher perceptions of effective GT teaching, their level of education/training, and the amount of professional support they receive. The final component of this study will be two 3-hour classroom observation sessions to collect qualitative data to provide evidence about GT teachers’ classroom practices. The instrumentation that will be used to standardize the observations for more reliability will be a checklist based on the skill indicators of the 10 NAGC–CEC standards, but not the knowledge indicators (38 out of 70 indicators)

Permission to record: The researcher would like to record the audio from the interviews with the participant’s consent. Will you permit the researcher to audio record during this research procedure?

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After you have completed your participation, the research team will debrief you about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

**Potential Risks:** There are minimal risks to participation in this study, including breach of confidentiality. Measures will be taken to prevent this, including keeping identifying information locked away and disassociated from reported results. There are no known physical, psychological, or economic risks associated with this study.

**Potential Benefits:** The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you might learn about your own practices and how they might improve over time. In general, this research may help the GT field at large to understand the perspectives and needs of GT teachers, which may benefit GT standards, accountability, and policy.

**Confidentiality:** The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect
your relationship with The University of Toledo. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

**Contact Information:** Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation you should contact a member of the research team:

Principal Investigator: Leigh Chiarelott, Ph.D., professor, 419-530-5213, leigh.chiarelott@utoledo.edu
Co-Investigator: Laila Abu Hassoun, M.Ed., graduate student, 419-344-9159, laila.abu@rockets.utoledo.edu.

If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the Office of Research on the main campus at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

**SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today’s date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

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<th>Name of Subject (please print)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Name of Person Obtaining Consent</td>
<td>Signature</td>
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This Adult Research Informed Consent document has been reviewed and approved by the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral and Educational IRB for the period of time specified in the box below.

Approved Number of Subjects: 10
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Format: Open-ended informal interview process based on a conversational style in a comfortable setting in which the interviewer is a participant-researcher. Therefore, the script below provides a guideline for the researcher, but it will not be followed exactly the same for each participant. Topics may be more or less emphasized or in a different order based on the participant. The participants’ various experiences and perceptions will guide the conversation in the moment.

Rationale: The reason for this format and protocol is to remove the barriers between the interviewer and interviewee to allow the interviewee to express beliefs and perceptions more freely and comfortably. Moreover, because the research questions focus on increasing attention on teachers, the interview protocol is designed to value the teachers’ perspectives and confirm they are at the center of the issue. In other words, the protocol will emphasize and empower the teachers to open up with support, appreciation, and respect for their role as the guides of our best and brightest students. This interview will answer major research questions 1 and 3.

Introduction: Develop rapport and line of conversation (thank the participant, ask about how the participant is feeling, ask how their day went, ask if he/she is comfortable in the location etc. …). Introduce yourself and your interests. Break the ice if possible.

Disclaimer: I use GT teacher to refer to a teacher who is teaching gifted and talented students and not a teacher who is gifted and talented herself/himself.

Competency model
1) Personal characteristics (included in section 2, but will mostly be gathered in observations)
2) Cognitive characteristics
3) Pedagogical characteristics

1. Conceptual Questions about competencies and effectiveness
1.1 Teaching competencies. Could you define the concept of “teaching competencies”?
1.2 Teaching effectiveness. Could you define the concept of “teaching effectiveness”?
1.3 Do you think the concepts of teaching competencies and effectiveness overlap? Please explain why or why not.

2 Questions about their own practice as GT teachers
2.1 What competencies do you need to have as a GT teacher in your classroom? Please describe these competencies. [Ask for list of competencies and make sure they explain each of the competencies]
2.2 Which of these competencies make you an effective GT teacher in your classroom? Please explain why.
2.3 Which of these competencies would you rank as first, second, and third most important? [Write ranking numbers next to the list of competencies]
2.4 What is your strongest competency? Please explain why.
2.5 What competency would you like to improve? Please explain why.

3 Interview Questions Related to the Standards
3.1 Are you aware of any state standards and/or national standards for GT teachers that apply in your classroom? [Ask for list of standards]
3.2 What of aspects of these standards do you consider as important for your classroom? Please explain why.
3.3 If you were in a position to change any standards, what changes would you make?
3.4 This is a completed list of the 10 competencies listed in the NAGC-CEC. The list is in random order. (Handout with list of standards/ no numbers: (1) Foundations, (2) Development and Characteristics of Learners, (3) Individual Learning Differences, (4) Instructional Strategies, (5) Learning Environments and Social Interactions, (6) Language and Communication, (7) Instructional Planning, (8) Assessment, (9) Professional and Ethical Practice, and (10) Collaboration.)
3.4.a Can you find the competencies that you described earlier on this list? Please explain.
3.4.b Would you consider adding one or two of these competencies to your own list of competencies that make you an effective a GT teacher? What are these competencies? Please explain why?

4 Questions related to needs
4.1 As you try to be the best teacher you can, to what extent do you feel you have wealth of resources, materials, and opportunities to do so? (administrative/school support)
4.2 Do you feel you work in a collaborative environment with colleagues of different disciplines? Please explain the ways in which you collaborate. (colleague support)
4.3 How much and what kind of communication and relations do you have with parents and the community? Tell me a story that exemplifies your community relations? (parent/community support)
4.4 In your opinion, what role does the government (state and/or federal) play in helping you become an effective teacher? (government support)
Appendix D

Letter of Interest

Dear Teachers/Coordinators

I am a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction focusing on Gifted Education at the University of Toledo interested in finding out more about the perspectives and needs of educators of gifted students. Your voice is important and highly valued, but unfortunately often overlooked. I want to know about gifted education standards, qualities of effective teachers, and support needs from your perspective.

