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Overcoming Gifted Student Underachievement Through Teacher Best Practices

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OVERCOMING GIFTED STUDENT UNDERACHIEVEMENT THROUGH TEACHER BEST PRACTICES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

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For Granny - proof that you can be a hardworking woman and an incredible mother.

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To Chase - none of this would be possible without your willingness and dedication to picking up the slack. I had the time because you took care of everything I'd be doing otherwise. Thank you for understanding this lifelong goal of mine and ensuring nothing would stand in the way of making it happen. I love you.

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Lastly, to our teachers - you are the most creative, caring, determined, and persevering people. This body of work is proof that NOTHING you do is done in vain. Together, we've proven that we have to know and love our kids to ensure they can blossom into the best versions of themselves. Days are long and sometimes thankless but I hope that this study is one small way of proving to the world that the work of a gifted and talented teacher is pure brilliance and worth every bit of the blood, sweat, and tears. I pray that this opens the door for educators everywhere to receive the recognition and validation that they so desperately deserve.

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to collect the best practices being utilized by gifted teachers affecting change amongst their gifted underachieving students. Data collected will explore trends deemed significant among the successful best practices being utilized by academically gifted certified teachers.

The researcher will administer surveys, conduct interviews, and classroom observations to collect data from a sample of participants who are currently employed as academically gifted certified teachers. This study will focus on these academically gifted certified teacher's definitions and recognition of underachievement, identified causes for underachievement, best practices employed to re-engage underachieving students, as well as perceptions of student success.

Results of this study will allow gifted teachers a marketplace of ideas to utilize when faced with the necessity of intervention for gifted underachieving students.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

When educators think of gifted students there is a universally held misconception that the population is high performing students that are eager to learn and achieve. Those teaching or raising gifted students know that this is certainly not always the case.

An article written by Joan Smutney, “Meeting the needs of gifted underachievers – individually!” refers to a “quiet crisis” among gifted students. This quiet crisis is commonly referred to as “gifted underachievement”. Many gifted students are not performing at the levels on which they are capable. This is an epidemic that remains quiet perhaps because many do not speak up on behalf of their students or because sometimes this underperforming goes unnoticed or overlooked. Smutney refers to the National Commission of Excellence in Education conducting a study that concluded that about half of all gifted students do not perform well academically. (Smutney, 2004).

The needs of many underachieving gifted students are not being met as educators are unsure of how to approach this struggle. There are many complex layers to defining gifted underachievement, the causes for a student underachieving, and ways to elicit hard work in gifted students. And while there is an abundance of research that has determined the various causes of gifted underachievement, there is much to be desired with regards to how classroom teachers can help underachieving students perform to the best of their abilities.

Purpose of this Study

Gifted teachers have a large volume of work on their plate. With current research merely suggesting theories to consider when working with gifted underachievers rather than concrete

best practices gifted teachers are left to try what they think may work or ignore the issue, continuing to perpetuate the problem.

There are gifted teachers, through trial and error efforts, making a difference in their classrooms. Much of this is done on small scales not through controlled research though their findings and best practices will not be found in scholarly journals. The purpose of this study is to document those strategies used by teachers of the gifted found to be successful in inspiring achievement amongst their struggling students.

This study will focus on collecting the best practices being utilized by gifted teachers affecting change amongst their gifted underachieving students. Determining trends among successful best practices will allow gifted teachers a place to start when determining ways to intervene with gifted underachieving students.

Setting

This study takes place in southern Louisiana in a large public school system that is made up of 47 school sites and approximately 32,000 students. The Department of Special Education in this district houses the Gifted & Talented program where approximately 1,700 students are provided services. Those gifted students have a choice between two programs - the academics program and the enrichment program.

This district's academics program offers accelerated and compacted curriculum in all content areas, utilizing gifted strategies to differentiate instruction and provide enrichment with targeted gifted skills being incorporated in academic instruction. There are two sites for elementary school academics, one for middle school academics, and one for high school academics. Students are transported to their designated site to receive services. The academics

program begins in the first grade as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students may receive enrichment services.

The district's middle and high school academics programs take on a magnet school type structure, where students who qualify can take courses in language, math, science, and social studies while taking electives through the regular education curriculum. The high school academics program also offers several advanced placement and college preparatory opportunities.

The enrichment program in this district provides services to gifted students while remaining at their neighborhood schools from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. In this scenario, students can receive services from a gifted enrichment teacher from four to six hours per week. Lessons in enrichment classes supplement the regular classroom with higher level thinking skills. Activities requiring critical and creative thinking might take the form of creative writing, art, research, leadership, logic, problem solving, literature analysis, or cultural exposure.

Students from grades pre-kindergarten through fourth grade are taught at their home zone schools while students in fifth through eighth grades attend an enrichment site one day per week to provide them an opportunity to learn with students from across the district.

Significance

The findings of this study will redound to benefit gifted education considering the detriment of the effects of underachievement in gifted students and teachers. The social/emotional well being of gifted students is one of the largest determinants in their learning due to the function of the gifted brain. Psychosocial conditions are paramount to the success of a gifted student which includes their ability to perform on the level in which they are capable. Not

only will gifted teachers have more information on underachievement, they will see concrete, effective approaches to overcoming gifted underachievement for their students.

The application of these findings has the potential to influence the classroom environment, reactions to student behavior, lesson planning, curriculum building, as well as individual student-teacher relationships. Through the findings of this research gifted educators have the opportunity to choose from proven strategies that will assist in the timeliness of their reaction to this critical issue, taking less time than trying to apply suggested theories.

The development of a classroom and/or school culture may be influenced by the findings of this study through their application in the organization of the classroom management plan, behavior incentives, or student engagement strategies. Administrators of gifted students will have the opportunity to support the practices of gifted teachers in an area that was previously less clear and potentially confusing for those less familiar with this population.

Future researchers can benefit from this study as a foundation for globally conducted research on gifted teachers' best practices and their effect on gifted underachievement. Larger studies can be conducted in different gifted settings, determining possible cultural influences as well as the influences of the varied services provided through gifted education. Collecting data from larger samples could also provide more significant findings.

Research Questions

- 1) How do academically gifted certified teachers define underachievement in their students?
- 2) How do academically gifted certified teachers identify underachieving students?
- 3) What strategies do academically gifted certified teachers utilize to overcome underachievement in the classroom?

- 4) What do academically gifted certified teachers use to measure success in their underachieving gifted students?

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms are stated to assist in the understanding of this study.

Gifted Students. According to the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) these are students with gifts and talents who perform—or have the capability to perform—at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential (NAGC, 2022).

Academically gifted certified teachers. Those teachers who have obtained a master’s degree in teaching gifted students or who have a master’s degree in education and have added-on required gifted courses to their existing teaching certificate. The following courses are required by the Louisiana Department of Education to obtain this certification:

- Characteristics of Gifted Individuals
- Methods of Teaching the Gifted
- Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted
- Creative Thinking or Problem Solving of the Gifted
- Educational Technology

Social-emotional needs. As defined by NAGC, “[g]ifted and talented students may have affective needs that include heightened or unusual sensitivity to self-awareness, emotions, and expectations of themselves or others, and a sense of justice, moral judgment, or

altruism. Counselors working in this area may address issues such as perfectionism, depression, low self-concept, bullying, or underachievement (NAGC, 2022).”

Acceleration. As defined by NAGC, acceleration is “A strategy of progressing through education at rates faster or ages younger than the norm. This can occur through grade skipping or subject acceleration (e.g., a fifth-grade student taking sixth-grade math) (NAGC, 2022).”

Individual Education Plan. According to NAGC, “an IEP is a document that delineates special education services for special-needs students. The IEP includes any modifications that are required in the regular classroom and any additional special programs or services. Federal law and the majority of states do not require IEPs for gifted learners (NAGC, 2022).” The state of Louisiana does consider giftedness an exceptionality requiring special education services and an IEP for qualifying students.

Gifted Setting. According to the Lafayette Parish Gifted Program the gifted setting refers to the type of setting from which gifted services are being provided - be it gifted academics or gifted enrichment

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

The federal definition of gifted and talented students is “those 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 and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (“Definitions of Giftedness”, n.d.).

It is the mission of the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) to “...support and develop policies and practices that encourage and respond to the diverse expressions of gifts and talents in children and youth from all cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. NAGC supports and engages in research and development, staff development, advocacy, communication, and collaboration with other organizations and agencies who strive to improve the quality of education for all students. (About NAGC, n.d.)” Among the ways that NAGC carries out its mission is the organization’s development of Pre-K to Grade 12 Programming Standards to guide gifted programming.

These NAGC Programming standards use “student outcomes for goals, rather than teacher practices, keeping them in line with the thinking in education standards generally. Because these standards are grounded in theory, research, and practice paradigms, they provide an important base for all efforts on behalf of gifted learners at all stages of development (Pre-K to Grade 12, 2019, p 1).” They are divided into six categories: Learning and Development, Assessment, Curriculum & Instruction, Learning Environments, Programming, Professional Learning. Each of these categories lists student outcomes and evidence-based practices to support them. Among these desired student outcomes are focuses on student self-understanding, high achievement, curriculum development, and professional development.

NAGC introduces Programming Standard 1: Learning and Development with the recommendation that “educators must understand the learning and developmental differences of students with gifts and talents (Pre-K to Grade 12, 2019)”. The introduction also calls attention to self-understanding as the need to “understand the cognitive development of students ... [and the] need to know about psychological and social and emotional needs that need to be addressed...(Pre-K to Grade 12, 2019, p 6).” The standards listed below reinforce the belief that there are many differences that must be addressed in gifted instruction in an effort for students to best understand the ways in which they learn.

1.1. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents recognize their interests, strengths, and needs in cognitive, creative, social, emotional, and psychological areas.

1.2. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of how they learn and recognize the influences of their identities, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and values on their learning and behavior.

1.3. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of and respect for similarities and differences between themselves and their cognitive and chronological peer groups and others in the general population.

NAGC Programming Standard 3 : Curriculum Planning and Instruction focuses on educators applying evidence-based curriculum and instruction by using a “repertoire of instructional strategies to ensure specific student outcomes and measurable growth...(Pre-K to Grade 12, 2019, p 10).” Student outcomes for this standard are as followed:

3.1. Curriculum Planning. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate academic growth commensurate with their abilities each school year.

3.2. Talent Development. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth in social and emotional and psychosocial skills necessary for achievement in their domain(s) of talent and/or areas of interest.

These programming standards and the linked student outcomes clearly suggest that students understanding his/herself and student growth/achievement are necessary components in a successful gifted program. While these standards set a focus on demonstrating understanding and high achievement/talent development there is no recommendation on how to best achieve these outcomes. In the programming standards, their corresponding introductions and evidence-based practices there is no mention of how to measure of growth, success, or reaching one's abilities nor is there a recommendation on what to do when a student does not perform to his/her abilities, commonly referred to as “underachievement”.

Through decades of research the definitions of gifted underachievement are still rather fluid. Gifted underachievement has approximately 15 definitions in scholarly literature that all include diverse acceptance of problematic tendencies and behaviors associated with the construct (Schultz, 2002).

The National Association of Gifted Children defines underachievement as “the unanticipated difference between accomplishment and ability.” In the article “The Underachievement of Gifted Students: What Do We Know and Where do We Go?” Sally Reis and D. Betsy McCoach (2000) determined that there are three general themes that have emerged from many of the definitions found in research. They are as followed:

1. Underachievement as a discrepancy between potential (or ability) and performance (or achievement)
2. Discrepancy between predicted achievement and actual achievement
3. Underachievement as a failure to develop or utilize latent potential without reference to other external criteria

With these themes in mind, the authors mentioned “one accepts the general premise that underachievement involves a discrepancy between ability and achievement... (Reis, McCoach, 2000)”. It is said that the definition is “in the eye of the beholder”, giving the research of this phenomena great challenges, as there are no true universally accepted definitions of underachievement.

One can recognize gifted underachievement through displayed behaviors and characteristics. According to Reis & McCoach (2000), the following are common characteristics of gifted underachievers:

PERSONALITY:

- Low self-esteem, low self-concept, low self-efficacy.
- Alienated or withdrawn; distrustful, or pessimistic.
- Anxious, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive or distractible; may exhibit ADD or ADHD symptoms.
- Aggressive, hostile, resentful, or touchy.
- Depressed.
- Passive-aggressive trait disturbance.
- More socially than academically oriented. May be extroverted. May be easygoing, considerate, or unassuming.

- Dependent, less resilient than high achievers.
- Socially immature.

INTERNAL MEDIATORS:

- Fear of failure; may avoid competition or challenging situations to protect self-image.
- Fear of success.
- Attribute successes or failures to outside forces; exhibit an external locus of control, attribute successes to luck and failures to lack of ability; externalize conflict and problems.
- Negative attitude toward school.
- Antisocial or rebellious.
- Self-critical or perfectionistic; feeling guilty about not living up to the expectations of others.

DIFFERENTIAL THINKING SKILLS/STYLES:

- Performs less well on tasks that require detail-oriented or convergent thinking skills than their achieving counterparts.
- Score lower on sequential tasks such as repeating digits, repeating sentences, coding, computation, and spelling.
- Lack insight and critical ability.

MALADAPTIVE STRATEGIES:

- Lack goal-directed behavior; fail to set realistic goals for themselves.
- Poor coping skills; develop coping mechanisms that successfully reduce short-term stress, but inhibit long-term success.

- Possess poor self-regulation strategies; low tolerance for frustration; lack of perseverance; lack self-control.
- Use defense mechanisms.

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES:

- Intense outside interests, commitment to self-selected work.
- Creative.
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity in rejecting unchallenging course work.

In reviewing this comprehensive list of traits/characteristics, one can see that there are many layers and dynamics affecting instruction of the gifted underachievers. There are many noticeable barriers to success that must be overcome in order to inspire success.

