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Gifted Students' Perceptions of Empowerment Within High School Classrooms

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GIFTED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EMPOWERMENT WITHIN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

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Past research has indicated that teachers' use of power directly influences students' sense of empowerment and that students who feel empowered are more likely to be motivated. Research has also indicated that gifted students who are motivated achieve at a level commensurate with their ability. Lack of teacher training regarding giftedness likely influences teachers' use of power, thereby impacting gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment and motivation. The relationship between teacher power and student empowerment and motivation, however, has not been thoroughly investigated in gifted education literature. This phenomenological study explored classroom situations in which gifted high school students felt empowered and the relationship between power, empowerment, and motivation. The study was conducted from a phenomenological perspective to better understand these gifted students' perceptions of empowerment within their classrooms. Specifically, the researcher attempted to explore the impact of different power dynamics, including teachers' utilization of various relational power bases (i.e., *reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power*) on gifted students' learning, their levels of motivation and engagement, and their overall sense of empowerment.

The 29 gifted students in this study reported that their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment were directly impacted by the power dynamics

within their classrooms, including the ways in which teachers chose to utilize power. Teacher power was perceived most positively by these students when it was based on authentic, personal relationships; utilized to structure and control the classroom environment so all students could learn; and shared with students. Additionally, the more connected these students felt to (a) teachers, (b) peers, (c) learning, (d) self, and (e) home and community, the more motivated and empowered they felt. Based on the findings in this study, it is important for educators to realize the significant impact the climate they create and encourage within their classrooms has on their gifted students and to take steps to make it as motivating and empowering as possible. Recommendations include providing educational opportunities and support for pre-service and current educators regarding (a) the academic and affective characteristics and learning needs of gifted high school students and (b) the importance and positive impact of facilitating connections and sharing power in the classroom.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research has suggested that students who feel empowered are more motivated to engage in the classroom and to take ownership of their own learning (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Nichols, 2006; Nichols & Zhang, 2011). Conversely, students who do not feel empowered tend to be less motivated (Nichols, 2006) and withdraw from learning situations in various ways (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). This is consistent with the gifted education literature, where the concept of empowerment is also closely tied to constructs of motivation and is often discussed using terms such as *autonomy* (Betts & Kercher, 1999; Clinkenbeard, 2012; Garn, Matthews, & Jolly, 2010) and *self-efficacy* (McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Siegle & McCoach, 2005).

It is probable, however, that issues of engagement and motivation for gifted students are complicated by a variety of factors that may not impact other students. For example, most classroom teachers have limited understanding of giftedness and how it manifests in the classroom (NAGC, 2015; Purcell & Leppien, 1998; Tomlinson, Coleman, Allan, Udall, & Landrum, 1996). Additionally, the "complexity of problems faced by teachers and the concomitant emotional side of their daily dilemmas" (Purcell & Leppien, 1998, p. 180) make it difficult to focus time and energy on a group of students often believed, inaccurately, to be able to "make it on their own" (NAGC, n.d.-c).

Furthermore, no other group of students faces potential accusations of elitism from individuals both within and outside of the educational system who are unfamiliar with their learning characteristics when attempts *are* made to support their learning needs (see Gallagher, 1996; Rinn & Cobane, 2009; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). With that said, supporters of gifted education contend that failure to provide differentiated learning experiences to gifted students due to fears of promoting "elitism" only hurts gifted students who, as a result, do not receive the support they need to develop their full potential (Paton, 2009; Rinn & Cobane, 2009).

Critics of gifted education cannot deny that gifted students exhibit characteristics that differentiate them from other students and that translate into unique educational and affective needs within the classroom (see Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). The most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U. S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2015) defines giftedness as:

> …students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (Section 9101)

Within this definition is recognition of the diverse characteristics of gifted students, as well as recognition that their needs may not be adequately met within the regular classroom.

Interestingly, in the majority of school districts across the United States, gifted students are now expected to receive programming to address their academic and affective needs within the regular classroom (Stanley & Baines, 2002). Unfortunately, the majority of classroom teachers have had little to no training on meeting the needs of these students (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013; Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014; Farkas &

Duffett, 2008). A byproduct of this lack of teacher training may be student disengagement (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008).

Too often at the secondary level, students report intense boredom (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008) and disengagement (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014), potentially leading to academic outcomes as dire as dropping out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Washor & Mojowski, 2014). Programming options that provide optimal levels of challenge for our most able students simply are not available in most United States' high schools. In fact, Callahan and colleagues (2014) report that in 90.7% of high schools, Advanced Placement (AP) is the primary programming option for gifted high school students, even though historically, this program was not designed specifically for gifted learners and is now often considered appropriate for all students. While research has indicated some beneficial aspects of AP for gifted students (e.g., better alignment with academic readiness, more intellectually similar peer group; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Hertberg-Davis, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006; Van Tassel-Baska, 2001), it is doubtful that their full academic, creative, and affective needs are met by this single programming option (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006). However, based on the fact that AP offerings and participation have exhibited a steady, upward trend over the last 20 years (see Judson & Hobson, 2015), this focus on AP at the high school level seems likely to continue.

Another programming concern for gifted students is the prolific use of heterogeneous grouping strategies in the classroom (Stanley & Baines, 2002), where the primary goal often becomes socialization of students rather than acquisition of individual learning goals or the pursuit of academic growth for individual students (Stanley &

Baines, 2002). Because of this, numerous professionals in the field of gifted education question the appropriateness of grouping gifted students heterogeneously, especially when the goal is scholastic improvement (e.g., Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Gallagher, Coleman, & Nelson, 1993; Huss, 2006; Rogers, 2007). While "socialization" may be a valid democratic goal, one must question whether this is the most essential goal for gifted students. In fact, one must consider the possibility that this focus actually decreases motivation to engage in the classroom for gifted students, a group of learners who often place a high priority on intellectual and creative pursuits and on the acquisition of new knowledge.

Realistically, however, heterogeneously grouping students for instruction likely is not going away in the near future. Teachers are often evaluated on their use of grouping strategies in the regular classroom (e.g., Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2015), and proponents of 21st Century Skills encourage all teachers to regularly utilize collaborative learning with their students (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, n.d.).

Based on this information, it seems likely that, at least in the near future, a majority of gifted high school students will continue to receive instruction in schools where programming is not designed to meet their specific affective and academic needs and in classrooms where teachers likely do not have the training or support to appropriately challenge them (Farkas & Duffett, 2008; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). It also seems likely that lack of understanding of the needs of gifted learners may negatively influence interactions between teachers and gifted students. Based on these suppositions, it seems logical that these factors may also negatively impact gifted students' motivation in the classroom, which in effect, may also impact their willingness

to engage and, eventually, their academic achievement. If, as suggested by prior research (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Nichols, 2006; Nichols & Zhang, 2011), students who feel empowered are also more motivated, it seems imperative to explore the situations in which gifted students feel empowered, the relationship between empowerment and motivation for these students, and the factors that influence both.

Problem Statement

Gifted students who are motivated achieve at a level commensurate with their ability (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Gifted students who are not motivated tend to withdraw from the learning situation. According to Washor and Mojkowski (2014), there is currently a "pervasive problem of student disengagement" (p. 10) in America's schools, where the educational system does little to shape its curriculum, culture, or structure to meet the needs of its students. Instead, students' "talents and potential" are ignored because they "reside just outside the traditional subject-matter bins of a cognitive-abstract curriculum" (p. 8). Gifted students are experiencing the negative impacts of this disengagement at the secondary level, where the academic and affective needs of many gifted learners are often not met on a daily basis, engendering a situation in which our nation may be "squandering one of its most precious resources" (Ross, 1993, p. 1). Marland (1971), in the first Congressional report on gifted education, stated that "intellectual and creative talent cannot survive educational neglect and apathy" (p. viii). Yet funding and support for gifted education is often reduced or eliminated due to accusations of elitism (D. Matthews, 2014), and the current educational climate advocates educating gifted students in classrooms with teachers who have not received appropriate training in adequately addressing their learning needs (see Hertberg-Davis & Callahan,

2008; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006). This combination of factors must certainly impact the power dynamics within high school classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment within their classrooms. Specifically, I attempted to explore the impact of different power dynamics, including teachers' utilization of various relational power bases (i.e., *reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power*) on gifted students' attitudes about learning, their levels of motivation and engagement, and their overall sense of empowerment. While motivation is a well-researched topic in gifted education (with learner autonomy a positive example of this concept and underachievement a less than ideal example), there has been no research directly examining the relationship between gifted students' motivation and overall feelings of empowerment and the ways in which these may be influenced by teachers' use of power in the classroom. I also explored other factors that gifted students perceived influenced these same psychosocial variables. For this study, empowerment was defined as "a student's feeling of competence to perform a task that is meaningful and has an impact on the situation" (Frymier et al. as cited in Houser & Frymier, 2009). By further exploring gifted students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics and their overall impact, information may be gained that will assist secondary practitioners in better structuring situations that will motivate and engage gifted students at this level. This knowledge may then be utilized in structuring classroom dynamics that will strengthen gifted students' sense of empowerment and enhance their motivation to engage with the learning process.

In order to explore this topic, the general research questions were as follows:

Q1 How do gifted high school students perceive the power dynamics within the classroom?

Q2 How do gifted high school students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics relate to their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or overall sense of empowerment?

Q3 What other factors do gifted high school students believe contribute to or inhibit their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school?

Researcher's Stance

In working with gifted students over the last 20 years as a teacher of advanced/honors courses and as a building-level gifted education coordinator, I have had the opportunity to work closely with many students. I have consistently found that the building of relationships is foundational for all students, but in my experience, it seems that this is especially true of those students considered at-risk and those who are gifted. Both of these populations of students (not necessarily exclusive of one another) have periodically expressed to me that they do not feel like they "fit" within the educational system—or more appropriately for many of them, that the educational system does not "fit" them. I have also noticed that there are certain teachers who seem to consistently "connect" with these students. Sometimes it is the same teacher who connects with both the at-risk and the gifted students; sometimes a specific teacher seems only to connect with one group or the other; but once the rapport is established, the students are much more motivated, much more engaged in these teachers' classrooms. I believe this to be due, at least in part, to the degree to which students feel valued, respected, and empowered in those classrooms.

My research interests center on gifted students, and that is the direction I have taken my research. While I am also very interested in pursuing this topic from the perspective of the teacher, I first wanted to explore gifted students perceptions of this phenomenon. I am anticipating that in the classes they most enjoy, gifted students feel that their learning and affective needs are being met (or better met) and that they perceive that they have a degree of power over at least some aspect of the learning environment. This desire to better understand gifted high school students' experiences in the classroom and the influence teachers have on their motivation and sense of empowerment has led me to qualitative research.

When I completed this study, it was my eighth year teaching in the leadership program in which I collected data. Many of these students were in my leadership class the previous summer, and one of them attended the high school at which I teach during the school year. I hoped that this familiarity would establish an environment in which these students felt comfortable sharing openly with me, but I also recognized that I had potential biases associated with this research and these students. For example, I believe that these gifted students desire more of a balanced power dynamic within their high school classes and that they are more empowered at the leadership program than they are in their regular schools. I attempted to lessen the impact of my biases through the process of establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Trustworthiness in Chapter 3).

The theoretical perspective to which I adhere is *interpretivism*. Interpretivism seeks to "understand and explain human and social reality" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67) and provides the context for my assumption that each person's truth is informed by her or his

culture and past experiences and must be interpreted through these lenses. This theoretical perspective is informed by my epistemological stance of *constructionism*. Constructionism contends that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Interpretivism also underlies my methodological choice of phenomenology.

Research Methodology

"Understanding is the primary goal of qualitative research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 12). Since the purpose of this study was to better understand gifted high school students' perceptions of the relationship between power dynamics, empowerment, and motivation within their classrooms, it made sense that this research topic would be investigated qualitatively. One type of qualitative approach is phenomenology, which explores a single phenomenon from the perspective of multiple individuals who have experienced it (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). Within this method of inquiry, reality is defined as only that which is "perceived in the human consciousness" (Mastin, 2008, Introduction, para. 2) and tends to be descriptive in nature rather than prescriptive.

Since "teachers' and students' perceptions of power in the learning environment likely shape educational experiences for all stakeholders" (Lovorn, Sunal, Christensen, Sunal, & Shwery, 2012, p. 70), perspective was the primary interest of this research. Therefore, this topic was explored qualitatively, from a phenomenological viewpoint, in order to better understand gifted high school students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics and the impact these have on their sense of empowerment.

Data collection included students' completion of: (a) a demographic form, (b) an Opinion Questionnaire (OQ) that allowed for open-ended responses from the students

regarding their personal experiences with power structures within their schools (see Appendix A), (c) the Learner Empowerment Measure (LEM: Frymier, Shulman, Houser, 1996) consisting of statements that require a Likert-scale response of 0 to 4 (i.e., "never" to "very often"; used primarily to develop interview questions; see Appendix B), and (d) in-depth, semi-structured interviews to further explore responses to the LEM and questionnaire as well as additional open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Additionally, I took detailed notes on relevant conversations students had during their attendance at a summer, leadership program.

Significance of the Study

Lovorn and colleagues (2012) contend that "as the world becomes more informationally, economically, culturally and educationally interdependent, it becomes necessary for teachers to develop critical understandings of power, classroom power dynamics and the power-related roles of stakeholders in the learning process" (p. 71). Schrodt, Witt, and Turman (2007) further advocate for continued research on power use as "an important means of achieving individual and educational goals in the classroom" (p. 309).

Teachers themselves report that "students with unusual intellectual talent and higher levels of academic achievement" (Farkas & Duffett, 2008, p. 50) are being neglected in today's classrooms. The majority of teachers also desire to make these students more of an educational priority, realizing that "educating them properly is the right thing to do" (p. 50). Yet they are at a loss as to how to accomplish this. Is it any wonder that secondary students report intense boredom in their classes (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008)? Shifting the power dynamics within the classroom may not only

enhance gifted students' motivation and engagement but also be a necessary step in "achieving [their] individual and educational goals" (Schrodt et al., 2007, p. 309).

By further exploring gifted students' perceptions of empowerment within their classrooms, including power dynamics and their impact, information may be gained that will assist secondary practitioners in developing those "critical understandings of power" and in better understanding the needs of gifted students. This knowledge could then prove beneficial in structuring classroom dynamics that enhance gifted students' senses of empowerment and their motivation to engage with their learning environments.

Definition of Terms

Achievement-Orientation Model—The Achievement-Orientation Model (AOM; Siegle & McCoach, 2005) incorporates the concepts of goal valuation, self-efficacy, and environmental perception to explain gifted students' motivations for academic success. Based on this model, gifted students who have positive self-perceptions in each of these areas will self-regulate on and engage with a specific task and are more likely to achieve their full academic potential, while gifted students with low self-perceptions in any of these areas, although capable of exceptional performance, will fail to realize that potential.

Advanced Placement—Advanced Placement is a program overseen by the College Board (n. d.) that allows high school students to participate in college-level courses. At the end of each academic year, students are able to register to take AP exams that may result in course credit at certain colleges and universities, depending upon their scores.

Affective (Characteristics, Factors, Learning, Needs)—Affective, sometimes called social-emotional, refers to the focus on social and/or personal awareness, including "the study of values, attitudes, and self" (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.-b).

Constructionism—Constructionism is an epistemological stance that asserts that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Whereas constructivism emphasizes the individual's role in the construction of meaning, constructionism claims that meaningful reality is only constructed through interactions with one's cultures and subcultures.

Cooperative Learning—Cooperative learning generally refers to structured activities in which students work together to accomplish a task. These groups are often structured heterogeneously (i.e., with students of various abilities, often one above average student, two average students, and two below average students; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Patrick, Bangel, Jeon, & Townsend, 2005; Slavin, 1994). Cooperative learning differs from traditional small-group learning in that it encompasses the goals of interdependence, accountability, leadership, responsibility, and social skills development for the students involved (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). It also includes teacher involvement in the formation of the group and facilitation of the group dynamics and requires group members to evaluate teamwork and contributions from other individuals within the group.

Differentiation—Differentiation refers to "modifying curriculum and instruction according to content, pacing, and/or product to meet unique student needs in the classroom" (NAGC, n.d.-b).

Empowerment—Empowerment has been theorized to encompass the dimensions of *meaningfulness, competence, and impact* (Frymier et al., 1996). K. W. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) also include the dimension of *choice*. However, for this study empowerment was defined as "a student's feeling of competence to perform a task that is meaningful and has an impact on the situation" (Frymier et al. as cited in Houser & Frymier, 2009).

Giftedness—There is much discrepancy from state to state and district to district regarding not only how to identify gifted students, but also the basic definition of giftedness (Carman, 2013). However, according to the most recent federal definition,

> The term 'gifted and talented,' when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (USDOE, 2015, Section 9101)

The term *gifted student* was used interchangeably with *gifted learner* throughout the manuscript.

High School—Students in grades 9–12 or 10–12, depending upon the structure of the school, are considered high school students. Typically, these students enter high school at 14 or 15 years of age and graduate at 17 or 18 years of age.

Interpretivism—Interpretivism is a theoretical stance that seeks to "understand and explain human and social reality" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67).

Phenomenology—Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology informed by the philosophical stance of interpretivism (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology explores a single phenomenon from the perspective of multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological interviews attempt to "uncover the essence of an individual's experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 93).

Power—For this study, power was conceptualized as emanating from five relational bases: *reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power* (French & Raven, 1959). They proposed that communication through these distinct power bases mediated an individual's influence over others.

Psychosocial Factors—Psychosocial factors are personal factors, such as motivation and resilience, impacted by both psychological and social influences.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—Self-Determination Theory proposes three separate types of motivation that encompass both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Deci & Ryan, 2008b). SDT posits that extrinsic motivation has several different forms that exist along a continuum (i.e., external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration). Intrinsic motivation results from a situation in which an individual experiences a sense of competence (i.e., self-efficacy), autonomy (i.e., control & choice), and relatedness (i.e., sense of belonging) When

these psychological needs are met, individuals can fully engage in self-directed behavior.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The concept of "giftedness" has intrigued societies around the world since at least the beginning of recorded history (Colangelo & Davis, 2003). While it is almost certain that even the very early societies (e.g., Neolithic) valued 'gifted' individuals who excelled in areas that increased the possibility of survival and proliferation (Stanley, 2005), we know for certain that later societies diligently recruited and trained these individuals. For example, young males "gifted" in leadership and military skills were sought out in Sparta as a means to further Sparta's pursuit of military superiority, and Plato selected for his academy both young women and men who excelled intellectually and physically (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Davis et al., 2011). In fact, those chosen for his Republic were required to possess "natural gifts that [would] facilitate their education" (Jowett, 1920, p. 794). Similarly, during Emperor Charlemagne's reign in the Middle Ages, intellectually advanced children were educated at the expense of the state (Heath, 1997), and during the Renaissance in Europe (Colangelo & Davis, 2003), gifted writers, artists, and architects were well supported and rewarded for their works.

Yet, societies have not *always* valued "gifted" children. In fact, in the United States there has always existed somewhat of a "love-hate" relationship with the gifted child (Gallagher, 1986), as politically and socially we vacillate between a desire for

equality and a desire for equity, between "egalitarian ideals and respect for high intellectual ability" (Gilman, 2003, p. 23).

There are five major strands in this chapter: (a) the development of conceptions of giftedness, (b) claims of elitism and the impact on gifted students, (c) characteristics and educational needs of gifted students, (d) power and empowerment in gifted education, and (e) empowerment as a motivational construct in gifted education. The first part of this chapter introduces the reader to the development of conceptions of giftedness, including society's changing perspective on giftedness through the years and the evolution of definitions and measures of intelligence. This information helps to establish an understanding for the next section, which discusses claims of elitism toward gifted education from both outside and inside the field. The third section highlights characteristics that gifted students exhibit and discusses the associated educational needs, including well-educated teachers and appropriate programming options. These first three sections lead to a discussion on power and empowerment and how these concepts relate to motivational models in gifted education. The final section discusses the potential impact of both empowerment and disempowerment on gifted students.

The Development of Conceptions of Giftedness

In Europe in the mid- to late-1800s, Francis Galton, strongly influenced by his cousin Charles Darwin's theory regarding natural selection, began advancing the viewpoint that intelligence is inherent (Fancher, 1985). He fervently argued in favor of the British system of educating the elite few rather than the American educational system that educated a much broader segment of the population but who "failed to turn out very many people of genuine intellectual distinction" (p. 30). Galton imagined the

development of an intelligence test that would accurately predict future eminence of adults based on a measure of their natural ability as young adults. He later championed the eugenics movement, which consisted of two primary goals:

> First, the development of an intellectually and psychologically superior "breed" of human beings who would be able to transmit their genetic virtues to their offspring; and second, the institution of customs and laws to ensure that this superior breed proliferates at a faster rate than the common run, and thus comes to dominate society numerically as well as qualitatively. (pp. 34-35)

Galton's influence continued into the next century, where James McKeen Cattell, an American psychologist, built upon Galton's reaction-time measurements to develop his own "mental tests" (Fancher, 1985, p. 46). The purpose of these tests was to measure individual differences in mental functions. Although these tests were later proven to be inaccurate measurements of intelligence (Fancher, 1985), his work "was at least partly responsible for the immediate favorable reception to [Alfred] Binet's tests in America" (Davis et al., 2011, p. 6).

In 1905, Binet, a French psychologist, took up the intelligence testing movement with the creation of the first "successful" intelligence test (Fancher, 1985). He and his colleague Simon were hired by Parisian government officials to develop a test to identify "dull children who would not benefit from regular classes and who therefore required special training" (Colangelo & Davis, 2003, p. 6). After multiple failed attempts in which Binet and Simon tested qualities such as hand squeezing strength and the degree of forehead pressure that causes pain, they eventually realized that measurements of memory, attention, comprehension, reasoning, and judgment provided results that aligned well with teachers' assessments of differences in students' levels of intelligence.

In 1910, Henry Goddard, an American psychologist, determined that the Binet-Simon tests not only accurately identified "feebleminded" children but also children with average and above average intelligence (Davis et al., 2011, p. 6). This allowed, for the first time, a means of quantitatively assessing and hierarchically ordering students based on their cognitive abilities. These Binet-Simon tests were the precursors to today's intelligence tests (Davis et al., 2011).

In 1916, Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman supervised the development of the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale for American youth, a modification to the Binet-Simon tests (Davis et al., 2011). Terman utilized this newly-devised measure of intelligence, to identify 1,528 students with IQs above 135 (most above 140). He and his colleagues then conducted a longitudinal study on these "Termites" that continued for more than half a century (Colangelo & Davis, 2003) and involved multiple interviews, questionnaires, and tests (Davis et al., 2011). Although the research design was flawed (Leslie, 2000), the data collected provided detailed information on these gifted individuals' "educational, professional, psychological, social, and even physical development" over the years (Colangelo & Davis, 2003, p. 7). Through his work, Terman was the first to empirically contest the earlier assertion that gifted students were inherently unattractive, weak, and emotionally unstable (Davis et al., 2011). In fact, he drew conclusions quite to the contrary, stating that the gifted individuals in his studies were "superior in virtually every area studied" (p. 6).

Terman believed that a person's genetics were solely responsible for her or his level of general intelligence and that it was possible to measure this as accurately as one would measure a child's weight or height (Leslie, 2000). He termed this "original

endowment" the *intelligence quotient* (IQ; para. 15). His study, however, ignored giftedness in artistic or creative areas, overrepresented children of Jewish descent, and underrepresented African-American and Hispanic students, creating a very narrow and "elite" representation of the gifted child (Davis et al., 2011). In fact, as a group, his participants were "overwhelmingly white, urban and middle class" and of the 1,528, there were "only two African-Americans, six Japanese-Americans, and one American Indian" (Leslie, 2000, para. 22).

Terman's work definitely moved gifted education forward as a field of study, establishing for the first time in modern history that gifted individuals were not at an inherent disadvantage but rather, in general, happy, well-rounded, and healthy (Leslie, 2000). His "studies undoubtedly represent the most widely recognized and frequently quoted research on characteristics of gifted persons" (Renzulli, 1978, p. 183). However, the fact that his intelligence assessments only identified the top 1% (Terman, 1925) of a sample that was not representative of the population (Davis et al., 2011; Leslie, 2000) moved us toward an elitist view of giftedness that continues to impact the field today.

A Brief History of Society's Perspective on Gifted Education

It is no wonder, given the early conceptions of giftedness and the history of the intelligence test, that gifted education has had claims of elitism leveled against it. However, while there is validity to some of these claims, the repercussions associated with the "fixes" has created a situation in which the learning needs of a subpopulation of students is not being met on a daily basis. It is not considered elitism to adjust curriculum for second language learners, nor is it considered elitism when we modify

curriculum so that students receiving special education services are provided with the least restrictive learning environment. Gifted students are simply another subgroup of students deserving of the best educational services we can provide for them. Through that lens, the withdrawal of gifted programming or the denial of services seems indefensible.

As early as 1931, Leta Stetter Hollingworth commented on society's view of giftedness: "It is felt that in a democracy no one has a right to something which cannot possibly be achieved through effort; so the existence of inborn superiority of mind is denied" (Hollingworth, 1931, p. 197). Hollingworth is credited with the founding of gifted education (Klein, 2000) and is considered the nurturant mother of the gifted-child movement (Stanley, as cited in Davis et al., 2011, p. 7). Her work as a psychologist, educator, and feminist in the mid-1900s in New York served to bring awareness to the academic and affective needs of highly and profoundly gifted children from multiple nationalities (Klein, 2000).

In 1922, as a faculty member at Teachers College Columbia University, Hollingworth oversaw a three-year longitudinal study of gifted children with the dual goals of educating and studying them (Klein, 2000). She later opened the Speyer School for gifted and cognitively disabled students in 1936, with the intention of studying both groups of students but also of providing for their individual learning needs. She believed in allowing students to progress at their own rates of learning and that it was necessary to provide for their physical and emotional health as well as their intellectual. She believed that gifted children should be both enriched and accelerated and spent her life attempting to "educate professionals, parents and the public about the psyche of gifted children" (p.

102). Unfortunately, after her death in 1939, the focus on gifted education greatly diminished, and by the end of the World War II in 1945, gifted education was in a "woeful state" (Jolly, 2009a, p. 45), with gifted programming virtually non-existent in the majority of schools across the nation.

Through the years, America's focus on the needs of gifted students has been cyclical, often fluctuating widely (Cramer, 1991; Jolly, 2009a; Tannenbaum, 1979). There has traditionally been increased support for identification of and programming for gifted students in times of national need. However, that support is quickly withdrawn when it is perceived that "gifted education [is] usurping resources from more urgent educational and societal goals" (D. Matthews & Kitchen, 2007, p. 27).

An example of support for gifted students being increased and then withdrawn based on the changing political climate is the 1957 Soviet launching of Sputnik. This was perceived to be a national crisis and spurred resurgence in America's interest in gifted education that had been lacking in the previous 20 years. According to Cropley and Cropley (2000), "This perceived failure of American science and engineering was attributed to lack of creativity, and judged to be the result of defects in education" (p. 208). During this era, the American educational system was, in fact, found lacking by many when compared to the Russian school system, and there were specific concerns about the lack of academic opportunities afforded gifted children in America compared to children in Russia (Davis et al., 2011). Because of this, efforts were increased to identify more academically gifted students, and the United States federal government began investing heavily in their education (Tannenbaum, 1979). For example, the National Defense Education Act provided $1 billion over a period of four years in the form of

loans, scholarships, and fellowships for educating highly able students in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Jolly, J. L., 2009c). This focus also resulted in college courses offered in high school, telescoped coursework to allow students to move through the curricula more quickly, and access in elementary school to foreign language instruction. New curricula for math and science were developed and ability grouping and acceleration were regularly utilized in schools across the nation. Tannenbaum (1979) referred to this era as a time of "total talent mobilization" (p. 12). This interest in gifted education, however, lasted only about five years. At this point, the United States had successfully launched its first satellite and no longer felt the same urgency to develop its gifted students (Jolly, 2009a).

It wasn't until the 1970s that interest in gifted education again surfaced with the introduction of the Marland Report (Jolly, 2009b). In 1970, the United States Congress tasked Sydney P. Marland with the responsibility of assembling a group of experts in the field of gifted education to compile a report on the status of gifted students (Jolly, 2009b). This represented the transition into what is considered the modern era of gifted education and resulted in the first federal definition of giftedness. It read:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:
>
> 1. General intellectual ability
> 2. Specific academic ability
> 3. Creative or productive thinking
> 4. Leadership ability

5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability (P. L. 91-230, Section 806)

This definition espoused a much more "holistic view of giftedness" (Jolly, 2009a) than earlier unitary ones that only identified students as gifted if they scored in the top 1% on an IQ test. According to Coleman (2004), Marland's definition "was a compromise between competing conceptions of the nature of giftedness, battles between psychology, biology, and education for their perspectives within the American context of anti-intellectualism, instituted racism and democratic idealism" (p. 10). As part of this same report, Marland stated that "intellectual and creative talent cannot survive educational neglect and apathy" (p. viii).

