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IS GIFTED EDUCATION AND ITS PROGRAM A BRAND?

by

FARZANA BEGUM

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
The City University of New York

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APPROVAL

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
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ABSTRACT

Is Gifted Education and Its Program a Brand?

by

Farzana Begum

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The education system has been under constant construction. *What will make our students successful* has driven education to make a number of changes, and therefore, over the years, the importance of differentiation evolved, mandating the education system to acknowledge that education should not be standardized and that all students learn and retain knowledge differently. As a result, a number of classroom environments and programs have been established to cater to these differences. One example of this is the establishment of the Gifted and Talented Program or Gifted Education in the education system.

Gifted Education provides identified students with a stimulating classroom environment that will meet their intellectual, pedagogical, and social needs. Gifted students are given opportunities of maneuvering challenges, pushing their thinking, limits, skills, existing abilities, and possible talents. However, despite the evident pedagogical advantages for these learners, over the years, Gifted Education and its program have evoked an ongoing and controversial debate. The constant question of how equitable or equal the program truly is, arises. Through close observation, the program undeniably appears to serve certain racial groups. The noticeable indications of racial disparities in our education system as a whole are also revealed through Gifted and Talented

programs. As a result, many have argued that Gifted Education and its program should be removed entirely from the education system.

However, we have seen the debate of whether or not Gifted and Talented programs should be removed for many years, and regardless of the substantial evidence of inequity shown in the specific students being served, the program continues to exist and remain in the system; therefore, proving that the chances of eradicating the program are extremely low. Parents continue to apply to these programs, and competitively figure out ways to get a spot in the program as young as four and five (Kindergarten). Parents work towards obtaining what they believe is the best quality of education there is to offer in public schools—giving the impression that the Gifted and Talented program is a high-demand brand that parents really want or would want.

To support this claim of the Gifted and Talented program being a brand, I gathered responses through written questionnaires from parents of Gifted and Talented children in a public elementary school from grades 1-5 and current or former Gifted and Talented teachers from grades 4 and 5 to learn more about the perspectives of those who are involved in the program. In addition, as a current Gifted and Talented teacher of five consecutive years in the fourth grade of a public school, I have included challenging experiences that support my claim that the Gifted and Talented program has developed into a brand for parents. Through my study, I intend to educate on what Gifted Education is, its advantages for its respective learners, the demographic disparities shown in who are being served in the program, its injustice towards unidentified gifted students and students of communities who are at odds with the education system or lack the resources to have access to this program through data and firsthand perspectives of members within this program, and possible solutions that can improve the equity of Gifted and Talented programs or the education system as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While developing my thesis, I was blessed with significant support from many individuals. My thesis advisor, Karen Miller, supported me greatly in discovering the value of composing this thesis and, most importantly, the importance of having my voice heard through my writing—that I should not be afraid to voice my opinions and share my expertise and experiences as an educator.

I want to thank a supportive parent, who wishes to be anonymous, in my current Gifted and Talented class who took the lead in getting in touch and communicating with all the class parents of the Gifted and Talented classrooms at my school to share my study and questionnaire. The class parents of our school represent on behalf of all the active parents in each class. Because of this parent's help, my study and questionnaire reached all the active parents of the Gifted and Talented child(ren) in my school, which ultimately created the heart of this thesis.

I want to thank my principal who allowed me to conduct my study at our school, and all the participants of my study who took the time to answer my questions and provide truthful thoughts that enlightened me greatly on the perspectives of Gifted and Talented programs. I want to thank my colleagues who allowed me to interview them to share their perspectives on the program because it is important to provide a safe space for educators to voice their thoughts, which many times than often, we, as educators, are not given a chance to.

Last but not least, I want to acknowledge and thank all family members, loved ones, and friends who listened to my ideas, complimented me on my dedication to completing this thesis, and, most importantly, supported me in what my bigger goal was in composing this piece, which is to shine light on an issue or topic that is really important to me. Regardless of my title of being a Gifted and Talented teacher, I love children, and the experience I gained in this role made me a

better educator and has motivated me to implement my learned practices in all classrooms with all learners because we all have gifts and we all have talents. Thank you.