This leads to there being difficulty in determining how one can intervene best. This requires the researcher to understand how a participant in this study defines underachievement before determining that their methods or best practices are successful.

Up to this point, there are no interventions determined to be applicable to all cases of gifted underachievement. This is greatly attributed to the individual need of gifted students, but has also led to years and years of research on this topic. There are many factors known to contribute to cases of gifted underachievement that ultimately determine whether or not a type of intervention will result in success.

The National Association of Gifted Children's website suggests that "[u]nderachievement is a very complex situation with many possible interwoven causes. Among the areas to explore are:

- social issues such as peer pressure;
- psychological issues such as emotional sensitivities or perfectionism;

- undiagnosed learning disabilities;
- lack of interest in curriculum or curriculum is not challenging and engaging;
- low teacher expectations, especially with twice-exceptional, minority, and students from low-income backgrounds.

In “The Underachieving Gifted Child : recognizing, understanding, and reversing underachievement”, author Del Siegle discusses factors that he believes contribute to gifted underachievement. One of those factors was a lack of early achievement, suggesting that “students who experience lack of challenge and early academic success may come to expect perfection as the norm (Siegle, 2013).” This perfection causes a student to do one of two things - embrace challenges when they are presented or “avoid performing in order to save face - not trying means not failing in their eyes (Siegle, 2013).”

Many gifted students excel in the regular education setting, learning and absorbing content quickly and maintaining high marks without much effort prior to being identified as gifted. Once they begin receiving services, they are presented with more rigor and challenges, often creating a struggle that they are not accustomed to working through. It is believed that this causes students to shut down when transitioning into a gifted setting as it does not seem as fun or exciting because there is a fear of failure. (Siegle, 2013)

There is research supporting underachievement in the instance that there is a disconnect between a student and the curriculum being taught suggesting that if a student lacks interest in subject matter he or she will lack and desire to perform. This causes these high-ability students to become difficult to motivate. (Reis, McCoach, 2000)

In the 2012 article, “The Impact of Scripted Literacy Instruction on Teachers and Students”, Rosso Dresser addresses the negative impact of scripted curriculums on education.

Many school districts have adopted these programs as a way to comply with state and federal mandates. Teachers are said to feel powerless and overwhelmed as “they are often caught between what they are asked to do and what they know is right for their students (Dresser, 2012, p 71)”. It is even more problematic for teachers when they see that their students are not meeting their academic goals and are left to wonder if it is due to their needs as exceptional learners are not being met. Gifted teaching best practices have historically suggested that standards are taught through content chosen personally for their students. The IEP process has often paved the way for this process. However, many districts that lack insight about giftedness push against or discourage this practice, strongly encouraging teachers to use scripted curriculums. There is no guarantee that what has been written or what has been planned will include the interests of all students. (Rosser, 2012)

One factor that is said to contribute to gifted underachievement is that of pressure. Dr. Sylvia Rimm (2008) discusses these pressures - the pressure to be extraordinary, the pressure to be creative and the pressure to be popular. Gifted students often feel pressure to sound or look intelligent, but when self-expectations feel impossibly high, children may shut down or become distracted to avoid the possibility of them being unable to live up to those expectations. “These exercises in avoidance temporarily protect them from feeling inadequate but result in many problem behaviors, adversely affect self-confidence, and may, indeed, lead to underachievement (Rimm, 2008).

Rimm (2008) goes on to suggest that “[g]ifted and creative children internalize pressures easily”. These may cause school problems and mental health problems for them. Understanding these pressures is the first step to helping them use their capabilities.

Another factor that contributes to underachievement is a lack in “academic self-perception”, dealing with one’s perceived academic abilities. With gifted students often struggling with perfectionism, this could be crippling in terms of a discrepancy between one’s performance and one’s ability. Many gifted underachievers are said to be this way because of a poor attitude toward school and/or a poor attitude to teachers or peers.

It is believed that gifted students are more socially accepted in circles with like-minded peers. The maturity, interests, and functions of the gifted brain are vastly different from those of their regular education peers. Peer relationships or influence of peers can cause one to lack achievement. These situations could be ones in which a student was being negatively influenced by problematic peers or could be the result of teasing, bullying, or personality clashes.

Within the school setting it is often difficult to separate one’s self from problematic peers, causing this strain to be a persistent problem. Some have gone as far as suggesting that a gifted student would rather fail or perform poorly than stand out for being smart, causing them to purposefully perform poorly or below their capability. (McCoach, Siegle, 2003) Rimm (2008) suggests that gifted students “play down their intelligence” (Rimm, 2008) through their vocabulary or topics used to engage in conversations with their peers.

Up to this point, there are no interventions determined to be applicable to all cases of gifted underachievement. This is greatly attributed to the individual need of gifted students, but has also led to years and years of research on this topic. There is a great need to develop interventions for gifted underachievement, as these “unmotivated students may see no compelling reasons for becoming better students (Reis, McCoach. 2000)”. Many teachers of these underachieving students find them falling behind academically, performing poorly on

standardized tests, acting out in the classroom environment - impeding the learning process for their peers, and typically resulting in a lack of or recognition in self worth.

There is an abundance of empirical research that leads many to believe that the issue of underachievement has the potential to have a grave impact on these students' futures, as they could become unmanageable employees. (Berkowitz, Hoppe. 2009) So the overwhelming question being asked after researching this topic is how can we help these students reach their full potential?

Students who are labeled "gifted" often struggle with motivation more than the average student. Whitmore (1986) says "too often, for no apparent reason, students who show great academic promise fail to perform at a level commensurate with their previously documented abilities, frustrating both parents and teachers. Gifted teachers are often seeking ways to reach these students who are "underachieving" finding nothing concrete.

Michelle Rahal with Educational Research Service (ERS) wrote a "Focus On: Identifying and Motivating Underachievers" publication for ERS' Information for School Decisions series in order to shed some light on this topic. Much of it was written for practitioners and provides a great deal of insight on this persistent issue. One of the suggestions made in this literature was to "capitalize on intrinsic motivation (Rahal, 2010)". This notion validates the thinking of this researcher, though it still presents somewhat vague strategies for teachers. While it suggests that "students learn best when they have a choice in what they are learning and find the material interesting (Rahal, 2010)," it neglects to mention specific ways in which teachers can go about doing this.

The self-determination theory provides valuable insight to student motivation and suggests a variety of ways to engage students. According to Deci and Ryan (1985) the self-

determination theory is “concerned primarily with promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991)”. One way that this theory is different from others that is set to explain motivation is that it aims to address some psychological needs that are inherent to human life.

This theory focuses on three innate needs - the needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy (or self-determination). The need for competence is best explained by “understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991)”. Relatedness is described as developing “secure and satisfying connections with others in one’s social milieu (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991)”. Autonomy is simply being responsible for one’s actions through self-initiation and self-regulation. Teachers finding ways to satisfy these needs contribute to students being motivated.

Competence suggests that students should be provided with opportunities for both not only challenge but performance feedback. This valuable feedback supports the notion that intrinsic motivation occurs when a person experiences satisfaction from his/her performance. Through valid and applicable feedback a student can continue to engage in activities that they feel there is an opportunity for success. This is not to be confused with negative or critical feedback, as this can create a perceived failure, causing one to have a “lowered perceived competence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991)” and a feeling of helplessness.

Relatedness suggests that relationships are key to intrinsic motivation. This need of students can be critical as research suggests “when children are denied the interpersonal involvement they desire, they can lose intrinsic motivation (Anderson, Manoogian, & Reznick, 1976)”. Field studies have determined that children with more involved parents and teachers are more motivated and self-determined especially if there is evidence of the child’s autonomy.

The need for autonomy refers to a child's ability to have a voice in decision-making. The ways in which this could and/or should happen are obviously dependent upon the context. One suggestion is that of "student choice" in classwork products.

These three needs being met will result in a child being motivated intrinsically. Extrinsic motivators, according to this research, are short lived and do not produce a genuine desire to engage in activity. Extrinsic factors such as monetary reward or competitions have been found to decrease motivation as the reward or win eventually expires. (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991)

Another detriment of motivation is that of consequence. A student who is working to avoid a punishment or failure is not truly internally motivated. This type of external motivation will not last long, as once they have avoided the negative consequence; their intrinsic motivation is undermined and is seen as a way to be controlled rather than something to inspire hard work. (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991)

When gifted teachers seek solutions to this classroom struggle of students' lacking motivation they are often directed to pragmatic theories that aim to explain the reason for students' withdrawal. There is a lack of specific research in the world of gifted that is designated to suggest concrete solutions to this problem. It is the aim of this researcher to collect concrete strategies to suggest that classroom teachers utilize in creating an engaging environment.

Up until this point it has been the belief of this researcher that practices of youth development –such as determining the interests and strengths of students- could pose a potential solution. Now that a review of the self-determination theory has been conducted, it is evident that the "Essential Elements of Youth Development" are very closely related to the suggestions of the self-determination theory.

The “Essential Elements of Youth Development” suggest that any successful attempt at developing youth should include a balance of the following elements: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The 4-H Youth Development program employs these essential elements throughout their programming to ensure the success of their youth members. (White, Scanga, & Weybright, 2018)

The element of belonging is very similar to the self-determination theory’s relatedness. This is where 4-H suggests that there should be a relationship with a caring adult and mentor. This also suggests that groups can focus on ways to include all members of the group through the feeling of a safe and inclusive environment, one in which every member feels as though they belong. (White, Scanga, & Weybright, 2018)

The element of mastery is providing youth with opportunities to solve problems and meet goals, having the opportunity to experience success. This is much like the need of competence. All students should be able to experience some level of accomplishment and opportunity to master their learning. (White, Scanga, & Weybright, 2018)

The element of independence and autonomy go hand in hand as they both suggest that students should have the ability to influence their own decisions and actions. This builds responsibility and has the potential to have more buy-in from students, as they feel more motivated by work that they chose to complete. Washington State University Extension’s Development Frameworks about the Essential Elements suggests that this element is critical because it presents an opportunity for self-determination! (White, Scanga, & Weybright, 2018)

The last of the essential elements – generosity – is not as closely related to self-determination theory as the others. This element suggests that youth need an opportunity to show respect and concern in order to feel that their lives have meaning and purpose. Though this

element is not mentioned a great deal in the self-determination theory, it is obvious to the researcher that the incorporation of this element into the classroom or home is valuable as it can provide additional motivation for students to be of service to others and serve a greater purpose than their own.

One of the greatest contributors to gifted education, Dr. Joe Renzulli, focused on a rare topic in a speech recently asking, “[h]ow can gifted students be encouraged to become leaders who use their gifts to effect positive change?” It is believed that learning about student motivation and the use of leadership development practices as a way to intervene in gifted underachievement will prove to be impactful. There are mentions of the need to begin leadership development within the education setting in many gifted journals with respect to helping all gifted education students cultivate new skills, which this research can provide secondary to its main focus.

Stephen Covey developed the “Leader in Me”, an “evidence-based, social emotional learning process—developed in partnership with educators—that empowers students with the leadership and life skills they need to thrive in the 21st century”. Covey defined leadership as “communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves” (“The Leader Formula”, 2007). Covey developed “The Leader in Me” to improve student performance and behavior through a school-wide program based on his 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. It is described as an “innovative, schoolwide model that emphasizes a culture of student empowerment and helps unleash each child’s full potential. (Goble, et al., 2015)

According to The Leader in Me website, “our schools should not merely be focused on improving test scores, but should provide opportunities for students to develop their full

potential. The program emphasizes leadership, accountability, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, cross-cultural skills, responsibility, problem-solving, communication, creativity, and teamwork” (“What is The Leader in Me, 2017). This program features many strategies that are daily parts of participants’ leadership development.

One such strategy is goal setting, where students determine academic and social goals that they set for his/herself, tracking progress daily. The intention of this strategy is for students to take ownership in his/her success by determining what they feel to be important as well as being held accountable through daily tracking and peer support.

Another strategy utilized through this program is that of leadership roles within the classroom and the school. These roles are designed to show students that they play an important part in the success of their classroom’s daily functions. These are also to give students opportunities for responsibility, typically building confidence when students have successfully completed them. Teachers give students ample opportunities to express their opinions pertaining to what they feel the optimal classroom were to look like, giving students ownership and providing a greater connection to the classroom.

The program also features curriculums that teach students to recognize leadership characteristics in famous people, fictional characters, and eventually in their peers and themselves. (“What is the Leader in Me?”, 2017)

The Western Kentucky Rock Solid Evaluation Team’s paper, “The Impact of *The Leader in Me* on Student Engagement and Social Emotional Skills,” featured many positive evaluations that led the researcher to believe that this program would contribute positively to the factors that gifted underachievers. This team found the program to have resulted in students taking more responsibility for their own learning and accepting responsibilities for their decisions. As it

relates to social interactions, this study found that students were promoting and maintaining positive connections with others as a result of The Leader in Me.

It is believed that the use of The Leader in Me as an intervention to gifted underachievement will prove to be impactful. There are mentions of the need to begin leadership development within the education setting in many gifted journals with respect to helping all gifted education students cultivate new skills, which this research can provide secondary to its main focus.

One factor that is said to contribute to gifted underachievement is that of pressure. Dr. Sylvia Rimm (2008) discusses these pressures - the pressure to be extraordinary, the pressure to be creative and the pressure to be popular. Gifted students often feel pressure to sound or look intelligent, but when self-expectations feel impossibly high, children may shut down or become distracted to avoid the possibility of them being unable to live up to those expectations. “These exercises in avoidance temporarily protect them from feeling inadequate but result in many problem behaviors, adversely affect self-confidence, and may, indeed, lead to underachievement (Rimm, 2008).