In 1978, Joseph Renzulli offered a new, operational definition of giftedness that was designed to be "useful to school personnel, and defensible in terms of research findings" (p. 180). In his three-ring conception of giftedness (see Figure 1), the focus was not on identifying the gifted *child* but on identifying gifted *behaviors* (Renzulli, 2002). According to Renzulli (1978), *gifted behavior* consisted of the interaction of three components: above-average (though not necessarily superior) ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Renzulli stated, "Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance" (p. 261). This new definition challenged current thinking in the field, bringing us closer to a more inclusive conception of giftedness and helping to counter claims of elitism.

This new conception of giftedness also addressed one of the primary issues Renzulli (1978) found with the Marland definition-- that it "fail[ed] to include nonintellective (motivational) factors" (p. 181). Renzulli (2002) defined task

commitment as a "refined or focused form of motivation" (p. 72) and posited that task commitment, along with creativity, are as important as general or specific ability in producing gifted behaviors (i.e., creative/productive accomplishments; Renzulli, 1978; Renzulli, 2002). "Nonintellective factors" of this sort are referred to in gifted education today as *affective* (i.e., social-emotional; NAGC, n.d.-b) or *psychosocial factors*, (i.e., psychological and social), and although there is no definitive list of what affective and psychosocial factors encompass, motivation is consistently included in the gifted education research literature (Rinn, 2012; Subotnik et al., 2011; Worrell, 2009; Worrell, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Subotnik, 2012).

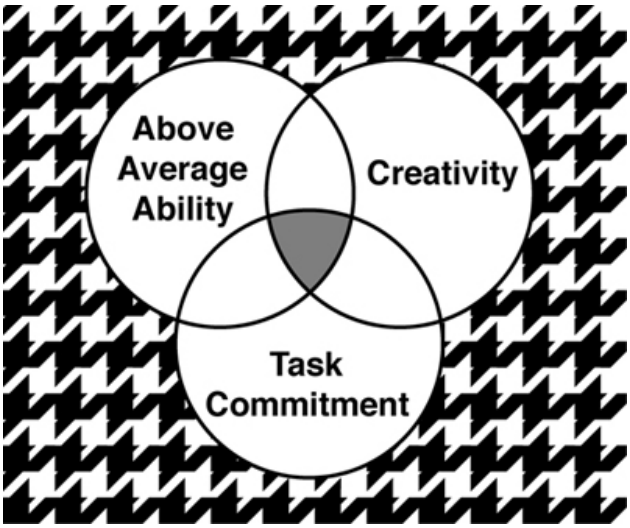

Figure 1: Three-ring conception of giftedness.

Federal Reports on the State of Gifted Education

While the 1970s represented a time of increased focus on the defining characteristics of gifted students, shortly thereafter, a report by the The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) entitled *A Nation at Risk*, criticized America for overall low educational standards and lack of academic focus within its

classrooms. The Commission's report stated that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 5). Similarly, John Gardner (1984), Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare at the time, asserted that gifted youth are our most important asset, and as such must be well educated for the sake of our nation. This sentiment, coupled with the results of *A Nation at Risk* resulted, once again, in a brief return to focusing on the educational needs of gifted students (Colangelo & Davis, 2003), which included implementing more rigorous academic standards and "promoting appropriate curriculum for gifted learners" (NAGC, n.d.-a). However, that emphasis was not sustained.

In 1993, the United States Department of Education released a report entitled *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*. In it, it spoke of a "quiet crisis" (p. 5) and claimed that, by inadequately addressing their learning needs, the nation was "squandering one of its most precious resources—the gifts, talents, and high interest of many of its students" (p. 1), especially those who were culturally and linguistically diverse and/or who came from poverty. This report served to increase advocacy for research in the field of gifted education and additional programming for gifted students (National Association of Gifted Children, n.d.-a), and while research in gifted education since that time has flourished, subsequent legislative mandates have "created budgetary and administrative priorities that have worked at cross purposes with the goals of gifted education" (Stanley & Baines, 2002, p. 11).

An example of one of these "budgetary and administrative priorities" to which the field of gifted education was opposed was the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

legislation. This legislation shifted the "emphasis in many schools from addressing the potential of the individual student to getting a majority of students up to a minimal level of competency" (Stanley & Baines, 2002, p. 11). This change was detrimental to gifted students as "fiscal policies, teaching methodologies, and the resurgence of egalitarianism" (p. 5) served to relegate the gifted learner to "second class status" (p. 12). "While parents and teachers of gifted students hear the dour pronouncements that there is no money for gifted programs, they cannot help but notice that districts somehow manage to fund new stadiums, uniforms, computers, ESL programs, and other initiatives" (p. 12).

Then in 2011, the Obama Administration delivered another blow to gifted students by eliminating funding to the Jacob Javits Gifted Education Grant Program, a federal program whose outreach had impacted more than 600,000 students across the nation, (Council for Exceptional Children & NAGC, 2011). This grant program was designed to

> focus[] resources on identifying and serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, particularly minority, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, and students with disabilities, to help reduce gaps in achievement and to encourage the establishment of equal educational opportunities for all students. (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2016)

The Jacob Javits Gifted Education Grant Program was first passed by Congress as part of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1988 and is the only federal program that has provided any type of funding for gifted education (gifted education programming is not federally mandated). With this cut in expenditures (i.e., $7,463,000), our nation once again jeopardized its most vulnerable population of gifted students.

In 2014, $5,000,000 in funding was restored to the grant program; in 2015 it was increased to $10,000,000 and in 2016 to $12,000,000 (United States Department of

Education [USDOE], n.d.-b). However, this funding is earmarked for research and curriculum development and may not be used by individual districts to directly support identification or programming (NAGC, 2016).

Well into the 21st century, the U.S. seems to have made little true progress in meeting the needs of gifted learners within the public school system. In fact, Callahan et al. (2014) report that little has changed for this group of students in the last 30 years. In reflecting on gifted education in the 21st century to date, it seems apparent that "the clear victims of fixed budgets and increasingly cumbersome legal requirements have been America's brightest children" (Stanley & Baines, 2002, p. 11).

In between times of intense focus on gifted students, the pendulum of concern consistently swings back to an emphasis on equality for all, above all, which is somewhat understandable. We live in a nation that was founded on the principle that all people are created equal. Within that context, schools are often seen as "instrument[s] of democracy" (McDaniel, 2002, p. 112), tasked with providing similar experiences for all students. Anything that can be conceived of as less than democratic within the school system is open to claims of elitism, and yet, "[s]chools can serve democratic purposes or political/economic purposes; but if they do not serve the purpose of talent development in all children, they will fall short of their promise" (McDaniel, 2002, p. 113). Providing every child the best possible education is the most fundamental responsibility of our educational system. Unfortunately, advocates for gifted education have failed to adequately establish that educating gifted students is not an issue of elitism but an issue of necessity. Because of this, claims of elitism have developed both outside and within the field.

Claims of Elitism and the Impact on Gifted Students

Margolin (1996) perceived gifted education as a system designed to prepare "oppressors in training" (p.176), stating that its purpose is to "single out the children of the affluent for training in leadership and dominance" (p. 164). Dorling (2010) goes so far as to state that there are no "important genetic differences" in the abilities of children (p. 44) and therefore, no need for any type of differentiated programming. He questions the "idea that different children have different limits" (p. 44) to their potential and calls the belief that there are 'gifted' people a misconception. Sapon-Shevin (1996) claims that the way in which giftedness is defined and identified and the way in which gifted education is implemented is meritocratic and elitist, designed specifically for "the children of white, privileged parents" (p. 195). She states that gifted services provided to gifted students do not necessarily address their identified strengths, and she is concerned that much of what is provided for gifted students would be good for all students. She calls for eliminating gifted programs entirely and "enthusiastically embrac[ing] heterogeneous classrooms as the ideal learning communities" (p. 211).

Even within the field of gifted education, there is validation for some of these claims. For example, a recent national survey of gifted programs across the United States found that, especially at the high school level, a single programming option, such as AP, is often provided for all gifted students rather than differentiated services based on a specific area of identification (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013). According to Starko (1990), "programs in which identification and programming are not clearly linked face difficulties when political ill winds blow" (Programming, para. 4). Additionally, some proponents of gifted education suggest that gifted programming *can* potentially benefit

certain students who have not been formally identified (Card & Giuliano, 2014; Ritchotte, Suhr, Alfurayh, & Graefe, 2016). For example, Card and Guiliano (2014) found that when fourth-grade students who were not formally identified as gifted but who had scored well on the previous year's state assessment were given the opportunity to participate in gifted education programming, they outperformed identified gifted students in the areas of math, reading, and science. Furthermore, many gifted education proponents are justifiably concerned with the underrepresentation of certain populations of students in gifted education programs (e.g., Callahan, 2014; Ford, 2003; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001).

Underrepresentation in Gifted Education

There is wide recognition that giftedness is as prevalent in low socioeconomic (SES) populations and in minority ethnicities and cultures as in any other demographic (Baldwin, 2007; Boothe & Stanley, 2004; Colorado Department of Education, n.d.; Ford, 2011; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; NAGC, 2011; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; Wyner, Bridgeland, Dilulio, 2007). However, identification of these students for gifted education programs and participation of these students in advanced curricular programming is well below what would be expected based on their percentages in the general population of schools across the United States (Callahan, 2014: Elhoweris, 2008; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001; Dorn, 2009; Ford as cited in Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014, p. 193; Worrell, 2003 as cited in Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014, p. 193; VanTassel-Baska, 2003). This discrepancy is often due to a combination of factors, including deficit thinking on the part of educators, assessment policies and tools too narrow to accurately measure diverse manifestations of intelligence, and lack of early educational and

enrichment experiences that would provide equitable opportunities for these students to develop and exhibit academic and intellectual strengths (Ford, 2003).

Few school districts across the nation have a gifted education program that "proportionately reflect[s] the demographics of their school system" (Ford, 2003, p. 283). In fact, Native American, Hispanic, and African-American children participate in gifted programs "at only about one-half or less of their prevalence in the larger society (Gallagher, 2003, p. 14). Additionally, representation in gifted programs of students from low SES households is even more disparate (Callahan et al., 2014). This lack of identification and lack of rigorous programming are perceived as detrimental to underserved gifted students and as contributing factors to many gifted students not reaching their full academic potentials (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001, p. 85). As Ford (2003) points out, when there are barriers to identification and programming, "gifted education, in effect, is viewed as a privilege, not a need" (Ford, 2003, p. 289).

There is no question that we must do a better job of identifying and serving students who are currently underrepresented in gifted education. However, as we continue to work toward this goal, we cannot allow claims of elitism from those opposed to the idea of gifted education to result in "political pressures to reduce or eliminate funding and support for…programs" (D. Matthews, 2014, p. 308) that are currently serving already identified gifted students. Denying services to these gifted students in order "to avoid the perceived unfairness to students without exceptional intellectual abilities" (Cross, Cross, & Finch, 2010, p. 236) is an indefensible practice. Awaya (2001) contends that "the future of gifted education lies in finding an avenue to meet the needs of diverse students and developing programs that can be justified within a

democratic society" (p. 179), and yet, we cannot sacrifice our gifted students in the process.

Lack of Consistent Definition and Federal Support

Potentially further exacerbating the perception of elitism is the fact that after 100 years of contributions to the field of gifted education in the form of various theories, proposed definitions, and research on the nature and needs of gifted learners, there is still no single, consistent definition of giftedness accepted by all (Carman, 2013; NAGC, 2015). According to the most recent federal definition:

> The term 'gifted and talented,' when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (USDOE, 2015, Section 9101)

Yet each state is at liberty to determine its own definition of giftedness (Callahan et al., 2014; Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2016). This creates a situation in which "those identified under one definition of giftedness could easily be excluded under a competing, yet equally valid definition" (Carman, 2013, p. 53). Additionally, gifted education programming and gifted education funding vary widely from state to state, with some states neither requiring gifted education services nor providing any monetary resources and other states mandating services and fully funding programs (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2016; NAGC, 2015). This lack of consistency from state-to-state enhances the notion that providing differentiated learning opportunities to meet the needs of gifted students is not essential.

The fact that gifted education is frequently viewed as an expendable resource surely increases the perception of elitism and impacts society's misconceptions about the necessity of appropriately educating gifted students (NAGC, n.d.-c). The myth that gifted students experience no academic problems and require no educational support in order to be successful "makes it easier for politicians to ignore them as a special population with special needs when faced with the difficult task of allocating scarce resources" (Moon, 2009, p. 275).

With that said, supporters of gifted education contend that failure to provide differentiated learning experiences to gifted students due to misconceptions or fears of promoting "elitism" only hurts gifted students who, as a result, do not receive the support they need to develop their full potential (Paton, 2009; Rinn & Cobane, 2009).

Characteristics and Educational Needs of Gifted Students

Even most critics of gifted education cannot deny that gifted students exhibit characteristics that distinguish them from other students and that translate into unique educational and affective needs within the classroom (see Table 1). For example, research has indicated that gifted students: (a) learn rapidly and have large knowledge bases; (b) have superior language ability, memory capacity, and metacognition; (c) have advanced reasoning and problem-solving abilities; (d) exhibit thinking that is complex, logical, and abstract; and (e) are highly curious and insightful (see Davis et al., 2011). They also: (f) have wide and varied interests; (g) exhibit emotional intensity; (h) require high intellectual and physical stimulation; (i) are highly motivated and able to persist for long periods of time; (j) are highly empathic and exhibit advanced moral thinking and a

strong need for justice; and (k) have excellent senses of humor, high levels of creativity, and prefer novelty (and this is not a comprehensive list…; see Davis et al., 2011).

Table 1

Characteristics of Gifted Students and Associated Learning Needs[a]

Characteristic	Learning Need
Excellent memory	Access to large quantities of information
Advanced comprehension	Challenging learning environment
Varied interests (multipotentiality)	Exposure to a wide range of topics and ideas
Excellent verbal skills	Opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflection
Flexibility and creativity of thought processes	Challenging and varied problem solving activities
Accelerated rate of thinking	Individually paced learning
Goal-oriented focus	Extended time for specific learning activities
Independence in learning	Independent and self-directed learning tasks
Analytical thinking	Opportunities for high-level thinking and problem solving; "time to think"
Self-motivation	Active involvement in learning and setting goals for learning
Emotional sensitivity	Opportunities for reflection
Interest in adult issues	Exposure to real world issues
Abstract and holistic reasoning	Multidisciplinary approach to learning
Voracious reading	Access to extensive and diverse resources

[a]Source: Southeastern Virginia (SEVA) Council for Gifted Administrators, 2012

The Role of the Regular Classroom Teacher

While all of these characteristics are by no means found in every gifted student, it is still easy to see why it is challenging to address the learning needs of gifted students within in the regular classroom. Not only do gifted students differ from the general population of students, they also differ from one another. In fact, according to Davis and colleagues (2011),

> gifted children differ from one another not only in size, shape, and color, but also in cognitive and language abilities; interests; learning styles; motivation and energy levels; personalities; mental health and self-concepts; habits and behavior; background and experience; and any other mental, physical, or experiential characteristic that one cares to look for. They differ also in their patterns of educational needs. (p. 32)

Classroom teachers play a significant role in the identification of and support for gifted students, yet most are unaware of the aforementioned characteristics (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Ford, 2011) and tend to have a limited understanding of giftedness in general (NAGC, 2015; Purcell & Leppien, 1998; Tomlinson et al., 1996). According to Henley et al. (2010), classroom teachers' knowledge of gifted students and their collaboration with gifted education teachers are "imperative for the success of gifted programs" (p. 205), but most classroom teachers receive very little, if any, training in how to meet the needs of gifted students in the regular classroom.

While some teacher candidates do receive limited information on the nature and needs of gifted learners as a small part of a required special education course at the university level, 63% of teachers in the field state that they have had very little to no training in meeting the needs of academically advanced students in their teacher education programs, and 58% of teachers say they have had no recent professional

development on meeting the needs of academically advanced students (Farkas & Duffett, 2008).

This lack of teacher training about the general characteristics and learning needs of gifted students contributes to classroom situations in which these students are often misunderstood and their needs are neither recognized nor met (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; NAGC, 2015; Purcell & Leppien, 1998; Tomlinson et al., 1996). Hickey (1990) found that classroom teachers often perceived gifted programming (especially when it involved pulling students from class) as disruptive and gifted students as arrogant, and Tomlinson and colleagues (1996) reported a "fear of gifted students on the part of many classroom teachers…due to lack of information and knowledge" (p. 168).

Lack of teacher training in gifted education, combined with the complex and emotional nature of teaching in general (Gallagher, 1996; Intrator, 2006; Purcell & Leppien, 1998), often makes it difficult for teachers to justify focusing time and energy on a group of students inaccurately believed to be able to "make it on their own" (NAGC, n.d.-c). "The demands on the regular classroom teacher to be more accountable, more skilled, and more productive… create extraordinary expectations and pressures" (McDaniel, 2002, p. 113). Additionally, often through no fault of their own, teachers' opinions frequently mirror the societal view that gifted education is unnecessary (NAGC, n.d.-c). Our nation is still experiencing the negative impact of the most recent political and economic climate (see Siemer, 2009), which has encouraged schools and districts to embrace the notion of egalitarianism, or that everyone should receive the same "educational experience" (Stanley & Baines, 2002, p. 12). While educational experiences should be similar in that all students should be challenged in the classroom,

the way in which teachers must differentiate in order appropriately challenge gifted students varies significantly; this is the training that most teachers never receive.

Many teachers, however, do report a desire to make gifted students more of an educational priority, realizing that "educating them properly is the right thing to do" (Farkas & Duffett, 2008, p. 50). Yet without training or support, they are at a loss as to how to accomplish this. Additionally, programming options that provide optimal levels of challenge for the most able learners simply are not available in most high schools.

Gifted Education Programming Options at the High School

In 2010, NAGC published programming standards for preschool through senior high students. These standards were designed to reflect best practice in the field of gifted education in the following six areas: (a) Learning and Development, (b) Assessment, (c) Curriculum Planning and Instruction, (d) Learning Environments, (e) Programming, (f) Professional Development. Yet, in a recent nationwide survey by Callahan and colleagues (2013), 73% of districts responded that they did not employ these standards at the high school.

For those districts that were using the standards, similar to other findings on lack of teacher training, providing professional development in gifted education for current teachers was the least utilized standard (Callahan et.al, 2013). The standard most often used was Curriculum Planning and Instruction (Callahan et al., 2013), which is focused primarily on differentiation of curriculum to meet gifted students' learning needs (NAGC, 2010). Somewhere in between the most and least utilized standard was the Programming standard. Student outcomes for this standard call for the opportunity for gifted students to participate in a "variety of evidence-based programming options" and

have access to "comprehensive, aligned programming and services" that are "guided by clear policies and procedures that provide for their advanced learning needs" (NAGC, 2010, p. 7). This is clearly not happening at the high school. Not only are most districts not even using these standards, the ones who are report extremely limited programming options for gifted students.

The Programming standard also encourages teachers to use multiple forms of grouping to serve the learning needs of gifted students (NAGC, 2010). These grouping options include "clusters, resource room, special classes, or special schools" (p. 7). In this instance, grouping clearly refers to gifted students working with other gifted students to extend their learning. However, most group work at the high school does not seem to be designed with the needs of gifted students in mind.

Advanced Placement. *Advanced Placement* (AP) is a program overseen by the College Board (n.d.) that allows high school students to participate in college-level courses in their high school classrooms. At the end of each academic year, students are able to register to take AP exams that may result in course credit at certain colleges and universities, depending upon their scores (College Board, n.d.). Callahan et al. (2014) report that in 90.7% of United States' high schools, AP is the primary programming option for gifted high school students, even though, historically, this program was not designed specifically for gifted students and is now often considered appropriate for all students.

Research has indicated that for gifted students, there are some beneficial aspects of AP when compared to other classes, such as intellectual engagement and increased challenge and motivation (see Colangelo et al., 2004; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008;

Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Van Tassel-Baska, 2001). In fact, in 2001, Van Tassel-Baska advocated for the acceptance of the AP program as an appropriate instructional option for gifted secondary students, stating that the "coursework is exemplary of a tailored curricular response that recognizes advanced cognitive capacities such as abstract reasoning, higher level thinking, and rapid learning rate in such students and provides a rich and complex set of learning experiences" (p. 127). However, the fact that AP is the *primary* "gifted" programming option at the high school level indicates that "gifted students are still considered and identified as a homogeneous group of students with all students being served in the same way" (Callahan et al., 2014, p. 7). Based on the diverse characteristics of gifted children (see Characteristics and Educational Needs of Gifted Students), it is doubtful that their full academic, creative, and affective needs are being met by this single programming option (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006). Furthermore, for those gifted students who do not participate in an AP course, or for those students who do not spend their entire days in AP classes, it is up to regular classroom teachers to meet their specialized needs. Additionally, while many AP teachers receive training and support in teaching their AP courses, most, just like regular classroom teachers, have had very little, if any, training in meeting the needs of their gifted students (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008).

Grouping. Another programming concern for gifted high school students is the prolific use of ineffective grouping strategies, where the primary goal may become socialization of students rather than acquisition of individual learning goals or academic growth for individual students (Stanley & Baines, 2002). These groups often take the form of *heterogeneous groups* (e.g., groups of students of various abilities, where an

above average student is grouped with a combination of academically average and below average students; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Patrick et al., 2005, Slavin, 1994,) in which students are expected to work together to accomplish a task. Cooperative learning is one type of grouping, and although it may differ tremendously in its structure and implementation, it generally refers to teacher-structured, heterogeneous groups. In practice, the term cooperative learning is often interchanged with other group work terms such as collaborative learning (O'Donnell, 2005; Robinson, 1991). It seems, however, that the most effective cooperative learning differs from traditional small-group learning in that it encompasses the goals of interdependence, accountability, leadership, responsibility, and social skills development for the students involved (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). It also includes teacher involvement in the formation of the group and facilitation of the group dynamics and requires group members to evaluate teamwork and contributions from other individuals within the group.

Research on cooperative learning documents increased achievement (Kyndt et al., 2013; Slavin, 1996), improved learning (Igel & Urquhart, 2012, p. 17), and enhanced intellectual ability (Farzaneh & Nejadansari, 2014, p. 287). One potential issue, however, is that, key advocates of cooperative learning have based their research results on the positive effects of cooperative learning for the average student rather than the gifted student (Johnson and Johnson, 2009; Neber, Finsterwald, & Urban, 2001; Robinson, 1990; Rogers, 1991). Additionally, Huss (2006) reported that only 5% of "well-intentioned" (p. 20) teachers claiming to use cooperative learning actually incorporated the guidelines of interdependence, accountability, leadership, responsibility, and social skills development.

Numerous professionals in the field of gifted education advise against grouping gifted students heterogeneously, especially when the goal is scholastic improvement (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Gallagher et al., 1993; Rogers, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, Landrum, & Peterson, 1992) because they do not have an opportunity to receive "instruction at a level and pace as well as conceptual complexity commensurate with their advanced levels of ability and achievement" (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992). Based on the lack of research on gifted students and cooperative learning and on the prevalent "misuse" (p. 20) of cooperative learning strategies, it is unclear whether more positive results might be possible. As it stands now, gifted students often voice frustration about being asked to teach other students who are unable to grasp the material or who will not listen, and they feel resentful that this time could not be used for their own learning (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Gallagher et al., 1993; Rogers, 2007; VanTassel-Baska et al., 1992). They also express concern about moving at too slow a pace, teachers providing a single group grade, and about a lack of quality and effort from other students, which often leaves them feeling like they have to do all the work (Coleman, 1994; M. Matthews, 1992). As one teacher put it, "The idea that the good student will pull up everyone else in a cooperative setting is a stark falsehood. What usually happens is that the good student ends up doing the other students' work" (Stanley & Baines, 2002, p. 12).

But this practice of grouping is likely is not going away in the near future. Grouping students is an instructional practice encouraged on a regular basis within high school classrooms. For example, proponents of 21st Century Skills highlight collaboration as one of the five key components necessary in every student's education (Russell, 2014). Additionally, teachers are often evaluated on their use of grouping

strategies in the classroom. For example, in the state of Colorado, for a teacher to score in the exemplary range on the teacher effectiveness rubric (part of the teacher evaluation system), her/his students must "engage in collaborative learning and group processes" (CDE, 2015, p. 9). Similarly, AP course offerings and participation have experienced a steady, upward trend over the last 20 years (see Judson & Hobson, 2015) that seems likely to continue.

Situated within this context, it seems probable that issues of engagement and motivation for gifted students are compromised, complicated by a variety of external factors that do not necessarily impact other students. Misunderstandings, misconceptions, inadequate funding, and lack of teacher training likely influence the power dynamics within the classroom, impacting gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment within that setting.

Power and Empowerment in Gifted Education

The concepts of power and empowerment have previously been topics of research in both K-12 and secondary education classrooms (e.g., Frymier et al., 1996; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). Lovorn and colleagues (2012) contend that research in these areas continues to be relevant because "as the world becomes more informationally, economically, culturally and educationally interdependent, it becomes necessary for teachers to develop critical understandings of power, classroom power dynamics and the power-related roles of stakeholders in the learning process" (p. 71). While the exact terms "power" and "empowerment" are rarely used in the field of gifted education, related constructs, especially engagement and motivation, continue to be topics of

investigation and discussion and are very applicable to the day-to-day lives of gifted students.

It is now commonly accepted in the instructional communication field that teachers' use of power directly influences students' sense of empowerment. For example, Frymier and colleagues (1996) through the development of a learner empowerment measure, determined that teacher communication variables (e.g., teacher immediacy) were associated with student empowerment. Additionally, research has suggested that students who feel empowered are more motivated to engage in the classroom and to take ownership of their own learning. Nichols (2006) explored a four-dimension (i.e., Affirmation, Rejection, Empowerment, Teacher Control) model of classroom motivation with 100 current elementary and secondary teachers and 100 pre-service teachers and found a positive correlation between positive student-teacher relationships and student empowerment, noting that classrooms based on positive relationships not only empower students but also may improve their motivation and achievement. Frymier and Houser (2000) examined communication skills utilized in student-teacher relationships at the undergraduate level and reported that both referential skill (i.e., clearly explaining and facilitating student understanding) and ego support (i.e., encouraging students and supporting them emotionally) were "significant predictors of [student] learning and motivation" (p. 216). Conversely, it stands to reason that students who do not feel empowered will be less motivated and will potentially withdraw from the learning situations in various ways, including disengaging or even dropping out of school (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). These findings are consistent with the gifted education literature, in that gifted students who are motivated achieve at a level commensurate with

their ability (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). Gifted students who are not motivated tend to withdraw, which often results in these students not reaching their potential. Understanding the origins and initial conceptualizations of power and empowerment in the general field of education help to further the discussion and application to gifted education.

Power

A number of writers broadly define *power* as "an individual's *potential* to have an effect on another person or group of person's behavior" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983, p. 176), influencing the other person or group to do something that otherwise would not have been done. This power encompasses not only verbal and nonverbal communication strategies, but also behavioral patterns (McCroskey, as cited in Teven & Herring, 2005). Power was initially conceptualized as emanating from five relational bases: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power (French & Raven, 1959). French and Raven (1959) proposed that communication through these distinct power bases mediates an individual's influence over others. While the initial research on these power bases related to employer-employee relationships, theorists and researchers in the field of education have since utilized these typologies to discuss teacher power in relation to students (see Schrodt et al., 2008; Schrodt et al., 2007; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). The rationale for this transition seems to be that "teachers act as managers of the classroom, responsible for directing and guiding students' behavior just as managers are responsible for directing and guiding subordinates' behavior" (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 181).

Reward power encompasses the use of positive or negative reinforcements (French & Raven, 1959) and is witnessed when students perceive that the teacher has the ability to deliver positive, tangible or psychological rewards such as extra credit or public recognition (Schrodt et al., 2008) or to remove something unwanted (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). *Coercive power* seeks compliance through threats of punishment (French & Raven, 1959) such as disciplinary measures or the decrease in a grade (Schrodt et al., 2008). *Legitimate power* is granted based on a socially accepted position of authority (French & Raven, 1959) and is seen in the classroom when students accept the teacher's right to guide and direct students and activities (Schrodt et al., 2008). *Referent power* is developed through building relationships (French & Raven, 1959) and is seen in the classroom when a student identifies with a teacher because of "perceptions of similarity or interpersonal affinity" (Schrodt et al., 2007, p. 310). *Expert power* exists when a person is believed to be credible in a certain area; this power varies in strength with the perceived degree of knowledge (French & Raven, 1959). In the educational system, expert power is based on students' perceptions of the strength of the teacher's content knowledge and competence (Turman & Schrodt, 2006).