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*To all the teachers who strive to be a part of the change,
and to all the children, who are all unique and gifted.*

Introduction

Throughout the development of the education system, a number of classroom environments or programs have been established to cater to the different kinds of learners our student population consists of. For one, the Gifted and Talented Program or Gifted Education has been established in the education system to provide selected students with a stimulating atmosphere that meets their intellectual, pedagogical, and social needs. The advantages are evident in serving the population of identified Gifted and Talented students. However, over the years, Gifted Education and its program have evoked an ongoing and controversial debate. The constant question of how equitable or equal the program is, arises. The program noticeably serves certain racial groups.¹ Despite acknowledging that there are clear indications of racial disparities in our education system and that the Gifted and Talented program is representative of this disparity, the probability of eradicating the program remains extremely low. Parents continue to apply for the program and competitively work towards having their child(ren) gain access to what they believe is the best quality of education there is to offer in schools—giving the impression that the Gifted and Talented program is more so a brand than a differentiated classroom environment that was established to cater to a group of learners that have specific pedagogical needs.

To prove this claim, I decided it was most effective and impactful to gain insight directly from parents. I found that it was necessary to gain knowledge of the perspectives and motives of parents who had or currently have child(ren) in a Gifted and Talented program. I believed that hearing from parents would either confirm or support or clarify preconceived notions of whether

¹ Hopkins, A., Garrett, K., & Garret, K. (2010). "Separate and Unequal: The Underrepresentation of African American Students in Gifted and Talented Programs." *Black History Bulletin*, 73(1), 24–30.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24759663>

or not the Gifted and Talented program is treated as a brand or as a genuine form of a differentiated educational program for students.

Because Gifted Education is also prevalent in institutions such as private schools, charter schools, and/or enrichment programs that have varying titles throughout the nation, I will be only focusing on the Gifted and Talented program in the New York City of Department of Education with a specific focus on elementary grade levels (grades 1-5). My decision to focus particularly on elementary students stems primarily from my personal interest and passion for elementary students as I am a current Gifted and Talented teacher of five consecutive years in the fourth grade of a public elementary school. Furthermore, I knew I would be able to investigate and execute my study about the Gifted and Talented program with my personal access to other Gifted and Talented teachers and relationships with students and parents who are in the program. Also, my strong desire to share my experiential and pedagogical knowledge of the field drove this study.

The public elementary school used to execute my study is located in a gentrifying neighborhood where, according to its 2021-2022 demographic snapshot, less than 5% are Asian, more than 50% of the student population is Black, 14% is Hispanic, 17% are White, and the remaining 5% of the population selected “other” as their racial identification. In addition, several programs are provided within the school: General Education, ICT (Integrated Co-Teaching), NEST, Dual-Language (Spanish), and Gifted and Talented. From kindergarten to grade 5, each grade consistently offers 4 out of the 5 programs: ICT, NEST, Dual-Language, and Gifted and Talented. In Table 1, you will see what each program entails and its characteristics, which are all detailed on the New York City Department of Education website and will be referenced throughout my study.

Table 1.1

<i>Program Name</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
<i>General Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Students will be educated in a classroom with non-disabled peers.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Selected students may receive Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) from a certified special education teacher which will take place within the classroom or in a dedicated location in the school.</i>
<i>Integrated Co-Teaching Services (ICT)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Include students with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) and students without IEPs. No more than 12 (or 40 percent) of the students in the class can have IEPs.</i> ● <i>There are two teachers—a general education teacher and a special education teacher. The teachers work together to adapt materials and modify instruction to ensure the entire class can participate.</i>
<i>Dual Language</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Teaches students in two languages: English and another language such as Spanish, Chinese, etc.</i> ● <i>Both languages are equally used. Students are taught to read, write, and speak in both languages.</i> ● <i>Classes are comprised of English Language Learners and English proficient students.</i> ● <i>The goal of the program is for students to learn how to speak, read, understand, and write in two languages, and also learn about and appreciate other cultures.</i>
<i>NEST</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Serves students with autism in a classroom with general education students. The class is a small Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, with one special education teacher and one general education teacher. As students get older, the class size increases. There is no classroom paraprofessional.</i> ● <i>Classes follow the New York State Learning Standards and the same curriculum used in all DOE schools.</i> ● <i>ASD Nest teachers are trained in specialized teaching strategies for students with autism, including a special social curriculum called Social Development Intervention (SDI) developed by NYU. SDI is an evidence-based program that supports social-emotional development. This is implemented to help students improve social functioning and is taught in small groups.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Students must meet the following criteria:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Eligible for an educational disability classification of Autism.</i> ○ <i>Average to above average intelligence with consistent development, including verbal and nonverbal abilities, working memory, language, and attention.</i> ○ <i>Academic skills on or above grade level.</i> ○ <i>Language skills on or close to age level, except in social language.</i> ○ <i>Mild to moderate social delays. May demonstrate challenges in interacting and/or playing with peers or adults, with handling changes in routine, and with monitoring and controlling their own emotions and behaviors.</i> ○ <i>Mild behavior challenges. The student is not physically aggressive, does not engage in self-injurious behaviors, and does not show “escape behaviors,” such as running away from staff or exiting the classroom or school building.</i>
<p><i>Gifted and Talented (G&T Program)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Offers accelerated instruction</i> ● <i>Taught by a certified general education teacher with an advanced certificate in gifted education</i> ● <i>Eligibility depends on where a child attends in Pre-K and if they attend a Pre-K school.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Parents who currently have their pre-K child(ren) at DOE/district schools, Pre-K Centers, NYC Early Education Centers (NYCEECs), or charter schools can add the G&T program to their kindergarten application and will be evaluated by their current pre-K teachers.</i> ○ <i>Parents who currently have their pre-K child(ren) at private or parochial school programs or are not yet in school can apply by listing the G&T program on their kindergarten application prior to or by the indicated deadline and completing an interview by early childhood education experts. Based on the interview, the early childhood education experts will nominate the eligible applicant.</i> ● <i>Teachers are asked to consider the following when nominating a child for the G&T program:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>the entire year’s learning experience with each</i>