Rimm (2008) goes on to suggest that “[g]ifted and creative children internalize pressures easily. These may cause school problems and mental health problems for them. Understanding these pressures is the first step to helping them use their capabilities.

Another concept that is taking the world of education by storm is that of teaching students to employ a “growth mindset”. Carol Dweck suggests that “[i]ndividuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others)... tend to achieve more than those with a more fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts). (Dweck, 2016). The growth mindset, while not denying that performance differences

might exist, portrays abilities as acquirable and sends a particularly encouraging message to students who have been negatively stereotyped—one that they respond to with renewed motivation and engagement. (Dweck, 2008) Students with different mindsets also had very different reactions to setbacks. Those with growth mindsets reported that, after a setback in school, they would simply study more or study differently the next time. But those with fixed mindsets were more likely to say that they would feel dumb. Dweck reminds us that “[i]f you feel dumb—permanently dumb—in an academic area, there is no good way to bounce back and be successful in the future (Dweck, 2008)”. In a growth mindset, however, you can make a plan of positive action that can remedy a deficiency.

When you think of gifted students going through an evaluation to determine their giftedness, that comes with an automatic label. This giftedness is recognized as an “exceptionality”, immediately acknowledging that the student is exceptional. Parents, teachers, and students alike often offer praise due to the exceptionality. Dweck’s studies tell us that “[p]raising children’s intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance (Dweck, 2016, p 177).” She goes on to explain that praising one for their innate intelligence rather than their efforts slowly but surely [causes one to] develop an aversion to difficult challenges. Also suggesting that she was most surprised to find that this extended beyond academic, athletic, but even emotional challenges. This allowed her to arrive at the conclusion that if one cannot accomplish something right away they more often than not will avoid that task or decide it is not worth the effort. (Dweck, 2016)

Dweck goes on to list many productive forms of praise, all involving effort and process as opposed to ability and products. There are growth mindset curriculums, premade lesson plans, magazine articles in teaching magazines, all suggesting that this teaching practice could be what

inspires a shift in how a student will approach his or her learning. This is important as Dweck's research pointed out that children with a fixed mindset share that they feel "constant measures of judgment...they feel as though their traits are being measured all the time (Dweck, 2016, p 187)." This is a detriment to a student's self-actualization. Knowing what many know about gifted children and their perfectionist tendencies causes alarm in this type of thinking. This suggests that many of our gifted students with fixed mindsets will be crippled with fear of judgment while taking on challenges.

This teaching practice has a great deal of promise in helping teachers to motivate gifted underachievers. The ability to empower students to understand how there is power in struggling and working through difficult challenges can completely transform a student who has typically under performed.

Another consideration is that of the twice-exceptional student. According to the National Association of Gifted Children, the term twice-exceptional or "2e", is "used to describe gifted children who have the characteristics of gifted students with the potential for high achievement and give evidence of one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria." These disabilities may include specific learning disabilities (SpLD), speech and language disorders, emotional/behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, autism spectrum, or other impairments such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). NAGC tells us that "[t]wice-exceptional children often find difficulty in the school environment, where organization, participation, and long-term planning play a role. They can be highly creative, verbal, imaginative, curious, with strong problem-solving ability, and a wide range of interests or a single, all-consuming expertise. However, at school, they may have difficulty keeping up with course rigor, volume, and demands--resulting in inconsistent academic performance, frustration,

difficulties with written expression, and labels such as lazy, unmotivated, and underachiever. All this may hinder their excitement for school and be detrimental to their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and motivation. (NAGC, n.d.)”

Students with two exceptionalities pose a challenge different from that of their gifted peers. Josephson, Wolfgang, and Mehrenberg outlined strategies to assist 2e students in their article “Strategies for Supporting Students Who Are Twice-Exceptional”. Here they mention a the following strategies to be applied in the gifted setting:

- Provide opportunities for student choice; allow the student multiple ways to respond to new content
- Explicitly link new content to previous learning; teach organizational skills
- Allow additional time for task completion to alleviate anxiety; help 2e students develop self-advocacy; teach stress management techniques
- After assessment data and other evidence is gathered, consider if the student is 2e or a gifted underachiever; provide the appropriate support(s) including counseling support, learning support, and/or gifted support
- Invite gifted support personnel and disability support personnel to plan meetings; create a balance of activities that will offer both challenge and remediation

Many of the characteristics of gifted underachievers are also associated characteristics of students with disabilities. Because these characteristics can present themselves in both underachieving gifted students and twice-exceptional students, it is critical that professional educators take a multidimensional approach to determine if there is the presence of a disability or not.

The article “Strategies for Supporting Students Who Are Twice-Exceptional” suggests that educators “Provide instruction that capitalizes on the student’s strengths first. Provide instruction that addresses the needs of 2e students second (Josephson, et al, 2008).” The authors suggest that when the strengths of 2e students are emphasized in their educational experiences, they have a more positive outlook on their difficulties. It is recommended that teachers can teach the way their students learn, using multiple styles to present content. In addition, teachers can give students multiple ways to present their learning. “For example, some 2e students with a disability in the area of writing and gifts and talents in the area of creativity may be able to create work products that go beyond traditional paper-and-pencil approaches; perhaps these students may best show what they’ve learned by creating original video content or a photo essay (Josephson, et. al, 2008)”. This article, as with many others, recommends student choice to support student success and engagement.

Much of the research on gifted underachievement speaks of researchers and their findings, though it does not typically involve the input of the classroom teacher. Those teachers with an academically gifted teaching certificate are the closest to this specific population and see things through a different lens.

The literature that exists about underachievement and gifted learning does a great job of explaining the ways in which gifted underachievement affects the classroom. There is also great mention of considerations that could be made by teachers when approaching these students. Much of the aforementioned research suggests several strategies that have impacted children and/or students but have not had a direct correlation to success amongst gifted students or gifted underachievers.

As mentioned before, the ambiguity of some of these suggestions tend to leave teachers unable to put strategies to use in an attempt to assist their students. There is still a requirement that a gifted teacher needs to continue exploring in order to find strategies that could be utilized, rather than the research mentioning or highlighting successful tactics currently in practice. Gaining a better understanding of what is seen in the classroom aims to provide practitioners with more specific and intentional insight.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how academically gifted certified teachers define “underachievement” as well as how they identify this struggle in their classroom. Another purpose of this study is to gather strategies that are being used to assist students in overcoming this issue and gain a better understanding of how we know these practices to be successful in order to better inform the pedagogy of gifted educators.

A qualitative study will be used in order to gather this information. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2014), is a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014, p 246-247).”

One interpretive theory that may influence the design of this research is that of Robert Sternberg’s Theory of Successful Intelligence. This theory suggests that there is much more to intelligence than one’s performance. Sternberg suggests that “intelligence is viewed as various kinds, the mental processes involved in creative, analytical, practical, and wise thinking are the same (Sternberg, 1999).” This theory refutes the belief that we measure intelligence with data and numerical scores, as many in the world of education do. Sternberg’s suggestion is that a person’s “successful intelligence” can be recognized in creative ideas or recognizing that a problem exists and finding ways in which it can be solved. Many of these characteristics can be attributed to students in the gifted program.

The influence of the successful intelligence theory could assist with the definition of underachievement according to the standards of gifted educators. This theory’s assumption that

“successful intelligence is defined as one’s ability to set and accomplish personally meaningful goals in one’s life, given one’s cultural context (Sternberg, 1999)” can influence the understanding of student success, or lack thereof. The assumption that creativity is necessary in order to solve problems and an analytical and practical approach to the application of these solutions proves to the researcher that data should not be the only measure of student achievement or performance.

Research Design

This design allows for emerging questions and the opportunity for the study to make adjustments to the research should it be necessary. There is no absolute truth in this particular area of research, which is why the ontological assumption that the “truth is relative” is most suitable. Due to the need for interactive research, one that warrants the researcher as a participant, a qualitative study is the best fit.

The ontological approach to this research aims to explain the nature of multiple realities that exist in the world of a gifted teacher who is struggling with students who are not meeting their full potential, otherwise known as “underachievers”. This pragmatic research aims to determine “what” underachievement is and “how” underachievement can be overcome by teachers with an academically gifted teaching certificate. Through the observations of gifted teachers, interviews of gifted academics and enrichment teachers, survey responses, and the analysis conducted by the researcher, who is also an academically certified gifted teacher, the researcher aims to answer the research questions posed in this study.

In this study, the epistemological assumption of this research suggests that the experiences of participants count as knowledge, as they have witnessed first-hand the actions of their students, as well as the strategies put in place in an attempt to overcome this struggle. The

researcher will gain knowledge through interviews and observations with those participants in the study to gather evidence that will answer the study's research questions. Pragmatism suggests that truths in this study are what the researcher finds at the time of the study. The realities of this study will become known through the emerging themes identified by the researcher.

The axiological approach to this pragmatic research revolves around the notion that there are several values held by the participants and that it is the role of the researcher to understand and interpret those values and how they affect the findings of this study. The researcher, an academically gifted certified teacher, positions herself to ask questions that will explore the satisfaction and values of the participants in order to best understand their objective perspectives. The researcher values the variety of experiences and points of view of participants, as they bring about a plethora of understandings relating to the topic. One of the objectives of this study is to determine the strategies being used to engage underachieving students. This objective cannot be met without gathering information from a varied population and analyzing all of their input to include in the research findings.

The pragmatic approach used to conduct this research aims to assist in solving a problem by gathering real-world experiences and learning about best practices of teachers. Creswell notes that researchers choose this framework as they believe that there is a variety of ways to collect data and conduct research as opposed to "subscribing to only one way (Creswell, 2013, p 11)." The researcher believes this research uncovered how to overcome underachievement as there is a "concern with what works and solutions to problems (Creswell, 2013, p 11)."

There are a variety of methods being used to conduct this case study. The case study approach, as explained by Creswell, is an in-depth study that utilizes a variety of data collection methods over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2013, p 14)."

The researcher aims to situate herself within the context of the qualitative study. Due to the nature of the researcher's career, there is an existing relationship between the researcher and the teachers participating in the study. The researcher serves in a supervisory role to these teachers that entails delivering professional development, providing classroom support, conducting accountability observations and performance reviews. The researcher has the responsibility to validate perceptions correctly. Walshaw reminds us that "the researcher seeks "the courage not to pretend to know what [she] does not know [and] the wisdom not to ignore its relevance (Walshaw, n.d., p 325)." The researcher needs to act as a researcher in this circumstance, collecting bias as it is given and accepting it to be the perception of the teacher, regardless of its critical nature to their existing relationship.

Data Collection

There will be varied methods of data collection that include a survey, teacher interviews, as well as classroom observations. Through these methods the researcher aims to collect participant meanings, study the context and the gifted setting of the participants, and validate the accuracy of the findings through classroom observation best practices in action. These three methods are sequential in nature with the results of the survey driving the questions included in the interview and the answers shared in the interview driving the "look-fors" in the observations.

The expectation of the survey is to gather information more specifically on the definition of "underachievement", identification of techniques used in the classroom as well as any impact this may have on student success. to gain more specific information on these same topics, but also adding questions involving strategies utilized by academically gifted certified teachers that aid in overcoming underachievement in the classroom. The purpose of this survey is to "generalize from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made (Creswell, 2014, p

157)” about the behaviors and attitudes of gifted teachers. The instrument has been designed for the purpose of this research with its questions being derived from the holes discovered in reviewing existing literature.

This survey will be sent out to participants electronically for a variety of reasons. One reason is that of the convenient nature; respondents will get the survey quickly and the researcher will get their responses quickly and organized. Internet surveys cost little to nothing. The medium that will be used in this study, a Google form, is a free application of the school district’s Google suite, ensuring all participants and the researcher can participate free of cost. Once the surveys have been collected, Google forms will segregate the data by question and/or by respondent to ease the data analysis process.

Respondents will include gifted academically certified teachers from kindergarten through twelfth grades. The researcher intends to send the survey to all gifted certified teachers in the Lafayette Parish School System with the intention of yielding 40-50 participants.

The survey will include demographic information that will include gifted setting, years of experience, in an effort to better analyze and categorize data collected. There will be open-ended questions, allowing teachers to elaborate on their responses, ensuring the best possible understanding of the researcher. Questions will include the aforementioned research questions and dig a bit deeper into personal interpretations of student success as well as indicators of student underachievement. The survey will also include an open ended opportunity for respondents to share whatever information they feel is pertinent to their success as educators that may not have been covered in the answers provided.

The next piece of the data collection process is teacher interviews. These will be conducted with a sample size of approximately 10-15 teachers will be interviewed, of those 10-

15 the researcher must use purposive sampling to ensure that participants are from each gifted setting and each grade level. The researcher will ask for volunteers to submit their interest in participating and from there choose an equal number of participants from the necessary categories : gifted elementary academics, gifted middle school academics, gifted high school academics, gifted elementary enrichment and gifted middle school enrichment.

Once the participants have been determined, the researcher will conduct interviews in the natural setting. Creswell (2104) refers to the natural setting as the site where participants experience or issue that is being studied. In this case classrooms of the teachers participating to make sure that the experience is convenient for the teacher. This natural setting also allows teachers to have quick access to any forms or materials that are used to assist with underachieving students. Teachers also seem to be more comfortable in their environment which could be beneficial to their transparency in responses.

Interviews will be scheduled within a two-week period, at the earliest convenience of the teacher. During these scheduled interviews the researcher will record the responses of the interviewee through the use of a digital recorder as well as hand-written notes. The hand-written notes will include those major phenomena brought about in conversation. The digital recordings will later be transcribed for the data analysis process to ensure that the researcher can use all provided information when analyzing the data and reporting the findings of the study.

A brief overview of questions that will be included in the interview are as follows:

1. How would you define “gifted underachievement?”
2. How many of your current students are dealing with this problem?
3. In what ways do you recognize this trait in your students?