According to Schrodt and colleagues (2008) extensive research in the 1980s via the "Power in the Classroom" studies indicated that pro-social forms of power (i.e., referent, expert, and reward) were "generally positively associated with cognitive learning, affective learning, and student motivation," while antisocial forms of power (i.e., coercive, legitimate) were "negatively associated with these same learning outcomes" (p. 183). More recent research indicates that referent power may be the single most significant mediator of learner empowerment (Schrodt et al., 2008). Specifically,

Schrodt and colleagues (2008) employed structural equation modeling to test "two theoretical models of learner empowerment as a potential mediator of teacher power use and students' ratings of instruction" (p. 180). They found that 66% of the variance in learner empowerment could be attributed to teacher use of referent, reward, or legitimate power. Learner empowerment varied "primarily as a function of an instructor's ability to be genuine and authentic, to connect with students, build rapport, and help students see things from their [*sic*] perspective" (p. 195).

Learner Empowerment

In a broad sense, *empowerment* is defined as ''the humanistic process of adopting the values and practicing the behaviors of enlightened self-interest so that personal and organizational goals may be aligned in a way that promotes growth, learning, and fulfillment" (Luechauer & Shulman, 1993, p. 13). To measure the construct of empowerment in an educational setting, Frymier and colleagues (1996) developed the Learner Empowerment Model (LEM). Through their research, they determined that three dimensions were significant indicators of the concept of learner empowerment: competence, meaningfulness, and impact. *Competence* is defined as the ability to perform a task well (K. W. Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) and includes the idea of feeling "qualified and capable to perform the necessary activities to achieve the goal (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 183). *Meaningfulness* is defined as the personal value of a goal, and *impact* is defined as the belief that a behavior makes a difference. Therefore, when appropriated to the instructional context, *learner empowerment* is defined as "a student's feeling of competence to perform a task that is meaningful and has an impact on the situation" (Frymier et al. as cited in Houser & Frymier, 2009). This definition varies slightly from

an earlier definition proposed by K. W. Thomas and Velthouse (1990), which also included the dimension of choice.

Empowerment as a Motivational Construct in Gifted Education

In general, empowerment has been conceptualized as a motivational construct (K. W. Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). This conceptualization also works in an educational context, as empowered students who experience a sense of competence in the classroom, are more inclined to participate, believe the assignments and activities have an impact on their learning, and feel that what they are being asked to do is meaningful (Frymier et al., 1996). In gifted education, motivation is often considered a psychosocial factor (e.g., Ritchotte et al., 2016), that is, a factor influenced by different social and psychological elements unique to an individual.

While the inclusion of the concept of motivation through the descriptor of task commitment in Renzulli's (1978) definition of giftedness was controversial at the time, it is now widely accepted that motivation and other psychosocial factors are necessary to "manifestations of giftedness at every developmental stage" (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 7). This perspective is encompassed in two explanations of motivation that have gained popularity in the field of gifted education, the Achievement-Orientation Model and Self-Determination Theory.

The Achievement-Orientation Model

The *Achievement-Orientation Model* (AOM; see Figure 2) was developed by Siegle and McCoach (2005) to explain gifted students' motivations for academic success. Based on this model, gifted students who possess the skills required to successfully

complete a task and who have high levels of *self-efficacy* (i.e., confidence in ability to perform the task), positive *environmental perception* (i.e., expectation of success within a supportive educational setting), and strong *goal valuation* (i.e., task meaningfulness) will be motivated to self-regulate and achieve that task. Conversely, low levels of self-efficacy, environmental perception, and goal valuation will result in lack of self-regulation, disengagement, and underachievement. The AOM is based on four psychological theories: (a) Self-Efficacy Theory, (b) Person-Environment Fit Theory, (c) Expectancy-Value Theory, and (d) Attribution Theory.

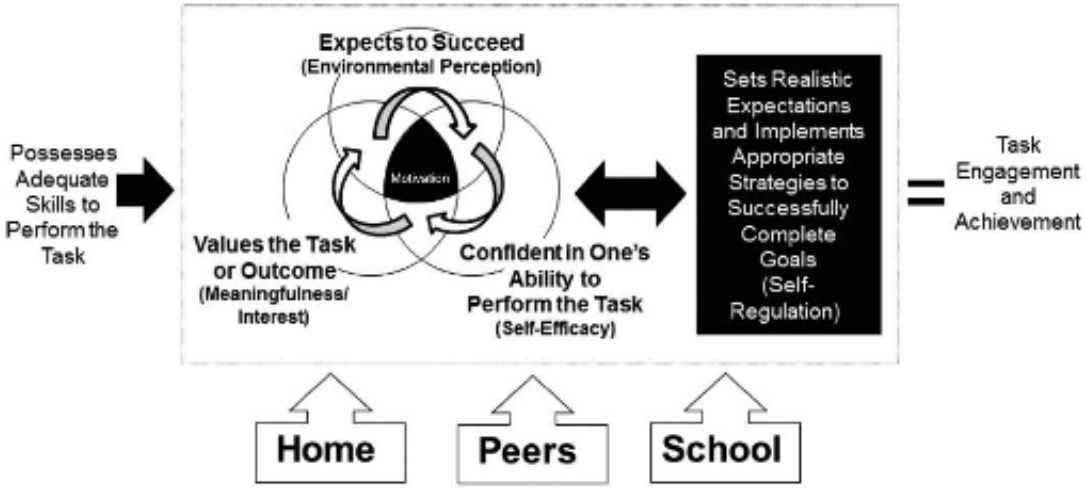

Figure 2. Achievement-Orientation Model.

Self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that she or he has the ability to accomplish a task or succeed in a specific situation (Bandura, 1977). This is in contrast to response-outcome expectations, which are defined as a person's belief that a specific action will result in a specific outcome. This distinction is important because a gifted student may believe that a particular action will produce a desired result (i.e., outcome expectation) but not believe that she or he has the ability to complete the

necessary action. The decision in this instance not to pursue the goal would be influenced by a self-efficacy expectation rather than an outcome expectation.

There are four specific components that comprise an individual's personal efficacy expectations: (a) performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). *Performance accomplishments* may be the most influential of the four sources of efficacy expectations because they develop based on "personal mastery experiences" (p. 195). As a person experiences success, mastery expectations increase; when a person experiences failure, mastery expectations tend to decrease. *Vicarious experiences* are based on social comparison and are less impactful on efficacy expectations than performance accomplishments because they are not experienced directly. A vicarious experience occurs when an individual witnesses another person with whom they identify in some way attempting and succeeding at something perceived as threatening. This can increase the expectation of success for the observer who then believes that 'if she can do it, I can do it.' With *verbal persuasion,* "[p]eople are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). Verbal persuasion is influential if the person believes the individual suggesting they can cope is credible. Finally, *emotional arousal* is generated by situations perceived to be stressful and can impact individuals' levels of self-efficacy. High levels of emotional arousal often result in decreased levels of performance; therefore, it is likely that a person's expectations of success in a situation decrease with increased levels of fear and anxiety.

Person-environment fit theory. The AOM component of environmental perceptions derives from the person-environment fit theory (French, Rodgers, & Cobb,

1974). According to this theory, there are two conceptions of person (i.e., subjective person, objective person), and two conceptions of environment (i.e., subjective environment, objective environment). The *subjective person* is the way in which the individual perceives herself or himself (e.g., self-concept). Similarly, the *subjective environment* is the way in which the individual perceives her or his environment (i.e., event, situations, interactions). Conversely, the *objective person* is the reality of the individual's characteristics, and the objective environment is the reality of the physical and social environment. Both the objective person and the objective environment exist "independently of the person's perception of [them]" (French et al., 1974, p. 316). Based on this theory, when there is alignment between environment characteristics (e.g., job demands, cultural expectations) and individual characteristics (e.g., hunger, goals), there is positive psychological adjustment. When there is misalignment, stress arises.

Expectancy-value theory. Eccles and Wigfield (1995) adapted the expectancy-value theory to explain students' motivation for and successful completion of academic tasks. The original theory includes the components of: (a) attainment value, (b) intrinsic value, (c) utility value, and (d) cost (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). *Attainment value* is defined as how important a student feels it is to do well on a task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). *Intrinsic value* is defined as the level of interest or enjoyment a student receives from the task. *Utility value* is how useful a task is perceived to be in helping a student achieve future goals, and *cost* "refers to how the decision to engage in one activity… limits access to other activities…, assessments of how much effort will be taken to accomplish the activity, and its emotional cost" (p. 72). Eccles' and Wigfield's work with expectancy-value theory has primarily focused on the first three of these

components (i.e., attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value). According to their research, students become motivated to engage in a task when they perceive that there is attainment value, intrinsic value, and/or utility value.

Attribution theory. Weiner (1972) applied attribution theory to the field of education to examine the ways in which causal beliefs influence the behaviors of teachers and students. Weiner was especially interested in *causal attribution,* or in how students explained (e.g., ability, effort, luck, task difficulty) success or failure on academic tasks, and in how these explanations impacted future performance in the same or a similar situation. Attribution theory distinguishes between internal factors of success or failure that are either controllable (e.g., effort, attitude) or uncontrollable (e.g., health and ability to a degree) and external factors that are uncontrollable (e.g., luck, task difficulty).

Weiner (1972) also differentiated between students with high and low achievement needs. Students with high achievement needs tend to attribute their success to the internal factors of high ability and effort and failure to a lack of effort. Conversely, persons with low achievement needs tend to attribute failure to lack of ability. When students attribute success to internal, controllable factors, they put forth greater effort and persistence and believe that they will also be successful on future similar tasks. According to this theory, the primary difference between students with high and low achievement needs is that those with high achievement needs are "more likely to *initiate* achievement activities; they work with greater *intensity*, *persist* longer in the face of failure, and *choose* more tasks of intermediate difficulty than persons low in achievement needs" (Weiner, 1972, p. 208).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of human "motivation, development, and wellness" (Deci & Ryan, 2008b) and has recently been applied directly to the field of gifted education, where Garn and colleagues (2010) examined the effect parents have on gifted students' academic motivations. Self-Determination Theory is concerned with the development of *intrinsic motivation,* that is, the desire to engage in an activity for reasons situated within one's self (e.g., personal interest, enjoyment; Deci & Ryan, 2008b). SDT posits that intrinsic motivation results from a situation in which an individual experiences a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. *Competence* refers to an individual's sense of effectiveness or mastery within an environment (i.e., self-efficacy; Learning-Theories.com, n.d.). *Autonomy* is the degree to which an individual acts from freedom of choice that is congruent with her or his sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2008a), and *relatedness* denotes a sense of belonging or connectedness to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When these psychological needs are met, individuals can fully engage in self-directed behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2008b).

Conversely, *extrinsic motivation* is the desire to engage in an activity for reasons outside one's self (e.g., money, reward, praise; Deci & Ryan, 2008a). According to SDT, extrinsic motivation has several different forms that exist along a continuum (i.e., external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration). *External regulation* represents total external control. For example, a student may complete an assignment only because of the reward promised for completion or the fear of punishment if it is not completed. *Introjected regulation* results when an individual acts from a sense of responsibility or guilt. Students who complete an assignment only because they do not

want to disappoint parents by getting a bad grade are acting as a result of introjected regulation. *Identified regulation* occurs when an individual sees the activity or task as personally valuable. An example of this would be students completing an assignment because attainment of good grades is seen as a vehicle to the self-chosen goal of college admission. *Integrated regulation* results when an individual's values are integrated into her or his identity or sense of self. Students demonstrate integrated regulation when they complete an assignment because they identify as a good student. This form of extrinsic motivation is the closest on the continuum to intrinsic motivation.

Unlike most other theories that treat "motivation as a unitary concept that varies primarily in amount" (e.g., Bandura's Social Learning Theory; Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 14), SDT proposes three separate types of motivation that encompass both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation. *Autonomous motivation* encompasses intrinsic motivation, as well as identified and integrated extrinsic regulation, and results in *volition*, or "self-endorsement" of an individual's actions (Deci & Ryan, 2008b, p. 182). "Consistently, the autonomy orientation has been positively related to psychological health and effective behavioral outcomes" (Deci & Ryan, 2008b, p. 183). *Controlled motivation*, on the other hand, encompasses external and introjected extrinsic regulation. When individuals are operating from a place of controlled motivation, they "experience pressure to think, feel, or behave in particular ways" (Deci & Ryan, 2008b, p. 182). *Amotivation* is the lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. "Differences in types of motivation result from the interaction between people's inherent active nature and the social environments that either support or thwart that nature" (Deci & Ryan, 2008a, p. 14).

The AOM and SDT may potentially be used to help explain the way in which perceptions of power dynamics within a classroom impact gifted students' academic engagement and achievement. Although neither model specifically addresses the concept of empowerment, both models theorize positive outcomes associated with increased motivation, which in turn, is theorized to be associated with empowerment.

Impact of Disengagement on Gifted Students

Too often at the secondary level, students report intense boredom (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Landis & Reschly, 2013) and disengagement (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008) found that AP and IB students, when discussing the regular classroom, reported "educational histories riddled with boredom, uninspiring instruction, and curriculum that did not stretch them" (p. 210). Landis and colleagues (2013) found that gifted "[s]tudents repeatedly reported boredom in courses perceived to be irrelevant and frustration with meaningless busywork" (Landis & Reschly, 2013, p. 239). Additionally, some teachers clearly recognize that gifted and talented learners do not receive the time and attention they need in their classrooms (Farkas & Duffett, 2008). These situations cannot help but contribute to a sense of disempowerment for gifted high school students, negatively impacting levels of engagement and potentially leading to underachievement outcomes as dire as dropping out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Washor & Mojowski, 2014).

Underachievement. Just as there is no single, universal definition of giftedness, there is also no single definition of underachievement in relation to gifted students (Reis & McCoach, 2000). However, it is most commonly defined as a discrepancy between a student's potential (i.e., ability) and her or his demonstrated performance (i.e.,

achievement). Within the school system, achievement is primarily measured by class grades, and ability is determined by IQ scores. Reis and McCoach (2000) have proposed the following definition of gifted underachievement that encompasses these aspects:

> Underachievers are students who exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations). To be classified as an underachiever, the discrepancy between expected and actual achievement must not be the direct result of a diagnosed learning disability and must persist over an extended period of time… Ideally, the researcher would standardize both the predictor and the criterion variables and would identify as underachievers those students whose actual achievement is at least one standard deviation below their expected achievement level. (p. 157)

Underachievement for gifted students often begins in middle school (Ritchotte & Graefe, in press; Ritchotte, Rubenstein, & Murry, 2015), although some research has indicated that the frustration and disengagement with school may begin as early as the elementary years (Hansen & Toso, 2007; Renzulli & Park, 2000; Ritchotte & Graefe, in press). Underachievement is often difficult to identify early, however, because gifted students may be achieving at grade level but may not be performing at a level commensurate with their abilities (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Reis & McCoach, 2000).

For years, researchers have been trying to determine what causes underachievement in gifted students. The answer is complicated, however, as some research points to external factors such as unsupportive home or school situations (Peterson, 2001) and other research indicates that it is primarily internal factors such as lack of time management (Balduf, 2009), poor locus of control, or poor self-concept (Kanoy, Johnson, & Kanoy, 1980).

Similarly, Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) explored factors that contributed to gifted high school students perception of boredom in the classroom. The more gifted

students had the opportunity for control, choice, challenge, complexity, and caring teachers (i.e., the five Cs), the more engaged and productive they were. As these five C's declined in middle and high school, gifted students reported more boredom and eventual disengagement. The students in their study "felt the honorable action in response to an inappropriate curriculum was to disengage from it and quit producing" (p. 20). Similarly, Reis (as cited in Reis & McCoach, 2000) "suggested that gifted students who are not challenged in school may actually demonstrate integrity and courage when they choose not to do required work that is below their intellectual ability" (p. 156).

Interestingly, in a study by McCoach and Siegle (2003), both achieving and underachieving gifted students exhibited high measures of academic self-perceptions, which challenged the notion that self-concept is a contributing factor to underachievement, at least for gifted students. Others research indicated that underachievement in gifted students is a combination of both external and internal factors. For example, Diaz's (1998) model of gifted education contributes academic underachievement to the interaction of personal, family, school, and community factors.

Unfortunately, due to its complex nature, there is no single intervention that will "ameliorate underachievement for all gifted students" (Ritchotte et al., 2015, p. 103). However, gifted students who are underachieving will most likely require career and personal counseling, as well as support in study skills, if they are to overcome the pattern of underachievement (Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen, & Maxey, 1993). Ritchotte and colleagues (2015) recommend that a "team of individuals invested in the students' success… first target the source(s) of his or her underachieving behavior and then develop an individual intervention plan" (p. 112).

According to Siegle, (2013), up to one-half of all gifted children underachieve at some point during their school careers, and many never catch up once leaving high school. Some gifted students who underachieve never make it to graduation, instead choosing to drop out prior to receiving a diploma.

Dropping out. The decision to drop out of school most often happens in the secondary years. M. S. Matthews (2006), in fact, found that the majority (54%) of gifted students who dropped out did so during their junior year of high school. Dropping out of school, according to M. S. Matthews (2006), is an "extreme manifestation of academic underachievement" (p. 217) and is believed to be one of the most "pressing educational and economic issues in the United States" (Landis & Reschly, 2013, p. 220). Students who drop out of school have a higher rate of unemployment, and those who *are* employed tend to earn lower salaries (Sum et al., 2003). Estimates on the number of gifted students who drop out vary from approximately 1% (M. S. Matthews, 2006) to 20%, (Renzulli & Park, 2000), depending upon the definition of giftedness utilized.

Similar to the general dropout population, research indicates that gifted students who drop out often disengage from school prior to making the decision to leave (Landis & Reschly, 2013). This withdrawal occurs as a result of disengaging academically, cognitively, behaviorally, and/or emotionally, although cognitive disengagement may be more of a determining factor for gifted students than for the general population. Washor & Mojowski (2014) contend that society suffers a loss with students whose gifts are not recognized and who disengage, even if the disengagement never progresses to the point of dropping out.

Conclusion

In 1996, Frymier and colleagues stated, "The challenge for contemporary teachers is to figure out how to manage the classroom environment so that students feel intrinsically motivated to learn and perform high quality work" (p. 181). Twenty years later, our goal and our challenge as educators remains the same. However, we find ourselves currently in a situation where, while we are searching for "models for the education of the gifted that do not violate equity" (Richert, 2003, p. 146), most gifted high school students are receiving the majority of their instruction in classrooms where teachers likely do not have the training or support necessary to meet their intellectual or affective needs (Farkas & Duffett, 2008; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). This situation undoubtedly negatively impacts gifted students' motivations in the classroom, as well as their ability to "perform high quality work" commensurate with their potential. The negative consequences of this, for individual gifted students as well as for the nation, cannot be overstated.

So how does understanding the concepts and interactions of power and empowerment in the classroom move us in the right direction? According to bell hooks (2003), a feminist activist and author, questions of power and authority in the classroom deeply shape the engagements, perceptions, and motivations of students, especially when they relate to gender, race, class, and/or culture. While "a student's success in the classroom has traditionally been attributed to student characteristics such as intelligence, work ethic, and motivation,…research in instructional communication has consistently found teacher behaviors to be significant predictors of student outcomes" (Houser & Frymier, 2009, p. 39). Despite the unfortunate limited availability of gifted educational

programming and formal teacher training at the high school level, the type of relational power that individual teachers choose to utilize in the classroom has potential to directly impact gifted students' sense of empowerment. Increased sense of empowerment may then lead to gifted students who are motivated and engaged in the learning process, helping to ensure that these students achieve their full potential.

Therefore, it seemed necessary to explore gifted high school students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics and perceptions of the impact of these dynamics on their motivation and sense of empowerment. Through this process, information may be gained that will assist gifted secondary practitioners in better understanding the experiences and needs of gifted high school students. This knowledge may then be utilized in structuring classroom situations that empower gifted students' and enhance their motivation to engage with the learning process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Prior research has suggested that power dynamics in the classroom impact students' sense of empowerment, influencing levels of motivation (Frymier et al., 1996). "Empowered students feel competent to perform in-class tasks, and empowered students reported learning more and having higher levels of motivation than unempowered students" (Frymier & Houser, 2000, p. 216). Based on this research, it seems there may be a lack of student empowerment at the secondary level, where gifted students often express boredom and frustration (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008) with a system frequently unprepared to meet the full range of their intellectual and affective needs (Callahan et al., 2014; NAGC, 2015; Purcell & Leppien, 1998). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to better understand gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment within their classrooms, including an exploration of the impact of different power dynamics on gifted students' attitudes about learning, their levels of motivation and engagement, and their overall sense of empowerment. One specific type of power dynamics explored was teachers' use of relational power bases (i.e., *reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power*).

In an attempt to better understand the relationship between power dynamics, empowerment, motivation, engagement, and learning from the perspective of gifted high school students, the following general research questions were pursued:

Q1 How do gifted high school students perceive the power dynamics within the classroom?

Q2 How do gifted high school students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics relate to their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or overall sense of empowerment?

Q3 What other factors do gifted high school students believe contribute to or inhibit their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school?

Research Methodology

"Understanding is the primary goal of qualitative research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 12). Therefore, I investigated the topics of power and empowerment qualitatively because the only way in which to develop an understanding of this phenomenon from the perspective of gifted students' is to listen to and report their experiences. When developing a qualitative research proposal, Crotty (1998) states that it is necessary for the social researcher to examine four specific elements: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Through this process, the researcher attempts to "ensure the soundness of [the] research and make its outcomes convincing" (p. 6).

The epistemology utilized for this research was *constructionism*, which asserts that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). I believe that gifted students' realities regarding the power dynamics within their schools are based upon their personal experiences and that they create meaning through engaging in ongoing interactions with educators and peers. Through gifted students sharing their experiences around power dynamics in the classroom, I hoped to better understand the realities of this phenomenon in relation to

motivation and empowerment for this subpopulation of students and the effects it has on their learning outcomes.

The theoretical perspective provides "the philosophical stance" around which a methodology is chosen or designed (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). *Interpretivism* seeks to "understand and explain human and social reality" (pp. 66-67). This is the theoretical perspective I chose to engage because I was seeking information regarding gifted students' culturally derived perceptions of the influence of teacher power on their sense of empowerment. I was interested in gifted students' "realities" with respect to this issue.

The methodology flows from the choice of epistemology and theoretical perspective and determines the way in which the researcher collects and analyzes data (Creswell, 2013, p. 22). According to Crotty (1998), *phenomenology* "requires us to engage with phenomenon in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately" (p. 79), to take a "fresh look" and to "question what is taken for granted" (p. 82). *Phenomenological research* explores a single phenomenon from the perspective of multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). It is directly influenced by our culture and tends to be descriptive in nature rather than prescriptive, reporting subjective experiences of the participants (Crotty, 1998). This is the primary methodology I undertook in order to explore the phenomena of power dynamics and empowerment within high school classrooms from the perspective of gifted students who had experienced it.

One method I employed to explore the relationship between gifted students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics and empowerment was the administration of an empowerment instrument. Students were asked to respond to Likert-scale statements

on the Learner Empowerment Model (LEM: Frymier et al., 1996; see Data Sources and Instruments section below). The responses from this instrument were primarily used to assist in developing questions for subsequent in-depth interviews with some of the students. Students were also asked to complete an Opinion Questionnaire (OQ) that I developed regarding their personal experiences with power dynamics within their schools (see Appendix A). A third method I utilized was taking detailed notes on relevant conversations students had during class sessions at a two-week leadership program the students attended. The above methods provided a means of triangulating the data gathered through phenomenological interviews.

Phenomenological interviews attempt to "uncover the essence of an individual's experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 93), and it was primarily through this method that I attempted to gain a degree of insight into the "lived experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) of the gifted students in this study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 students based on responses to the LEM and the OQ (see Appendix A). Demographic data was also considered in an attempt to differentiate the interviewees as much as possible. The interview questions further explored students' responses to the LEM and the OQ but also included additional open-ended questions (see Appendix C).

Research Participants and Setting

The participants in the study were a convenience sample of 29 high school students (i.e., 11 seniors, 17 juniors, and 1 sophomore; 17 females and 11 males; see Tables 2 & 3) attending a two-week, summer, residential leadership program designed for gifted and talented students on a mid-sized university campus in the Rocky Mountain region during the summer of 2016. All 29 students had signed consent and assent forms.

Twenty-nine students completed the demographic form and the LEM; 28 students completed the OQ (see Data Sources and Instruments section below).

Purposive sampling was employed to select interviewees. Purposive sampling is a type of selective sampling utilized to produce maximum variation from a somewhat homogeneous group (Merriam, 2009). *Maximum variation* refers to the attempt to choose participants whose experiences with the phenomenon vary widely in order to represent as many diverse perspectives as possible (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2013) recommends identifying a group of three to 15 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Thirteen students were selected from this group of 29 for individual interviews. Four students were chosen because their responses were representative of the majority of participant responses. Seven students were chosen in order to represent as much diversity as possible (i.e., opinion, ethnicity, SES, sex) among the participants. Two other students requested that they be allowed to share their thoughts on the topic, so they were also included.

Students at the leadership program ranged in age from 15 to 17. Of the 29 participants, 23 students were Colorado residents and attended from the Colorado Front Range (eight students), Denver-Metro Area (six students), Boulder Valley (two students), and Western Slope (six students). One Colorado resident attended school in Indiana. The other students traveled from Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Washington, and Wyoming (one student each). All 10 seniors participating in the study had attended the leadership program the previous year. Of the remaining 19 students, all but three had previously participated in the enrichment program for younger students that took place during the same time as the leadership program on the university campus.

Table 2

Student Demographics 1

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Household Income	# in Household	Primary Home Language
Bob	M	16	11	White	Prefer Not to Respond	4	English
Eragon	M	16	11	White	$100,000+	4	English
Jane	F	16	11	Black/African-American & White	$100,000+	5	Prefer Not to Respond
Alex	F	17	12	White	$45,000+	4	English
Slurmp	M	15	11	White	$100,000+	5	English
Dautravious	F	15	10	White	No Response	No Response	English
Rickie	F	16	11	White	$100,000+	3	English
Ender	M	17	12	White	$100,000+	4	English
Frederick	F	16	11	White	$75,000+	4	English
Kendrick	M	17	12	White	$75,000+	4	English
Chuck	M	17	12	White	$100,000+	3	English
Ricky	F	16	11	White	$75,000+	3	English
Mandy	F	16	12	White	$100,000+	4	English
Jon	M	16	12	White	$100,000+	4	English
Diamond	F	16	11	Black/African-American	$25,000+	5	English
Elyse	F	17	12	White	$100,000+	4	English
Hugo	M	15	11	White	$100,000+	4	English
Dmitri	F	15	11	White	$45,000+	2	English
Stevio	M	16	11	White	$100,000+	4	English
William	M	16	11	White	$100,000+	5	English
Sage	F	17	12	White	$100,000+	5	English
Calisse	F	17	12	White	$100,000+	5	English
Dennis	M	16	11	White-parents South African	Prefer Not to Respond	4	English but can speak Afrikaans
Alan	M	17	11	White	Prefer Not to Respond	4	English
Ashley	F	15	11	White	$100,000+	3	English
Patricia	F	17	12	White	$100,000+	5	English
Kara	F	17	12	White	$100,000+	4	English
Caspar	F	16	11	White	Prefer Not to Respond	4	English
Dee	F	16	11	Hispanic/Latino	$25,000+	2	Spanish

Table 3

Student Demographics 2

Pseudonym	State of High School Attendance	Parent Reported GT ID	Student Reported GT ID	OQ	LEM	Interview
Bob	Wyoming	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Eragon	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Jane	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alex	Colorado	Talent Pool	Talent Pool	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slurmp	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Dautravious	Washington	No Response	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Rickie	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ender	Indiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Frederick	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kendrick	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Chuck	North Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ricky	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mandy	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Jon	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Diamond	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elyse	Missouri	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hugo	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dmitri	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Stevio	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
William	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sage	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Calisse	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dennis	Illinois	No Response	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alan	Colorado	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ashley	Colorado	No Response	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Patricia	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kara	Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Caspar	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Dee	Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Students attending the leadership program were housed in the university dormitories, and the majority of classes and activities also took place on campus. The leadership program was in its 25th year and was a subsection of a larger enrichment program that was designed to meet the intellectual and affective needs of gifted, talented, and/or creative students in 5th- through 10th-grades through various classes and enrichment opportunities. This enrichment program was in its 39th year.