	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>individual child</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>each individual child holistically</i> ○ <i>each child from a strengths-based perspective</i> ○ <i>observed behaviors that may occur more than once (consider a wide range of observations and not a minimum/maximum number)</i> ○ <i>the various and many ways children express what they know and are able to do</i> ○ <i>The end-of-year expectations as outlined in The New York State Prekindergarten Learning standards</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Teachers are asked to consider the DOE's policy of ensuring equal education for all students without regard to their actual or perceived race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, or weight.</i> ● <i>Teacher/Program Nomination Form contains three sections: Curiosity and Initiative, Approaches to Learning, and Perceptiveness and Self-Direction</i> ● <i>Teachers are asked to use authentic assessment data collected throughout the school year to help in their selections.</i>
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For my study, I gathered responses from parents of Gifted and Talented children from grades 1-5 using a questionnaire. The questionnaire, along with consent forms, were given electronically for purposes of convenience for parents and consisted of ten questions. The following questions were asked, and in total, fourteen parents answered anonymously: 1) How did you learn about the Gifted and Talented program? 2) What steps did you take for your child to be enrolled in a gifted program? (Tutoring, Workbooks, Exams, etc.?) 3) In your opinion, what distinguishes the Gifted and Talented program from other programs? 4) What is your reason(s) for applying for the Gifted and Talented program? 5) Why do you prefer your child to be in the Gifted and Talented program rather than the other programs offered in the school? List reasons. 6) Do you believe the Gifted and Talented program was the best for your child? Explain. 7) How do you

think the Gifted and Talented program will shape your child's future? 8) In your opinion, what are the cons of the Gifted and Talented program? 9) If you could, would you change your child's placement with this program? Why? 10) In your opinion, what would you change about the Gifted and Talented program?

Based on the parents' responses, I decided to further my study by interviewing teachers and gaining insight on their perspective on the Gifted and Talented program. We must acknowledge that the success of Gifted and Talented classrooms connects with the effectiveness of the teachers educating within the program. Because these classrooms are cultivating success within the students, the program remains. Therefore, I asked myself, *what are Gifted and Talented teachers doing in their classrooms that ensures the success and continuation of the program? Is something different being done in their classrooms that perhaps is not taking place in other classroom environments?* I knew I would only know the answer to this question by listening to the educators themselves who are teaching the program effectively in our school, and therefore, soon after, I interviewed two teachers—a former fourth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher and the current fifth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher. I took the opportunity to ask not only about their teaching practices and opinions about the program but also about their experiences while teaching the program. This consisted of both positive and challenging experiences.

I created another questionnaire of twelve questions that was sent electronically to both colleagues for convenience purposes, similar to the parents. The following questions were asked and answered: 1) How would you define Gifted and Talented? 2) What is your point of view on Gifted and Talented programs? 3) What are the advantages of the program? 4) What are the disadvantages of the program? 5) Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with students that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population? 6) Have you experienced

difficult/challenging moments with parents that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population?
7) What makes your classroom different from other classrooms based on your noticings? 8) What makes your classroom successful? 9) What are the components of a **strong** classroom? 10) What are things you make sure to incorporate into your classroom to ensure success from each student?
11) What makes an effective teacher? Do you embody those characteristics?

While reading the responses of my colleagues, I made many connections. I made connections to their opinions, practices, and, most importantly, experiences. As a current fourth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher, my claim of the Gifted and Talented program being a brand was always just an opinion I held within myself. My five consecutive years of teaching the program accumulated a number of experiences—experiences that were positive and experiences that were indeed challenging, frustrating, and questionable. During these challenging moments, I too, began to question the establishment of the Gifted and Talented program and the education system as a whole. Yes, I saw the effectiveness of the classroom environment, and yes, I knew my dedication fostered and cultivated success among the students. Every year, students astounded me, and I believed that the program was best fitting for the kind of learners they were—that it was a differentiated classroom environment they needed to ensure their success. However, regardless of the positives I experienced, I could not ignore the challenges that made me question whether the Gifted and Talented program was really equitable or equal, similar to the debates of this controversial issue.