4. Are there any particular pieces of data or assessments that you use in order to measure underachievement?
5. How does the issue of underachievement affect your job satisfaction?
6. Are there any strategies or methods that you practice in order to attempt to engage these students who are “underachieving”?
7. What advice would you give to new/incoming teachers regarding underachievement?
8. What measures do you use to determine that an underachieving student has performed to his/her ability?

The conversational nature of an interview allows for the researcher to ask for clarification or follow-up questions to assist in validating data as well as ensuring that the answer of the interviewee is understood.

Lastly, the researcher hopes to observe academically gifted teachers in their classrooms with the hopes of seeing potential identification of underachievement as well as best practices being put to use. These observations will be focused on the teacher and his/her strategies and serve as a confirmation of information gathered in the surveys and interviews.

The data collected through observations will be hand-written notes that will allow for data analysis when completed. Should forms or resources that are beneficial to the study be seen, the researcher will photograph them or scan them in order to preserve them for later analysis.

The sample of teachers included in this study will be both purposive and random. Purposive observations will be conducted in the classrooms of those teachers interviewed in an effort to watch the teacher’s best practices in action. It is here that the researcher will see student

and teacher interactions, documenting all behavioral responses to the teacher's strategies and other visible observations of underachievement and or success in working through this struggle..

Random observations will take place with the researcher going into gifted classrooms and documenting observations when she is there on official business of her job. This allows for the observations being conducted to be spontaneous and for the researcher to witness things she may not see with a planned or intentional visit. While observing, the goal of the researcher is to document what previously suggested practices or measures of success are seen.

During these qualitative observations the researcher will serve as an observer as participant. According to Creswell (2014) this role is known to all participants and allows for interaction with the teacher and students if further explanation or emergent questioning is necessary. It is of the utmost importance that the researcher records things as they are seen, without bias or omission of things witnessed that do not work or were not successful strategies. The relationship between participants and researcher should be revered as such throughout the duration of the study, trumping the relationship of supervisor and employee. In all stages of data collection the researcher will remind all participants of this dynamic, reminding participants that the research being conducted without bias trumping a teacher impressing his/her superior. Teachers must be reminded that what is disclosed or observed as a participant in this study will bear no weight on their performance evaluations.

Data Analysis

Much of the qualitative data analysis of this study will rely on the analysis of content, matching of patterns developed, consistent comparative analysis, or the revelations of earlier research found within the data. Due to the nature of this study, there is not much that has married these previously independently explored concepts. This will present a challenge to the

researcher, however, the purpose of this study is to answer the research questions regarding the strategies deemed successful in overcoming underachievement by teachers of the gifted. Much of the data should result in overwhelming repetitive observations, patterns of behaviors or expressed feelings.

According to Yin, there are many ways to analyze the data collected in a case study. For this particular research, the times-series analysis seems to be an approach that will work well to “answer “[h]ow”- and “why”- questions about relationships (Yin, 1994).” Explanation-building works to “identify a set of causal links (Yink, 1994)” in the data collected and the purpose of the study.

The data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2013) will be used by the researcher to organize, code, memo, and interpret data. The researcher will “winnow” through the data, a term that Creswell (2014) refers to focusing on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it. To assist in analyzing the data, the researcher will use a computer data analysis program. This will assist in organizing and sorting the data. The computer program will also assist in storing the data while the analysis process is ongoing. After this computer analysis, hand coding will be conducted to ensure that trends and themes are correctly identified. Analysis of significant statements and generating meaning units are a large part of this phenomenological research.

Analysis of the data collected will be a coding process that best suits the learning style of the researcher. The researcher hopes to sort through the observations, interview data, and survey responses employing the same process. The researcher must aggregate data into smaller themes to analyze data.

The coding process will begin during data collection with pre-coding. This is the process which Saldaña refers to as the “circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich

significant participant quotes or passages that strike you (Saldaña, 2016, p 20)”. As the researcher collects data and responses pre-codes and preliminary jottings will be used by the researcher to document thoughts being had as the study unfolds.

As the data collection continues and data analysis begins the researcher will use analytic memos to keep track of thinking and reflection. These memos serve as a place to “dump your brain about participants, phenomenon, or the process under investigation... (Saldaña, 2016, p 44).” Saldaña (2016) suggests that coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent qualitative data analytic activities, for there is “a reciprocal relationship between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon”. Researchers are to think of a code not just as a significant word or phrase you applied to data, but as a prompt or trigger for written reflection on the deeper and complex meanings it evokes. Saldaña also reminds researchers that “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see (Saldaña, 2016, p 44)”. These analytic memos are about creating an intellectual workplace for the researcher.

The first cycle coding will employ affective methods of coding which Saldaña describes as investigating “subjective qualities of human experiences (e.g. emotions, values, conflicts and judgments) and directly naming those experiences (Sandaña, 2016, p 124)”. Teachers’ responses to survey and interview questions will be given emotional codes that are used to label the emotions recalled/expressed by the participant. Participant experiences, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, and actions relating to relationships, decision-making, and judgment will be noted and categorized. The literature reviewed in this study suggests that much of the strategies that

can elicit motivation or inspire engagement are due to relationships and teacher decision-making. These emotion codes will help in categorizing this type of data.

Another affective first cycle coding method to be used is evaluation coding. This method assigns judgments about the merit, worth, or significance of programs or policy. Research questions three and four - “What strategies do academically gifted certified teachers utilize to overcome underachievement in the classroom?” and “What do academically gifted certified teachers use to measure success in their underachieving gifted students?” are the reason for utilizing this code to “collect information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming (Saldaña, 2016, p 141-142).”

After the first cycle coding is complete, the researcher will use code mapping to organize and “enhanc[e] and the credibility and trustworthiness (Saldaña, 2016, p 218)” of the qualitative data display. In this part of the data analysis phase the codes will be reorganized into selected lists/categories to be condensed into central themes and concepts. (Saldaña, 2016)

Second cycle coding will employ pattern coding of the previously analyzed and coded data. Pattern Codes are “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis (Saldaña, 2016, p 236).” Pattern Coding called “super coding” finds relationships between codes and saves the query for future reflection and continued analysis. (Saldaña, 2016)

In thinking of the implications of the results of this study – to define underachievement and share best practices being used in overcoming this struggle – this theory has the potential to positively impact the beliefs of those involved with the gifted. The utilization of the successful

intelligence theory could influence the existing misconception that those gifted students with good grades and high-test scores are a reflecting high achievement and those without are “underachievers” who are not reaching their full potential.

The researcher must ensure that when analyzing data she only discusses results without bias, meaning not taking sides or leaving out information that does not support the proposed hypothesis or beliefs she may hold. Another thing to consider is that the researcher must avoid only disclosing positive results. This includes the necessity of reporting any findings that may be contradictory to the themes emerging in the data. The researcher will respect the privacy of all participants by issuing numbers as identifying factors, omitting names and/or roles. In the event that a participant wants to be identified to have their voice heard and documented, the researcher will respect their wishes after ensuring the understanding of any risks involved with doing so.

Chapter 4. Research Findings

This chapter contains the results of the study conducted to answer the research questions:

1. How do academically gifted certified teachers define underachievement in their students?
2. How do academically gifted certified teachers identify underachieving students?
3. What strategies do academically gifted certified teachers utilize to overcome underachievement in the classroom?
4. What do academically gifted certified teachers use to measure success in their underachieving gifted students?

This chapter also includes discussion that the analysis conducted was consistent with the methodology of the successful intelligence theory and how the analysis ties back to the research questions. Additionally, this chapter includes sample demographics, using tables to complement the summary. The process used to analyze transcripts from the 43 survey responses and the 13 individual interviews conducted to uncover codes and themes is described in detail in this chapter. There were two levels of analysis: (a) open coding, (b) selective coding. At each level of analysis, constant comparison was used to distill the data further, until themes emerged from the data.

Sample

Forty-three participants, all teachers with an academically gifted certificate, were surveyed for this study. The response rate for this survey was 86%, as 43 of the 50 academically gifted certified teachers in this district participated. All gifted settings offered in this school system were represented in this study, with thirteen (30%) in elementary academics, eight (19%)

in middle school academics, eleven (26%) in high school academics, and eleven (26%) in gifted enrichment.

The total years of teaching gifted varied among the 43 participants sampled. Those participants with over 21 years of experience represented 30% of the sample size. Those participants with 16-21 years represented 19%, 11-15 years of experience represented 12%, 8-10 years of experience represented by 16%, 4-7 years of experience represented by 16%, and 0-3 years of experience represented 7% of the sample size.

Purposive random sampling was used to select interview participants from the pool of survey respondents. Thirteen participants were chosen to represent each of the gifted settings and grade level clusters within them. Among them were three teachers in the elementary academic setting, three teachers in the middle school academic setting, three teachers in the high school academic setting, and four teachers in the gifted enrichment setting - two from elementary and two from middle school.

The experience of those teachers who participated in the interview phase of this process included three teachers with 21 or more years of experience, two teachers with 16-20 years of experience, four teachers with 11-15 years of experience, two teachers with 8-10 years of experience, and two teachers with 4-7 years of experience.

Data Collection

The research surveys were the first piece of data collected. After the completion of the surveys, responses were coded to drive the questioning in the interviews. Questions were written to ensure that responses further explained connections to the successful intelligence theory as well as the self-determination theory throughout the data collection part of the research process.

The survey questions can be found in Appendix A and the subsequent interview questions of the study are provided in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

There were two methods of data collection in this study - teacher surveys and interviews. The coding of each data collection method was conducted at the conclusion of each phase of the study.

Surveys were conducted through the use of a Google form. Responses were collected in a Google spreadsheet. Once surveys were completed the researcher manually conducted open coding, determining emergent themes in the data. Through the use of Creswell's data analysis spiral, the researcher organized data, read and memoed thoughts and initial connections to research questions. The researcher then classified codes into themes before interpreting and assessing the data as organized.

The second cycle of coding was done selectively, specifically looking for patterns and relationships among those themes and codes discovered in the first round. Coding resulted in notable repetition, with the researcher seeing overwhelmingly similar patterns in the participants' responses for nearly every question. The coding of the survey responses also determined what questions were asked in the interview in an effort to elicit more detailed information about the study's research questions.

The codes determined through the data analysis of the survey results are displayed in Table 1. The percentage of times a concept was mentioned, as seen in this table, resulted in the development of corresponding interview questions, written to gather more specific information and more elaboration from the participants of the study.

Table 1. Percentage of Participant Responses by Codes determined from Survey Responses

Survey Question	Codes			
Definition of underachievement	100% “Unmet potential”			
Recognizing underachievement in students	67% “Lack of engagement”	30% “Poor class participation”	53% “Poor grades/performance”	47% “Incomplete work”
Describing success/measure growth	51% “Reaching goals”	84% “confidence”	72% “Level of engagement”	
Strategies used to re-engage students	79% “Student choice”	21% “Classroom Jobs”	37% “Growth Mindset”	100% “Relationship Building”

Once interview questions were written, interviews were conducted with teachers, one-on-one, using Zoom to transcribe and record responses from the interviewees. As responses were given, pre-coding transpired, with the researcher making notes of responses that were remarkable or responses that seemed to elaborate on previously determined themes.

After interviews were concluded, transcriptions were coded manually, again with Creswell’s data analysis spiral, using both the themes determined by the survey as well as the pre-coding memos to begin the first cycle of coding. In the first cycle, evaluation coding was used to make note of the significance of strategies presented in the data.

The second cycle of coding was selective, conducted with the purpose of making connections and determining relationships between the themes determined in the first cycle of coding as well as within the two sets of data collected.

It is important to note that the researcher previously intended to use electronic means to coding when designing the study. As the study took place, the researcher became more

comfortable with manual color-coding, utilizing varied highlighter colors for coding, and determined that this method was preferred to that of using a digital platform.

How Teachers Define Underachievement

Unmet Potential. Unmet potential is the code used in this dissertation to describe the definition of gifted underachievement. All responses to this question reflected a discrepancy between a gifted student's potential versus his/her performance.

Research question number one, "How do academically gifted certified teachers define underachievement in their students?" is imperative to this study because it allows the researcher to understand how gifted teachers in the study's setting defined underachievement. The researcher feels that it is hard to determine the success of strategies without a true understanding of how a gifted teacher perceives underachievement.

All forty-three of the teachers surveyed, regardless of setting, defined gifted underachievement similarly. Responses to this question were highly saturated, with merely different word choices when responses differed. A more in-depth discussion of this question during the interview phase of this study also yielded all thirteen participant's responses mentioning some variation of unmet potential.

An example of one response from an elementary gifted academics is as follows:

Student performance is not up to their potential, due to a variety of factors . (Participant 12)

Another participant, teaching in the middle school setting, responded similarly.

When people with high ability levels do not perform in accordance with their potential.
(Participant 8)

Another example of a participant's response is as follows.

Underachievement manifests in different ways, but overall it's just basically a gifted student not meeting their potential. They're not working to what they're capable of.

(Participant 10)

A gifted enrichment teacher shared their definition

Able students not meeting their potential or working to their capabilities due to lack of effort or engagement. (Participant 6)

One high school teacher shared their understanding of underachievement.

Students who lack the motivation, task commitment, self-confidence, or time-management skills necessary to achieve according to their potential. (Participant 1)

How Teachers Identify Underachieving Students

Lack of Effort. Lack of effort is the code used in this dissertation to describe how a teacher recognizes a student's underachievement. Incomplete work, lack of engagement, poor class participation, and poor grades are the ways in which a lack of effort are seen by teachers who participated in this study.

Research question two, "How do academically gifted certified teachers identify underachieving students?" is connected to findings emerging with this code. In order to provide insight to teachers' best practices, the researcher must know the ways in which a teacher identifies when a student is underachieving.