After conducting a review of the literature and investigating various state and national standards, I have discovered that while teachers of the gifted are widely regarded as the central component of education and have high expectations set for them, very few studies have explored the perspectives of teachers of the gifted directly. I hope to fill this gap in the research with your help. I believe you and I can help each other to explore the fundamental standards, needs, and supports to let your voice be heard. Cooperation and participation is key.

Therefore, I invite you to participate in my dissertation research, titled Gifted Teachers are Made, Not Born: Effective Teaching and Teacher Needs from the Perspectives of Teachers of the Gifted. This research is qualitative in nature and will involve a questionnaire, two interviews, and two classroom observations within a case study methodology. This study will only occupy approximately 6-10 hours of your time throughout the entire semester. I know your time is valuable, so I am willing to work within your schedule, but remember that this is time well invested for your sake and the sake of the field of gifted education. I do not want to take up too much of your time, but I also want to budget enough time to give full consideration to your thoughts and experiences.

My goals include: defining your needs, hearing your voice, sharing your experiences, exploring your role in gifted education, and hopefully improving practice and standards.

Your participation is completely voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not based on your own discretion. However, your participation will be greatly appreciated and may help researchers, policymakers, and future teachers to understand and respond to your perspective as a teacher of the gifted. It is my sincere desire to cooperate with you to the fullest this need and extent what is necessary to achieve such goals.

If you are interested in participating or would like to learn more about the study, please contact me by phone at 419-344-9159 or by email at Laila.abu@rockets.utoledo.edu.

Sincerely,

Laila Abu Hassoun
Appendix E
Background Questionnaire

PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: ______________________________ (confidential) Age: ___ Gender:_______

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Educational background

(1) The highest level of education I have earned a degree in is (circle one):

Bachelor’s Degree Master’s Degree Ph.D.

(2) I am licensed to teach the following grade levels (circle all that apply):

Early Childhood Middle Childhood Adolescent/Young Adult

(3) I am licensed to teach the following subjects (circle all that apply):

Math Science Language Arts Social Studies

Fine Arts/Music Phys. Ed Foreign

(4) I am licensed or certified to teach gifted and talented students?

Yes No

If yes, the type of license or certification is:_________________________

Teaching experience

(5) I have taught for _____ years

(6) I have taught in the gifted and talented field for ________ years

Type of program/curriculum

(7) The school district I teach in is: ________________________________

(8) I teach in more than one school in my district: Yes No

Please list the name or names of the school(s) you teach at:
(9) The type of gifted and talented program I currently teach at is (circle one):

Enrichment Acceleration Pull-out Self-pacing
Cluster grouping Other:__________________________

(10) I have previously taught using the following gifted and talented program styles (Circle all that apply):

Enrichment Acceleration Pull-out Self-pacing
Cluster grouping Other:__________________________ Not applicable

(11) As part of our gifted and talented curriculum, our school district teachers (circle all that apply):

Critical thinking Creativity Problem Solving

Other (please list all other areas):________________________________________

Professional development

(12) Please list the names and describe the types of professional development you have participated in:

International conferences: ____________________________________________

National conferences: ________________________________________________

State conferences: ____________________________________________________

Workshops: __________________________________________________________

Panel/Roundtable discussions: _________________________________________

On-site (in-school) training: __________________________________________

Webinars: __________________________________________________________
Appendix F

Observation Tool

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<th>Teacher</th>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Grade Levels</td>
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### 1. Individual Learning Differences (NAGC-CEC Standard)
- S1 Integrated perspectives of diverse groups.

### 2. Instructional Strategies (NAGC-CEC Standard)
- S1 Applied pedagogical content knowledge.
- S2 Applied higher-level thinking and metacognitive models to content areas.
- S3 Provided opportunities to explore, develop, or research their areas of interest or talent.
- S4 Paced delivery of curriculum and instruction consistent with individual needs.
- S5 Engaged individuals from all backgrounds in challenging, multicultural curricula.
- S6 Used information and/or assistive technologies to meet the needs of individuals.

### 3. Learning Environments and Social Interactions (NAGC-CEC Standard)
- S1 Designed learning opportunities that promote self-awareness, self-efficacy, leadership, positive peer relationships, intercultural experiences, and leadership.
- S2 Created safe learning environments that encouraged active participation in individual and group activities.
- S3 Created learning environments and intercultural experiences to appreciate own and others’ language and heritage.
- S4 Developed social interaction and coping skills to address personal and social issues.

### 4. Language and Communication (NAGC-CEC Standard)
- S1 Accessed resources and develop strategies to enhance communication skills.
- S2 Used advanced oral and written communication tools, including assistive technologies, to enhance learning.

### 5. Instructional Planning (NAGC-CEC Standard)
- S1 Set high expectations for student performance
- S2 Incorporated activities for students to apply new knowledge
- S3 Engaged students in planning, monitoring, or assessing their learning
- S4 Encouraged students to express their thoughts
- S5 Had students reflect on what they had learned

### 6. Research Strategies (William and Mary Classroom Observation Scales)
- S1 Required students to gather evidence from multiple sources through research-based techniques
- S2 Provided opportunities for students to analyze data and represent it in appropriate charts, graphs, or tables
- S3 Asked questions to assist students in making inferences from data and drawing conclusions
- S4 Encouraged students to determine implications and consequences of findings
- S5 Provided time for students to communicate research study findings to relevant audiences in a formal report and/or presentation
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Adopted from:
Appendix G

Concept Map
## Appendix H

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