The responses I gathered from the participating parents and my colleagues who have taught the program revealed that regardless of the differentiated classroom environment the program offers for its students, the Gifted and Talented program also presents itself as a brand to many. Through my study, I intend to educate you, my readers, on what Gifted Education is, its advantages

for its respective learners, the demographic disparities shown in who are being served in the program, its injustice towards unidentified gifted students and students of communities who are at odds with the education system through data and firsthand perspectives of members within this program, and possible solutions that can improve the equity of Gifted and Talented programs or the education system as a whole.

CHAPTER 1

What is the Problem?

The definition of Gifted Education has evolved over the years. In 1972, the U.S. Department of Education, currently known as the Department of Education, originally provided the following definition:

“Gifted and Talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.”²

However, the broadness of the definition left educators and societal members to identify gifted students inadequately and with minimum inclusion of diversity. By 1993, the original definition of Gifted and Talented was extended, explicitly detailing the characteristics of gifted students and the inclusion of diverse cultures. It states:

“Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high-performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas. Possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.”³

² Rimm, S. B., Siegle, D. B., & Davis, G. A.. (2017). *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (7th ed.). Pearson.11.

³ Rimm, S. et. al. (2017). *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (7th ed.). Pearson. 12.

The change from a broad definition to a lengthy and more explicit definition initiates a conversation about why such a change was necessary. The phrases that were added later on, such as “youth from all cultural groups” and “across all economic strata,” insinuates that when identifying gifted students, these factors were perhaps not being considered and interestingly, this issue continues even to today as an issue of inequality in the Gifted and Talented conversation. The current New York City Department of Education website states, in regards to Pre-Kindergarten teachers nominating students for the Gifted and Talented program to “consider the DOE’s policy of ensuring equal education for all students without regard to their actual or perceived race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, or weight.”⁴ Noticeably, the information provided for the other programs, such as General Education, ICT, Dual-Language, and NEST, does not specify using the same guidelines—leaving you to ponder why. *Why are these guidelines specified for only the Gifted and Talented program?*

Let’s take a moment to dig deeper into the issue of inequality existing in the Gifted and Talented program. *Does it actually exist, and if so, how do we know?* The answer is found in the various data and studies completed by many others concerned with the issue, for example, Donna Y. Ford. Ford is a distinguished professor in the College of Education and Human Ecology at Ohio State University. Over the years, she has proven to be an expert in Urban education and Gifted education. She has written numerous articles on Gifted education and, specifically, dives into the issue of the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs. In her piece, *Investigating the Intersection of Poverty and Race in Gifted Education Journals: A 15 Year Analysis*, her and

⁴ “Gifted and Talented,” NYC Public Schools, New York City Department of Education, <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/gifted-talented>.

Ramon B. Goings conducted a study to comprehend the impact of race and poverty on racial representation in the gifted population. Within her piece, she shares data from the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection. In the 2011-2012 school year, the composition of Blacks in gifted programs was at 8.8 percent. Hispanic comprised 16.8 percent, and 1 percent were comprised of American Indian/Alaska Native students.⁵ White comprised an outstanding 59.9 percent—clearly demonstrating an overrepresentation of White gifted students and accentuating an evident underrepresentation of minority groups in gifted programs.

Along with Donna Y. Ford’s concern for the issue, public data on the National Center for Education Statistics, as shown in Figure A, supports the issue of the possible lack of equity and equality in the Gifted and Talented program. The data depicts the lack of representation in gifted programs, particularly in the Black population. The NCES recorded the percentage of public-school students enrolled in Gifted and Talented programs by sex, race/ethnicity, and state in the U.S. from 2013 to 2014. According to the data provided, all the states showed a consistently lower percentage of Black students in gifted programs than all other races. The highest percentage of Black students shown in the gifted program was 11.1 percent, which was in Maryland, and the highest percentages were consistently shown amongst the White and Asian communities. The percentage of White students in the gifted programs goes as high as 20 percent, shown in the state of South Carolina, and Asians go even higher, as high as about 40 percent, shown in the state of Maryland. The consistency of low percentages amongst Black students in all states nationwide proves that the lack of equity and equality in Gifted and Talented programs is perhaps more of a systematic issue within the education system than an individual education-related issue.