Many examples were provided to elaborate on ways in which gifted underachievers displayed a lack of effort.

One teacher elaborated on seeing underachievement in their high school students.

Usually I feel I'm seeing underachievement when those students do not turn in assignments on time, they don't participate in class, they don't necessarily engage in

classroom discussion or activity. Sometimes they isolate or distance themselves, but they are not putting forth any effort. (Participant 2)

Another participant, who teaches gifted middle schoolers, described their English students' lack of effort as apathy.

We do a lot of explanatory writing. They don't want to do the assignment. The simple routine class assignments aren't completed. They'll do the bare minimum without putting forth a whole lot of effort. There is no desire to show what they know, they refuse to give any explanation or proof through evidence. They've clearly answered the question, so I know they know the answer, but when I ask for elaboration or evidence it's not worth their time. (Participant 9)

A notion that was mentioned a variety of times is that an underachieving student showed a lack of effort in classwork or participation though they performed exceptionally well on assessments.

I'm sure people could see poor grades and feel that maybe a student isn't capable. However, I am reminded that many of my underachievers are putting forth little to no effort in class but are fully capable when I see their results on end-of-unit tests and statewide assessments. These students are performing at the top of the district, scoring higher than their peers, though they have Fs in class due to incomplete work or projects. This proves to me, time and time again, that underachievement is the culprit, not an inability to perform the assignment given. (Participant 5)

Barriers to Success.

Barriers to success is the code utilized in this study to indicate the reasons for gifted student underachievement. "How do academically gifted certified teachers identify

underachieving students?”, research question two, can be answered in the findings of this code. It is imperative that teachers not only elaborate on how they identify gifted underachievement, but provide reasons as to why they believe students are not meeting their potential. Highly saturated responses determined by this study suggest that perfectionism, lack of confidence, failure to recognize value in work, and imposter syndrome are commonly identified barriers to success.

Perfectionism is often associated with gifted students, especially as it pertains to a barrier to success. Among the participants who were interviewed, nine of the thirteen (69%), responded that perfectionism was a factor contributing to gifted students underachievement.

You might have kids who are so perfectionistic that they can't stand the thought of trying their best to fail. So, they just don't try because they won't fail. (Participant 12)

Another participant mentioned their high school students' fear of failure.

My students are such perfectionists that they're scared they'll do the wrong thing or they won't measure up to the expectations of the assignment. For them, it's easier not to tell themselves that they didn't even try than it is to accept criticism and be less than perfect. (Participant 2)

One participant describes the lack of confidence that causes underachievement being due to the transition into the gifted setting.

Many gifted students are in the regular education setting prior to being identified as gifted. In this setting they rarely struggle and are often seen as the “best of the best”. They knew that they were better than anybody else and then they were thrown in with peers who are equally intelligent or more so, and their confidence level just dropped. They compare themselves to others so much that their work suffers for it. They say

“well, if I can’t be the best then I’m just not going to do it.” This is very much the issue for the students I teach who are underachieving. (Participant 6)

Another barrier to success, a lack of confidence, was mentioned by eleven of the thirteen interview participants.

One participant feels that a lack of confidence is being caused by a fear of failure.

One factor that leads to underachievement in the students I see is that they are not feeling confident enough to trust themselves to find the answer or do the work required of them. I feel like many of them say “I’m so afraid that I’m going to make a mistake that I’m not even going to start or I’m not going to try so that I can say - oh, I’m still smart.”

(Participant 4)

Participant 10 echoed the sentiment about a lack of confidence connected with fear of failing when sharing their thoughts.

I feel that they’re not turning stuff in not because they didn’t do it but because they fear it’s not good enough. They are underachieving due to a lack of confidence. If they feel like they can’t do it, they don’t even want to try, because they’ll just fail. (Participant 10)

Another barrier discussed by six of the interview participants was when students did not recognize value in the work being assigned to them.

One thing I notice with underachievers is saying “this is easy, I don’t even really need to do this for myself.” It’s like they are bored when learning content that they don’t really care about thinking “I can already do this” or “why do I need to continue to do this”. Sometimes I feel underachievers often wonder “when am I going to use this in life”.

(Participant 3)

Another participant shared their thoughts on this lack of value on assigned work.

I feel my underachievers are finding no personal connection to what they're learning, thinking "I don't find any value in it, I'm not doing it." They understand the game that is school so even if they understand an assignment or know that a grade is going to help them out, they feel like the work doesn't matter in the larger picture of life so it exacerbates their feeling that none of it matters. (Participant 5)

Imposter syndrome is a term that was discussed five times in interview responses.

Participants who brought up the term were asked to elaborate for understanding where needed.

I think that a lot of what they have learned up to this point has come so easily. When there is a challenge, they have a little bit of imposter syndrome - not wanting the world to see that they're not as smart as they think they are or as they feel they're perceived to be.

(Participant 9)

Another participant's explanation is as follows:

They're trying to live up to this label of gifted. They seem afraid to fail because they're not going to measure up to the standards that have been set for those who have been deemed gifted. It's like imposter syndrome, you know, where you feel like a fraud, like you're not truly capable of being who people say you are or expect you to be. I think sometimes they just shut down because it's better not to let someone know what you know in case you'd fall short. (Participant 1)

One participant talked about how this imposter syndrome could be due to their social status.

They try not to achieve in order to fit in. They don't want everyone to know what they're capable of, they tend to shy away from answering questions because society kind of portrays things one way about gifted students and they may not fit that type - they feel

like an imposter. Maybe they believe that they're not good enough for the gifted world but they know they are different from the world of their friends or their families who are not gifted. They don't want to be seen as a nerd or be made fun of. However, they don't seem to fit the bill of what they perceive of a typical gifted student. Their family dynamics or friends' perceptions of education or giftedness have an impact on them. They don't want to look or be different from what their gifted peers expect of them or of what their families and social groups expect of them. (Participant 8)

Strategies Utilized by Teachers to overcome Gifted Achievement

Strategies for Success. Strategies for success was the umbrella code used to note those teacher best practices shared in both the survey and interview responses. These findings answered research question three, “What strategies do academically gifted certified teachers utilize to overcome underachievement in the classroom?”

The following strategies for success were included multiple times and used to create subcodes that included student choice, classroom jobs, growth mindset, and building relationships.

It is important to note that when asked if outside factors - those beyond the control of the teacher or those utilized schoolwide - assisted in re-engaging underachieving students not a single teacher believed that school wide incentives were the cause for success.

Student Choice. Student choice is the subcode used to represent the strategy of a teacher giving a student a choice in how he/she presents information. Thirty four, 79%, of the survey participants mentioned this as a strategy used to re-engage a student on their surveys for the item asking them to “[d]escribe strategies or methods in which you have used to re-engage gifted students”.

Survey responses included:

“I try to let them chose how they’ll present their learning as often as possible”

“...allowing choice of assignment/product/assessment...”

“[g]iving more students choice in selection of topics or activities...”

“Allowing choice WHENEVER possible.”

“Widening parameters, giving directions that allow for more student choice in how certain stages of the activity are complete.”

“Choices in how they would like to express what they know”

“Give choices and give a say in developing a checklist or rubric for the project”

“I like to use a choice board after a required learning activity so they know that they will have a choice of activity based on their interest.”

Classroom Jobs. Classroom jobs is the subcode used for all classroom jobs or leadership roles given to students within the classroom setting. Of the thirteen interview participants only two were unable to describe a use of classroom jobs/leadership roles in their respective experiences. Both alluded to employing other methods and not seeing a need for this strategy.

All teachers who used classroom jobs, 85% of interview participants, confirmed the impact that it had on their underachieving students.

I have leadership roles for some students and for some activities. I don’t have roles for every student in the classroom every day. I like to assign these roles based on the task at hand. I feel that if everyone in a group has a job with something different to accomplish, roles are broken up in a way where everyone has a part of the project to complete in order to contribute to the whole project. What’s assigned varies based on the students within the group and the task at hand. I’ve noticed that they don’t want to disappoint

their peers because the whole group is relying on them to come through and follow through with their part. It also helps that they are in a group that tends to help keep one another - especially an underachiever - on task. (Participant 2)

We don't have a set classroom job or leadership role that we divide up evenly amongst the class. Sometimes we assign leadership roles intentionally to students who need to see their abilities - like an underachiever. So this is a kid who might not normally stand out but in this activity, we're going to empower them to complete a task to prove to both them and their peers of their abilities. We feel that this guides so many of them seeing they are truly capable and leaders in the classroom. (Participant 13)

Classroom jobs generally depend on what's happening in the classroom. Students are able to decide what their roles are going to be. We have a discussion leader, supply distributor, and classroom cleaner. Once that particular activity is over and time has passed someone will ask "can I pass out papers today". That kind of stuff is better to me than assigning a role. They have taken leadership of their own classroom, which I think is important. It's shown me a lot about students who I may not have seen as leaders or who may not have seen themselves as leaders. They are seeing that some of these tasks are challenging things and despite what they previously thought, they're seeing that they're up for the challenge. I love that! (Participant 9)

Sometimes students contribute to our classroom by picking up trash, others by giving compliments to their peers, others by sharpening pencils. In whatever way they

contribute they all feel a certain level of accomplishment. This is huge for underachievers because they get a taste of what it's like to accomplish something and they generally continue to try harder in other areas. They're chasing that feeling again. (Participant 3)

I try my best to try and empower them. When the opportunity presents itself, I'll take advantage of it. In this case, sometimes assigning a job completely unrelated to content or work is necessary to show them they're contributing and gifted in a different way. (Participant 1)

I do have leaders to take over and sometimes I have people hand out materials, other times I have others teach younger or newer students a lesson or strategy. They see that they're having an impact on other people. They're just so proud. They perform better, They are more motivated. Unbeknownst to them, that's the goal. (Participant 6)

Growth Mindset. Growth mindset is the subcode assigned to any teaching of perseverance, working through struggle, taking risk, and grit. All thirteen of the interview participants shared that they utilized growth mindset verbiage and lessons in their gifted classrooms.

Many gifted students strive for perfection with straight A's or the satisfaction of every component on a rubric. One participant discussed growth mindset as it pertains to their high school students.

I get to discuss the makeup of [Advance Placement] courses and how we will grow all year long and that the goal of the course is to continue to get better. All throughout the year I teach them that as long as they're writing and improving they're meeting the set

objectives of the course. They see that through feedback and comparing with other assignments just how they're developing. They want to get better. They can't walk in and make all A's on essays and assignments. It's frustrating to them but they eventually learn what's expected of them and it becomes a motivation to succeed. It's truly growth mindset in action. They have to learn how to get better and how to improve and put it to practice. They are learning how to make adjustments and how to take small steps to get better. As the year progresses we reflect on growth and it's powerful. (Participant 2)

One teacher purposefully poses questions with no answers or gives tasks without a solution.

We give tasks that will require perseverance. It's difficult, but they learn slowly and surely that if they put their mind to it and keep going, the question will be answered or the problem will be solved. This whole process proves that though it may not be easy it's gratifying to persevere and get to a solution. (Participant 13)

One elementary gifted academics teacher discussed the impact of explicit instruction of growth mindset and the ways in which the brain worked.

I teach many lessons specifically on grit and what a growth mindset is. We'll do mini lessons weekly, pulling a variety of resources. We use different sayings daily like "stay in the struggle" empowering students to give themselves and others the power to do so. We talked about our brains allowing growth when we are challenged and pushed and that concept in itself resonates with students who don't want to remain stagnant. (Participant 11)

Several participants discussed the methods of how they employ growth mindset teachings as strategies for underachievers in their classroom environments.

My [United States history] curriculum helps a lot with stories of grit from historical individuals. It's through the studying of these historical figures who go through the same type of struggle and same kind of process where they are introduced. We model growth mindset so much more than we intentionally teach it - we show that success is not final and neither is failure. Even when we've succeeded we show students that's not the end, there is still more to learn and more to do. The impact is proven when students start pursuing progress over perfection and are committed to improve even when their grades are "good". (Participant 7)

Giving students tasks with the intent of them struggling teaches them. Productive struggle is not something they know how to do because they don't often have to. Giving them a particular task where they need to struggle and work through it to be successful is necessary. And they need this in a protected way. They need this in an environment where it's okay that they fail as long as they fix it in the end. If they meet the parameters of the project, no matter how amazing or how basic, the important thing is the work that they have to do to get through it. This allows them to see that they have no choice but to make it work - and then to celebrate that! (Participant 5)

In the district we have to reteach and reassess students. This policy shows students that you learn through mistakes. After putting in time and effort and practice, you come up with different strategies -you become better problem solvers. This is something you may not see the end result til much longer down the line, but you will see the result of your hard work. I find that this policy has an impact on students because it proves that you just

need a little extra practice, it shows that if we put in the time, we will achieve.

(Participant 8)

Relationship Building. Relationship building is the subcode used to describe the intentionality in a teacher getting to know a student's needs. Every single participant in both the survey and the interview phases of the study commented on their use of relationships to encourage an underachieving student. Creswell says that “when gathering new data no longer sparks new insights...(Creswell, 2014, p 189)” your data is saturated. With regards to relationships, there was an extensive amount of saturation specific to creating a safe/trusting environment where a student is more likely to take risks.

Another area of high saturation with regards to relationships as an effective strategy was acquiring information about student interests and incorporating those into lessons or activities to inspire more participation or a greater effort. Each interviewee described suggested ways to build relationships within their individual responses.

One teacher shared her use of anecdotal observations to guide relationship building in her classroom.