The leadership program is held every year in mid-July. It is designed for gifted, talented, and creative students entering their junior or senior year of high school and emphasizes the development of individual and group leadership skills. For the first two and a half hours of each morning, students participated in a leadership seminar with the leadership program teachers. While some topics and activities were planned ahead of time for the group during these sessions, many topics were chosen and activities were developed throughout the two weeks based on students' strengths, interests, and needs. During the 75 minutes after lunch, students' applied their leadership skills by assisting a teacher in the enrichment program class of their choice. The final 75 minutes of the day was spent with the leadership program counselors. During this time, students and counselors debriefed the day's events and worked on special leadership activities that benefitted the enrichment program. In the evenings, the leadership program students once again developed and applied their leadership skills by assisting with recreational and craft activities for the younger enrichment program students.

During the first week of the leadership program, students, teachers, and counselors attended a ropes course. This experience was designed to allow the students to challenge themselves personally through individual activities designed to facilitate

growth. This experience also helped to establish trust and rapport within the group and to develop/enhance goal setting, teamwork, and leadership skills through team building activities.

The leadership teachers and counselors met daily to debrief and plan. The theme for the leadership program alternates each summer, focusing one year on interpersonal leadership development and focusing the next year on intrapersonal leadership development. Students do not need to be formally identified as gifted in order to attend the leadership program. Nevertheless, many who attend each year *are* formally identified. For this study, the leadership students were asked to self-report whether, and in what area(s), they had been identified as gifted. I attempted to confirm this with each participant's guardian(s) via the guardian demographic form included with the consent form.

However, as discussed in the literature review, there is much discrepancy from district to district regarding not only how to identify gifted students, but also the basic definition of giftedness (Callahan et al., 2014; Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2016), so even students attending the program who are identified as gifted may have been identified in different ways and in different areas. Additionally, the identification methods utilized often fail to formally identify gifted students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged populations (Colangelo & Davis, 2003). Therefore, the definition of gifted for this research study was broadened beyond formal school identification as described below.

As part of the application process, each leadership program applicant submitted two recommendations from teachers who could attest to past performance in her/his

area(s) of interest/strength and who could comment on her/his future leadership potential. Regardless of formal identification, at the very least, the students participating in the leadership program who were not formally identified were considered high potential based on multiple teacher recommendations and probably would have demonstrated "gifted behaviors" (Renzulli, 1978) in the area of leadership, a category recognized in the federal definition of giftedness (i.e., leadership; USDOE, 2015). Hence, by using the criteria of "evidence of high…leadership capacity" (USDOE, 2015), the students in this leadership program likely would be considered gifted in the area of leadership, regardless of whether they were formally identified by their school districts. Therefore, the term *gifted* is used when discussing these students in this study.

Data Sources and Instruments

Demographics Information

Guardians received a demographic form to complete when they received copies of the consent and assent forms. This demographic form (see Appendix D) asked for: (a) total number in household, (b) household income range, (c) highest level of education for each guardian, (d) child's area of gifted identification. Students will also be asked to complete a demographic form (See Appendix E) during the leadership program. The student demographic form asks for: (a) pseudonym, (b) age, (c) grade, (d) sex, (e) race/ethnicity, (f) home language, (g) in what area they have been identified, (h) with which guardian they live, (i) number of brothers and sisters, (j) how many people live in the house, (k) guardians' jobs, (l) nearest public library (a potential indicator of poverty), (m) number of total books in the house (a potential indicator of poverty), (n) number of years attended the enrichment and/or leadership program, (o) means by which the

attendance fee was usually paid, (p) state where attending high school, (q) size (in numbers) of high school, (r) GPA, (s) approximate number of students in class, (t) types of learning activities/courses in which participated, (u) favorite class and letter grade in that class, (v) least favorite class in high school and letter grade in that class. Questions on both the guardian and student demographic forms that might be considered sensitive had the option of "Prefer not to respond."

Opinion Questionnaire

I designed an Opinion Questionnaire that asked for short, open-ended responses to questions about teacher and learning situation preferences (see Appendix A). For example, a teacher preference question was, "Who has been your favorite teacher so far in high school and why? What did s/he teach? What grade were you in?" A learning situation preference questions was, "What learning situations make you feel the most competent and capable?"

Learner Empowerment Model

The LEM (Frymier & Houser, 1994; Frymier et al., 1996; see Appendix B) was initially developed to help researchers and practitioners "understand the role of communication in the process of empowerment" (p. 181) in undergraduate university classrooms. It consists of 35 statements to which participants were asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale (i.e., 0 = "never" to 4 = "very often"). The statements on the instrument focus on the empowerment dimensions of impact, meaningfulness, and competence (see Table 4). This measure of empowerment was chosen because of its high reliability and because it was normed on students fairly close in age to the students in this study. In the original testing of the instrument, the impact factor had an alpha reliability

of .95; meaningfulness had an alpha reliability of .94; and competence had an alpha reliability of .92 (Frymier et al., 1996). With all three factors included in the model, the single empowerment measure had an alpha reliability of .89. To further establish validity, empowerment was correlated with *trait motivation* (i.e., motivation based on individual characteristics), *state motivation* (i.e., motivation based on interest in current activity), relevance, and affective learning. No correlation was found to exist between trait motivation and empowerment; however, all three dimensions of empowerment (i.e,. impact, meaningfulness, competence) significantly ($p < .05$) and positively correlated with state motivation, relevance, and affective learning.

Table 4

Learner Empowerment Model Dimensions

Dimension	# of Questions	Examples of Statements
Impact	16	I have the power to make a difference in how things are done in this class.
		I have a choice in the methods I can use to perform my work.
Meaningfulness	10	The tasks required of me are personally meaningful.
		I look forward to going to this class.
Competence	9	I feel confident I can adequately perform my duties.
		I feel intimidated by what is required of me in this class.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews included some open-ended questions that were developed ahead of time and asked of all students (see Appendix C). These questions

were based on the majority of students' responses on the LEM and the OQ. Some interview questions were specific to a single student based upon her or his individual response to a question on the OQ. In addition, I asked follow up questions as applicable, based on students' responses to all of the interview questions and to other topics or ideas that arose within the context of the interview. This interview format allowed me to pursue specific information from all of the students while still remaining open to information the individual students felt it was important to share.

Data Collection Procedures

After approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix F) and from the director of the leadership program, I informed families about the research study through a letter (see Appendix G) mailed to home addresses that briefly outlined the research project and provided contact information for the researcher. Included with the letter were two copies each of the *consent* (i.e., parental permission for student to participate; see Appendix H) and *assent* (i.e., student agreement to participate; See Appendix I) forms. There was also a demographic form for guardians to complete (See Appendix D). A return envelope with address and postage was included. Families were asked to return signed documents by a specified date. I followed up through email with families who had not responded by the specified date to determine if they were willing to participate. Through these efforts, I received signed consent forms for 29 students. Mailing addresses, and email addresses for guardians and students are part of the information collected on the leadership program application.

On the first day of the leadership program, I met with the students whose parents had given consent and asked if they had questions about the study and if they would like

to participate. All 29 students still wanted to participate, and I collected assent forms at that time from the students who had not already submitted them with the guardian consent forms. There was one other student who wanted to participate but whose guardian had not returned the consent form and did not respond to email attempts to contact him during the two weeks of the leadership program. This student completed the same forms (i.e., demographic form, LEM, OQ) as the other students at his request, but I did not collect them, and I did not record observations about him during the two weeks of the leadership program.

Also on that first day of class, the students completed the demographic form and the OQ. Completion of the demographic forms took about five minutes. All 29 students completed it. The students also chose pseudonyms at this point. Completion of the OQ took between 15 and 25 minutes. One student expressed anxiety about completing the OQ because he thought it would take him too long. He was reminded that he could choose not to complete it, leaving 28 students who completed the OQ. The OQ was administered after the demographic forms were completed but before students responded to the LEM so that statements on the LEM did not influence responses to the OQ.

The students completed the LEM on the second day of the leadership program during the class portion of the day. Students were asked to respond to the statements on the LEM twice. The first time they responded, they were asked to think about their favorite high school class so far. The second time they respond, they were asked to think about their least favorite high school class so far. Asking about favorite and least favorite class allowed me to obtain often very different perspectives on students' high school experiences.

After data from the OQ and LEM were collected and analyzed, individual, semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted with 13 students. Eleven of the interviews were scheduled during lunch, dinner, or choice time during the leadership program and took place in the dining hall or in the residence hall. The remaining two interviews took place during the month of August. After choosing an agreed-upon location and time, the two remaining students were asked to inform their guardians of the time and location of the scheduled interview and to receive verbal permission to attend. One interview took place at a coffee shop; the other took place at the student's school. During each of the interviews, I took brief, written notes as well as audio recording them on a personal, locking, recording device. These interviews were later transcribed.

All of the interviews ranged in length from approximately 25 minutes to approximately 60 minutes, with the majority lasting 45-60 minutes. Most of these interviews could have extended beyond this timeframe, but because of the constraints of the leadership program, they were abbreviated. Several students offered to meet and talk more about it later, and multiple participants continued to email on the topic over the next couple of months.

Once all of the interviews were transcribed, they were sent to the students to review. Twelve of the 13 participants confirmed that they had received the transcript and would email me if they found any modification that needed to be made or if they wanted to add additional information. Three of the students made corrections and/or added additional information. One of the students, who had emailed earlier volunteering to meet again after the leadership program was over to talk more about the topic, did not

respond to the email containing the transcription. Three email attempts were made to contact her for a response.

I also emailed students after I wrote a biography for each one to verify that they felt it accurately represented them. The same twelve students confirmed that they had received it. Four students clarified information in the biography. Those clarifications are represented in the final Interviewee Profiles in Chapter 4.

Data Handling Procedures

All of the students participating in the study were assigned a student number. This student number was used on the OQ, the LEM, on the interview notes, and on the recordings and transcriptions in place of the student's name. A chart matching student names and student numbers was stored separately from the collected data. Students also chose a pseudonym to use in reporting data specific to a participant (e.g., quotes from an interview). These pseudonyms have been used when writing about the students in order to help ensure confidentiality beyond the research site.

All identifying information, including but not limited to the master list of student numbers and associated student information, consent forms, and assent forms, were stored in a secure filing cabinet in my office, separate from other research documents. The audio recordings, transcriptions, and other electronic documents were password protected on my university computer. Besides me, the confidential documents have only been available to my doctoral committee members. Interview audio recordings will be destroyed after three years.

Data Analysis Procedures

Demographic Forms

Information from the guardian demographic forms and the student demographic forms were used to help establish context for the study and to select a demographically diversified sample of students (e.g., different geographic regions, both male and female participants) for the interviews. This information also helped to ensure maximum variation among participants.

Opinion Questionnaire

I aggregated responses (i.e., all responses for each question listed together) from the OQ to look for similarities and variations. I was interested in patterns across all participants' responses (e.g., majority of participants feel strongly about a particular statement topic, similar sentiments expressed) as well as unique individual responses (e.g., a relevant response not offered by other participants). This information helped ensure maximum variation among students chosen for the interview. I was interested in interviewing students who represent a typical respondent from this group as well as individuals who answered very differently from other students in the study.

I also analyzed each OQ individually to get to know each of the 29 participants better and to begin looking for possible themes (see explanation of inductive analysis below). Examining the questionnaires in two stages (i.e., individually and aggregated), allowed me to look for themes within individual responses and for similarities and differences in themes across student responses (see inductive analysis in Semi-Structured Interviews below).

Learner Empowerment Model

I also aggregated responses from the LEM to look for similarities and variations. I was interested in patterns within individual responses (e.g., neutral response on all Likert-scale statements, scoring one section of items all 4s), patterns across all participants' responses (e.g., similar Likert-scale responses on the same statements), and extreme (e.g., scoring one section of items all 4s) or unique (e.g., a single student with very different responses to statements) responses. Again, this helped me to learn more about each of the students and to select some to interview who could represent the majority response as well as some who might provide varied responses to the interview questions.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I analyzed responses to the OQ and the LEM to develop interview questions and to assist in determining which of the 29 students to interview. Thirteen students were chosen via purposive sampling in order to provide as much variation as possible in regard to demographics and responses on the OQ and LEM.

Analysis of the interview data was ongoing, beginning with notes taken and reflections recorded during the interviews. After the interviews were transcribed, I employed *inductive analysis* of the students' responses. D. R. Thomas (2006) states that the purpose of inductive analysis is to "allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (p. 238) and includes close reading of the text, the creation of categories, and ongoing refinement of categories as text continues to be read and reviewed. Transcripts from student interviews were read multiple times and coded

based on significant phrases or sentences found within the text that pertained to gifted students' perceptions of and experiences with classroom power dynamics and empowerment. Notes were recorded in the margins of the transcripts in order to facilitate comprehension of and connections between coded sentences and phrases. These phrases and sentences were then clustered into themes common to the research participants' responses. (This same procedure was utilized for inductive analysis of the OQ completed by the students.) The themes continued to evolve over many weeks as groups were refined and re-conceptualized based on continual analysis and on feedback from one expert in qualitative research and one expert in gifted education.

I then developed subthemes in a similar fashion based on students' responses and included examples of student statements that supported the themes and subthemes. I shared this information with the two experts referenced above and with a veteran, high school educator familiar with the characteristics of gifted students. Each was asked to determine if themes, subthemes, and supporting statements aligned. Through this process I attempted not only to better understand the meanings the gifted students in this study assigned to the phenomenon of power dynamics and empowerment within their high school classrooms, but to also "ensure the soundness of [the] research and make its outcomes convincing" (Crotty, 1998, p. 6).

Additional Data Collected

In addition to students' responses on the OQ and the interviews, I kept notes on conversations with students regarding attitudes about learning, engagement, motivation, empowerment, and power dynamics within their classrooms. I also pulled relevant information from emails the students sent to me after the leadership program ended.

These data were used to support the development of themes and subthemes and, at times, are used as examples of support in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), complete trustworthiness of a qualitative study is impossible. "The naturalistic criteria of trustworthiness are open-ended; they can never be satisfied to such an extent that the trustworthiness of the inquiry could be labeled as unassailable" (p. 329). The question then becomes, "How does a researcher convince others that 'the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?'" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The degree to which this is established hinges on the qualitative researcher's ability to persuade the reader of the trustworthiness of the study through the evaluation of the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is concerned with how well the findings from a study represent the reality of the participants (Merriam, 2009). According to D. R. Thomas (2006), the procedures most applicable for establishing credibility are peer debriefings and member checks. Member checks allow participants to review and make modifications to the initial interview transcript and possibly also to respond to the researcher's themes, interpretations, and conclusions drawn from the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to member checks as the most "crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). While D. R. Thomas (2006) does not elaborate on or define peer debriefings, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that it is a method in which the researcher's "biases are probed, meanings explored," and "interpretations clarified" (p. 308). Merriam (2009), using slightly different terminology, states that a peer examination or a peer review

"would involve asking a colleague to scan some of the raw data and assess whether the findings are plausible based on the data" (p. 220).

Peer review and debriefing of the research process for this study took place with a veteran high school teacher familiar with the characteristics of gifted students, with a professor who specializes in qualitative research methods, and with a professor who specializes in gifted education. This process involved feedback on various aspects of the research process, from development of initial interview questions to vetting of the findings and conclusions.

In addition, I employed member checking. This was accomplished by asking the participants to review the transcripts of their interviews prior to any analysis. I also asked students to review and provide feedback on biographies I composed about each of them based on the data obtained during the two weeks of the leadership program (and for two of the students from the interviews conducted after the leadership program ended). Furthermore, to gauge my analysis of, interpretation of, and conclusions regarding gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment, I asked students to review and give feedback on the themes, subthemes, and supporting student statements to determine if they felt the information accurately represented their perspectives. Specifically I asked them to confirm that they had received and read the information and to let me know if they had questions or disagreed with any of the information. This occurred via email. Ten of the 13 students confirmed that they had received and read the information. No students expressed that the themes and subthemes did not represent their general experiences.

A final form of credibility I employed was triangulation through the use of "multiple methods of data collection" (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). Triangulation allows the researcher to examine the data from multiple perspectives to facilitate interpretation. In this study I triangulated using data from the following sources: (a) OQ, (b) LEM, (c) semi-structured interviews, (d) conversations during the leadership program, if applicable, (e) email conversations after the leadership program, and (e) review of relevant literature.

Transferability

Transferability is similar in nature to generalizability in that both are concerned with how well the findings can be applied in other settings with different individuals (Merriam, 2009). However, while the burden of proof for generalizability lies with the quantitative researcher, with transferability, it is the person reading the research who must decide if and how the information presented is applicable. "The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298). The qualitative researcher's role in this context is to provide enough "rich, thick description" (Merriam, 2009, p. 227) to allow the reader to make this transfer. Merriam (2009) also suggested "maximum variation" (p. 227) as a selection strategy to enhance the possibility that transfer occurs.

I provided in-depth descriptions of the participants' responses by sharing detailed information about the students' thoughts, feelings, and reflections on the topics of classroom power dynamics and empowerment. I also used their own words as much as possible, utilizing direct quotes that attempted to capture the essence of their experiences. Additionally every effort was made to diversify the sample of students chosen for

interviews in order to obtain maximum variation. These efforts were made in order to facilitate the reader's ability to make connections to other gifted high school students.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are closely related concepts in qualitative research. Dependability refers to how well findings from a study can be corroborated by others and is established through the thorough examination of "the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). In order to accomplish this, detailed records about the research process should be maintained by the researcher. This attention to detail also allows "future researcher[s] to repeat the work, if not necessarily gain the same results" (p. 71). Confirmability is primarily concerned with whether the findings from a qualitative study "are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004).

To establish dependability, D. R. Thomas (2006) recommends a research audit in which the ultimate findings and interpretations are compared with the original data to determine if they are consistent. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that this audit, "properly managed, can be used to determine dependability and confirmability, simultaneously" (p. 318). Merriam (2009) elaborates on Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) use of the term "audit trail" (a critical component of the audit), explaining that this is a method that allows others to "authenticate the findings of a study by following the trail of the researcher" (Merriam, 2009, p. 222).

An additional key component in establishing dependability is reflexivity, defined by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Merriam, 2009) as "the process of reflecting critically

on the self as researcher" (p. 219). Reflexivity allows the reader to better understand how a researcher's biases, his or her "assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation" influence the "interpretation of the data" (Lincoln and Guba as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

In order to establish dependability and confirmability, I developed and maintained an audit trail. I recorded and maintained written records of how and when information was collected, how categories were decided upon, and how other pertinent decisions were made regarding the analysis of data. In regard to reflexivity, I have elaborated on my assumptions and biases regarding the research project (see Researcher's Stance in Chapter 1) in order to enhance the integrity of the dependability and credibility of the study.

Summary

Since understanding gifted high school students' perceptions of the relationship between power dynamics, empowerment, motivation, engagement, and learning was the primary goal of this study, qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate research method in which to engage. Through the use of processes that enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I have attempted to increase the trustworthiness of the gifted students' stories I share. Primarily through analysis of responses to a Learner Empowerment Measure, an Opinion Questionnaire and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, eight themes emerged, which are explored in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to better understand gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment within their classrooms, including the impact of various power dynamics. Relational power bases (i.e., reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power) were explored as they related to gifted students' attitudes about learning, their levels of motivation and engagement, and their overall sense of empowerment. I collected information from a total of 29 high school students for this study (see Tables 2 & 3). Open-end responses from the Opinion Questionnaire (OQ; 29 students) and individual, semi-structured interviews (13 students) were the primary sources of qualitative data used to derive meaning. However, Learner Empowerment Measure (LEM) responses, demographics information, conversations with students, and email communication were also utilized to provide context and to support information obtained from the OQs and interviews. I first re-read OQ responses and interview transcripts, individually, multiple times and coded significant phrases. Next, I compared responses across Oqs and interview transcripts in order to cluster meaning into common themes and subthemes. In writing these results, I chose to use participants' own words as much as possible because their perceptions of power, though related to French and Raven's (1959) relational power bases, were uniquely applied to the high school setting and deviated to a degree from traditional conceptions. To that end, this chapter

begins with brief interviewee profiles (see Table 5) to provide readers with the context needed to better interpret meaning students ascribed to their experiences. Next, the presentation of themes and subthemes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis is guided by the following research questions:

Q1 How do gifted high school students perceive the power dynamics within the classroom?

Q2 How do gifted high school students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics relate to their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or overall sense of empowerment?

Q3 What other factors do gifted high school students believe contribute to or inhibit their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school?

Interviewee Profiles

Although 29 students participated in the study, 13 of these students provided the majority of the in-depth information through one-on-one interviews, informal conversations, and follow-up emails. This section provides contextual information to help the reader become more familiar with their stories. The names used are pseudonyms chosen by the students (see Table 5).

Jane

Jane was going to be a junior at a small, Colorado high school of about 400 total students. "We don't read what typical schools would read for literature classes, and we teach with the more philosophical way, but there's a word for it: the classical order. It's like rhetoric. We're taught in a very rhetorical way" (Interview, July 17, 2016). She had taken advantage of honors courses at her high school and reported a 3.5 GPA. Her favorite class in high school so far had been Rhetoric and her least favorite Chemistry.

This was her first year to attend the leadership program; she had never attended the summer program before.

Jane stated that she "enjoyed performing and singing" (Interview, July 17, 2016), and while she appreciated that her high school allowed her to capitalize on these strengths, the limited diversity in her high school was concerning to her. She stated that she was one of only two "ethnic people" that attended and that she didn't always feel as though she could relate to the interests and concerns of other students in the school.

Prior to moving to Colorado, she had been raised in the South by her aunts. Her self-reported information differed from that reported by her current guardian because she was living with her girlfriend in their own apartment, and they were supporting themselves, which also differentiated her from others at her school.

Alex

Alex would be a senior when school began in the fall. She attended a larger Colorado high school and anticipated about 200 students in her graduating class next year. She had been accepted into her high school's arts magnet program and reported her unweighted GPA as a 3.4. Her favorite classes had been all three of her dance classes (her area of particular talent), and her least favorite class so far had been Chemistry. She had attended the summer program for seven years, and this was her second year at the leadership program, where she was able to attend through a combination of scholarship money, donations from GoFundMe, contributions from her grandparents and parents, and money she made working.

Alex's high school had been identifying students for gifted programming in intellectual and academic areas for years but was just beginning to identify for gifted

programming in the area of visual and performing arts. She had been identified for the talent pool, which provided advanced programming for her in the area of dance and choir, while the school continued to collect a body of evidence to assist in formal gifted identification. "I was given that opportunity [to choreograph a dance] my junior year, and it really gave me my moment to create art, create *my* art, and display it in front of an audience, which was how my teacher recognized that I was gifted in dance and that creative aspect of like creating formations and movement through music" (Interview, August 30, 2016).

While Alex had taken advantage of both honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes at her high school, she described experiencing significantly more enjoyment and satisfaction in her arts classes than in her academic classes. This sentiment was reflected in her LEM responses, where, for her dance classes, positive statements (e.g., statements dealing with choice, contribution, ownership) for her dance classes were all marked "very often" and negative statements (e.g., "not important to me," "waste of time," "boring") were all marked "never." Alex later thanked me: "Thank you so much for letting me be a part of this project. I am so excited to hear more about your research" (Email, September 8, 2016).

Ender

Ender was a senior during his second year in attendance at the leadership program. He had attended the summer program the four previous years. Ender currently attended a private, boarding school in Indiana where he played rugby and fenced.

> So we wake up; we all go to breakfast because we board there, so we all live there, too. We go to breakfast; go to classes; go to lunch; go back to classes; and then we go to sports right after, and everyone has to either participate in a sport or participate in some integral activity…then after that, we eat dinner, and then we

> have required two hours of homework time…and then after that we go to bed, and we do it all again. (Interview, July 19, 2017)

He would have approximately 200 students in his graduating class. His favorite high school class thus far had been AP United States History, and his least favorite class had been Honors Physics.

Ender stated that he had been consistently accelerated in mathematics since elementary school and that his continued achievement during middle school would have played a significant role in determining the programming options available to him at the high school had he stayed in the public school system. However, he chose to go a different route. "Just for middle school to high school, the high school will look at your record from middle school and that plays a much bigger part in the selection for Advanced Placement, honors and all that. For me, how I performed at an earlier age didn't really matter except that it was how I performed that decided whether I got into the private school or not" (Interview, July 19, 2017).

After the interview concluded, Ender thanked me for taking time to listen. "I'm really passionate about education. I could talk about this for days. I want to be a teacher, so I'm always thinking, 'What would my students need of me?'" (Conversation, July 19, 2016).

Frederick

Frederick was an incoming junior. She attended a Colorado high school and reported approximately 180 students in her junior class. Frederick had participated in both honors and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes but had left traditional high school and entered a charter school program where junior college classes counted both toward a high school diploma and an associate of art's degree. In this setting her favorite

class so far had been Shakespeare and her least favorite class Economics. She had a 3.8 college GPA. She had attended the summer program for two years prior to coming to the leadership program this year.

Frederick said she remembered being identified as gifted early—maybe even in Kindergarten. At the elementary level, programming consisted primarily of giving the gifted students more work. "It was still easy; it was just a lot more of it" (Interview, July 17, 2016). She continued to take the most challenging courses available in middle school but also continued to dislike school. "I have always kind of hated school. It was more for social reasons when I was in elementary school (I was constantly getting picked on), but in middle school it started to be like I just hated the work and stuff" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Her freshman year, she began the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program but eventually decided that it was not a good fit for her. "That was like the worst year of my life. I hated it so much. It was so, so much high-level work and high-level studying and stuff, and I'd never really ever been taught how to prepare for any of this because, you know, [they assumed] I just knew how to do it already, and that's not true" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Between her freshman and sophomore year, she did her own research and found out about the charter school option. "You can just jump right into college and not worry about it, not worry about any more high school" (Interview, July 17, 2017). Music is her passion, but instead of continuing her plan to drop out of school to tour with her band, she now had long-term educational goals that included a master's degree in Live Music Production.

Diamond

Diamond attended a large Colorado high school and would begin her junior year in the fall. There were approximately 500 students in her sophomore class, and she anticipated the same for her junior year. Her favorite high school class had been Geography, and her least favorite had been AP World History. She had also taken some honors classes. She had a 3.6 GPA and was attending the leadership program for the first year through a scholarship program in her district designed to support low-income students who were high achieving.

Diamond was very aware and appreciative of the opportunities available to her and seemed to embrace the notion that it was up to her to take advantage of those in order to achieve the success she wanted for her life. She talked of feeling connected to and being impacted by historical events that had shaped her understandings and expectations, and she appreciated the diversity she was surrounded with in her high school and the opportunities that diversity afforded her.

> The school I go to is really, really diverse….People who go to school often want to know about other cultures and want to know about other people…, so the school itself feels welcoming, and then you kind of feel safe to do other things….I think it also allows you to go into different subjects, different clubs. You could be really sporty, like tennis, and then you can do something like the play at the same time, and no one's going to judge you. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Diamond was involved in multiple extracurricular activities at her school, including Student Advisory Council and a new club, whose mission was to "diversify AP and Honors courses and help double the amount of the people of color enrolled in these courses by the end of the year" (Email, March 12, 2017). Diamond, whose parents came

from Nigeria, also spoke of being deeply connected to her family, finding motivation in them and their achievements (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Elyse

Elyse had just finished her junior year and anticipated approximately 500 students in her graduating class. She attended high school in Missouri, where her favorite classes had been AP United States Government and AP Comparative Government. Her least favorite class had been Personal Finance. Elyse reported a 3.9 unweighted GPA (4.4 weighted) and was attending her second year of the leadership program. She had attended the summer program for six years prior to attending the leadership program.

Elyse spoke of a "very solid gifted program" (Interview, July 14, 2016) growing up. "The whole gifted program. I felt like that was an important part [of what I wanted to talk about] because it definitely shows how and why I can get where I'm going" (Interview, July 14, 2016). She was identified for gifted programming in first grade. During elementary school, she attended a special school for gifted students one day a week, where each morning the students participated in a class (same class for an entire semester) that focused on a different topic or concept (e.g., architecture, feeding the world), incorporating creativity and cross-curricular connections. In the afternoons, students were able to choose to participate in a class that teachers at the school had designed around their own interests. In her middle school, gifted students had the opportunity for an hour and a half every other day to participate in gifted programming, with courses structured similarly to the courses that had been available at the elementary. In high school, the focus had shifted more toward advanced coursework, but students also had additional support.

> In high school you get more choices of how advanced your classes are, but we have two gifted counselors at our school, and they're…we talk to them twice a semester. They keep us very updated. They make sure we know what our goals are, and one of the teachers is a teacher at…my high school, our gifted teacher, and she moves with us. (Interview, July 14, 2016)

At that point, Elyse was hoping to attend Rice University, which would allow her to continue to focus on interdisciplinary studies, double majoring in bio-medical engineering and political science.

Hugo

Hugo would be a junior when school began in August. He attended a Colorado high school, where he had participated in honors and AP courses, was heavily involved in the music programs, and had a weighted GPA of 4.23. He anticipated that his junior class would have about 150 students in it. His favorite class so far had been Chamber Choir and his least favorite AP United States History. He had attended the summer program for three years, and this was his first year in the leadership program.