⁵ Goings, R. B., & Ford, D. Y., (2017), “Investigating the Intersection of Poverty and Race in Gifted Education Journals: A 15-Year Analysis,” *Gifted Child Quarterly*.

Figure 1.1

National Center for Education Statistics: Percentage of public school students enrolled in Gifted and Talented programs, by sex, race/ethnicity, and state: Selected years, 2004 through 2013-14

[Standard errors appear in parentheses]

State	2004, total	2006, total	2011-12, total ¹	2013-14 ¹											
				Sex			Race/ethnicity								
				Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or more races		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
United States	6.7 (0.05)	6.7 (0.04)	6.4	6.7	6.4	7.0	7.7	4.3	4.9	13.3	4.4	5.2	6.9		
Alabama	4.8 (0.11)	5.5 (0.06)	8.4	8.4	8.0	8.9	11.2	3.9	4.9	17.6	6.9	11.7	5.7		
Alaska	4.1 (0.19)	4.1 (0.19)	4.7	4.9	4.7	5.2	6.8	3.0	4.3	6.3	2.3	0.9	6.5		
Arizona	5.9 (0.17)	6.3 (0.11)	5.8	4.8	5.0	4.6	6.6	2.3	3.4	9.9	3.3	1.7	5.5		
Arkansas	9.9 (0.65)	9.5 (0.43)	9.8	9.8	8.9	10.9	11.1	8.5	5.5	16.2	2.2	6.2	6.3		
California	8.4 (0.18)	8.3 (0.21)	8.2	7.8	7.6	8.1	9.7	4.5	5.8	15.1	8.1	5.3	9.0		
Colorado	6.7 (0.11)	6.8 (0.11)	6.5	7.7	7.9	7.5	9.6	4.1	4.4	12.8	6.4	4.3	9.0		
Connecticut	3.0 (0.32)	3.8 (0.41)	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.4	2.7	1.1	1.0	4.6	0.5	1.1	2.4		
Delaware	4.6 ¹	(⁺)	5.6 ¹	(⁺)	2.0	2.3	2.1	2.5	2.9	1.4	1.2	6.1	1.8	2.4	
District of Columbia	—	(⁺)	—	(⁺)	0.1	#	#	#	0.1	#	#	0.3	0.0	0.0	
Florida	4.5 (0.06)	4.7 (0.05)	5.4	5.8	5.6	5.9	7.6	2.3	5.3	13.3	4.1	4.3	6.2		
Georgia	8.9 (0.30)	9.3 (0.35)	10.4	12.9	12.1	13.8	16.1	10.4	6.5	26.5	9.0	10.5	12.5		
Hawaii	5.7 (0.57)	6.2 ¹	(⁺)	1.4	3.0	2.4	3.5	4.4	2.1	1.6	4.2	1.7	4.2	2.5	
Idaho	3.9 (0.23)	4.2 (0.20)	3.0	3.6	3.5	3.7	4.1	2.2	1.4	7.1	2.7	1.9	2.9		
Illinois	5.4 (0.22)	5.8 (0.24)	3.5	6.8	6.5	7.1	5.7	7.7	6.7	15.4	10.9	6.4	7.1		
Indiana	7.1 (0.49)	7.9 (0.40)	12.6	12.1	11.6	12.6	14.0	4.9	6.5	20.8	8.7	9.5	9.8		
Iowa	8.5 (0.38)	8.2 (0.26)	9.3	9.4	9.2	9.7	10.5	3.2	4.2	13.9	4.4	4.1	7.9		
Kansas	3.3 (0.11)	3.0 (0.12)	2.9	2.7	2.8	2.5	3.2	0.9	0.9	6.8	1.9	1.6	2.5		
Kentucky	13.0 (0.54)	14.6 (0.50)	12.7	15.8	14.7	17.0	17.3	7.9	7.5	26.8	14.6	10.9	11.7		
Louisiana	3.9 (0.32)	3.4 (0.13)	3.0	4.2	3.7	4.8	5.8	2.3	3.6	14.8	5.2	2.8	4.3		
Maine	3.0 (0.36)	3.2 (0.19)	4.6	4.9	4.5	5.3	5.0	2.4	2.6	8.0	3.5	3.1	3.7		
Maryland	13.8 ¹	(⁺)	16.1 ¹	(⁺)	15.8	16.0	14.7	17.4	17.5	11.1	14.0	39.4	10.1	10.2	17.2
Massachusetts	0.8 (0.13)	0.7 (0.10)	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.4	1.0	0.4	0.3	0.5		
Michigan	3.9 (0.37)	3.4 (0.29)	1.9	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.5	0.7	0.6	3.0	1.6	1.0	0.7		
Minnesota	8.1 (0.37)	8.8 (0.28)	8.0	7.2	7.1	7.4	7.2	6.0	4.7	14.9	4.6	2.5	5.8		