I just try to engage with them and figure out what it is that they care about and what it is that they like. Sometimes it's a one-on-one conversation where some common ground comes up. Other times I recognize a soccer sweatshirt and strike up a conversation about soccer. I try to figure out each student as individuals. In doing so I try to truly understand their mindset behind it. I think that through this they feel more respected and then they have a stronger connection to me. They're more willing to work for you and feel safer to try things because they know you care about them. (Participant 4)

One middle school gifted teacher described sharing personal information with her students to build relationships and set an example for her students.

If I'm having a bad day or something I let them know even if it's a tough conversation. Even if it's sad I need to tell you this because if you're having a bad day, if something's happening in your life I need you to know that I support you unconditionally. The impact of those relationships is that I think they'll work harder for someone that they trust and respect because I've shown them that. They know I'll allow them to share with me when something is wrong or something bad is happening because I've done it myself. This shows we're both people, we're both human. (Participant 10)

Another teacher shared that relationships garner respect from students that will be the reason for their effort.

I think it's important because it establishes trust and I think that if a student knows that you care about them and have interest in them they respect you. They're more likely to perform for you if they respect you even if they don't see the purpose in the assignment or could care less about the content. (Participant 2)

One participant shared that the purpose of building relationships is to truly understand the needs of their middle school students.

One thing that is strong is empathy and compassion, trying to understand the why. You know, you have to talk to them, you have to understand their mindset behind their decisions. They know that I care but they also see that I'm going to hold them accountable and they're going to get a consequence when they're not meeting the expectations set for them. A lot of times I think that they feel more respected and have a stronger connection to me because I try to see what's the source of their struggle. What's

the real reason that you're not succeeding? If I can pinpoint that, I can provide the assistance to get past that hurdle whether they don't understand the task, they don't have an interest in it or maybe something's going on at home that's much bigger than this school work. (Participant 4)

Another participant, a middle school teacher, shared small and simple ways they build relationships.

I eat lunch with them, try to talk to them whenever I'm passing their desk, I try to see them outside of school. Sometimes I attend a concert or a sporting event. Whatever I do, I'm always using this time to talk about things that are unrelated to content. I think it's important to bring it up later - reminding them that I wasn't just listening to them but that it was memorable. It makes them feel more comfortable talking to me when it does pertain to school related things, they appear to feel more open and comfortable.

(Participant 11)

One elementary gifted academics teacher takes the information gained by building relationships to apply it to content.

I feel like I take the time to truly get to know my students. I do this through interactions with them, giving them unique questions on interest inventories, sending random surveys to see how they're feeling about things in the classroom or sharing random facts, and designating time for them to share whatever they want about their weekends or their lives outside of school with the class. I weave this information into instruction. I add personal touches to math problems or try to relate students to historical figures. I feel like this just increases engagement and may add more of a reason to work or put forth effort for a

student who is disinterested in the subject and otherwise chooses not to do anything.

(Participant 12)

One participant, who teaches gifted enrichment, explained that relationships with students make it easier for them to hold students accountable.

When you have an established relationship with your students you tend to talk to them more sarcastically or with a greater sense of humor. You show them that you can relate to them and you don't have to sugar coat things with them. I'm very honest with them and know that they feel a certain level of comfort with me that allows them to do the same with me. They know that I'm a safe space and know that I'm someone who knows the game that they're playing and can see through behaviors used to deflect work or responsibility that other teachers may have fallen for in the past. I see it and talk to them about it, they can't get away with excuses or laziness because I can safely call them out.

(Participant 3)

Building relationships allows one interviewee to push their students to reflect on progress.

There are a lot of times when you can talk about failure and still support a student and remind them of their accomplishments or previous mistakes. They know through an established relationship that you're going to applaud their success and push them through moments of failure or struggle because you're reminding them of ways they've learned in the past or ways that your passions and beliefs can continue to push them. They feel seen and understood so there is a safety - an ability to reflect on how they can move forward without fear of judgment or disappointment. (Participant 13)

How Success is Measured for Underachieving Gifted Students

Success Recognition. Success recognition was the code assigned to the ways in which participants recognized that an underachieving student was now successful and working to their potential. The themes emerging from this code were imperative to the success of this study.

In order to determine whether or not any of the strategies suggested were successful, the researcher needed to answer research question four, “What do academically gifted certified teachers use to measure success in their underachieving gifted students?” Many success measures were recurring and assigned subcodes - reaching goals, confidence, and level of engagement - by the researcher to further categorize findings.

Reaching Goals. Reaching goals is the subcode used by the study to note ways in which we recognize success in setting goals and meeting them.

One participant referred to the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) to determine student success.

It’s going to depend on the kid, obviously, but we’ve set a variety of goals for each student to reach throughout the year. For one kid it may be that they could only write two or three sentences and now I have them writing four paragraph essays. Others it’s maybe that they were so shy that we decided to focus on giving them opportunities to speak throughout the year and at the end of the year they are able to get up in front of the classroom and present a PowerPoint presentation. We were intentional about setting goals specific to the underachievement we see and we track progress to see, eventually, that they’ve met that goal! (Participant 4)

Gifted evaluations were used to describe reaching goals by one elementary gifted teacher.

We set goals based on a student's gifted evaluation. We know that grades are an indicator of success for a student who is academically gifted. When their grades are poor and they are underachieving we know that we can be intentional about setting goals specific to academic performance because their evaluation tells us this is an area in which they should be successful. Setting goals for a student who qualifies for gifted solely on IQ requires elements of creativity and encouragement to take risks and think outside of the box. An underachiever struggling to be creative needs the right approach. We know if they're growing when we set goals for their specific areas of giftedness and they meet them. This is one sure way to prove a strategy is successful. (Participant 12)

Confidence. Confidence is the subcode assigned to those responses that indicate an increased level of belief in one's ability once the strategies shared were applied to underachieving students.

A lot of times I do it emotionally. I see that they are comfortable in taking risks and in failing in something. Sometimes I see a kid who has a problem with getting low grades that I decide we're going to focus on making the kid believe in themselves before even touching the grades. I tell administrators "let's make this kid feel good about himself". I feel like you have to heal the person in order to truly educate them...I can just see the satisfaction when I see a student look at their grade and see that "wow". They truly didn't expect to score as highly as they did. That one moment is a game changer. They now have proof of what I've been trying to prove to them in showing them their abilities. I usually always see a change in approach, they seem notably more proud in their work and try to put forth even more effort. (Participant 1)

You know that you are successful when you see underachieving students working their hearts out and you see improvement in the level of confidence that you've been building up. You see them doing activities that once were a turn off, they seem to be excited about and try to help others. I don't watch for them to get something right, I don't expect them to get everything right. I want to see improvement and the confidence that they know what they're doing. That they are secure in moving forward after a mistake or a failure because they know that they can try again and that they can do it. We get to a point where we do something and they're asking themselves how they can improve this work. They're working on things independently without me or someone else telling them how to do the work. I think success is when these students are able to answer questions for themselves and they are able to initiate how they do things and what they do. They believe that they are capable of accomplishing the task at hand. (Participant 6)

There are things that data doesn't show. I had a student last year who barely spoke, she didn't like working with a partner, and kept to herself. At the end of the year she was happily working in groups and she even made an announcement on the school loudspeaker. There's no test or raw data to display the different person that she was at the end of the year. I believe that so much growth in underachievers is truly in their social emotional well being and their visible confidence. (Participant 3)

The pride they feel in their work, to me, says a lot. When they're excited to show you and excited to tell you about their product, it helps me to know that they are reaching their potential. They are finally believing in themselves, working through fear or struggle, and

trying harder than ever before. They're not doing the bare minimum and just turning it in - they've succeeded and can't wait to show me. (Participant 13)

When I see a happy student, that's success to me. Their lack of confidence has stopped them from being happy and I finally see their personality in the work they've done. (Participant 11)

Level of Engagement. Level of engagement is the subcode assigned to the recognition of success in a student's work ethic, increased effort, or increased participation.

A participant explains engagement through discussion of content.

The level of attentiveness and level of engagement in the classroom every day speaks volumes. How engaged are they in class? Are they talking about what we've learned with their friends? With their families? When they're bringing what they've learned home and they're sharing it with others. That's confirmation that they're now invested. And when this happens with underachievers I can now focus on digging deeper into classroom conversations and within the curriculum. (Participant 10)

An interviewee describes their perception of success through engagement.

I see success in different ways but mostly through participation, you know, engaging in the conversation. I now see a student working with their peers to get whatever task completed and I'm even seeing completion of individual tasks. I see that as they're trying, they're getting better. They're putting forth the effort in completing assignments, classroom discussions, writings, projects, and other activities. (Participant 2)

One participant, who teaches middle school, noted that some underachieving students might be seen as achieving because of their good grades but we can not consider success until we see them pushing beyond their previous accomplishments.

For me, I have students who make wonderful test scores and straight A's. With little to no effort, this is still something that comes naturally to them. When I deem my efforts successful, I see students taking risks and pushing themselves further than the rubric given. A student can satisfy the components in a rubric and still have room for improvement. It's when I see that happen I know that it's working. I see more creativity, more robust vocabulary, more vivid description and it's obvious that they're trying harder than they were before. They're not dialing it in, they're truly engaged. (Participant 5)

Application of content acquired is another level of engagement linked to success recognition.

I measure success when I begin to see a deeper understanding of the content over time. We do an exit ticket and you're able to see instantly who understood and who didn't. We also can see at the end of units who have truly understood what was taught. But when I see true effort and mastery of the content, I see a student's ability to create a problem based on the math concept we're learning. I see a student able to identify theirs or other students' mistakes. There's a deep level of understanding that goes beyond making a grade for the sake of their report card. An underachieving student is no longer achieving when they're invested and they are able to show how they can apply what they have learned. (Participant 8)

Conclusions

This chapter contains the results of the analysis, connects the analysis back to the research questions, and demonstrates consistency of the analysis with successful intelligence methodology. Forty three participants were surveyed in this study, thirteen of those were also interviewed. Interview questions were structured to gain a deeper understanding of what best practices were utilized by academically gifted teachers to overcome underachievement in gifted students as well as how those teachers determined those practices to be successful .

There were two phases of two levels of analysis, first an open coding and selective coding of the survey responses, then open coding of the interview responses and selective coding of the interview responses inclusive of codes utilized for the survey responses. Constant comparison analysis was exercised using manually mind mapping and line-by-line color coding . Comparison analysis was also used to discover the relationships between and within the open and selective codes, leading to the codes and subcodes presented within this chapter.

The codes and subcodes resulting from this study summarizing overcoming underachievement are:

- Unmet Potential
- Barriers
- Strategies for Success
 - Growth Mindset
 - Classroom Jobs
 - Student Choice
 - Relationship Building
- Success Recognition
 - Reaching Goals
 - Confidence
 - Level of Engagement

The research design indicated that classroom observations would be utilized to validate the findings of the survey and interview responses. Due to the high level of saturation yielding robust participant responses, the researcher decided this step of the research to be unnecessary.

When determining significance of the data collected, the researcher notes that the setting of the participants did not appear to influence the responses shared. Noted in participants' responses, one can see that the findings of the study revealed consistent beliefs in understanding and identifying gifted underachievement as well as consistency among strategies being utilized and ways in which success is determined.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study is to document those strategies used by teachers of the gifted found to be successful in inspiring achievement amongst their underachieving students. This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions:

1. How do academically gifted certified teachers define underachievement in their students?
2. How do academically gifted certified teachers identify underachieving students?
3. What strategies do academically gifted certified teachers utilize to overcome underachievement in the classroom?
4. What do academically gifted certified teachers use to measure success in their underachieving gifted students?

The theory for what motivates gifted underachieving students is multi-dimensional and comprises four subsequent themes: (a) unmet potential, (b) barriers to success, (c) strategies for success, (d) success recognition.

Understanding Gifted Underachievement

The best practices of academically gifted certified teachers cannot be linked to overcoming underachievement without gaining a keen awareness of what is meant by “gifted underachievement”. When we hear about the strategies utilized by teachers to overcome underachievement in the classroom we must also understand how we can determine whether or not they are successful. For that reason, this study was conducted in a linear fashion, with a broad survey phase leading to a more narrow interview phase meant to gain more specific

details. All of the elements presented in this study can help contribute to the approach of providing support for gifted underachievement.

While the definitions of underachievement found in current literature, as outlined in the literature review, vary greatly this researcher believes it to be imperative to understand how a teacher defines the term before one can understand how a teacher's approach to overcoming it and whether or not this approach can be successful. For that reason this study sought to answer research question 1, "How do academically gifted certified teachers define underachievement in their students?"

This study yielded a highly saturated response to this question and produced a simple definition - unmet potential.

With the setting for this study being a large school district in the state of Louisiana, it is imperative to note that Louisiana Bulletin 1508 recognizes gifted children as "those students who demonstrate abilities that give evidence of high performance in academic and intellectual aptitude (Bulletin 1508)." Gifted students are identified through an evaluation process. In this evaluation, a student must have a test of cognitive abilities, as well as achievement in reading and achievement in math. Gottfredson (1997), described cognitive ability as a general mental capability involving reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, complex idea comprehension, and learning from experience. A gifted exceptionality indicates a student is highly intelligent, capable of high performance. All students going through the evaluation process for gifted receive a detailed evaluation with descriptions of performance and ability in the areas mentioned above. (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017)

When the participants in this study refer to unmet potential, they are referring to the potential of a gifted student detailed in his/her evaluation. Any time a teacher discusses a

discrepancy of grades versus performance ability they are not doing so based on anecdotal evidence or their perceived measures of success. The teachers interviewed are referring explicitly to the use of the evaluation as a way to gain insight on a student's potential which takes into consideration their strengths and weaknesses in students' cognitive abilities and achievement abilities in reading and math.