Hugo had been identified as gifted in early elementary and was grade accelerated from first to third grade.

> In first grade, I think it was around end of semester one…up until that point I had been complaining…to my parents that I was really bored in class. I would finish my work and be done and be helping other kids instead of focusing on things. I would always be getting in trouble with my teacher. My teacher thought I was just a really obnoxious kid because I would just speed through my work so fast and get everything done. (Interview, July 18, 2016)

He said academically the move had made things better, but he was still struggling a little with "fitting in"—things like not getting his driver's license at the same time as his classmates, but at the time that the decision to accelerate was made, "I was like, 'I just want one less year of school to do'" (Interview, July 18, 2016). Hugo also spoke about the stress the label of "gifted" can cause for students. "Oh, I'm gifted. That means I have

to succeed in everything. That means that kids are going to be looking to me and being like 'Oh, he's the gifted one. Let him do it.'" (Interview, July 18, 2016).

In the early elementary grades, Hugo had received advanced programming in math and science. Beginning in fifth grade, he was pulled from his regular classroom for special gifted classes, which he found frustrating because he felt the rationale for these gifted classes was simply, "Instead of more quality or high level education, we're just going to give you more work on top of what you're already doing in class" (Interview, July 18, 2016). At the middle and high school, gifted programming had been honors and AP courses—some of them good but some similar to his fifth grade experience of same rigor, more work.

Once he got to high school, however, he realized that giftedness could encompass artistic and creative strengths, also, which resonated with him because of his talents in the musical arena. Hugo participated in his high school theater program, school choirs, and even joined a community choir to further explore his passion for singing (Email, March, 15, 2017). His career goal at the time of the interview was to become a cognitive neuroscientist. Hugo thanked me for undertaking this study (Email, March 6, 2017).

Sage

Sage would start her senior year at a Colorado high school in the fall. She anticipated about 300 students in her graduating class and had a weighted GPA of 4.61. Her favorite high school course had been AP Psychology, and her least favorite high school course had been AP Chemistry. She had also participated in honors classes and was involved in student government at her school. This was her second year attending the leadership program, and she had attended the summer program for four years.

Sage attended a small K-8 school prior to beginning high school. She was identified as gifted in third grade, but no programming was provided for students until fifth grade. Unfortunately, by the time Sage reached fifth grade, they had cut the program. "It was a really good program but because it was cut, we didn't really do anything with it, so I'm officially in the program, but nothing is ever being done about it" (Interview, July 17, 2016). She was accelerated in math in fifth grade, attending classes at the middle school, but that was difficult for her because "they taught at a different time in the middle school than they did at elementary school; I ended up missing like the first two hours of the day, and that's when they did like all of their other stuff. And then when I came back, that's when they were doing math" (Interview, July 17, 2016). She said she spent the majority of that year working in the library because she got tired of reading by herself at the back of the classroom—although she did have an art teacher who took it upon herself to work with her independently in the afternoons. Sage would read a classic book, and then they would work together to design an art project related to it. Later in the conversation about her elementary school, Sage laughed,

> I was one of those kids where I knew I was smart, and I decided everybody else had to know it, too. I actively acknowledge it. I 100%, like I wouldn't say I deserved it, but I understand why I was so ostracized at the time. It didn't really matter all that much to me, but like looking back on it, I kind of…I think it would have been better if maybe I had been shown how to…you know, growing up in such a small town and such a small school, there wasn't anybody else like me. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Sage transitioned to a larger, charter school for middle school and was currently attending a public high school, where she had access to advanced programming, "but basically the only difference, in my school at least, between the honors and the normal class, is that our A ends at a 92 and theirs ends at a 90" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Sage later thanked me for taking the time to interview her. "Thank you for listening. It's rare to have the opportunity to rant about this in a safe environment" (Conversation, July 17, 2016).

Calisse

Calisse would also be a senior at a Colorado high school. She reported 184 students in her graduating class and a GPA of 3.94. Her favorite class had been AP Biology, and her least favorite class had been Pre-Calculus. Calisse was also involved in multiple clubs and sports at her school and enjoyed volunteering. She attended the summer program for one year, and this was her second year attending the leadership program.

Calisse had attended a small, private K-8 school, where she said she was advanced in all of her classes but was only accelerated in mathematics. "We were an entire year ahead of them [in math], so we were using a different textbook, doing all that type of stuff, but it was just me and one other girl, and so we really taught ourselves." (Interview, July 20, 2016). She transitioned to a public high school after eighth grade, where there were more programming options available, including advanced academic classes in subjects other than mathematics. It was during her sophomore year that she was formally identified for the gifted program.

> Now I'm in the gifted program, but it doesn't do anything…it's like this one lady who's awesome, and I love her, but she's only one person, and she can't really do that much. She meets with you sometimes and is like, "Hey, how's it going?" You're like, "Good," because if you say "Bad," there's not really anything she can do. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Calisse had a full schedule as a high school student but seemed to have learned to efficiently manage her time. "I really know my schedule. I schedule every hour of my

day out. I love my planner" (Interview, July 20, 2016). She also seemingly loved everything biology related and eventually wanted to research vaccinations, majoring in Biology and minoring in Political Science so she would have the option to "go into the political side of the vaccines" (Interview, July 20, 2016).

Dennis

Dennis was preparing to begin his junior year at a large Illinois high school, where he would have approximately 1,100 students in his class. He was involved in band and participated in multiple math clubs and competitions. He reported his GPA as somewhere between a 3.8 and a 4.0, and his favorite high school class had been AP Calculus BC (BC designates the second level of AP Calculus). His least favorite class had been Freshman English. Dennis had attended the summer program for six years, and this was his first year attending the leadership program.

Dennis said he vaguely remembered being pulled for advanced mathematics' programming in elementary school, which at his school was K-4. That acceleration continued into middle school (i.e., fifth and sixth grades) and junior high (i.e., seventh and eighth grades). Also in middle school, he participated in advanced reading programming at lunch but didn't enjoy that nearly as much as the math. Junior high also provided the option of accelerated programming in science, and at the high school, Dennis had multiple advanced academic options, including honors and AP courses. He described himself as a "math person" (Interview, July 18, 2016). "It is really interesting to me and super elegant….I speak math much better than I speak English—to the point where I can spew math at people, and it makes perfect sense to me, and they're like, 'Can you say that in English please?'" (Interview, July 18, 2016).

Patricia

Patricia would be a senior at a large Colorado high school and would have approximately 550 students in her graduating class. Her favorite class had been AP United States History, and her least favorite class had been Geometry. Her current GPA was a 4.2. on a 4.0 scale. Patricia was very involved in visual artistry courses at her school, focusing on sculpture and ceramics, and outside of school she danced competitively. She had attended the summer program for three years, and this was her second year attending the leadership program.

Patricia was identified as gifted in first grade but didn't actually begin receiving any services until third grade, when she was then pulled from her regular class a couple of times a week. "Then they give you extra work to do in class [on top of what you're already supposed to be doing]. I always forgot to do it, but you were supposed to do it. They would have us analyze songs and do extra math worksheets" (Interview, August 10, 2016). However, gifted programming was cut in fifth grade, so "we had pretty much nothing" (Interview, August 10, 2016). In middle school, there was again a gifted program, but Patricia lamented the lack of advanced classes. "You basically just met with the gifted coordinator at the beginning of the year to set goals for yourself and at the end of the year to say you achieved those goals you set. It didn't actually have any impact on what you were taught" (Interview, August 10, 2016). In high school, she had been able to take advantage of honors and AP courses and some advanced coursework in visual art. At that point, Patricia was planning to major in Physics or Engineering in college.

Kara

Kara would be a senior at a private Maryland high school in the fall and reported that she would have approximately 70 students in her graduating class. While Kara had taken honors and AP classes in high school, her favorite class had been Studio Art, and her least favorite class had been Banned Books/Visual Texts. Kara had a 2.11 GPA and was attending her second year of the leadership program. She had also attended seven years of the summer program.

Kara was identified as gifted in first grade. "In elementary school, the gifted and talented program was occasionally we'd meet in the library, and we'd have an extra project to complete or something" (Interview, July 17, 2016). In middle school, the gifted programming consisted of honors classes, but because of the other students in the classes, Kara felt it wasn't a good fit for her. "I thought the honors kids were bad. They were malicious and mean spirited" (Interview, July 17, 2016). In addition to these challenges, Kara was dealing with issues outside of school, which negatively impacted her further.

> I was a very good student in elementary school. In sixth grade I would get a B a quarter, but other than that it was all A's. Then in middle school I started strong in my seventh grade English teacher's class—I had a hundred plus at some point. But I was struggling through some things…, and that just killed any motivation I had in school. (Interview, July 17, 2016).

However, she continued with honors and AP courses through her freshman year in high school, where again, she felt her needs were not being met. "I hated it….I just don't ever want to take an AP class again. I understand that there is a lot that aren't like that, and it was probably just a bad class, but it just seems like a whole lot of hype for something that isn't really necessary" (Interview, July 17, 2016). At that point in her

educational career, she and her family began researching other options and eventually decided on a private school. "It was a very liberal, a very progressive school, but it was still school" (Interview, July 17, 2016), and although sophomore year had still been somewhat of a struggle, by her junior year, she had connected with a few students at the school and had found a niche that capitalized on her creative talents in art and writing and allowed her to better express who she was. "I still don't do as much homework as I should, but I do still do it" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Dee

Dee attended a large Colorado high school and had about 600 students in her junior class. Her favorite class so far had been Earth Science, and her least favorite class had been Biology. She had a 3.9 GPA and had been selected for a program for low-income, high achieving students. This program had provided the funding for her to attend the leadership program for the first time that summer.

Dee had moved between elementary schools several times growing up, and in middle school was bullied and never felt like she fit in (Conversation, July 20, 2016). At the high school, however, she was determined to take full advantage of every opportunity and stated that she had "taken almost every class honors" (Interview, July 20, 2016), since beginning high school, as well as the only AP course that had been available for freshmen to take (Interview, July 20, 2016). One thing she especially appreciated about her high school was that students could participate in advanced programming without being formally identified as gifted.

> Within those classes they treat you as if you have taken that test and been identified, but you weren't, which I really like because a lot of people feel like they can't get into those classes because they feel like they have to be identified. For us, our school, it's really open and understanding and accepting of that, so

> everybody gets a chance to feel like they can succeed in those areas. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Dee's success in her advanced coursework to date, however, had come with challenges that many others do not face.

> I think a lot of it has to do with the way I learn. I've never been diagnosed with a learning disability, but my brothers have [dyslexia], and I feel like I do have a learning disability because I can read a story and not understand what I just read, so I have to reread it three times to understand. For me, it's just processing what I just learned—not that the teachers are lacking in teaching it to me or that I'm not engaged. It's just that I really most of the time don't understand. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Additionally, Dee felt that education was not a priority in her school system and that many students in her school were dealing with drug problems (Conversation, July 20, 2016). She, on the other hand, did value education and was not only involved in advanced academics and multiple clubs at her school but also worked. She lived with her grandmother but had supported herself for the last year, earning enough money to purchase a car, while still maintaining her grades. She said she never got to sleep before 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. and was up by 5:00 a.m. every morning. She had had to give up her job in order to attend the leadership program but felt that taking advantage of this opportunity was more important. She would begin looking for another job later in the summer. Dee was the only participant who reported that English was not the primary language spoken in her home.

After the interview, Dee thanked me, "Thank you for choosing me and talking to me. I think I might have had a different perspective than some other people. I like being able to represent the perspectives of people who think like me" (Conversation, July 20, 2016).

While very different individuals in many ways, these gifted students all evidenced not only a willingness, but an enthusiasm to share stories about their high school learning experiences. Five of the students actually thanked me for exploring this topic and for the opportunity to participate. Throughout the process they were thoughtful and articulate, and even though, at times, they expressed frustration with the system, they were respectful of the efforts put forth by their teachers and, overall, still very excited about the prospect of learning.

Table 5

Abbreviated Interviewee Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Grade[a]	Race/Ethnicity	State of High School Attendance	Parent Reported GT ID	Student Reported GT ID
Jane	F	16	11	Black/African-American &White	Colorado	Yes	Yes
Alex	F	17	12	White	Colorado	Talent Pool	Talent Pool
Ender	M	17	12	White	Indiana	Yes	Yes
Frederick	F	16	11	White	Colorado[c]	Yes	Yes
Diamond	F	16	11	Black/African-American	Colorado	Yes	Yes
Elyse	F	17	12	White	Missouri	Yes	Yes
Hugo	M	15	11	White	Colorado	Yes	Yes
Sage	F	17	12	White	Colorado	Yes	Yes
Calisse	F	17	12	White	Colorado	Yes	Yes
Dennis	M	16	11	White- parents South African	Illinois[b]	No Response	No
Patricia	F	17	12	White	Colorado	Yes	Yes
Kara	F	17	12	White	Maryland	Yes	Yes
Dee	F	16	11	Hispanic/Latino	Colorado	Yes	Yes

Note. Additional demographic information included in Tables 2 and 3
[a]Grades represent the upcoming school year. [b]Gifted education is neither mandated nor funded in Illinois. [c]Attending college only

Overview of Themes Regarding Power and Empowerment

Eight themes emerged from this qualitative inquiry (see Table 6). These themes are presented through the lens of the primary research questions. With regard to the first research question, the following three themes represented gifted high school students' perceptions of power dynamics within the classroom: (a) positive teacher power, (b) negative teacher power, and (c) the added dimension of peers. Next, with regard to the second research question, the following three themes represented gifted students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics as they related to their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or overall sense of empowerment: (a) teacher-student interactions, (b) structure of the learning environment, and (c) peer interactions. Last, the third research question examined other factors that gifted students believed contributed to or inhibited their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school. This research question is represented by the following two themes: (a) personal factors and (b) external factors. An examination of these eight themes and their corresponding subthemes follows.

Table 6

Themes and Subthemes for Each Research Question

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes	Representative Quotes
RQ1	Positive Teacher Power		
		Authentic & Nurturing Relationships	"My AP Psychology teacher…creat[ed] discussion and a personal connection with the students."
		Exemplary Teaching	"I think it's really rare that being a fantastic person happens in connection with actual good teaching ability."
		Perception of Distinction	"When the teacher sees my response and chooses to read it aloud to the class—this makes me feel like my response was a good example."
		Shared Power	"I like equal power as long as the class is controlled; the teacher shouldn't have less power than the students."

Table 6, continued

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes	Representative Quotes
RQ1	Negative Teacher Power		
		Unsafe Environment	**"**It just kind of always sucks to be yelled at."
		Teacher Power Entitlement	**"**The respect goes one way…. 'You respect me because you're in my classroom.'"
RQ1	The Added Dimension of Peers		"I think that peers definitely influence [power dynamics] in several ways."
RQ2	Teacher-Student Interactions		"The connection runs deep between me and him. That's where I tend to thrive—in the classes where I know the teacher."
RQ2	Structure of the Learning Environment		
		Meaningful Opportunities	"I just didn't feel like anything I was doing in school was meaningful to me at all. I just hated it."
		Utilization of Time	"I already knew this information, and I find it to be a waste of time."
		Individual Influence	"It's just that horrible illusion of freedom. I hate that so much. Yeah, I hate having an illusion of a choice. I see right through that."
RQ2	Peer Interactions		
		Sense of Community	**"**Small classes are better for me, I think, because there is more community."
		Quality Collaboration	**"**The group of people that I was with in those honors classes was the reason that the group projects were good."
RQ3	Personal Factors		
		Internal Drive	"Everything I do is something that I want to do. It's just kind of me—I'm motivating myself."
		Desire to Learn	"School isn't really about learning any more—it's just about passing."
		Passion for Content	"I didn't really feel passionate about the subject, and hence, wasn't motivated to complete my work."
		Future Goals	"What's going to be the end result?"
RQ3	External Factors		"I have a chance to do more, that I wouldn't have done before, because of them. I should work harder."

Exploration of Research Question 1

The first research question was, "How do gifted high school students perceive the power dynamics within the classroom?" Responses that best answered this research question focused on participants' understanding of the concept of power and how it manifested in the classroom. The primary themes emerging for this question were

(a) positive teacher power, (b) negative teacher power, and (c) the added dimension of peers. Within the theme of positive teacher power, subthemes included (a) authentic and nurturing relationships, (b) exemplary teaching, (c) perception of distinction, and (d) shared power. Within the theme of negative teacher power, the subthemes were (a) unsafe environment and (b) teacher power entitlement. Although not directly addressing the research question, an overview of the participants' definitions of power is shared first to provide context for this section.

What is Power?

Students in the study primarily defined power in terms of who had control of the learning environment. While they did acknowledge that peers impacted the power dynamic within the classroom, most of the students felt that teachers had the power the majority of the time. These students also noted that the degree and type of teacher power could be situation specific, differing based on the teacher and the content being taught. For example, Elyse said, "Definitely it depends on the certain classes. I feel in the language arts and my government class you have a lot more power because it's more up into interpretation and how can you add to this knowledge" (Interview, July 14, 2017). Sage gave a different example,

> My Spanish teacher had absolutely no power; it was absolutely the students. My Chem teacher had all the power; Stats teacher had all the power; Lit just about none. Students really had a lot of power in that. Psych had a lot. Pre-Calc had absolutely all the power, and STUCO [Student Council] was an entirely different situation. I think it really depends on the teacher and the students, and it depends on the class material itself. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

When asked how she would define power, Elyse responded, "Power in the classroom? I would say how the teacher handles a situation" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Sage's response was similar, "[Power is] the authority to shape how the class goes and

the authority to shape discussions, if they happen, or the lesson itself" (Interview, July 20. 2016).

Students reported experiences with what they perceived as both positive and negative teacher power. How that power impacted them was dependent upon the way in which teachers employed it in their interpersonal interactions with students. In general, when teacher power was used to facilitate relationships and a positive classroom climate, it was perceived as positive power by the participants. When it was used to threaten or intimidate, it was perceived as harming the teacher-student relationship and was perceived as negative. Frederick commented,

> If they use their power to push you to go further and be a better learner in person, that's awesome. If they're just doing the whole, "Do this because I said so" sort of thing, then that's abusing their power. Like, "Hey, do this assignment or else I'll fail you," you know? That's no good. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

The way in which students perceived these interpersonal interactions often determined who they believed were good and poor teachers. For example, Alex stated, "I think a good teacher utilizes like their power in an individual, like student to teacher sense, like in a classroom, I guess by relating directly…to me personally" (Interview, August 30, 2016). Sage's response was similar,

> I think [the difference between good and poor teachers is] whether they use it [power] for positive or negative influence, because oftentimes the teacher will use it to shut students down, or use it in a negative way and not encourage positive action. Whereas other teachers will use that authority to encourage proactive engagement and all of those other things that really make the classroom environment much better. (Interview, July 21, 2016)

Positive Teacher Power

Teacher power was perceived as positive when it was based on teachers facilitating authentic, personal relationships and positive classroom climates that fostered

student learning. In these instances, teachers were able to effectively influence the class because students believed that they had something in common with the teacher and/or that the teacher cared about and was personally invested in them as learners and as individuals. Included under the first theme of positive teacher power are the subthemes of (a) authentic and nurturing relationships, (b) exemplary teaching, (c) perception of distinction, and (d) shared power.

Authentic and nurturing relationships. "My AP Psychology teacher was amazingly enthusiastic about the subject and compounded that with creating discussion and a personal connection with the students" (Sage, OQ, July 12, 2016). Teacher-student power dynamics were perceived as positive when students sensed connections between themselves and their teachers. In this situation, it was as if students "granted" teachers the power to lead. Sometimes students expressed feeling connected because they felt they could relate to the teacher (or the teacher could relate to them) on a personal level. Dautravious' (see Tables 2 & 3) favorite teacher had been her Choir teacher. "She was…about nine years older than me, and it was really nice to have a teacher who could relate to my problems" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Dee felt connected to a teacher whose experiences put him in a position to relate well to all of his students and to help them also connect to each other.

> I think it was his experience in what he dealt with that connected us all. He was like a really diverse person. He's from Brooklyn, one of the worst places to be, but then again he's also privileged, too, so he got to explore the world. He was there rallying and doing all this stuff with Martin Luther King. He was around long enough and he had enough experience to teach us something else or make us feel connected in a way that a lot of teachers don't. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Use of appropriate humor and fun also served to build rapport and create positive connections between teachers and students. Kara said, "My junior year I just really

clicked with [my Spanish teacher]…He was just funny. I really like him…I just like funny people. We all do" (Interview, July, 17, 2016). Dee expressed a similar sentiment:

> My favorite teachers, what they like to do is…these relationships on the first day of school…make their class funny or fun. And I feel like when teachers do that, in a way, the students respect them more because it's not really just about learning anymore, it's about a friend—not necessarily being your friend but making a personal connection. For them doing that, we tend to all respect them because of that. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Jane actually used the term power when she spoke of humor:

> Some teacher, they'll go on these hilarious rants. Of course, you want them to do that every day because it's the funniest thing ever, but I think a good teacher who has power would be like, "Okay, we've learned this. We've covered what I wanted to, so we can talk a little bit. I can tell you this funny story about what happened over my weekend, or this funny story from thirty years ago." (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Students also perceived that they had a good relationship with their teachers when they felt supported. Kara shared such an example:

> You know, I wrote on my form, my art teacher has always been very supportive of me. Even in sophomore year, she always had my back. She knew what I wanted to do, and she encouraged that. She encouraged developing my own vision. She also encouraged me to explore a bit deeper than I was planning on doing. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Additionally, when students believed that a teacher was approachable and found him or her genuinely likeable, this positive perception fostered personal connections. Students often spoke of these teachers in general terms such as "awesome" and "wonderful." Mandy (see Tables 2 & 3) commented on her favorite teacher being "nice," noting that "the whole class loved him" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Dee shared her thoughts on her favorite teachers.

> My favorite teachers are the teachers that know when something's wrong with you, and they are not necessarily a counselor, but they check on you and make

> sure everything is okay….Those are generally the teachers that I like—it's the ones that you can connect with on a more personal level. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

At times, students' positive perceptions of the teacher-student power dynamic were enhanced via the teacher's use of humor or targeted support. At other times, students felt they could relate to the teacher in some way or they simply liked them as individuals. Regardless, when students sensed that their relationships with their teachers were authentic and nurturing, teacher power was perceived as positive, and teachers were, in essence, freely "allowed" to lead. In fact, it seemed to be primarily because of these positive relationships that teachers held the power in these situations. The impact on students of various teacher-student interactions is further discussed in regard to Research Question 2 (see "teacher-student interactions").

Exemplary teaching. "I think it's really rare that being a fantastic person happens in connection with actual good teaching ability" (Sage, Interview, July 17, 2016). More than one student made the observation that it was rare to have a great teacher. However, they were also willing to recognize teacher power in situations where they felt the teachers were knowledgeable about what they were teaching but were also accomplished teachers and adept at managing all aspects of the classroom. The sub-theme of exemplary teaching encompasses the following ideas: (a) strong organization and management, (b) excellent instructional strategies, and (c) vast content knowledge.

Strong organization and management. "I wouldn't trust the students to have [complete] control of anything" (Jane, Interview, July 17, 2016). Most of the participants recognized the vital role teacher power played in structuring an effective and efficient classroom. They commented on the necessity to have someone with power who could

organize and control the learning environment. Hugo told a story about one of his "most stressful" and "tense" experiences (Interview, July 18, 2016). It was a class project on *Animal Farm*, where students worked in separate groups knowing that a single class grade would be given to everyone at the end of the project. "There were some train wrecks with that," he commented. Yet, because "she [the teacher] was able to control the situation in a way that it was benefiting [for all students]," Hugo ultimately referred to this as "the most educationally enriching activity of my entire year."

Calisse spoke about the importance of organization:

> My favorite teacher, my biology teacher—this didn't even hit me until my junior year, which is the first year I didn't have her—I knew when everything was. I knew when the quarter ended. I knew when the semester ended. I knew when every big event was happening, all that kind of stuff. Somehow she managed to fit that into her teaching program, too, so that was really nice. She kind of was able to keep the whole class organized….She was also really organized, and so that was just really nice for me because it just made my life easier. It made everyone's life easier. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

It was important to the students in this study to feel as though their teachers had the learning environment under control. For them, this included both day-to-day organization and dissemination of information as well as the larger task of classroom management. When teachers were skillful at managing these classroom components, students perceived this as a positive form of teacher power.

Excellent instructional strategies. "That's the mark of a good teacher—being able to analyze and read what your students need and being able to provide it for them" (Ender, Interview, July 19, 2016). Beyond strong organizational and classroom management skills, participants perceived that teacher power was positive when it translated into effective pedagogy. Students described good teachers as those who knew and could effectively employ the methods necessary to teach their students well. For

example, Frederick said, "I think it all really has to do with the teacher, honestly, because any subject can be amazing or boring based on how it's taught….I think that a class entirely depends on the teacher and how the teacher decides to interpret it and deal with the materials" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Students often talked about the need for teachers who knew how to present information in the most efficient and effective way. When teachers exhibited this characteristic, the students perceived this, too, as a positive form of teacher power.

Vast content knowledge. "The most meaningful learning situations are when a teacher is an expert" (Chuck, OQ, July 12, 2016; see Tables 2 & 3). Beyond the ability to manage the classroom and to choose and implement beneficial instructional strategies, students spoke of the importance of having teachers who knew their content well. This also was perceived as a type of positive teacher power. "My favorite teacher…she just knows so much about everything…she could have done anything in life." (Elyse, Interview, July 14, 2016). Dennis, in talking about a "fantastic" teacher, said, "She's a nationally recognized science teacher….So in the first instance, she knows *a lot* of different explanations for why stuff happens….She always had an explanation. She knew her subject really, really well" (Interview, July 18, 2016).

The students in this study wanted teachers who knew the material well enough that they could expand on it, make connections, and go in-depth with the material. When teachers exhibited this characteristic, the students perceived this as a positive form of teacher power. In fact, those students who had had teachers with this level of content expertise seemed to regard these teachers with a certain level of respect and to trust them with at least a degree of power in the classroom.

Interestingly, as important as relationships with their teachers were to these students, for many, this component in isolation was not enough. Similarly the characteristics of strong organization and management, excellent instructional strategies, and vast content knowledge, although all perceived of as positive forms of teacher power, were not enough in and of themselves to create what students felt was the most beneficial power dynamic within the classroom. These students repeatedly expressed a desire for authentic and nurturing, excellent teachers who knew how to manage the classroom and how to present information in the most efficient and effective way. In addition to this, they wanted teachers who were experts in their content areas.

Perception of distinction. "When the teacher sees my response and chooses to read it aloud to the class—this makes me feel like my response was a good example*"* (Dmitri, OQ, July 12, 2016). Although discussed by fewer participants, a third example of positive teacher power resulted from affirming recognition from the teacher. Several students spoke of times they were acknowledged by teachers because of exemplary effort or performance in some area. Jane shared a favorite memory about her Rhetoric teacher, "He started videotaping me when I did my presentations because he wanted to show them to other classes. Like, 'This is how you make your presentations interactive and this is how you make things work'" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Use of teacher power to praise students in some manner was perceived as positive by those who discussed it.

Shared power. "I like equal power as long as the class is controlled; the teacher shouldn't have less power than the students" (Patricia, Interview, August 10, 2016). Teacher power was also perceived as positive when it was shared with the students. Students discussed the power dynamic of shared power in the contexts of both authentic

and nurturing relationships and exemplary teaching. Exemplary teaching for these participants included that teachers were willing to, and could successfully, share power in the classroom. They also perceived that shared power was both a result of and a factor in their relationships with their teachers. While some students felt the opportunity for shared power had rarely been available to them during their high school experiences; others felt it happened more frequently. Patricia said "in certain classes, it's 50-50" (Interview, August 10, 2016). She defined shared power as a classroom that is

> based on respect, where it's mutual and you're sharing that and everyone's contributing….Better teachers, usually they develop that relationship where it's the 50-50 early on, and then it's just maintained throughout the school year. In classes that aren't as great, the teachers usually have most of the power….they don't worry about maintaining a relationship. They're just lecturing at you, and you're not getting any of this information. (Interview, August 10, 2016)

Dee defined shared power as "teachers giv[ing] us our freedom because we're young adults, and it's at that time where it's either you want to learn or you don't, and it's like we need to get it together or we're not going to get it together" (Interview, July 20, 2016). She also said that she felt teachers shared power in most of her classes and that part of what that meant was that when something needed to happen, "it's not necessarily the teacher always stepping in, but there's also the peers stepping in, too."