Mississippi	6.0 (0.19)	6.1 (0.20)	6.7	6.7	6.3	7.1	10.2	3.5	5.7	14.7	10.7	3.3	4.8		
Missouri	3.8 (0.12)	3.6 (0.11)	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.5	2.2	2.7	11.6	2.2	3.0	3.9		
Montana	5.6 (0.28)	5.2 (0.20)	4.2	3.8	3.9	3.7	4.2	2.4	2.0	6.5	3.4	1.7	2.5		
Nebraska	11.4 (0.31)	11.4 (0.24)	11.8	12.0	11.5	12.6	13.5	8.3	6.9	19.9	8.7	5.6	11.7		
Nevada	1.9 (0.01)	1.9 ¹	(⁺)	2.0	3.3	3.3	3.3	5.4	0.9	1.7	5.5	2.0	1.8	4.6	
New Hampshire	2.3 (0.55)	2.6 (0.54)	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	0.4	0.3	1.6	0.0	0.7	1.1		
New Jersey	6.9 (0.38)	7.0 (0.35)	6.5	5.9	5.4	6.5	7.1	3.1	2.9	11.9	7.5	2.9	4.6		
New Mexico	10.7 (0.26)	4.0 (0.14)	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.3	8.2	3.3	3.1	13.4	5.7	2.6	5.8		
New York	2.2 (0.18)	2.9 (0.13)	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.9	2.2	0.9	0.6	3.6	1.9	1.1	2.1		
North Carolina	10.9 (0.83)	10.8 (0.42)	10.6	10.0	9.8	10.3	14.4	4.0	4.5	18.7	7.9	5.9	9.8		
North Dakota	3.1 (0.30)	2.8 (0.18)	3.3	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.2	1.7	0.7	6.2	3.1	3.1	0.1-0.2		
Ohio	7.4 (0.40)	7.3 (0.33)	3.7	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.9	1.4	1.9	11.2	1.8	3.5	3.5		
Oklahoma	14.0 (0.45)	13.7 (0.39)	13.9	13.7	13.1	14.3	16.5	7.6	7.7	26.5	8.5	13.3	11.1		
Oregon	7.1 (0.20)	6.9 (0.16)	6.8	6.5	6.7	6.3	7.4	3.1	2.6	16.6	3.0	2.5	7.6		
Pennsylvania	4.8 (0.19)	4.5 (0.17)	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	4.4	1.0	1.2	8.8	3.3	2.0	2.7		
Rhode Island	1.8 (0.38)	1.4 (0.21)	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.1-0.2	0.1		
South Carolina	12.7 (0.98)	11.0 (0.57)	12.0	13.4	12.0	14.9	18.7	6.5	7.2	25.6	14.1	8.2	11.7		
South Dakota	2.2 (0.20)	2.7 (0.17)	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.9	2.3	0.8	0.7	4.5	3.0	0.4	1.3		
Tennessee	3.3 (0.18)	1.7 (0.10)	2.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.0	0.6	0.7	4.0	1.8	1.3	1.5		
Texas	8.0 (0.10)	7.6 (0.07)	7.7	7.6	7.4	7.9	10.6	4.0	6.0	18.3	6.6	5.8	8.2		
Utah	4.6 (0.29)	5.0 (0.05)	3.9	4.7	4.4	5.0	4.9	3.7	3.4	10.7	5.6	2.2	3.4		
Vermont	0.8 (0.17)	0.8 (0.15)	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.1-0.3	0.6	0.9-2.6	0.2-0.6	0.1-0.2		
Virginia	12.1 (0.38)	12.6 (0.32)	11.8	12.1	11.6	12.6	14.6	6.0	7.5	22.6	11.3	8.4	13.4		
Washington	3.8 (0.10)	3.9 (0.13)	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.7	1.3	1.9	6.7	1.3	1.2	3.1		
West Virginia	2.2 (0.19)	2.2 (0.21)	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.3	1.1	10.2	5.4	1.9	1.7		
Wisconsin	6.8 (0.47)	6.4 (0.35)	6.0	6.2	6.0	6.4	6.5	5.2	4.7	8.8	3.0	2.1	5.5		
Wyoming	3.2 ¹	(1.04)	2.2	(0.35)	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.7	4.2	2.4	1.3	5.6	3.1	0.9	1.8