Participant 12 spoke repeatedly about the data found in a student's evaluation as a rationale in proving success in underachievement strategies. They said "*[w]e set goals based on a student's gifted evaluation. We know that grades are an indicator of success for a student who is academically gifted. When their grades are poor and they are underachieving we know that we can be intentional about setting goals specific to academic performance because their evaluation tells us this is an area in which they should be successful...*"

Much of the literature that discusses recognizing underachievement uses arbitrary terms of measuring potential. Even NAGC discusses underachievement being evident in a "discrepancy between accomplishment and ability (NAGC Underachievement, January 2022)", without explaining how one can determine a student's ability.

Some student learning targets are based on the school district's perception of ability. This often lacks the consideration for a holistic understanding of a student's giftedness, skillset, or abilities. The gifted evaluations utilized in the state of Louisiana help teachers to address the needs of a gifted student in much more direct ways.

The researcher believes that without truly understanding the ways in which a child can perform, one could never possibly know if what they are seeing is actually underachievement nor could they know how to properly address this issue with a student.

Recognizing the Root of Underachievement

There are many aspects involved in recognizing underachievement revealed in the research findings of this study. Research question 2 “How do academically gifted certified teachers identify underachieving students?” is answered by seeking a true understanding of potential barriers to student success.

Literature suggests many reasons for this ailment that include but are not limited to perfectionism, anxiety, pressure, fear of failure, lack of confidence, boredom, or masking. (Reis & McCoach, 2000; McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Rimm 2008; Seigle, 2013)

The findings of this research suggest perfectionism, lack of confidence, fear of failure, inability to recognize value, lack of interest, and imposter syndrome are the most prevalent barriers to success. When a student goes through an evaluation process for gifted they come out with a label of not only an “exceptionality” but also of “gifted”. These words have strong connotations associated with them. A gifted student often is perceived to be exceptional. A gifted student has a true gift. Neither of these labels placed upon gifted persons discuss the intricacies of their extraordinary brains or the behaviors that manifest as a result.

Both the literature review and research findings of this study allude to the pressure that gifted students place on themselves or that parents and teachers put on them. Rimm (2008) suggests that “[g]ifted and creative children internalize pressures easily”. These pressures, again, are due to the expectations that come with being labeled as gifted.

Imposter syndrome was discussed in this study to be when a student does not “want the world to see that they’re not as smart as they think they are or as they feel they’re perceived to be (Participant 9).” Underachieving gifted students feel that they can not measure up to the labels that come with their exceptionality. Many of their behaviors are due to their desire to protect the

world from seeing them as less than the stereotypical gifted child. It is the belief of this researcher that many of these students, those with imposter syndrome, are not fully aware of all of the intricacies that come with being gifted.

From these pressures, perfectionism becomes a cause for a student to underachieve. The results of this study would agree as survey responses for this research discuss students “not attempting work because it is easier than attempting the work and falling short”. The research suggests that with many gifted underachievers, work can typically be done easily so when a challenge is given they often shut down because they are unable to navigate the feeling of struggle nor do they know how to persevere.

Fear of failure is another barrier to success that is derived from the pressures of being gifted. Much of the literature and findings of this study suggest that underachievers feel they are so afraid of getting something wrong that it takes a longer period of time before they will even attempt the work or they will not attempt the work at all. These students can not see the risk of trying being worth it. Results of this study suggest that this is a measure of control as it is easier to fail without trying because they know that their inability was not the cause. A student with this mentality can justify receiving a failing grade because it is no reflection of their work because there was no work done. Something to note that was brought about through this study’s findings is that it is not laziness, it is truly a defense mechanism used to address a fear of failing.

Another barrier to success for a gifted underachieving student is when a student does not see the value in the work being assigned to them. Research findings from this study suggest that many gifted students see school as simply a means to an end. They have to finish school to move on to the next phase in their lives. An example of this would be a student who wants to be an engineer not understanding the value of writing essays properly. They realize that in the grander

scheme of their career there are more pertinent things to learn. Because of this, they do not value the experience being given to them.

Some gifted underachievers lack value in school as a whole. The things that excite them are found outside of the realm of content. They prefer to spend their time on other things, considering schoolwork to be a waste of their time. There is very little value placed on the experiences that school brings, including the social aspects.

The research findings of this study aim to remind gifted educators that there is no one reason for a student's underachievement. If a strategy is chosen to aid a student in overcoming their underachievement this study proves that you must know why the student is not reaching his or her potential. This researcher believes that there can be no significant success in a strategy if there is no known root of the problem.

Specific Strategies for Success

In an effort to answer research question 3, "What strategies do academically gifted certified teachers utilize to overcome underachievement in the classroom?" this study explored a variety of teaching methods that have been researched and proven effective through the literature review. The theories and strategies reviewed in this study were selected due to their significance in student growth and motivation in other areas of youth development or education. These concepts are the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan), the Leader in Me program (Covey), and growth mindset (Dweck) specifically. Through the findings of this study, the researcher has discovered significance in the application of these strategies resulting in success for gifted underachieving students.

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination theory provided significant insight to the ways in which one can inspire motivation. The components of this theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, provide a great organizational framework for the findings of this study and how they can impact the motivation of gifted underachievers.

Competence is this self-determination theory's need for a student to understand what is expected of them. This study's findings included significance in participants recognizing the value of giving students specific expectations throughout their educational experiences through the use of success criteria or rubrics. The fear of failure is lessened or diminished when a student knows exactly what is expected of them and ways in which they can succeed. Deci and Ryan's discussion about intentional feedback and constructive criticism was echoed by the gifted educators interviewed in this study.

Much of what teachers credited to overcoming underachievement was creating trusting relationships - the component of relatedness - so that feedback can be critical and brutally honest. Of the strategies for success, relationship building was the most saturated, with every interview participant crediting suggesting their success starting with the development of authentic relationships.

The researcher held the belief that much of what was suggested to overcome underachievement was to get to know your students and their needs in order to address them. One thing that the existing literature lacks is tangible ways to build these relationships. The self-determination theory suggests relationships with teachers, peers, mentors, anyone who will hold a student accountable and show empathy and compassion for their unique personalities and needs. Deci and Ryan suggest that relatedness is necessary for someone to have self awareness and understand their worth (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991)

The findings of this study provide several specific strategies that gifted teachers have used and deemed as successful with regards to building relationships. The specific suggestions for how teachers can build relationships provided in the interview phase of the study were as follows :

- collect personal information through surveys or interest inventories
- have intentional one-on-one time with students
 - eat lunch with them
 - attend their extra curricular activities
 - initiate conversations about topics unrelated to curriculum or school
 - have individual conferences with them
- sharing personal information about yourself

While relationship building methods are not exclusive to the aforementioned, these are the methods found to be significant and effective through this study.

Through the suggestions of both the self-determination theory's relatedness component and the findings of this study building relationships creates an environment of trust within the classroom, allowing an underachieving student to feel safer in trying. The relationships formed remind them that it will be safe if they were to fail, that they can trust the feedback provided to them, and that they will still be cared for if they are not successful in every endeavor.

The high level of saturation of building relationships found in the data collected leads this researcher to believe that this is the most significant strategy discussed in this study. This study's findings suggest that a teacher who is working to assist a student in overcoming their underachievement should always begin with trying to build a relationship with the student. This

process has the ability to result in establishing trust, understanding the student's needs, and understanding the student's barriers to success, at the least.

The self-determination theory's component of autonomy is the suggestion by Deci & Ryan that a student who has a voice in his/her education will be more motivated. One subcode of the strategies for success code that emerged from the data collected was student choice. This was also a significant finding of the study, as there was saturation in the survey responses crediting student choice for a way in which a teacher re-engages a student.

The themes discovered through the coding of barriers to success suggested that lacking interest in the content or the inability to recognize value in a task or assignment were significant reasons for underachievement. Autonomy, through student choice, can provide a student with ownership in their studies. Literature reviewed for this study suggested that teachers should support students with multiple exceptionalities through providing opportunities for student choice (Josephson, et. al, 2008). While underachievement is not an additional exceptionality or disability, the researcher believes it to be an area of weakness in need of support.

The participants in this study suggest that a student who has a choice in how they present their knowledge is more likely to attempt work than a student who does not.

Suggestions for autonomy found in this study was the incorporation of student interests into curriculum, assignments, or lessons. This study found that students were more likely to engage in a task if it included a component where their personal interests were represented. The researcher believes that true autonomy can be accomplished once a teacher has gained information about the student's interests and student's preferred learning methods when building relationships.

It is believed by the researcher that the components of the self-determination theory and their individual theoretical frameworks add significant value to overcoming gifted student underachievement. Deci & Ryan's three components provide an all encompassing approach to teachers looking to meet the needs of their gifted learners who are not meeting their potential.

The Leader in Me Program aims to develop children's ability and "increase student performance" ("The Leader Formula", 2007) as leaders through the application of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective people. Research surrounding Steven Covey's program applauds its effectiveness as it "... emphasizes a culture of student empowerment and helps unleash each child's full potential (Goble, et al., 2015)".

Data collected in this study resulted in significant discussion about the incorporation of classroom jobs in the gifted setting amongst underachieving students. Participants shared their experiences in giving a student who is not progressing or working to their potential an opportunity to find ownership of something other than content or class work. Where a student may feel immense pressure due to the high expectations of an assessment or written assignment, a classroom job can provide them with the feeling of accomplishment or success after completing the duties of their job. Participant 13 shares that "...so many of them [see] they are truly capable and leaders in the classroom."

The Leader in Me program, by design, gives every student in the classroom a leadership role or classroom job. The findings of this study revealed that this strategy, assigning a classroom job, was used individually in an effort to show a student a strength that he/she may not have previously realized.

Due to the nature of underachieving students' individual barriers to success often relating to assigned work or content, there is a specific need to allow a student to excel in an area

unrelated to content. The researcher believes that while a student may never see true value in the work required or learning acquired in the educational setting there is a chance for growth when obtaining new skills or finding ways to contribute to their classroom environment. It is important to understand that overcoming underachievement may never change or diminish the student's barrier to success. However, using the suggested strategies from the research findings, one can find an alternative way to reengage or motivate a student.

As discussed by the participants of this study, underachieving students who are assigned a classroom job often feel a sense of responsibility to put forth effort as it pertains to their specific jobs because they do not want to let down their peers. Sometimes grades or accomplishments with content related work is not enough to motivate them but contributing to their peers when they carry out the duties of their job gives them a reason to follow through. Having others rely on the work that they do seems to hold an underachiever more accountable than academic performance that may otherwise seem arbitrary.

This study suggests that assigning a classroom job to an underachieving most often results in them experiencing accomplishment and wanting to continue to feel that way, "they generally continue to try harder in other areas. They're chasing that feeling again (Participant 3)."

Another strategy with a high level of saturation in this study was the teaching of Dweck's growth mindset. Dweck's studies tell us that "[p]raising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance (Dweck, 2016, p 177)." She goes on to explain that praising one for their innate intelligence rather than their efforts slowly but surely [causes one to] develop an aversion to difficult challenges. This thought has a direct correlation to what this

study suggests about barriers to success for gifted underachievers, that the pressures of being gifted often results in a fear of failure that cripples a student from achieving.

In teaching gifted students about growth mindset there is an opportunity to reframe the thoughts about the process of working being more important than the product. Gifted students who are not accustomed to struggle or challenge typically shutdown. Through the intentional teaching of growth mindset verbiage and practices, this strategy shows significance in its ability to inspire a shift in how a student will approach his or her learning.

Teachers shared that teaching a growth mindset is successful but student's application of it is difficult. Slowly and surely, if an underachieving student puts in effort - they put their mind to it and keep going - the question will be answered or the problem will be solved. This whole process proves that though it may not be easy it's gratifying to persevere and get to a solution.

Dweck tells us that struggle is imperative in learning. Gifted students have such a difficult time with this as they are not sure how to navigate this feeling and often shut down during moments of challenge and struggle. The reward of using growth mindset teachings is not immediately recognizable. Findings of this study reveal that there is no instant gratification but is rather something you may not see the end result til much longer down the line, but you will see the result of your hard work.

Gifted underachievers becoming acclimated with not just the feeling of being challenged or struggling but ways to respond to those feelings is imperative to their success. Through the incorporation of growth mindset teachings, this study believes that gifted underachievers can begin to overcome their fears of failure and can be given the proper tools to manage the feelings that come with the pressures of being gifted.

Using Success Recognition

Reflecting on Sternberg's Theory of Successful Intelligence, where "intelligence is viewed as various kinds, the mental processes involved in creative, analytical, practical, and wise thinking are the same (Sternberg, 1999)." This theory refutes the belief that we measure intelligence with data and numerical scores, as many in the world of education do. Sternberg's suggestion is that a person's "successful intelligence" can be recognized in creative ideas or recognizing that a problem exists and finding ways in which it can be solved. Many of these characteristics can be attributed to students in the gifted program.

The last of the research questions, "What do academically gifted certified teachers use to measure success in their underachieving gifted students?" is necessary to the significance of this study as we must have an understanding of how to recognize success when utilizing the best practices revealed in this study.

Gifted teachers participating in this study referred to the school district's use of standardized test data and student grades to measure success. The findings of this research yielded the belief that sometimes a student's academic performance can show success and growth, however, some gifted students may never show growth in this way.

Teachers discussed the individual nature of growth in students, based on the necessity of understanding the specific barriers to success in underachieving students. The findings of this study remind us of the true purpose of gifted education - differentiation in instruction based on the individual needs of its students. Measuring growth is no different, it is on a completely individual basis.

Giving consideration to the barriers to success recognized in this study, participants suggested the need for setting goals with students, also a part of the IEP process. Goals set

revolve, again, on the individual needs for each gifted student. With underachievers goals are set to work toward specific outcomes that address their lack of effort or engagement in the classroom environment. Through the use of these measurable goals, teachers can determine whether or not a student is progressing toward growth or has met their growth targets.