One of the ways students felt that shared power was manifested was through class discourse in which they were heard and validated by both their teachers and their peers. In fact, the perception of being heard often contributed to students' choice of favorite teacher or favorite class. "My favorite teacher really listened to our opinions and let us talk" (Frederick, OQ, July 12, 2016). When discussing her favorite teacher, Jane said,

> I really adore my Western Civ I teacher….He really cared about his students, and he wouldn't go too far before asking, "Any questions, comments, or concerns?" If you had anything, he was willing to listen, answer that, and that's really

> important to me because if a teacher's not willing to get both sides of the story or hear what you think, I find it annoying because they're basically giving you their opinion, their bias, and not allowing you to learn and then make your own decision on what you learn. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

This perception of shared power as positive teacher power surfaced in the majority of conversations with students. It was very important to students to feel as though they were entrusted with aspects of their own learning. The impact on these students of shared power is further discussed in regard to Research Question 2 (see "Individual influence").

Negative Teacher Power

Students also described specific examples of when teacher power was in some way detrimental to the teacher-student relationship. This is discussed under the second primary theme of negative teacher power, which includes (a) unsafe environment and (b) teacher power entitlement.

Unsafe environment. "It just kind of always sucks to be yelled at" (Patricia, Interview, August 10, 2016). The primary examples of negative teacher power were situations in which the learning environment felt psychologically unsafe. Students had varied examples of when this was the case, but the common thread throughout these stories seemed to be that in these situations, students felt threatened in some way. Jane elaborated, "With certain teachers, you don't express your opinion because they will take it out on you if it's different from theirs…they hold the power over your grade and over your high school experience" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Calisse shared a different type of example:

> My least favorite teacher…was just a mean person….I would go into her office hours [for help], and she would be like, "Sorry, I'm not your tutor. I can't help you with that." It was hard for me because usually a lot of stuff comes easy to

> me. It was hard for me asking for help in the first place, and she just kept continuously shutting me down." (Interview, July 20, 2016)

While a couple of students mentioned the recognition that teachers controlled their grades and "can send you to the principal's office, get you written up, a lot of stuff like that" (Calisse, Interview, July 20, 2016), the majority of the comments about not feeling completely safe in the environment were examples of teachers attempting to exert power through intimidating measures such as yelling or through more passive aggressive measures such as comments that they should already know how to complete an assignment and refusing to help.

Teacher power entitlement. "The respect goes one way….'You respect me because you're in my classroom'" (Hugo, Interview, July 18, 2016). Students also discussed situations in which teachers seemed to have the expectation of power simply because of the status of teacher. Jane articulately commented,

> A bad teacher doesn't know how to control that [power in the classroom]. They want to joke around with you and be one of you, and then on the flip of a dime they want to be like they have all power and everyone respects them. I feel like you can't have both. You can be respected and people do what you want, and then every now and again you can kind of deviate, or you deviate and you get no respect. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Hugo said he felt it was

> a superiority thing. Like, "I'm the teacher. I'm in control of the classroom."…It's a condescending thing I guess. It's just like, "You guys are my students. You are going to learn from me." The respect goes one way. Like, "You respect me because you're in my classroom. Once you enter my classroom, it's all rules and all my expectations." (Interview, July 18, 2016)

While not always perceived of as harmful by students, these interactions seem more closely associated with negative teacher power in that they did nothing to build a positive teacher-student relationship or to foster respect from the student. Students also

seemed unwilling to grant these teachers power in the classroom simply because the teachers expected it.

The Added Dimension of Peers

"I think that peers definitely influence it in several ways" (Alex, Interview, August 30, 2016). As stated earlier (see "What is Power?"), students also spoke of peers as major players in the power dynamics within the classroom. Sage spoke of situations in which students had "all the power" in the classroom (Interview, July 17, 2016), and Jane commented that when students had all the power, it was never good (Interview, July 17, 2016). In these situations, the influence of peers on classroom dynamics was perceived of as negative. In other situations, for example when students used their power to support and challenge one another, the influence of peers on classroom dynamics was perceived of as positive. Diamond explained how power dynamics often intersect in the classroom. "Well, teachers have a lot of influence in the class, but the students determine, they create, I would say, an atmosphere of what's going on" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Students frequently mentioned their peers in discussions about motivation, power, and empowerment. These concepts are relevant to Research Question 1 primarily as factors that influenced the students' perceptions of the power dynamics within their classrooms. The impact of these power dynamics will be further developed in relation to Research Question 2 (see "Peer Interactions").

Exploration of Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was, "How do gifted students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics relate to their learning, engagement, motivation and/or overall sense of empowerment?" The responses that best answered this research question centered on

students' understanding of the concept of empowerment and how it was either fostered or hindered in their classrooms. The primary themes for this section were (a) teacher-student interactions, (b) structure of the learning environment, and (c) peer interactions. Within the discussion of the theme of structure of the learning environment, subthemes included (a) meaningful opportunities, (b) utilization of time, and (c) individual influence. Subthemes associated with the theme of peer interactions were (a) sense of community and (b) quality collaboration. Similar to the discussion of Research Question 1, an overview of the participants' definitions of empowerment is initially shared to provide context for this section.

What is Learner Empowerment?

Students described empowerment as the perception that they understood a situation and had some degree of influence over the process or the outcome. Elyse's response was specific to the educational setting. "Empowered to me just feels like you're really just like confident and kind of can feel like you know which direction you're going in that class" (Interview, July 14, 2016). Jane spoke in more general terms about her understanding of empowerment. "Empowered to me is being able to read and accept your situations but not letting them define you" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Like the concept of power, *when* students felt empowered during the school day also tended to be described as class and teacher specific. For example, Diamond said, "I think in most classes, it's most of the time, and then some classes are some of the time" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Patricia stated, "Especially in AP and honors classes, you experience that [sense of empowerment] a lot" (Interview, August 10, 2016). Elyse concurred, "The higher level you go, the teachers trust you more to be able to be mature,

but the lower you are, it's like they feel they still need to have that involvement" (Interview, July 14, 2016).

Several participants spoke of feeling empowered in their high school classes fairly frequently. For example, Sage said she felt empowered "a pretty good amount" of the time. The majority of participants felt that they were empowered much less regularly. When asked how frequently he felt empowered in the classroom, Ender responded, "Not very often" (Interview, July 19, 2016). Frederick mused, "I don't ever feel that empowered in a classroom. It's just kind of not that sort of environment for me. I don't really like classroom learning too much. No matter the subject, it's just not really my thing. I don't really like school very much" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Students' engagement and motivation, and hence, their sense of empowerment, were directly impacted by their perceptions of the power dynamics within their learning environments. Specifically, this included their perceptions of the power dynamics inherent in direct (a) teacher-student interactions, the power dynamics created due to the (b) structure of the learning environment, and the power dynamics in (c) peer interactions.

Teacher-Student Interactions

"The connection runs deep between me and him. That's where I tend to thrive—in the classes where I know the teacher" (Hugo, Interview, July 18, 2016). As stated in the discussion of themes for Research Question 1 (see "Authentic and nurturing relationships"), teacher-student power dynamics were perceived of as positive when students sensed connections between themselves and their teachers. The discussion in this section expands on that idea, looking specifically at how students' perceptions of the

outcome of their interactions with teachers either positively or negatively impacted their learning, motivation, and engagement.

When students perceived that their direct interactions with teachers resulted in personal connections or close relationships, their motivation and engagement increased. Many students shared similar stories. Alex said, "In my favorite classes, the teachers are always supporting me. I feel like I am always given that encouragement and that gives me motivation and drive" (Interview, August 30, 2016). Hugo's thoughts on the subject were similar, **"**If you know that teacher…and you have that connection with them, you're more engaged in what they're trying to say. You're more interested and you respect them, I think, more, if they don't distance themselves" (Interview, July 18, 2016). In talking about a teacher with whom she felt connected, Jane said, "I always felt like I had to do my absolute best in his class or I had to participate to impact the class conversation just because I cared about what he thought about me" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Sage reported a similar experience, "The only class I've ever really been motivated by a teacher was AP Psych…she just was fantastic….I just wanted to make her happy, like, 'Here is some nice work for you,' because I liked her as a human being so much, and I respected her as a human being" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Students also perceived that a positive relationship with their teachers directly impacted their learning. "I need to connect to the teacher to really learn from them [*sic*]" (Calisse, Interview, July 20, 2016). Hugo shared, "My favorite teacher taught Physical Science and was my Knowledge Bowl coach. I have a personal connection with her, and she makes learning fun by utilizing that connection" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Jane also commented on the impact the relationship with her teacher had on her learning. "I could

go to him for anything….I knew that with him it would remain confidential and he would try to help me the best he could. He would always tell us that he really cared, you know?….I felt like I learned more in his class because of that relationship" (Interview, July 17, 2016). For these students, positive interactions with their teachers that resulted in the perception of a connection seemed to lead to a willingness to engage and openness to learn.

In fact, this relationship with the teacher was sometimes the single deciding factor determining whether students chose to engage in a particular class. Hugo reminisced, "I've had teachers that have annoyed me, or whatever, for different reasons, are too strict, or I don't like the way they teach, or whatever, but I've had that connection with them and that's what's made the class for me" (Interview, July 18, 2016). In thinking back over her high school experience so far, Calisse said,

> Even though I'm not a big history person, I still took a bunch of classes so that I can be in her class, and I did really well on the AP history exam thing. I think it's just because I really liked her. Then, my Physics teacher is amazing. He's a really awesome guy, and I do not like physics at all, but I love going to his class, and so it's like that's what's really important for me. (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Other students shared similar comments. For all of them, that perceived connection with the teacher often led them to choose a class they would not otherwise have chosen in order to maintain or to further their relationship with the teacher. When taking the class was required (e.g., for graduation), the positive relationship with the teacher often served to make the course more bearable.

Conversely, when students did not feel they had a good relationship with their teachers, their learning, engagement, and motivation were negatively impacted. For example, Alex said, "I feel like I get really anxious when I don't have a good relationship

with the teacher" (Interview, August 30, 2016). Calisse shared her perspective, "There have definitely been some teachers that I just didn't connect to, and it was really hard for me to want to go to their class every day and want to learn" (Interview, July 20, 2016).

Students also believed there was a connection between their relationships with their teachers, the degree of shared power in the classroom, and their personal sense of empowerment. Basically, in situations where power was effectively shared, students reported feeling more connected to the teacher and more motivated to engage in learning. Likewise, when students felt they had limited or no power in the classroom, their engagement, motivation, and relationship with the teacher were negatively impacted. Patricia explained,

> Classes where you don't have power, you feel less motivated to contribute; you don't really want to because you don't really care about the teacher, about the information as much. In a class where you have more power, you want to contribute; you want to maintain that relationship with the teacher. The other teachers that are less willing to share, they don't worry about maintaining a relationship. It's less balanced—the more power the teacher has, the less they really care about the students it feels like…they become almost more scary to talk to, and I tend to avoid asking questions if I have them. (Interview, August 10, 2016)

Sage summed up the relationship between these different power dynamics. "If I feel empowered in the classroom, I'm definitely more likely to be engaged in the classroom….I think having that good relationship with my teachers is one of the things that really helps me have that [sense of empowerment]" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Structure of the Learning Environment

Students also recognized that the way in which teachers structured the learning environment often communicated power and impacted classroom power dynamics. These power dynamics, in turn, impacted students' motivation, engagement, and how

they perceived their learning. Students repeatedly spoke of the desire for meaningful activities and assignments and for opportunities to exercise a degree of control over their environments. Subthemes within this theme are (a) meaningful opportunities, (b) utilization of time, and (c) individual influence.

Meaningful opportunities. "I just didn't feel like anything I was doing in school was meaningful to me at all. I just hated it" (Frederick, Interview, July 17, 2016). Students often talked about wanting what they were asked to do in the classroom to be relevant and applicable and to provide them with opportunities to make meaningful connections. Sage wanted to be provided with "situations that allow for long-term impact or long-term relevance" (OQ, July 12, 2016), and Dennis wished for more opportunities to learn "things that are applicable" (OQ, July 12, 2016).

Mandy indicated that for her, "the type of learning that isn't just dates and formulas but that ties to the real world and that I will actually remember are [*sic*] most meaningful" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Hugo felt seminars and discussion were the most meaningful learning experiences because "they allow me to connect what I'm learning to the world around me" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Similarly, Alan agreed, I think the most meaningful [learning situations] are when they use real-world examples because it makes me feel like what I'm learning has significance" (OQ, July 12, 2016).

When teachers provided these opportunities for students to make meaningful connections between what they were being asked to do and the real world, it positively impacted their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment. Elyse spoke in terms of both level of engagement and perception of learning.

> Making the connections makes it so much easier to learn and memorize what's happening, to understand it, because there's a difference between understanding it

> and memorizing, and so teachers who are big on memorizing—you know, you're just bored. You're just like, "What am I doing?" But when you spend the class time understanding and really talking through it, I think it makes a big difference. (Interview, July14, 2016).

Calisse spoke excitedly about the impact making meaningful connections had on her engagement and overall sense of empowerment.

> I just love eureka moments. That's why I love biology. My favorite part is when you realize how everything connects because everything connects to biology, and you're looking at something and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I finally understand this! I thought I understood but I don't. I didn't, and now I do. Now I know how these things all connect." It's crazy, and it's so much fun, and you just feel so smart and so good and your brain is so happy. That's definitely where I feel most empowered is when something just clicks and I'm like, "I get it. I know what's going on." (Interview, July 20, 2016)

When students couldn't derive meaning from what they were being asked to do or felt like the activities lacked relevance and applicability, their motivation, engagement, and sense of empowerment declined. For example, Slurmp (see Tables 2 & 3) wrote, "Situations that are boring and have no real life applicability for me, I see no use in going through" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Mandy stated, "Random formulas that I use once for a test and then never need again or things like philosophy, which just tries to explain the world in convoluted, complicated, confusing, and unnecessary ways—it doesn't really help me in my everyday life, and it does not interest me" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Beyond this need for relevance, applicability, and meaningful connections, students also expressed a desire for recognition of their (a) learning preferences and (b) strengths.

Recognition of learning preferences. As students spoke about meaningful learning opportunities, they often commented on their own characteristics and preferences for learning using terms such as "introverted, "extroverted," and "tactile learner." Jane responded, "I enjoy taking notes and repeating writing steps, as well as

watching videos. I'm a very visual learner. I enjoy having sound, too, because it helps me focus, as well as moving my legs or hands" (OQ, July 12, 2016). As a group, they seemed very aware of themselves as learners.

Many spoke about "teaching styles" not being compatible with their "learning styles." Several students spoke about particular learning situations that did not work well for them. For example, Jane said, "There are different ways that people learn. Some people are visually stimulated; some people learn audibly….Neither one of those, I felt like, really worked for me" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Diamond stated, "I'm more like, like a visual learner. You can tell it to me, but then once I actually see…how it actually works together, it makes sense after that. Sometimes looking at something will help, will make it easier and help if I see steps and how it works" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Hugo explained, "Everyone learns in different ways. Me, I'm not an auditory, or a read/write learner, or a visual. I'm a kinesthetic learner….I'll listen to your lecture, and all that. I can take my notes, but when I go home or whatever, and I'm studying, I have to think about it kinesthetically" (Interview, July 18, 2016). Several students, similar to Hugo's response, talked about finding their own ways to deal with the inconsistencies between their learning preferences and the ways in which teachers presented material so that they were able to stay engaged and gain a better understanding of the content.

Others spoke of the mismatch between their learning preferences and the structure of the learning environment. When students perceived these were incompatible with one another, it negatively impacted their engagement and motivation. "World History was my least favorite because the class was very lecture based, and it was hard to focus" (William, OQ, July 12, 2016). Mandy wrote, "Algebra 2 was my least favorite class

because it was a flipped classroom, which did not work for me" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Jane shared an interaction with one of her high school teachers. "He was like, 'Well, I know you could do better.' It's like, 'I could, but you don't want to teach me a different method of learning, so I'm not going to do better'" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Ender spoke of the misalignment between student learning preferences and teacher instructional choices from a more philosophical stance.

> His teaching style just didn't connect with me…and that's just usually what it comes down to—the student needs to learn in a different way than the teacher is used to teaching, and that kind of comes along with like growth as a teacher—being able to best serve the students in their class [*sic*]." (Interview, July 19, 2016)

The students in this study spoke freely about a desire, or even a need, to pursue learning through methods best suited to their preferences. When they had these opportunities, their learning and engagement was enhanced. They also, however, spoke openly about situations where they felt there was a mismatch between their learning preferences and the ways in which teachers presented material and/or the overall learning environment. When this was the case students often felt frustrated, and some shared examples of preferring to withdraw from the situation rather than attempt to engage in any type of learning.

Recognition of strengths. Consistent with their high awareness of themselves as learners, the participants also spoke of their personal strengths and the areas in which they could potentially use those strengths to positively impact those around them. When teachers recognized those strengths and were able to provide these meaningful opportunities, or when students were able to seek them out, their engagement and motivation were positively impacted.

Any time Dennis had the chance to talk about mathematics during the two weeks of the leadership program, he was happy. He was also pleased when he had opportunities to utilize his strength in math to help others during the school year. "I have the biggest impact in math. In any high school math class I can effectively be a second teacher. My Calc teacher had me teach a few of the messier problems" (OQ, July 12, 2016). In further conversation with Dennis, it became clear that because his math teacher had recognized his strength in Calculus and had provided him with opportunities to use his knowledge to help his classmates learn, he not only felt valued, but was more engaged in the class.

On more than one occasion, Diamond spoke of the satisfaction it gave her to help those around her.

> I think for specific classes, for me, like in Chemistry, I know some people struggle more than I did. In our class, specifically, I feel I'm able to impact and help others in that class if they're struggling more than I am in that particular thing….I do feel like I'm able to make a difference a little bit and help others and stuff like that. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Similarly, Dee responded, "I take, like, initiative upon myself to help them, so sometimes when someone doesn't understand and they're taking up a long period of the class and everybody else gets it, I'll be like, 'Hey, you know, I can help you when we're done'" (Interview, July 20, 2016).

While students did not appreciate the *expectation* that they would teach or tutor other students (see "Pros and cons of group work" below), when they felt that their expertise was truly needed and valued and could draw upon it to positively impact their peers, this increased their engagement in the learning situation. They wanted to be able to "make a difference."

The students in this study seemed to evince a fairly acute awareness of themselves as learners. When they were provided with opportunities that built on their preferences and strengths, their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment were enhanced. Often, however, students shared examples of when their strengths were not recognized or well utilized or when they felt there was a significant misalignment between their learning preferences and their learning environments. In these instances, their learning, engagement, and motivation were negatively impacted.

Utilization of time. "Reiterating exactly what we had recently read in a textbook….I already knew this information, and I find it to be a waste of time" (Elyse, OQ, July 12, 2016). Another area where the structure of the learning environment impacted power dynamics was the way in which teachers chose to prioritize the use of time. It was clear from the conversations that students valued their time, and anything they did not perceive of as a valuable use of that resource negatively impacted their engagement and motivation. Inappropriate pacing in classes was mentioned multiple times by students as something that they believed wasted their time and that negatively impacted their motivation. For example, Calisse shared an example from one of her classes:

> In my World History and Literature class, we talked about revolutions for like three months, and we did the same project on the same revolution for so long. Different revolution, same project, and I was like, "This is boring. I already know what a revolution is. I don't need to learn about seven different revolutions." It was awful. I was like, "This is a waste of my time….We just need to keep going." (Interview, July 20, 2016)

Patricia shared another example, "Geometry has been my least favorite class because I was in a class with average sophomores who didn't pick up math quickly, and

therefore, the class was taught at an agonizingly slow pace" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Hugo also lamented,

> A problem I've had with honors classes is questions and stuff like that. I'm a really inquisitive, curious person. I would always ask questions, and I've had teachers tell me, "Slow down. You're going too fast. I'm going to get to that." Or "That's too complex of a thing for what we're looking at here." I was like, "I understand that you're trying to work with the class. Can we talk after about it?" They're like, "No, I don't have enough time." It's like, "I get that you need to work on the whole class, and if I'm slowing down the class, I understand that, but I also want to further my education individually as well." (Interview, July 18, 2016)

When students were not able to pursue learning at what they believed to be an appropriate pace, they expressed frustration. Typically students commented on the pace of instruction moving too slowly, but some commented on teachers moving through material too quickly and not allowing enough time for them to delve in depth into a topic they found interesting. In both scenarios, their motivation was negatively impacted.

Individual influence. "It's just that horrible illusion of freedom. I hate that so much. Yeah, I hate having an illusion of a choice. I see right through that" (Frederick, Interview, July 17, 2016). As discussed earlier, students' defined empowerment as personally understanding a situation and being able to influence it. Sometimes their desire for influence in their learning environment was expressed in terms of control; other times students spoke of choice. While the terminology employed was not always consistent, students were very clear about their desire to have some degree of legitimate influence over the learning environment. Frederick attempted to explain it, "You know, kids start to mature a lot and start to develop their own opinions and need to have their own freedom sooner than people think" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Choice and control. "Lack of choice and control really can make a class frustrating for a lot of students and can quickly unmotivate them. It's difficult to motivate students, but it's really easy to unmotivate them, unfortunately" (Ender, Interview, July 19, 2016). When students were allowed choice and control in the classroom, their motivation, engagement, and sense of empowerment increased. For example, Rickie (see Tables 2 & 3) wrote, "I feel the most competent when we have a lot of choice in what we do and time to do things that are interesting" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Sage said,

> A lot of times you just feel as though you're just talked at all day long, and I think being given the opportunity to have some control over how you feel about the situation, and have some control over whether or not something is actively bothering you or making you feel better, just really gives me the opportunity to, I guess, yeah, control, to have a bit more control, and that's something that I really value, and I like feeling as though I have the power to control myself and make sure that I'm in a good place. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

The positive impact on students' motivation and empowerment extended to choosing classes. Calisse commented, "For me, personally, my favorite classes have been my AP classes because if you're in an AP class, you are making the choice to be in that class….Classes that are by choice are definitely better than classes that are required" (Interview, July 20, 2016). Frederick, who was taking college courses in high school, talked about the primary difference between the two settings. "I feel like I have more power in the college classroom because I know that my learning there is my choice. I'm there because I want to be, and I chose that class, and I chose to be at this school. I chose to be in that class, and you know, if it really came to it, I could just drop out, you know? I have that option to try something else" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Throughout discussions with students, the perception of choice or control consistently enhanced their motivation to engage and their overall sense of empowerment.

Creativity. Within the discussion of choice and control, several students also commented on how important it was for them to have opportunities to incorporate creativity into assignments and activities. For example, Kendrick (see Tables 2 & 3) shared, "I feel most capable in situations where I'm required to be creative and throw my ideas out" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Ricky (see Tables 2 & 3) felt she had "the biggest impact in more fun and creative projects where I can share humor and opinions in a more catchy way" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Options for creativity also influenced students' choices of favorite classes. For Alex, her favorite classes were those where "I was allowed to explore creativity" (OQ, July 12, 2016). As with choice and control in general, when students had the opportunity to incorporate creativity, it tended to increase their engagement and motivation.

Freedom within structure. I found it intriguing that, as many times as students expressed the desire for choice and control, they also recognized that too much freedom could actually inhibit motivation. Freedom within the confines of some degree of structure seemed to be the most constructive option. Elyse said, "My thing is like I like having choice, but when it gets too far broad, I feel like I just go crazy. I like structure I guess. I like having the requirements and expectations at least of the teachers, and once I have that I can usually just go crazy with what I want to do" (Interview, July 14, 2016). Dautravious stated, "I feel like I have the least control when I am given complete free reign. My mind goes in too many places, and I usually can't decide on what to do" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Ricky struggled when there were either "too many rules or boundaries or too little rules and boundaries" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Ashley (see Tables 2 & 3) agreed, "I don't feel capable in situations where teachers either tell us too little or too much about

what we're doing because it makes me feel dumb either way" (OQ, July 12, 2016).

Finally, Calisse commented,

> I don't mind choice. I'm not very indecisive, especially about like what question I'm going to answer. If they give me five options, I'll just be like, "Okay, that one looks good. I'll do that one" and just go with it and not really worry about any other choices. But once I've made my choice, I definitely want more specific instructions just so I know I'm doing the right thing because the most stressful thing for me is waking up in the middle of the night before a big project's due and being like, "Oh my god. I know I did something wrong." (Interview, July 20, 2016)

The desire to influence their learning environment through options for choice and control was very important to these students. The topic arose in multiple settings in multiple conversations. However, at least in the context of school where there typically was some type of evaluation or judgment tied to the outcome, these students preferred a degree of guidance as opposed to complete open-ended options. Whereas too much freedom served to stifle their motivation, freedom within well-defined parameters seemed to serve to create an environment in which it was safe to explore. This situation increased their motivation and engagement.

Peer Interactions

"My favorite class was Spanish 2 because I enjoy learning other languages and because I really enjoyed the people in the class" (Dautravious, OQ, July 12, 2016). As stated in the discussion of themes for Research Question 1 (see "The Added Dimension of Peers"), power dynamics influenced by peers could be perceived of as either positive or negative. The discussion in this section expands on that idea, looking specifically at how students' perceptions of the outcome of their interactions with peers either positively or negatively impacted their learning, motivation, and engagement.

Students valued the opportunity for beneficial interactions with peers. Specifically, they spoke of the positive impact a (a) sense of community and opportunities for (b) quality collaboration had on their motivation and engagement. "If you're in a class where everyone's really motivated and excited, that sets the bar for other people and allows them, even if they weren't feeling it that day, to maybe try more, try harder, and be more engaged" (Diamond, Interview, July 17, 2016). However, certain types of peer interactions, for example, when it was perceived that peers didn't care about learning, negatively impacted students' motivation and engagement.

Sense of community. "Small classes are better for me, I think, because there is more community" (Mandy, OQ, July 12 2016). Students spoke with appreciation of instances where they felt connected to their peers through a sense of community. This often happened when the students felt they had something they valued in common with other students. Hugo commented, "Chamber Choir was my favorite class because I was able to forge a true connection with an amazing group of people over a passion we all loved—music" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Ender spoke of the difference a sense of community made in his motivation as he navigated AP United States History. "It was definitely my most difficult class, but I looked forward to it every day because of my teacher and then also the community that he created with the students….That class community among the students is really important" (Interview, July 19, 2016). As students shared stories about their classroom experiences, it became evident that camaraderie, that feeling like an integral part of a larger community, was a positive influence on their motivation to attend and to engage.

The reverse was also true, however. For example, Sage shared that even though AP Psychology was her favorite class because of the content and the teacher, she didn't actually "enjoy being in the class" because of her peers (OQ, July 12, 2016). "It was frustrating because it was a really nice environment—she [the teacher] worked very hard to create a nice environment, but it wasn't often used that way" (Interview, July 17, 2016)." Rather than feeling like an integral part of a class community, Sage felt as though she stood alone, which meant that she often didn't feel like going to the class. "It was a very big class. I think we had 40 students….I did the reading every week, but just about no one else did….It was very frustrating at certain points of the year" (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Quality collaboration. "The group of people that I was with in those honors classes was the reason that the group projects were good" (Hugo, Interview, July 18, 2016). While similar to a sense of community in that peers played a vital role in students' motivation and engagement, sense of community focused more on feeling connected to peers in some way. A sense of quality collaboration, on the other hand, occurred when students felt a similar commitment from their peers. When students perceived that the peers with whom they were working were willing to put forth the same effort and cared as much as they did, it increased their engagement and motivation. Calisse shared, "With AP classes or more advanced classes or more specific classes, people are choosing, like, 'I want this class.' It just makes everything easier because 95% of the time, everyone is engaged and everyone is willing to do everything" (Interview, July 20, 2016). Similarly, Ender spoke of the positive impact quality collaboration in his AP United States History class had on his motivation and engagement.

> The caliber of the students in my class was a lot higher than normal, and I think they also collectively pushed me to do better because I was with them. I was in a positive atmosphere where people really cared, and they really wanted to do well, and so just indirectly it made me want to perform at their level. (Interview, July 19, 2016)

Students sometimes spoke of quality collaboration in terms of group work; although, group experiences also represented some of their worst educational experiences.

Pros and cons of group work. A specific type of collaboration about which students frequently spoke was group work. At times, working in groups was a positive experience for the students and increased their motivation and engagement. In other situations, it was a negative experience, serving to diminish their motivation to participate in that setting. Alex talked about the difference in her perception of group work in her performing arts classes and in her content classes.

> Working as a group in dance, it's like when you're working on choreography and stuff like that. One person is leading, and then as a group you all work together and feed off of each other's tempo and energy. Whereas in school, working on a social studies project, it's so different because you're not feeding off of energy. (Interview, August 30, 2016)

She went on to talk about the positive impact of a shared sense of responsibility that came with a positive group experience. "With Dance IV, I'm motivated to go because…like we're all working as a team. I have to be there because if I'm not there, other people are going to feel that. It's going to be detrimental" (Interview, August 30, 2016).