In the 2019-2020 school year, demographical percentages of gifted seats detailed a similar narrative of racial disparities within gifted programs. According to the New York City Department of Education, approximately 15,000 out of 65,000 rising kindergarteners across New York City apply for a gifted seat each year, and a combined 2,500 kindergarten seats are provided and filled. DOE’s demographic data reveals that “just 6% of Gifted & Talented students were Black, despite representing 17% of the kindergarten population, and only 8% were Hispanic, despite representing 40% of the kindergarten population”⁶. Additionally, “43% of gifted students were Asian, despite making up 20% of the kindergarten population [and] 36% of gifted students were White, despite representing 20% of the kindergarten population.”⁷ The percentages, when compared, show that Black students again were at the lowest percentile in the gifted population. Regardless of the higher composition of Black students in the Kindergarten population, their numbers are well below the percentages of any other race. For an incredibly diverse city such as New York City, not seeing diversity in the state’s gifted programs is alarming and further agrees with the notion of underrepresentation of minority racial groups in these programs.

Upon looking at several pieces of data, it is clearly proven that, indeed, there are evident racial disparities in the Gifted and Talented program—that the program favors certain racial groups more than others and that it cannot be ignored or simply “claimed” as an issue. The data shows it is a fact and not a claim. However, what we must also acknowledge is that the Gifted and Talented program is just a part of the issue that our education system as a whole seems to portray consistently. The education system is so strongly cemented and grounded by racial disparities that even public data bold-facedly depicts it without a struggle, and although the Gifted and Talented

⁶ Knudson, A. (2021) “New Admissions Process for NYC Gifted & Talented Program.” *Silive*, 17 Feb. 2021, <https://www.silive.com/education/2021/02/nyc-unveils-new-admissions-process-for-gifted-talented-program.html>.

⁷ Knudson, A. (2021) “New Admissions Process for NYC Gifted & Talented Program.”

program was originally established as a form of a differentiated classroom environment for specific learners, it has been stained over the years by racial disparities.

CHAPTER 2

What are Parents Saying?

A question that has driven me in my study is—*despite the clear evidence of underrepresentation of certain racial groups and data proving the lack of equity and equality in the Gifted and Talented program, why does it remain in our education system?* My answer to this question is very simple. It is because the program is wanted by many, and is that necessarily wrong? Briefly, let's acknowledge that it is easy to judge on the outside when the data is glaring at us and feeling guilty is an expectation; however, the situation is more complex than the simple answer of “the program is wanted by many.”

For example, parents seek to find the best resources for their children, especially in the area of education, to ensure their child's success in the future.⁸ In doing so, many parents select the Gifted and Talented program because, to them, it is quality education—a quality education that will in turn “guarantee” a successful future. *Are the parents wrong? Are they a part of the systematic issue?* Arguably, no. Through my study, it is revealed that parents who seek the best for their children, without a doubt, are not necessarily thinking about the overarching racial disparity issue in the education system; their concern stems from simply thinking about what is best for their child. Members of society who may or may not be aware of the racial disparity that exists in the program or the education system as a whole are not necessarily a part of the problem—they may be simply maneuvering through the odds of society to ensure some kind of success in the future. However, for some, their perspective on this form of “quality education” compared to

⁸ Conklin, I. (2017, June 7). School choice ... *The Christian Century*, 134(12), 6. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A497796866/AONE?u=cuny_gradctr&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=e936f74c.

the other forms of education offered in the system may prove otherwise. Parents who perceive the Gifted and Talented program as the only form of “quality education” may be contributing to the problem in the system. Through my study, you will see both sides.

I want to begin my study with full transparency by acknowledging I am a current fourth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher, and I have been teaching the program at my public school for five consecutive years. Many may argue that I, too, am part of the problem. Acknowledging the racial disparities that exist behind this program, why would I teach it? For me, the answer is again simple. I love children, and for me, I have two choices: I can either remain in the flawed education system and take the position of being one less teacher perpetuating racial disparities through my pedagogical practices, or I remove myself from the system completely and risk the possibility of having my position taken by an educator who may not be aware of these racial disparities and unknowingly, perpetuates them within the classroom. My goal is not to be a part of the inequitable or unequal problem but to somewhat be a part of a possible change. I know with awareness and the right intentions, the students I teach will flourish.