Setting and reaching goals in a student's IEP is one way to ensure that the success is measured individually and has taken into consideration barriers to success, specific expectations, and is not just based on how a school district views growth and achievement.

A student's confidence is another way that teachers can deem a strategy's success. The barriers to success in this study remind us of the fears of failure, imposter syndrome, etc., with which gifted underachieving students are plagued. Teachers in this study revealed the significance of success noted when observing an underachieving student's increased confidence. The saturation in the discussion of confidence in this study revealed that a student gaining a belief in his/her abilities leads to increased effort and participation in classroom discussions, activities, and assigned work.

Participants noted seeing a student working without assistance, being able to tackle the tasks at hand independently and without support as being a major sign of gaining confidence. Students working through problems or struggles without shutting down and with perseverance also are indicators of increased belief in oneself.

Knowing that many underachieving students either do not put forth effort in their work and turn it in quickly or do not attempt the assignment at all reminds us that when we see a student who takes pride in their work and is excited to share their finished product marks an increased confidence. Participant 10 called this "confirmation that they're now invested."

One of the ways this study reveals as a recognition of success is increased engagement. The high volume of saturation in responses about increased participation led this researcher to believe the significance of this measure. When underachieving students feel inspired to contribute more to classroom discussions or participate in classroom activities more than before, it can be determined that the strategies being implemented to help them overcome underachievement are working.

Levels of engagement can reveal massive growth in underachieving students as noted in participants' responses. Where students would previously choose not to participate in group work and after the utilization of the best practices in this study they are now leading a group's work. Other examples included the major change in a student previously afraid to speak in public going on to make school wide announcements.

It should be noted that small improvements in engagement are just as indicative of the success of a strategy being implemented. Completion of work or turning an assignment in sooner than before are also small indicators of an underachieving student being motivated to put forth effort.

This research also reminds us that in some instances an increase in grades or assessment scores can also prove, for some, that an underachiever is meeting his/her potential. This data can reveal to teachers that a student's barriers to success are less of a problem than previously when academic performance is increased and there is notable improvement.

Implications of the Study

When you think about the potential of underachievers developing skills to become leaders and contribute to the gifted classroom setting (and in their futures) in a more positive way, it can greatly impact the way gifted students are perceived. It will also change the way

teachers approach working with underachievement, as they will not be as frustrated or willing to give up on working through these challenges. Teachers will now have the support of a program that is all encompassing of students - regardless of the extent of their needs. This program could greatly change the way that gifted students engage in their studies and in the desires for their civic engagement and college and career paths.

This study has the potential to raise school performance scores, as underachieving gifted students often do incredibly poorly on standardized tests that determine these scores. While this is not the most important part of this study, it is definitely one of the perks that could come of its success.

The findings of this study remind us that, as the review of literature suggested, addressing underachievement must be done so with consideration to students as individuals. Learning the barriers to success, addressing them with appropriate strategies, and determining their success is all extremely specific to underachieving students as individuals.

Previous studies on the underachievement of gifted students suggest significantly the necessity for individualized understanding of a student. Addressing underachievement must be done in the same fashion. This study echoed that sentiment. All participants revealed their belief for individual approaches to gifted underachieving students.

Where this study goes beyond the scope of existing research is in its specificity in recommended strategies for overcoming underachievement. This researcher hoped that this study would provide gifted teachers with a marketplace of ideas when attempting to assist their students with recognizable barriers to success.

Practitioners in the field of gifted education are rarely researchers. The plates of gifted educators are often full and in having tried and true strategies to implement, the stress of working

with an underachieving student can be alleviated in having suggested methods, linked directly to gifted underachievement to implement rather than having to seek out methods that may or may not have an impact.

Where existing gifted research is limited in its approach to overcoming gifted underachievement this study took small but significant steps in correlating existing theories and practices proven to have remarkable impacts on youth development and education and directly linking their ability to impact growth in gifted student underachievement. Teachers across the country are often experimenting with a variety of approaches day in and day out, attempting to motivate and engage underachieving students, many of which are successful. Current research has yet to explore the validity of these attempts in practice. It is the belief of this researcher that sometimes the most effective strategies are those seen in the classroom rather than those recognized by educational researchers.

The researcher hopes that the findings of this study contribute to the field of gifted education in the training of gifted studies, whether that be through implementation at the district level, implementation in collegiate courses, presentations at gifted specific conferences, or even in publication of its findings for general consumption.

This researcher also hopes that this study contributes to the field of educational research by creating a greater volume of ethnographic research being conducted in gifted classrooms. Action research is taking place daily by teachers who are simply trying to provide help to their struggling students. Educational researchers can find great value in the “on the spot” experimentation being conducted by teachers. While a teacher’s better judgment may not go through the methodological research process, there is still a great deal of value in what is being done. The world of education can gain a great deal of insight through more intense research

being conducted alongside teachers who are not researchers by trade but are using research methods everyday in their classrooms. The validity of their practices could change the scope of education research as we know it.

While not the main goal, this researcher also hopes that the impact of this study's findings permeates to the understanding of giftedness, bringing a greater awareness of gifted education. Where many administrators expect high test scores and academic performance from gifted students, one can hope that the findings of this study reveal that there are many barriers to success that have to be overcome in order to inspire growth in gifted students. This study hopes to reveal that growth among gifted students can be measured in a number of ways that do not have a direct correlation to academic performance.

It is important that gifted students are seen with a myriad of abilities, not just the existing stereotype of high achieving and high performing students who will breed great achievement through assessment. The complexity of the gifted brain is a large part of gifted education that is often underestimated.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The setting for this study was a large school district in southwest Louisiana. The sample size of this study was limited to teachers within this district, limiting the participation of gifted educators from a larger setting or multiple settings. Though there was a high volume of saturation provided from the participation of this sample, expanding this research nationwide could yield different results.

While the researcher still agrees that qualitative research was the right choice for this study, qualitative research tools, such as interviews, are not designed to capture hard facts. More credibility could be given to this study if coupled with quantitative research. For example, a

survey designed for quantitative research, and subsequent statistical analysis, may offer more evidence to strengthen the data discovered using qualitative research tools.

Several areas for future research include but are not limited to the exploration of other research-proven motivation strategies, the development of a specific inventory to gauge the level of gifted student underachievement, exploring the efficacy of gifted identification nationwide and its impact on gifted underachievement, or possibly using the best practices shared in this study to have control and focus groups to further validate their efficacy.

While this researcher conducted this study based on their experiences with existing theories in youth development and education, there are several educational practices that were not explored in this study. Research specific to motivation could add additional strategies to the world of gifted education. Research on the use of whole brain teaching could impact the understanding of a gifted brain and how this strategy satisfies the unique needs of gifted students.

The school system utilized to conduct this research has unique gifted settings - elementary academics, middle school academics, high school academics, and elementary/middle school enrichment. As noted in participants' responses, the findings were consistent among participants. The setting of the teacher did not seem to have any impact on the responses given, strategies discussed, nor did it have an impact on the ways in which the teacher measured success. If this study were to be replicated, the setting and sample of the study may have a different impact due to the structure of the gifted setting(s) being studied.

The setting of this study used the Louisiana requirements for the evaluation of gifted students to measure growth and success. This is specific to only one state's evaluation and identification process but other states evaluate students in vastly different ways. For example, the state of Georgia's gifted eligibility includes scores in mental ability, creativity, motivation, and

achievement (Section III Gifted Education Eligibility Chart, 2022). A study that compares the evaluation requirements of each state could greatly impact how we understand and implement gifted education strategies.

When reviewing Georgia's creativity requirement for gifted eligibility, one could say there is a greater presence of creative gifted students in their program who require a totally different set of approaches to motivate them. The academic setting would probably not suit these learners and you may see a higher volume of underachievement due simply to the nature of these student's giftedness. This eligibility chart makes this researcher believe that there is disparity amongst gifted students in the nation because eligibility requirements are vastly different by state. Is this equitable? Should there be federal requirements for eligibility in gifted services?

This study revealed recurring barriers to success. These were discussed with teachers who have experienced them in their tenure, recognizing them amongst their students anecdotally. There is no standard method to which we deem a student an underachiever. This researcher wonders if through an extensive study of barriers to success an instrument could not be developed to easily determine the individual barriers of students upon their entry to the classroom at the beginning of the year. We take interest inventories to gauge a student's preferences, hobbies, and likes. We give diagnostic assessments to determine a student's current level of performance, yet barriers to success are something we cannot often see until they reveal themselves over time. An instrument measuring these could provide immediate insight and give teachers the ability to address them on day one of their time with their students.

Conclusion

The nature of a student's gifted underachievement is deeply rooted in their barriers to success. In gaining a deeper understanding of a student's giftedness, one can determine not only

the ways in which they are underachieving but can also begin to devise a plan with the goal of motivation.

The results of this study suggested that there is a linear approach to overcoming gifted underachievement. One must determine if there is unmet potential, then they must determine barriers to success, followed by employing a strategy for success, and then recognizing success. All of these factors are mutually exclusive, though the ways in which each piece is implemented is expected to vary based on individual underachieving gifted students.

In seeing students with unmet potential, teachers have deemed these students as gifted underachievers. Those participating in this study attributed that lack of achievement to perfectionism, lack of confidence, fear of failure, inability to recognize the value in education, a lack of interest, and having imposter syndrome. Participants provided an in-depth look at the strategies being utilized in their classrooms to assist students in overcoming their underachievement in the gifted setting. Through the implementation of classroom jobs, growth mindset teachings, intentional relationship building, and giving student's choice in their learning, teachers are seeing growth. Growth was measured in this study by participants through recognizing increased confidence, higher levels of engagement, and reaching of individualized goals by those students they classified as gifted underachievers.

Gifted education in the state of Louisiana follows the same requirements for curriculum and matriculation as the students in regular education. Teachers in this study are doing their best to satisfy the components of the curriculum required as well as crafting individualized education plans that allow them to address the individual needs of their students. In becoming an academically gifted certified teacher, these educators are afforded the opportunity to learn about how they can maintain this balance. However, the coursework required to earn this certification

could not possibly present an aspiring gifted educator with everything necessary to meet the extensive individual needs of their students. Until then, the need for additional research specific to successful teacher's best practices in gifted education remains.

Appendix A. Survey Questions

1. How would you define “gifted underachievement?”
2. How many of your current students are dealing with this problem?
3. In what ways do you recognize this trait in your students?
4. Are there any particular pieces of data or assessments that you use in order to measure underachievement?
5. How does the issue of underachievement affect your job satisfaction?
6. Are there any strategies or methods that you practice in order to attempt to engage these students who are “underachieving”?
7. What advice would you give to new/incoming teachers regarding underachievement?
8. What measures do you use to determine that an underachieving student has performed to his/her ability?

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions

What is your current teaching position?

How many years have you been teaching?

How many of these years have been spent teaching gifted students?

1. How would you describe your philosophy on gifted education?
2. Describe your classroom management style.
3. How would you define “gifted underachievement”?
4. How many of your current students do you feel are facing this problem?
5. Are there any particular pieces of data or assessments that you use in order to measure underachievement?
6. In what ways do you recognize underachievement in your students?
7. What would you suggest are the contributing factors to a gifted student’s underachievement?
8. How do you measure student success in your classroom?
9. What accomplishments, if any, let you know that a student is reaching his/her potential?
10. Do the students in your classroom have classroom jobs or leadership roles?
 - a. If so, can you describe the impact of these roles on your students?
11. What methods, if any, do you use to teach your students about grit or growth mindset?
 - a. If applicable, can you describe the impact of these methods?
12. Describe how students in your classroom receive feedback on their performance?
 - a. Do you find that this impacts their motivation? How?
13. In what ways do you intentionally foster relationships with your students?
 - a. Describe the impacts of these relationship builders.

14. In what ways, if any, do you incorporate students' interests into your instruction?
 - a. In what way does this impact student achievement?

15. Are there any strategies or methods that you practice in order to attempt to engage these students who are "underachieving"?
 - a. If so, can you describe them? What impact do you find they have on your students?

16. Are there outside factors that contribute to student's overcoming underachievement?

17. What advice would you give to new/incoming teachers regarding underachievement?

18. How does the issue of underachievement affect your job satisfaction?

19. How does the issue of underachievement affect your classroom environment?

Appendix C. IRB Approval



TO: Neil Mathews
LSUAM | Col of HSE | Education |
CC00165

FROM: Alex Cohen
Chairman, Institutional Review Board

DATE: 20-Apr-2022

RE: IRBAM-22-0309

TITLE: Overcoming Gifted Student
Underachievement Through Best Practices
Application

SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application

Review Type: Expedited Review

Risk Factor: Minimal

Review Date: 20-Apr-2022

Status: Approved

Approval Date: 20-Apr-2022

Approval Expiration Date: 19-Apr-2023

Expedited Categories: 07

Requesting Waiver of Informed Consent: No

Re-review frequency: Annually

Number of subjects approved: 50

LSU Proposal Number:

By: Alex Cohen, Chairman

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.

5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

** All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/research>*

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Vita

Samantha Simmons Webre, born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After earning her bachelor's degree, she worked as a 4-H Youth Development Agent in southwest Louisiana while earning her master's degree. She then went on to become an elementary educator in her school district in southwest Louisiana for seven years while earning her education specialist degree in gifted education. After beginning her doctoral studies in gifted education, she assumed her current position of Gifted & Talented Program Manager.

While in the classroom, Webre was recognized as her school's Teacher of the Year. She presented several professional presentations at the national, state, and district level to bring awareness to gifted education. Among them was a presentation delivered at the National Association for Gifted Children's Annual Convention entitled "Using Children's Literature to Teach Gifted Kids About Acquiring a Global Perspective". After earning her doctorate, Webre intends to continue serving in her current position with her district while implementing new approaches to teacher support and professional development opportunities.