Patricia said,

> Group projects are successful if you're in a group of kids who also want to learn; it's usually in more advanced classes you experience that—where it's a group of kids who want to contribute and want to get to that goal. If you're with a group of kids who don't really care, you end up with less of that motivation to work and one kid does all the work. (Interview, August 10, 2016)

When students felt as though others in their groups were *not* as invested, it became a stressful situation for them. Frederick wrote, "If everyone will just do their part or let me assign them, great. When my group won't cooperate, though, I feel very out of control" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Patricia also sensed a lack of control in that type of situation. "I feel least capable when I have to rely on others to do things in projects, and most of the time people won't do them, but you still have to entrust your grade with them" (OP, July 12, 2016). Dautravious contributed, "In English we did a thing called lit circles, and that was awful because I was surrounded by people who didn't care as much as me about their grades. They were all happy having Cs in the class, and I was not" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Dee's response was similar, "I don't like the fact that we all get the same grade, not individual grades….I'm pretty much taking up someone else's slack and giving them my grade, and I think a lot of teachers don't understand that" (Interview, July 20, 2016). Again, similar to the responses above, Elyse shared, "I end up double checking everything that everyone else is doing because I don't like having their poor work reflect back on me because I did all the hard work. I think I deserve to be credited for that and not have the poor work shine down on me" (Interview, July 14, 2016).

In general, as much as most of the students valued the opportunity for quality peer interactions, when they felt these interactions were disadvantageous, their motivation was negatively impacted. When they perceived their peers were taking advantage of them or when they were forced to work with others who did not care or contribute as much as they did, they felt frustrated and like things were out of control. When faced with these situations, many expressed a desire to just be able to complete the work individually so they did not have to rely on peers whom they felt they could not trust.

Exploration of Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, "What other factors do gifted students believe contribute to or inhibit their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school? For this research question, student responses served to illuminate the primary themes of (a) personal factors and (b) external factors. Within personal factors, students discussed (a) internal drive, (b) desire to learn, (c) passion for content, and (d) future goals. External factors consisted of academic programs not directly associated with the classroom and individuals outside the school environment that students credited with impacting their motivation.

Personal Factors

Periodically during the two weeks of the leadership program, students would comment on not feeling motivated by their high school classroom environment and what they were being asked to do in their high schools. Often, my question when this topic arose was, "Then why do you keep doing what you're asked to do?" Through these informal discussions, as well as during the interviews, it became apparent that there were personal factors that functioned independently of or in combination with other factors to influence their decisions to ultimately either engage or disengage in these circumstances. Within the theme of personal factors, the subthemes discussed are (a) internal drive, (b) desire to learn, (c) passion for content, and (d) future goals.

Internal drive. "Everything I do is something that I want to do. It's just kind of me—I'm motivating myself" (Calisse, Interview, July 20, 2016). Multiple students spoke of what seemed an innate determination to succeed, often in spite of the circumstances. Jane asserted, "I drive myself really hard….I feel like it's very arrogant to say that

everything comes from within, but I feel like naturally I am kind of a driven person" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Ender responded in a similar fashion.

> I'm definitely a very driven person. I hold myself to a very high expectation. Not always super motivated but definitely have very high goals. One of my favorite things to do is to set goals. I don't know why, but it's like almost fun for me—set goals and achieve them, and so I'm very driven. (Interview, July 19, 2016)

He went on to tell me a story:

> A lot of people told me that AP United States History was one of the hardest classes at our school….When I applied for it, they said that I had the scores to place, but because of my previous performance in my sophomore level humanities, which was AP World History, they didn't know if it was the best choice for me. I thought that I could do it. (Interview, July 19, 2016)

Ender reported a challenging semester due to this choice but a very successful outcome in the end. He performed well in the class, and it actually ended up being his favorite. Setting a goal to achieve his desired outcome in spite of the recommendation of others was a satisfying experience for him and kept him engaged and motivated throughout the year.

Sage shared a story about her AP Chemistry class. "I just absolutely despised the teacher so much and despised the environment so much, that I had to force myself to go to class every day" (Interview, July 17, 2016). She elaborated on what a poor relationship this teacher had with his students. "It seems he was like out to get you all the time….We ended [the year] with like eight kids…because nobody wants to take the class because it's miserable and almost impossible to get a good grade." Then she went on to say, "I will fully admit that I'm a perfectionist, and I like my GPA, and I like having straight A's. And just really the thought of failure, and honestly, the fact that I just hated him so much, made me want to prove to him that I could still get a good grade in his class." Similar to Ender's story, Sage's determination to succeed, in spite of the

situation, was what motivated her to continue to fight for, and ultimately achieve, an A in the class.

Kara shared in-depth about her experiences trying to find peace with herself, with her educational experiences, and with her world in general. "My grades suffered because of that. On tests and stuff, I didn't do as well as I could have because I hadn't been motivated to actually do the work" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Toward the end of her sophomore year, her motivation had deteriorated to the point where she was in danger of not passing. While her story differs in tone and substance from some of the others, that underlying internal drive is still evident.

> The last month, the last two weeks especially…, they were like, "You are going to fail if you don't get all this stuff turned in…." It was just like…"Yeah, no." I decided, "You know what? I do want to stay here. This is a good school, and I'd really hate to fail out of it simply because I refuse to do the work that I needed to do." I worked my ass off for the last two weeks. I got like three essays and three lab entries for my Chemistry class done in that time. I certainly didn't pass with flying colors, but I passed. I went on to the eleventh grade. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Kara, too, was facing a challenging situation, and like the previous two examples, it was through an internal drive and a belief in herself that she was able to succeed with the task at hand.

While some students spoke in general terms of this innate determination to succeed, others shared specific examples of when it was necessary to channel this drive in order to overcome discouraging odds. This internal drive served as a source of motivation for many students in this study. In each example shared above, there was not only this sense of determination but also a belief that they were capable of achieving the desired outcome.

Desire to learn. "School isn't really about learning any more—it's just about passing" (Dee, Interview, July 20, 2016). In multiple settings, in multiple conversations, students also expressed an intense desire to learn and to understand. When those opportunities were available, motivation and engagement increased. When those opportunities were not available, students spoke of feeling frustrated and unmotivated, often preferring to disengage. Kara said, "I just desperately want to learn. I'm always craving new knowledge that's relevant to me really" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Calisse's sentiment was similar, "I like to learn a lot, and so even if we're learning about stuff that is boring to me, maybe something that I can't connect to, I still am usually pretty engaged and pretty willing to learn" (Interview, July 20, 2016). Hugo shared,

> I was always a really curious kid and still am a curious person. I get motivated by the curiosity of just not knowing—that uncomfortability [*sic*] of not knowing about something. Then I'll take the initiative and strive to go learn about it. I was always one of those kids….It's just satisfying and rewarding for me to learn. (Interview, July 18, 2016)

However, students also expressed frustration with a system that was not necessarily designed to satisfy that intense desire and with teachers who often seemed unwilling to try to understand or accommodate that intense desire. Sage said, "I really enjoy learning. That's something that I really, really liked to do, but I never really enjoyed school itself because of all of the problems and because of the busy work because it just wasn't enjoyable because I wasn't actually learning" (Interview, July 17, 2016). Dee spoke of well-intentioned teachers who attempted to help her once she returned to school after missing a couple of months due to health issues. "They see that you try hard and that you're doing good…, and they're like, 'Well you don't have to do

this assignment since you fell so far behind,' which is okay to an extent, but at the same time, it's like, I still want to learn what I missed" (Interview, July 20, 2016).

This desire to learn was in many ways closely related to internal drive. For example, both seemed somewhat inherent in the students' personal characteristics rather than something influenced by external forces. Additionally, the intense desire to learn and understand served as motivation for these students, just as the intense internal drive to succeed did.

Passion for content. "I didn't really feel passionate about the subject, and hence, wasn't motivated to complete my work" (Hugo, Interview, July 18, 2016). Throughout the interviews, students referred to intense personal connections to certain content. In these conversations, it seemed that it was neither a result of the relationship with the teacher nor of the structure of the learning environment; rather, it was a personal passion for the content that students brought with them to the situation. That personal connection to and passion for the content served as motivation in and of itself. For example, Chuck wrote, "AP Music Theory is my favorite because I enjoy the simple math and common sense layer that is put into music" (OQ, July 12, 2016). Hugo said, "I think science is what I challenge myself the most in. I always want to take that extra leap in the sciences" (Interview, July 18, 2016). Frederick commented, "If I care about something and I have an interest or a passion for something, I'll put my all into it" (Interview, July 17, 2016). "Presenting something I'm proud and passionate about really motivates me" (Frederick, OQ, July 12, 2016).

It is clear that when students were passionately and personally connected to the content, they were more motivated in the classroom. Many of these students spoke of

pursing these interests even outside of the school day. For instance, Dennis said, “On my own time, if I'm just looking for a subject to get lost in Wikipedia, it's math. Sometimes I don't even plan it, it just happens, and then I run out of time” (Interview, July 18, 2016). For other students, unfortunately, their only opportunities to pursue their passions were outside of school, thereby, often decreasing their motivation to engage in their classes. Similarly, some students talked about feeling unable to really engage in subjects about which they didn’t feel passionate.

Future goals. “What's going to be the end result?” (Alex, Interview, August 30, 2016). Several students stated that their motivation to succeed in certain situations was simply that they recognized that by completing what they were being asked to do, whether or not they found any immediate or personal value in it, they were putting themselves in a better position to achieve a future goal that was important to them. Sage said, “[My motivation] for most classes…is that I want to get into a good college, and I know that’s the way I’m going to succeed with my life…if I get into a good college, if I get a scholarship so that I can actually attend that college” (Interview, July 17, 2016). Alex provided another example.

> It's like, I have to pass English because if I pass English, then I can go to college to become more successful at dance because colleges that want a good dancer will accept a good dancer who is also academically secure, you know? I think my motivation for being successful, doing my homework, attending class, it all comes from just like, “What's going to be the end result?” (Interview, August 30, 2016)

Frederick also commented,

> The big, big difference [between my high school and college classes] was when I found myself in that same, like, “What am I doing? I hate this. What's the point of learning this?” mood, I had to remind myself that I'm getting a degree now. Like, I'm getting a degree. I'm working towards something. (Interview, July 17, 2016)

These students evidenced the ability to connect their present endeavors to their long-term goals, even in situations where there was not necessarily a clearly discernible connection. Because they had a future goal and a plan to achieve it, they were motivated to persevere in often less than engaging circumstances.

External Factors

"I have a chance to do more, that I wouldn't have done before because of them. I should work harder" (Diamond, Interview, July 17, 2016). Finally, at times, other individuals and academic programs outside the classroom served to increase students' motivation. While three of the examples shared here are from the same student, the impact for her was significant. Based on my experiences with other culturally diverse gifted students from low-income households, her comments could represent the experiences of other low-income gifted individuals who were not included in this study. Diamond shared three examples of factors that had impacted her motivation to succeed. First she talked about an external academic program designed to support high-achieving, low-income students in attaining high school and college success.

> They've given me an opportunity that I would've never known about that could set me apart from other people. Then, after I see that then it's…"Okay, this may not be my best subject, might not be my best day, but this proves that I can do it. I have a chance to do more that I wouldn't have done before because of them. I should work harder." (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Diamond also talked about how knowing and being able to make connections to the experiences of others from similar backgrounds can be motivational.

> I also think there are some things in history that people know about. Specifically, for minorities, in the past, if you see that history, you really take that in, or even people today who have become successes and stuff like that, that come from poor backgrounds, you feel like they came from even rougher spots than I came from. You feel like, "Why can't I then go ahead and do that?" (Interview, July 17, 2016)

Finally, Diamond talked of the impact her family has had on her motivation to succeed. "My family, my brothers and sister, all my brothers and sisters [help with my motivation]….I have a family who've been really successful. After you see that, you feel like you can, therefore, do it" (Interview, July 17, 2016).

Another student also specifically mentioned the impact family had had on her motivation. Calisse said, "My mom is really, really motivated….I definitely owe part of [my motivation] to genetics because she's very together….Finally I was like, 'Mom, I don't need you to motivate me. I've got this'" (Interview, July 20, 2016). This issue of support was discussed in the previous research questions in the context of the classroom, specifically in the form of teacher support and peer support. The student support discussed here, although still impacting educational motivation, originated from sources outside of the classroom in the form of an external academic program and the influence of family.

When discussing external factors, being able to connect to others seemed to play a significant role in motivation. Family was influential for both Diamond and Calisse because they in some way related to the experiences of different family members. Diamond's motivation was also positively impacted because she could relate to the stories of other individuals of similar backgrounds or experiences who had overcome obstacles to succeed.

Summary

Based on the responses of these gifted students, there were a myriad of factors that impacted the power dynamics in their high school classrooms, thereby influencing their attitudes about learning and their engagement, motivation, and overall sense of

empowerment. Students defined power as having control of the classroom. They defined empowerment as feeling like they thoroughly understood a situation and could in some way influence the process or the outcome. Eight themes regarding power and empowerment emerged from this qualitative inquiry.

The first three themes were associated with Research Question 1 and dealt with the students' perceptions of the power dynamics within their classrooms. They were (a) positive teacher power, (b) negative teacher power, and (c) the added dimension of peers. Students considered referent, expert, and reward power to be positive forms of teacher power because they encouraged authentic, personal relationships and positive classroom environments that cultivated student learning. The students considered coercive and legitimate power to be negative forms of teacher power. Not only did these power dynamics not foster authentic and nurturing teacher-student relationships, the use of coercive power actually damaged the relationship because students felt unsafe in those situations. Students also acknowledged that their peers had power to influence the class. As with teacher power, this could be either positive or negative, depending upon the circumstances.

The next three themes addressed Research Question 2 and were associated with the students' perceptions of how classroom power dynamics related to their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or overall sense of empowerment. These themes were (a) teacher-student interactions, (b) structure of the learning environment, and (c) peer interactions. When students perceived that interactions with their teachers resulted in close relationships or personal connections, their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment increased. Conversely, when teacher-student interactions did not

result in the perception of a positive relationship, learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment were negatively impacted.

In regard to the structure of the learning environment, when students believed that what they were being asked to do was meaningful and when they had some type of legitimate influence, again, their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment increased. The students also reported increased learning, engagement, and motivation when they felt a part of a community of peers who shared their passions and/or who were committed to quality collaboration. When either the structure of the learning environment or interactions with peers were perceived as not conducive to learning, their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment declined.

The final two themes were developed in response to Research Question 3 and addressed students' perceptions of the impact of other factors on their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school. These themes were (a) personal factors and (b) external factors. Students were often able to maintain their motivation because of personal factors such as a strong internal drive to succeed, an intense desire to learn, and/or a personal passion for the content. Future goals also helped to motivate many of the students in the study. Additionally, two students shared examples of when external factors, such as outside organizations and other individuals, positively impacted their motivation to succeed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to better understand gifted high school students' perceptions of empowerment within their classrooms. This included an exploration of gifted students' perceptions of the different power dynamics, including the use of teacher relational power bases (i.e., reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power; French & Raven, 1959), and how these impacted their attitudes about learning, their levels of motivation and engagement, and their overall sense of empowerment. I also explored other factors that these students perceived influenced these same qualitative variables. The following research questions guided this study:

Q1 How do gifted high school students perceive the power dynamics within the classroom?

Q2 How do gifted high school students' perceptions of classroom power dynamics relate to their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or overall sense of empowerment?

Q3 What other factors do gifted high school students believe contribute to or inhibit their learning, engagement, motivation, and/or sense of empowerment in school?

Student perceptions of power in the classroom are believed to impact "learning experiences" (Lovorn et al., 2012, p. 70). Although many teachers report a desire to do a better job of focusing on the educational needs of the gifted students in their classrooms (Farkas & Duffett, 2008), for others, lack of information and training translates into

disadvantageous learning environments for these students. These potentially detrimental environments may range from teachers ignoring gifted students' academic needs due to the mistaken belief that they are capable of making it on their own (NAGC, n.d.-c) to situations in which teachers actually "fear" the gifted students in their classrooms (Tomlinson et al., 1996, p. 168). The logical implication that power dynamics, such as those mentioned above, must certainly impact gifted students' motivation and sense of empowerment was the major impetus behind this study. Further, given that the relationship between power and empowerment has not been thoroughly investigated in gifted education literature, I felt research in this area was both timely and necessary. Therefore, this study sought to explore the impact of power dynamics on gifted students' attitudes about learning, their levels of motivation and engagement, and their overall sense of empowerment, with the primary goal being to gain a deeper understanding of these relationships. The following section will provide a discussion of the findings as they relate to gifted students' perceptions of power and empowerment.

Discussion of Findings

Power

As stated in Chapter 4, the gifted students in this study defined power as being in control of what happened in the classroom. Sometimes this power was held by the teacher; sometimes it was held by the students. Teacher power was perceived most positively when that power was shared with the students but teachers were still available to provide some direction and support as needed. It was also important in these situations that the teachers were in control of the overall learning environment (e.g., positive atmosphere, good classroom management).

While French and Raven (1959) examined power in relation to changes over time in an individual as opposed to a group, broader definitions of power include the potential to influence individuals *or* groups (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). This broader definition was more consistent with the way the students in this study spoke of power, in that they often spoke of teacher and student power influencing an entire class. French and Raven (1959) spoke of power in the general terms of "person" and "social agent;" I have adapted the language to be more consistent with classroom settings by using terms such as student and teacher.

The gifted students in this study described some degree of experience with all of French and Raven's (1959) proposed social power bases (i.e., reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert). However, the most impactful of these five power bases were referent power and expert power. With regard to referent power, the teacher has power to influence because of the student's perception of identification or a relationship with the teacher (French & Raven, 1959). For the students in this study, it was often imperative for them to develop and maintain relationships with their teachers in order to engage in learning. Beyond relationships with their teachers, they also greatly desired teachers with expert power. French and Raven (1959) defined expert power as an individual "having superior knowledge or ability in very specific areas" (p. 164). The students offered insights that would extend this definition to include not only competence in subject matter, but also competence in pedagogy and classroom management. Students wanted teachers who knew how to teach, who were content experts, and who could manage the classroom in order to ensure learning could take place for all students. This naturally led students to respect and to positively respond to those teachers who

were competent in all three of these areas. Both referent and expert power, according to the perceptions of these students, led to positive learning outcomes and therefore seemed to be most valued by them. This finding is supported by Kanevsky and Keighley's (2003) research on gifted students who had disengaged from the classroom and were underachieving. Their most "powerful" finding was the importance "of teachers and their teaching" (p. 25). A caring teacher was more important than any other classroom element in keeping students engaged. "Teachers who cared about their teaching and their students were admired and valued [by gifted students] for their professional integrity and commitment" (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003, p. 25).

Although referent and expert power were the primary foci of students' responses when asked about the impact of power dynamics in the classroom in this study, the other three power bases emerged as well (i.e., reward, coercive, legitimate). For example, several students mentioned that their motivation in certain classes increased when teachers in some way highlighted something that they had done well. This type of response most closely aligned with reward power, defined as influence based on the ability to reward through positive or negative reinforcement (French & Raven, 1959). Referent, expert, and reward power have been referred to as pro-social forms of power and have been positively associated with learning and motivation (Schrodt et al., 2008). This is consistent with responses that indicated that students in this study perceived referent, expert, and reward power as forms of teacher power that positively impacted their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment.

The remaining two power bases, coercive and legitimate power, have been described as antisocial forms of power that negatively impact learning and motivation

(Schrodt et al., 2008). Coercive power results when one individual is able to influence another individual through threats of punishment (French & Raven, 1959). Students in this study recognized that teachers had the power to, for example, send them to the principal's office or assign a lower grade as means of influencing their behavior. Primarily, however, they spoke more in terms of psychological "punishment" imposed either through covert measures like refusing help when students needed it or overt measures like yelling. These were perceived of as negative forms of teacher power and align most closely with French and Raven's (1959) definition of coercive power.

Legitimate power is defined by French and Raven (1959) as the influence that an individual has because another individual believes that person ought to have the right to influence him or her. In the classroom setting, this would translate to teachers having power because students accept that an individual in the role of teacher has the right to influence them and that they, as students, have an obligation to respond accordingly. Interestingly, while the concept of legitimate power arose in conversations with the students, it was primarily focused on students' perceptions that some *teachers* believed that they should have power simply because they were in the role of teacher. These gifted students were generally unwilling to recognize teacher power in these situations, and, because this expectation often negatively impacted students' perceptions of their relationships with these teachers, it corresponds with Schrodt and colleagues' (2008) classification of legitimate power as antisocial. The students' responses to teachers' expectations of power were consistent with the characteristics of many gifted students. According to Hollingworth (as cited in Silverman, 1993), "When the gifted child

perceives those in authority as illogical, irrational, erroneous, or unjust, negativism toward authority is likely to develop" (p. 67).

Empowerment

Frymier et al. (1996) developed their definition of empowerment based on K. W. Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) components of competence, meaningfulness, and impact. Because their Learner Empowerment Model (LEM) was utilized to help craft the Opinion Questionnaire (OQ) and the interview questions for the current study, their definition of learner empowerment was initially adopted: "a student's feeling of competence to perform a task that is meaningful and has an impact on the situation" (Frymier et al. as cited in Houser & Frymier, 2009). Competence "refers to the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries" (K. W. Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 672). If a student is feeling competent, she believes she has the necessary ability and is fully capable of achieving the desired outcome (Frymier et al., 1996). Meaningfulness refers to the personal value a particular tasks holds for an individual (K. W. Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), and impact refers to the belief that the chosen behavior makes a difference.

The gifted students in this study defined empowerment as feeling like they not only understood a particular situation and the associated expectations, but that they were also confident (i.e., competence) that they could in some way influence (e.g., control, choice) the process or the outcome of the situation (i.e., impact). The students referenced both competence and impact in their definition of empowerment, and in that way, were closely aligned with Frymier and colleagues' (1996) definition. Additionally, while students did not include meaningfulness when asked to explicitly define empowerment, it

was consistently implied as they spoke about their desire for tasks that were relevant and applicable and with which they could in some way connect.

The gifted students in this study repeatedly talked about how important it was to have tasks they perceived as meaningful. Meaningfulness for them meant that what they were being asked to do was applicable and relevant to their current lives or future goals and allowed them to make connections to other content areas, to their own interests, or to the larger world. Further, the task was made more meaningful for them when they had some degree of choice and control, for example, choosing to work either with someone or alone or choosing how they wanted to learn or present material. The perception of a task as meaningful was also enhanced when students had the opportunity to build on or use their strengths (i.e., competence) to impact the situation or to help those around them. Conversely, when any of these components were missing or when they felt as though a task was wasting their time, it became less meaningful to them. Along these same lines, Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) found that gifted students' "sense of justice was…offended by the time wasted waiting for classmates to learn what they already knew, or finish work they had already completed" (p. 25).

It seems clear that for the gifted students in this study, empowerment included the same three dimensions of competence, impact, and meaningfulness found in Frymier and colleague's (1996) definition. Inconsistent with their definition of empowerment, however, these students also included a desire to influence the situation or the environment through choice and/or control. The inclusion of the ideas of choice and control make their understanding of empowerment more consistent with K. W. Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) definition of empowerment. K. W. Thomas and Velthouse

(1990) defined *choice* as the level of self-determination students believe they have in deciding what they want to accomplish and how they want to accomplish it. While both Frymier and colleague's (1996) and K. W. Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) definitions incorporated meaningfulness, competence, and impact, K. W. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) also included the dimension of choice, which was based on their research on employer-employee relationships. Although Frymier and colleagues (1996) initially included all four dimensions in their research on the relationship between professors and undergraduate students, choice did not emerge in the final analysis as a significant dimension of empowerment and was ultimately eliminated from their definition of learner empowerment. They theorized that "choice may not be applicable to the classroom context" (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 190). Another possibility they offered for the exclusion of choice in students' responses was that choice could potentially still be important but that because undergraduate students tend to not have much choice in their classes, they did not have an expectation of it. A third possibility was that "choice may only be important in contexts where long-term relationships between subordinate and superior are established" (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 190), which isn't typically the case in undergraduate classes.

The gifted high school students in this study desired meaningfulness, competence, and impact, but they equally, if not more so, desired choice, and they lamented the impact lack of choice had on their sense of empowerment. In fact, choice and control were interwoven into much of the students' discussions about power and empowerment. Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) determined that five "interdependent features" (p. 20) were necessary for gifted students to engage and produce and that the absence of any one

of the five features contributed to gifted students' sense of boredom and disengagement. These interdependent features were referred to as the five Cs and included complexity, challenge, caring teachers, choice, and control. In the current study, the concepts of choice and control were difficult to distinguish from one another, and often one could have been substituted for the other in students' statements. Kanevsky and Keighley (2003), too, found that gifted students' "concerns related to control were intricately intertwined with choice. In practice and research, they are difficult to distinguish because making a choice is only significant if you have sufficient power or control to act on it" (p. 23).

When students in this study were given the opportunity for choice, or when they perceived that they could affect some type of control over their learning environment, tasks were perceived as more meaningful, and students were more likely to report being motivated and feeling empowered. They also reported better relationships with their teachers when there was the opportunity for some degree of control through shared power, and in their favorite classes, they had opportunities for choices regarding what they wanted to learn, how they wanted to learn it, and with whom they wanted to work. Again, this aligns with Kanevsky and Keighley's (2003) findings. When discussing their research with gifted students, they differentiated choice and control in the following way: "Control issues were evident in comments related to the implicit distribution of power while choice issues focused on explicit opportunities to act on one's preferences" (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003, p. 23).

When students perceived that they had influence in the classroom, it also served to bolster their sense of competence, as long as there was also some structure and support

provided by the teacher. Conversely these gifted students felt very frustrated and often vulnerable in situations where they sensed they had a lack of control, such as when teachers utilized coercive power or in group situations when they felt they could not trust the other students to care about the task and to fully commit to it.

It is interesting that choice and control were so important to these gifted high school students but did not emerge as a significant dimension when empowerment was examined at the undergraduate level (Frymier et al., 1996). It is possible that for high school students in general, because of more opportunities to develop long-term relationships with their teachers, choice is more relevant for them than for undergraduate students (Frymier et al., 1996). However, the most salient explanation might be found in better understanding some of the characteristics of gifted students. According to Silverman (1993), many gifted students exhibit perfectionistic tendencies, or an awareness and a striving for what is possible. With this perfectionism often comes the need to control the situation in order to move it toward what the gifted student perceives to be possible. Some gifted students also have an intense need for precision, which translates into a "demand for accuracy, exactness, [and] precision of thought and expression" (Silverman, 1993, p. 60). Both of these characteristics lend themselves to gifted students' need for choice and control.

Relationship Between Power and Empowerment

There was an interrelationship between the four dimensions of empowerment (i.e., competence, meaningfulness, impact, control) in my conversations with students. As they spoke of their experiences in high school, it was clear from the beginning that there was a close relationship between their perceptions of the ways in which teachers

utilized power in the classroom and the impact of this power on their sense of empowerment. It was often difficult to separate the two constructs, as teacher power seemed to directly impact learner empowerment. In addition to power perceptions impacting students' feelings of empowerment, they also described the impact of these perceptions on their engagement and motivation. Learning, although not explicitly mentioned as frequently as engagement and motivation, was often implied in their discussion of those concepts. In general, when students perceived that teachers used power in a positive manner, students learned more, were more motivated and engaged, and often felt more empowered. Conversely, when it was perceived that teacher power was used in a negative manner, learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment declined.

Relationship Between Motivation and Empowerment

It was difficult to discern a distinct difference between the concepts of motivation and empowerment when talking with the students. K. W. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) stated, "Our perception is that the word *empowerment* has become popular because it provides a label for a nontraditional paradigm of motivation (p. 667). Frymier and colleagues (1996), too, conceptualized empowerment "as a motivation-based construct" (p. 182). Hence, it makes sense that these terms often seemed interchangeable in students' responses. However, while there was definitely a relationship between the two, at times it seemed clear that there were aspects of empowerment that were not necessarily present when students spoke of feeling motivated. This difference seems consistent with a comparison of empowerment and the Achievement-Orientation Model.

Achievement-Orientation Model. The construct of empowerment seems to be both related to the motivational constructs of the Achievement-Orientation Model (AOM; Siegle & McCoach, 2005) and somewhat distinct at the same time. According to the AOM, gifted students who possess the skills necessary to successfully complete a task and who have high levels of self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in ability to perform the task), positive environmental perception (i.e., expectation of success within a supportive educational setting), and strong task meaningfulness (i.e., goal valuation) will be motivated to self-regulate, engage in, and achieve the task at hand. Conversely, low levels of any one of these components, (i.e., self-efficacy, environmental perception, or task meaningfulness) will result in lack of self-regulation, disengagement, and underachievement.

While the AOM directly corresponds to some of the components of empowerment (i.e., task meaningfulness with meaningfulness; self-efficacy with competence), it seems that students do not necessarily need to be empowered learners to feel motivated and to engage in tasks. For example, a student may find a math assignment to be interesting (i.e., task meaningfulness, meaningfulness), believe that he can complete the task successfully (e.g., self-efficacy, competence), and feel his learning environment is safe and challenging (i.e., positive environmental perception). None of this definitively implies that the student is empowered, however, because only competence and meaningfulness are present in this scenario, while impact and choice are absent. According to K. W. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) all four components need to be present for an individual to feel empowered.

In a second scenario, a student in a different class feels that a particular math task is interesting, that she can complete the assignment successfully, and that her learning environment is safe and challenging. Additionally, this student is empowered to learn because she was able to choose the math task, how she learned the math material, how she presented her learning, or who she worked with to complete the math task. Further, she felt that choosing to successfully complete the task positively impacted her ability to continue to be successful in her math class and even in her future math classes. This seems to suggest that students can be motivated to learn without being empowered; however, students are not empowered simply by virtue of being motivated. Further, while meaningfulness is implied in the "task meaningfulness" component of the AOM and competence is implied in the "self-efficacy" component of the AOM, choice and impact are not explicitly included in the model. Perhaps, choice and impact could enhance the motivational constructs in the AOM and increase the likelihood that students will self-regulate, engage, and achieve in their learning. The findings of this study may support this supposition, primarily in that students themselves defined empowerment as including aspects of choice and impact, two dimensions not specifically included in the conception of motivation in the AOM.

As further support for this supposition, in the exploration of Research Questions 1 and 2, students were asked to respond to questions about the power dynamics in their high school classrooms and the impact of those dynamics on their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment. The terms empowered, engaged, and motivated were all used when describing the influence the various school-related factors had on them. In the exploration of Research Question 3, students were asked to elaborate on

other factors that influenced their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment. As discussed in Chapter 4, these other factors were, in effect, a combination of personal factors and additional factors situated outside of the classroom environment. As students spoke about these factors and how they impacted them, they repeatedly used the terms motivated and engaged. However, the students did not once use the term "empowered" when discussing this research question.

In reflecting on this evidence, the absence of the term empowered in this context may make sense. As students discussed the ideas in Research Question 3, they were often elaborating on factors that encouraged them to keep doing what was asked of them in their classrooms even when the particular learning environment was not necessarily meeting their affective or academic needs. Students spoke of being able to find meaning in a task via means such as connecting it to a personal, long-term goal. In these situations, if students were in some way able to generate meaning for the school-related task (i.e., task meaningfulness, meaningfulness), felt they could accomplish it (i.e., self-efficacy, competence), and even believed that within the classroom there was support and the expectation of success (i.e., environmental perception), they may have been able to feel engaged and motivated to accomplish the task without feeling empowered. If, according to K. W. Thomas and Velthouse (1990), choice and impact along with meaningfulness and competence are all needed in order for someone to feel empowered, the absence of choice and impact would preclude a sense of empowerment. Because students were discussing factors outside of the classroom, it is unlikely that any of those factors were able to significantly influence the degree of impact or the amount of choice within the classroom, and therefore, may not have been able to positively influence

students' sense of empowerment in that setting. The fact that these gifted students still spoke of being motivated to achieve, may mean that high levels of task meaningfulness (i.e., meaningfulness), self-efficacy (i.e., competence), and positive environmental perception were present but that the dimensions of impact and choice were missing from the classroom environment.

Self-determination theory. A theory of motivation relevant to the discussion of gifted students, which contains aspects of empowerment and the AOM, is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Self-Determination Theory is concerned with the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008b), which, according to this theory, develops when an individual experiences a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence in SDT is basically synonymous with competence in K. W. Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) conceptualization of empowerment and with self-efficacy in the AOM. Autonomy is defined as acting from freedom of choice congruent with a sense of self (Deci and Ryan, 2008b) and therefore, is closely related to the definition of choice in the concept of empowerment. Relatedness in SDT is defined as a sense of belonging or a need to connect with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While this component of SDT was not explicitly delineated in the conception of either the AOM or empowerment, the idea of connections was clearly evident in the responses of the gifted students in this study.

Connections

An interesting finding in the current study was the importance of connections and the relationship of that concept to motivation and empowerment. The gifted students in this study talked about how vitally important connections were in relation to each of the

three research questions. In fact, the idea of connections surfaced again and again in different contexts. Students spoke of five different types of connections that influenced their motivation and sense of empowerment: (a) connections to teachers, (b) connections to peers, (c) connections to learning, (d) connections to self, and (e) connections to home and community.

Rather than a theme specific to a single research question, it seemed that connections were more of an umbrella under which motivation and empowerment occurred. These students felt motivated and empowered in classes where they felt connected to their teachers, their peers, and their learning. Connections to teachers occurred when students felt understood and supported by teachers they genuinely liked or when they identified with a particular teacher in some way. Connections to peers happened when students felt part of a community within the classroom and/or when they were able to have quality interactions with other students who they believed cared as much as they did, were willing to work as hard as they were, and were equally committed to a quality outcome. They also spoke of feeling connected to peers who shared a common passion. (The students in this study frequently used the word "passion.") The way in which the students in this study spoke of connections was very similar to the concept of relatedness in SDT.

Connections to learning included connections to content either because teachers were able to help make the content meaningful for students or because the students brought their own passion for the content to the classroom. This overall need for connections may be tied to the characteristics of gifted students. For example, one of the key characteristics of gifted students is their propensity for intensity (Silverman, 1993).

This intensity often manifests as a desire and capacity for deep relationships with individuals and is also associated with a "passion for learning" (Silverman, 1993, p. 63).

Throughout the two weeks of the summer program, the students in this study evinced a deep understanding of themselves as learners, or connections to self. All 29 of the students, at some point, talked about their passions, strengths, preferences, and/or their future goals. This connection to self influenced what they found to be meaningful and the decisions they made. It was also often enough to sustain their motivation to succeed in challenging or discouraging circumstances. Again, this seems to relate to the characteristics of many gifted students, whose intellectual curiosity often extends to a fascination with and "curios[ity] about their own psychological makeup" (Silverman, 1993, p. 55). Gifted students are also often very analytical thinkers. "When that incisive intellect is focused inward… acute self-awareness ensues" (Silverman, 1993, p. 65). Additionally, there were students for whom connections to family and connections to other people (or to organizations) in their community served as sources of motivation in the classroom. Again these connections are associated with the concept of relatedness. The powerful influence of these students' connections to family and others in their communities could partly be the result of the ability of many gifted students to relate to the experience of others because of a highly developed sense of empathy (Silverman, 1993).

Connections to peers, teachers, content, and self were more likely to occur in upper level content courses (e.g. Advanced Placement classes, Spanish III) or in elective courses (e.g., Dance IV, Chamber Choir, Game Design, Theatre). In these settings students reported more opportunities to work with students who had similar interests and

were equally committed to the process and the product, and they felt that teachers were often more willing to share power with them in these classes. Additionally, these were usually classes they had *chosen* to take, and they often focused on topics about which students already had an intense interest. Students frequently reported that these were their favorite classes and that the teachers of these courses were their favorite teachers. This finding is somewhat supported by prior research that indicates that, when compared to other classes, AP courses offer a better fit as far as intellectual engagement and challenge (Colangelo et al., 2004; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Van Tassel-Baska, 2001). This need for mental stimulation in the form of intellectual engagement and challenge is also a characteristic often indicative of giftedness (Silverman, 1993).

There were, however, a few distinctly different responses in regard to AP. For example, Jon's (see Tables 2 & 3) least favorite course was AP Human Geography because he felt there was too much busy work that was not relevant, applicable, or meaningful (OQ, July 12, 2016). Similarly, Diamond's least favorite class was AP World History because the information was covered too quickly and she wasn't able to obtain the level of understanding she preferred (OQ, July 12, 2016). AP United States History was Hugo's least favorite class because he "didn't really feel passionate about the subject" (OQ, July 12, 2016).

While many states report that AP courses comprise the whole of their gifted education programs, for Jon, Diamond, and Hugo, AP did not meet their intellectual needs, and therefore, could not be considered an appropriate programming option in and of itself. In all of their examples, some level of connection to learning was absent, and

this impacted how motivated these students were to engage in the AP courses. While some gifted students' engagement and motivation may be enhanced through the different types of connections possible in AP courses (e.g., to content, to peers, to teachers), based on this finding, this does not seem to be the case for all gifted students. This is supported by Callahan and colleagues' (2013) assertion that AP classes alone do not meet the needs of all gifted students. However, since AP is what high schools use most for gifted programming, AP teachers have a responsibility to embed differentiated learning opportunities that connect to gifted students' interests, identity, learning styles, and future goals (i.e., connections to self). Based on the findings of this and other studies (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Ritchotte & Graefe, in press; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012), these additional opportunities for connections may increase the likelihood that gifted students will be motivated to engage and achieve.

In general, the more areas in which the students in this study felt connected, the more motivated and empowered they were. When connections were lacking, the students' motivation and sense of empowerment decreased. As stated earlier, this aligns with prior research on the important role connections play in keeping gifted students engaged in their learning (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Ritchotte & Graefe, in press; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

Implications for Educators

Based on the findings from this study, there are potential implications for educators. Developing and maintaining connections have repeatedly been shown to be important to gifted students (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Ritchotte & Graefe, in press; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012) and may play a significant role in moving these students

toward being intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The gifted students in this study spoke about their desire for connections to teachers, peers, self, learning, and home/community. When they had these connections, they reported positive outcomes, including increased learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment. This suggests that teachers should be aware of the potential positive impact of these connections and to provide as many opportunities as possible to nurture and enhance them within the classroom.

Additionally, although some teachers believe that gifted students do not necessarily need their assistance in achieving their full potential (NAGC, n.d.-c) and other teachers even report feeling threatened by the presence of gifted students in their classrooms (Tomlinson et al., 1996), based on the findings in this study, teachers should be aware that gifted students value that teacher-student relationship. The gifted students in this study also valued when teachers had expertise but still acknowledged and validated their perspectives, allowing opportunities for choice and control.

One recommendation, based on the findings in this study, is to share this information with pre-service and current teachers. Not only is it important for them to have training regarding the academic and affective characteristics of gifted students and the learning needs associated with these characteristics, it also seems necessary that they are aware of the importance and impact of different types of meaningful connections in engaging, motivating, and empowering gifted high school students. The gifted students in this study wanted to be heard by their teachers and to share the responsibility for their own learning in the classroom. It seems that a natural first step toward creating

connections that would increase the likelihood of these outcomes might be simply to ask the students when and why they feel motivated and empowered during the school day.

Further, while these students spend the majority of their day in the classroom, ideally, there would also be other resources in place in the form of gifted education specialists, counselors, administrators, and/or other school personnel who understand the intellectual, social-emotional, and learning needs of gifted students. These individuals could provide support for teachers in meeting gifted students' needs and additional support to students, including helping them learn how to appropriately advocate for their own needs in the classroom.

Finally, a contribution of this research is the finding that suggests motivation and empowerment may not be the same construct. Although teachers should certainly want their students to be motivated learners, this research calls into question whether this is enough. In other words, if students are motivated predominately by grades, for example, should "passing" classes take precedence over learning? Don't we, as educators, want our students to want to learn and to feel like learning is not only a priority but possible at their schools? Empowerment through choice and opportunities to complete tasks that are impactful may hold the key to unlocking gifted students' love of learning and helping them become lifelong autonomous learners (Betts & Kercher, 1999).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of this study is that the sample was taken exclusively from gifted high school students attending a summer leadership program. While there was some diversity within this sample, the majority of the participants were students who identified as "White," whose primary home language was English, and whose parents reported mid-

to upper-socioeconomic statuses (SES; three of the interviewees reported income in the lower-mid to low-SES ranges). Regionally, although students attended from eight different states, 22 of the 29 students were from different towns within the same state (5 different states were represented by the interviewees). Additionally, the fact that these students were interested in and had been selected to participate in the leadership program may mean that their perspectives differ somewhat from gifted students who would not have met the qualifications or did not have the desire to attend. Future research is needed to expand this research to a more diverse population of gifted students.

A second limitation is the retrospective nature of the study. Students were asked to report their recollection of different types of power dynamics and the impact those dynamics had on their learning, engagement, motivation and sense of empowerment. Future research might include an outside observer recording examples of power dynamics within the classroom, including the various types of teacher power utilized. This information could then be triangulated with teachers' reported use of power and with gifted students' perceptions of teacher power and its impact on their learning, engagement, motivation, and sense of empowerment.

Future research could also systematically examine the impact of classroom interventions on gifted students' attitudes about learning at the high school level. It seems beneficial to attempt to determine specific strategies that teachers could implement that have the potential to positively influence gifted students' motivation and sense of empowerment. While it is unclear at this point what those potential strategies would be, a first step might be for researchers to interview gifted students and their teachers to determine what strategies have already been successful in meeting those objectives and if

they differ depending upon whether the student is an elementary, a middle, or a high school gifted student.

Conclusion

Research on the topics of motivation for and empowerment of gifted students is timely and relevant. Past research has indicated that gifted students who feel motivated are more likely to achieve at a level commensurate with their ability (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). When gifted students are not engaged and motivated, there is the possibility that they will withdraw from the educational environment, never fully reaching their potential (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Ritchotte & Graefe, in press; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). Student disengagement is already an issue in schools (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). This issue may be further complicated for gifted students who often do not have programming options available to meet their unique affective and intellectual needs (Farkas & Duffett, 2008; Henley et al., 2010) and whose teachers do not have the training necessary to recognize these needs and to be able to make the necessary educational modifications within the classroom (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; NAGC, 2015; Purcell & Leppien, 1998; Tomlinson et al., 1996).

Based on the results of this study, it seems that engagement and motivation may also be impacted by the power dynamics within the classroom, including the way in which teachers choose to utilize power. It also seems as though the concept of empowerment, although closely related to motivation, may be qualitatively different but still similarly impacted by power dynamics. By better understanding both the similarities of and the differences between motivation and empowerment, researchers and teachers may be able to enhance the educational experiences and achievement of gifted students.

Ultimately, it is important for educators to realize the significant impact the climate they create and encourage within their classrooms has on their gifted learners and to take steps to make it as motivating and empowering as possible.

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APPENDIX A

OPINION QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant # _____

Opinion Questionnaire

1. What has been your **favorite** class so far in high school and why?

    - What grade were you in?

2. What has been your **least favorite** class so far in high school and why?

    - What grade were you in?

3. Who has been your **favorite** teacher so far in high school and why? (For example, "My Chemistry teacher because.…" or "My Algebra II teacher because…"- don't use names.)

    - What grade were you in?

4. Who has been your **least favorite** teacher so far in high school and why? (For example, "My Chemistry teacher because.…" or "My Algebra II teacher because…"- don't use names.)

    - What grade were you in?

5. In what types of learning situations do you feel you have the **most choice** and/or **control** and why? (For example, when I work alone on a project or essay, in my AP Literature discussion groups, when teachers are presenting information to the

entire class, when teachers put us in groups for projects in my US History class, when I am being assessed on what I have learned in math, etc…)

6. In what types of learning situations do you feel you have the **least choice** and/or **control** and why?

7. What learning situations make you feel the **most competent** and **capable** and why?

8. What learning situations make you feel the **least competent** and **capable** and why?

9. What types of learning situations are **most meaningful** to you and why (either in general, or you can share a specific example)?

10. What types of learning situations are **least meaningful** to you and why (either in general, or you can share a specific example)?

11. In what types of learning situations do you feel you have made the **biggest impact** on the class?

12. In what types of learning situations do you feel you have made the **least impact** on the class?

APPENDIX B

LEARNER EMPOWERMENT MEASURE

My **Favorite/Least Favorite** High School Class So Far is_____

Grade in High School at the Time_____ Letter Grade in that Class_____

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Occasionally/ Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Very Often

1	I had a choice in the methods I could use to perform my work.	0	1	2	3	4
2	I had the opportunity to contribute to the learning of others in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
3	I felt unable to do the work in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
4	I possessed the necessary skills to perform successfully in class.	0	1	2	3	4
5	I had faith in my ability to do well in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
6	My participation was important to the success of this class.	0	1	2	3	4
7	This class was boring.	0	1	2	3	4
8	This class was not important to me.	0	1	2	3	4
9	The information in this class was useful.	0	1	2	3	4
10	I had the opportunity to make important decisions in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
11	I made a difference in the learning that went on in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
12	This class was exciting.	0	1	2	3	4
13	I had the power to make a difference in how things were done in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
14	I had no freedom to choose in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
15	This course will help me achieve my future goals.	0	1	2	3	4
16	My contribution to this class made no difference.	0	1	2	3	4
17	The tasks required in this course were a waste of my time.	0	1	2	3	4
18	I had the qualifications to succeed in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
19	I had freedom to choose among options in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
20	The tasks required of me in this class were valuable to me.	0	1	2	3	4
21	I could make an impact on the way things were run in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
22	I felt confident that I could adequately perform my duties.	0	1	2	3	4
23	I felt appreciated in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
24	I believed that I was capable of achieving my goals in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
26	I had the power to create a supportive learning environment in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
27	I felt intimidated by what was required of me in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
28	I couldn't influence what happened in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
29	This class was interesting.	0	1	2	3	4
30	I could influence the instructor.	0	1	2	3	4
31	I lacked confidence in my ability to perform the tasks in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
32	The tasks required of me in this class were personally meaningful.	0	1	2	3	4
33	I looked forward to going to this class.	0	1	2	3	4
34	I felt very competent in this class.	0	1	2	3	4
35	I could determine how tasks could be performed.	0	1	2	3	4
36	Alternative approaches to learning were encouraged in this class.	0	1	2	3	4

Questions or Comments About Statements (Optional)

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APPENDIX C

SELECTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for All Students

1. What has been your experience with gifted and/or advanced programming in school?

2. Are there certain "types" of classes or learning situations that usually meet your learning needs?

    - If so, what are they, and why/how do they meet your needs?
    - How frequently have you had classes like that in high school?

3. Are there certain "types" of classes that usually don't meet your learning needs?

    - If so, what are they, and why don't they meet your learning needs?
    - How frequently have you had classes like that in high school?

4. Heard you heard the term "empowered" before?

    - If so, how would you define it?
    - What would it mean for you to be an empowered learner?
    - How often do you feel that way?
    - How does feeling empowered in a class impact you?

5. In the context of your high school classes, how would you define power?

    - Who has the power in your classes?
    - Is there a difference in how you respond in classes based on who has the power?
    - Is there a difference in how you respond in classes based on how the teacher uses her/his power?

APPENDIX D

GUARDIAN DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Guardian Demographic Questions

Requested Demographic Information (for background information on research setting; all information will be kept confidential):

Total Number in Household ____

Parent/Guardian 1: M / F

Highest level of education of parent/guardian 1

- ☐ Did not attend school
- ☐ Elementary school
- ☐ Junior high/middle school
- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ Graduated from high school or equivalent
- ☐ At least some college
- ☐ Graduated from 2-year college/vocational school
- ☐ Graduated from 4-year college
- ☐ At least some graduate school
- ☐ Completed graduate school
- ☐ Prefer not to respond

Parent/Guardian 2: M / F

Highest level of education of parent/guardian 2

- ☐ Did not attend school
- ☐ Elementary school
- ☐ Junior high/middle school
- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ Graduated from high school or equivalent
- ☐ At least some college
- ☐ Graduated from 2-year college/vocational school
- ☐ Graduated from 4-year college
- ☐ At least some graduate school
- ☐ Completed graduate school
- ☐ Prefer not to respond

Guardian Demographic Questions Continued

Child's Ethnicity (Please choose one):

- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Not Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer

Child's Race (Please choose at least one):

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer

In what area(s) has your child been identified as gifted?

- ☐ Intellectual
- ☐ Academic, specifically _____
- ☐ Creativity
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Visual Arts
- ☐ Performing Arts
- ☐ Psychomotor
- ☐ Identified but don't know in what area
- ☐ Not formally identified
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer

APPENDIX E

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Student Demographic Information

Participant # _____

Name to use instead of real name (pseudonym) _____
Age ___
Grade ___
Sex ___

Race/Ethnicity: Please choose at least one:
__Hispanic/Latino
__White
__Black or African American
__Asian
__American Indian or Alaskan Native
__Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
__Prefer not to respond

How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____ brothers _____ sisters

How many people live in your house? _____

With whom do you live?
___Mom
___Dad
___Other: _____
___Prefer not to respond

First Parent's/Guardian's job
_____ Sex: M/F
___Prefer not to respond

Second Parent's/Guardian's job
_____ Sex: M/F
___Prefer not to respond

Do your parents usually speak a language other than English at home? Y/N
If yes, which one? _____
___Prefer not to respond

Student Demographic Information Continued

Approximately how many total books does your family currently have in your home?
___none
___1-10
___11-50
___51-100
___101-250
___more than 250
___Prefer not to respond

How close is your nearest public library?
___less than 10 miles
___10-20 miles
___more than 20 miles
___don't know

In what state are you attending high school? _____

What class/size is your high school (for example, 3A)? _____

About how many total students are in your class (junior or senior)? _____

Current GPA _____ (approximate if you're not sure)
___Prefer not to respond

I have been identified as gifted in the following category/categories:
___intellectual
___academic (list specific
area(s):_____)
___creativity
___leadership
___visual arts
___performing arts
___identified but don't know in what area
___not formally identified
___Prefer not to respond

Letter grade in favorite class last year _____ What was the class?
_____
___Prefer not to respond

Letter grade in least favorite class last year _____ What was the class?
_____
___Prefer not to respond

Student Demographic Information Continued

During my high school career, I have participated in/experienced:
___exams/assessments
___honors classes
___AP or IB classes
___independent study
___online classes
___online class activities or blended learning (combination of in-class and online)
___essay writing
___individual presentations
___debate
___community service activities/projects
___group activities (such as
_____)
___group presentations
___discussion groups (3-5 people)
___Socratic seminars or larger group discussions
___individual project work
___project work in groups
___other_____
__

How many times a week, on average, during the last school year did you participate in group work in class? ___less than one ___1-3 ___4-5 ___more than 5

How many years did you attend SEP?

Including this year, how many years have you attended LEP?

How is your SEP/LEP usually paid for? For example, parents, other family member, school, job…

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	May 4, 2016
TO:	Amy Graefe, M.A., Ed.S.
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[891241-1] Gifted High School Students' Perceptions of Empowerment
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	May 4, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE:	May 4, 2017
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 4, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Amy -

Thank you for your patience with the IRB process. Your application is very thorough and clear. This research is interesting and worthwhile.

Please make the following two small changes before using these forms in your research protocols:

1) Parent consent form - please amend the last sentence before signatures so it correctly notes to contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, in the Office of Sponsored Programs.....and change the phone number to 970-351-1910.

2) Assent form - please consider letting students know that their participation in this study is voluntary (I would recommend you add the specific paragraph to the assent form to ensure students know they will not be penalized for either starting and then stopping or for not even starting).

These small revisions do not need to be submitted for futher review. Once revised, your materials and protocols are approved and you may proceed with participant recruitment and data collection.

Best wishes with your research and please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX G

LETTER TO FAMILIES

Dear Families,

I am currently collecting information on gifted/high-potential high school students' perceptions of power dynamics within their classrooms. Specifically, I'm interested in the degree to which gifted high school students feel empowered in their classes and the impact this has on their engagement. If you grant permission, and if your child indicates a willingness to participate, s/he will complete a brief questionnaire and then possibly be selected to participate in a 30-40 minute interview that will take place outside of structured leadership program activities. Depending on the number of participants and the students' schedules during the leadership program, the interview may take place one-on-one or in a small focus group.

I will also be taking notes on thoughts about this subject that are shared in the leadership program class discussions and may use examples of student reflections or journal entries if it is okay with them. Students' real names will not be used when sharing information obtained, and students may request that any information shared in discussions and/or journal entries/reflections not be included in the data collection.

I've enclosed a consent form, which contains additional information about the research project. If you would be okay with your child participating in this research study, please initial page 1, sign page 2, and either mail, email, or fax the form back to me (see below). I've also included an assent form for your child to sign, but I will explain the study in person to them once they arrive at the leadership program and make sure they are still willing to participate.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I'm looking forward to a great two weeks with your child.

~Amy

Amy Graefe, Coordinator
Center for the Education & Study of Gifted, Talented, Creative Learners

amy.graefe@unco.edu
970-351-1061 (fax)

University of Northern Colorado
Campus Box 141
Greeley, CO 80631

APPENDIX H

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Gifted High School Students' Perceptions of Empowerment
Researcher: Amy Graefe, Ed.S., School of Psychological Sciences
Phone Number: [redacted] E-mail: amy.graefe@unco.edu
Research Advisor: Dr. Kathy Cochran, School of Psychological Sciences
Phone Number: [redacted] E-mail: kathryn.cochran@unco.edu

I am one of your child's leadership program teachers this year and am researching gifted/high-potential, high school students' perceptions of the power dynamics within their classrooms. Specifically, I'm interested in the degree to which gifted high school students feel empowered within their classes and the impact this has on their engagement. If you grant permission, and if your child indicates to us a willingness to participate through providing assent, s/he will complete a brief questionnaire, which will take approximately 5 minutes to complete, short responses to a few questions, and then possibly be selected to participate in a 30-40 minute audio recorded interview. Depending on the number of participants and the students' schedules during the leadership program, the interview may take place one-on-one or in a small focus group of approximately 3-6 students.

The questionnaire contains 35 Likert-scale statements such as "I can make an impact on the way things are run in class." Short written response and interview questions will ask students to expand on answers in the questionnaire and to reflect on specific experiences they have had.

I will also be taking notes on thoughts about this subject that are shared by students in the leadership program class discussions and may use examples of student reflections or journal entries if it is okay with them. Students' real names will not be used when sharing information obtained, and students may request that any information shared in discussions and/or journal entries/reflections not be included in the data collection. I may also pull descriptive data from students' leadership program applications, including teacher recommendations and student essays. Again students' real names will not be used.

I foresee no risks to the students beyond those that are normally encountered in a classroom setting. The statements on the questionnaire are straightforward and should be easy to understand, and the interview questions are designed to explore students' thoughts and opinions, so there are no right or wrong answers.

I plan to audiotape the interviews so I can listen to them in more detail at a later time. Portions of students' responses may be selected to share with others in order to provide examples of students' feelings/opinions regarding power dynamics in their classrooms. To help maintain confidentiality, computer files of students' responses to the questionnaire and interview will be created and students' names will be replaced by numerical identifiers or pseudonyms. The names of students will not appear in any professional report of this research.

Please feel free to email or call me if you have any questions or concerns about this research and please retain one copy of this letter for your records. Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Amy Graefe

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, in the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

_____ _____

Child's Full Name (please print) Child's Birth Date (month/day/year)

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX I

ASSENT FORM

ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Hi! My name is Amy Graefe, and I am one of your leadership program teachers this year. I am currently doing research on gifted/high-potential students' perceptions of power dynamics in their schools and would be very interested in your thoughts and opinions. I'll want to know things such as in what situations you have choice during your day, what learning situations you prefer, and how these aspects of your school day affect your motivation. If you are willing to assist me, I will ask you to fill out a 35-item questionnaire, which will take approximately 5-10 minutes, and answer some questions in writing, which will take about 5-10 minutes longer. I will then choose a few students for a brief (probably 30-40 minutes) interview during a time that works well with your leadership program schedule. Depending on your schedule, and depending upon the number of students who complete the questionnaire, we might meet one-on-one or in a small focus group of about 3-6 students. I am planning to audiotape your interview so that I can review it in more detail later. I may pull out portions of your interview to share with others, but I won't use your real names. I'm going to take notes during our leadership program time together and may ask if you're willing to share information from your journals that relate to empowerment. I may also pull descriptive data from your leadership program application, teacher recommendation, and essay. Again, I won't use your real names if I choose to share any of the information (be thinking about a pseudonym you might like me to use instead of your real name).

There are no right or wrong answers to either the questionnaire or the interview questions—I'm truly just interested in your perceptions and high school experiences. Again, your real names won't be used for any information that is shared with others, and if you share something in a discussion, reflection, or interview and decide you don't want me to use it, you can just let me know.

Working with me on this project probably won't help you and shouldn't hurt you in any way, but your responses will contribute to the information available to teachers about meeting the educational needs of high-potential/gifted students. Your parents have given permission for you to participate, but the decision is up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you may stop at any time.

Again, participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study, and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and won't affect your leadership program experience in any way. If you would be willing to participate in my research and share your thoughts and feelings about the power dynamics in your classes and when you most feel empowered during your school day, please sign and date below. Thanks!

Amy Graefe, Coordinator
Center for the Education & Study of Gifted, Talented, Creative Learners
University of Northern Colorado
amy.graefe@unco.edu

Student Name	Student Signature	Date

Researcher Signature	Date