To reveal intentions and authentic perspectives of why this program exists, it was crucial to hear from the people who were associated with the program, and therefore, I decided to hear from parents. For me and perhaps many others, there are preconceived notions as to why parents may choose and fight competitively for a spot in the Gifted and Talented program, but to confirm or clarify these notions, it was important to hear from them directly. I administered a questionnaire to parents from grades 1 to 5 who currently had a child(ren) in the Gifted and Talented program. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions, which were given electronically for convenience purposes. The parents were provided consent forms and were ensured anonymity for their responses. In total, fourteen parents participated and answered the following questions. Their

responses are detailed in Table 1.2. 1) How did you learn about the Gifted and Talented program? 2) What steps did you take for your child to be enrolled in a gifted program? (Tutoring, Workbooks, Exams, etc.?) 3) In your opinion, what distinguishes the Gifted and Talented program from other programs? 4) What is your reason(s) for applying for the Gifted and Talented program? 5) Why do you prefer your child to be in the Gifted and Talented program rather than the other programs offered in the school? List reasons. 6) Do you believe the Gifted and Talented program was the best for your child? Explain. 7) How do you think the Gifted and Talented program will shape your child’s future? 8) In your opinion, what are the cons of the Gifted and Talented program? 9) If you could, would you change your child’s placement with this program? Why? 10) In your opinion, what would you change about the Gifted and Talented program?

Table 1.2

Parent Responses to Questionnaire

<i>Parent</i>	<i>Responses</i>
<i>1</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Local parents on the playground</i> <i>2. Before the GNT did the practice questions on DOE website. Bought a month long trial to a website that has practice tests but only used once.</i> <i>3. The teachers have been the most amazing. It has made our elementary school experience amazing. It seems like it's just more work then the other classes besides the amazing teachers.</i> <i>4. Child had showed high level visual skills when little.</i> <i>5. The teachers, their classmates</i> <i>6. Yes. BUT as a white parent I have a lot of conflicting feelings about having my white child in a global majority school. I worry we are taking a spot from a child of color who needs it more.</i> <i>7. The teachers have touched and changed her life in so many ways.</i> <i>8. In the big picture it's just another way privileged people keep and get more privilege. The system is not truly fair to POC. I worry that my child is to hard on themselves due to the pace of GNT. We try to emphasize it's about hard work not A's.</i> <i>9. Very mixed feelings here. Again, I worry that as a white parent we should not have taken a spot in the class. Since this class continues to have lower enrollment, I let that worry go a little over time. The teachers have made it amazing, but the kids just have more or faster paced for vocab and math isn't the point of GNT to me.</i> <i>10. A fair process for all of NYC kids. Testing at K is way way too young. The curriculum less about getting ahead and more IB big thinking.</i>

2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Other parents</i> 2. <i>Workbooks and exams</i> 3. <i>It is an advance program and it kept my child engaged at school.</i> 4. <i>In other programs the work was to easy and my child was getting board with school</i> 5. <i>He is engaged, challenged and excited to learn</i> 6. <i>Yes. When the work was to easy for him there was no interest in going to school because he felt like he wasn't learning anything</i> 7. <i>It has given him a lot to look forward to, it has exposed him to numerous career options. He maintains that he wants to become a scientist because of something he did in class.</i> 8. <i>Sometimes the class sizes are to large</i> 9. <i>No.</i> 10. <i>The class sizes</i>
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Word of mouth.</i> 2. <i>We didn't do that much. We did some practice flashcards.</i> 3. <i>From my experience as a parent the teachers seem well-rounded and have special teaching credentials. Every G+T teacher we've had has been wonderful. As far as school work, I am not quite sure how it compares to gen ed, but I do know they go deeply into topics and also are doing advanced math.</i> 4. <i>Many people told us our daughter was extremely smart as a small child so we wanted to put her in a program that didn't bore her. Most of her dads family also attended some form of G+T/accelerated program growing up.</i> 5. <i>I feel like a lot of g+t kids have certain neuro-divergencies that often come with being gifted, and the teachers seem to be educated on that and have a lot of patience. I also appreciate the depth at which they go into certain subjects.</i> 6. <i>It's hard, not having much to compare it to, but overall I think yes.</i> 7. <i>I believe it has shaped my daughter to be a hard and consistent worker. I think she will adjust to middle school well academically because she's been trained to be an independent worker.</i> 8. <i>Possibly the fact that they have the same kids in their classroom year after year. This is a hypothetical con. I just wish the class was mixed up a bit each year so the kids could get to know other children in their grade more.</i> 9. <i>No.</i> 10. <i>Possibly mixing it up so the same students aren't together year after year.</i>
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>from other parents</i> 2. <i>workbooks day prior to test</i> 3. <i>As I understand the children work a little faster and cover more ground than other classes</i> 4. <i>To challenge our child and maybe it will help her get into a better middle school. (Although I haven't researched how to apply to middle school yet)</i> 5. <i>challenging, consistency they stay together for 5 years</i> 6. <i>Unsure since the class is so large but she enjoys it and keeps up with the work.</i> 7. <i>It has given our child confidence. She is usually shy, I think since they are with the same children for 5 years they gain confidence and develop bonds. Instead of concentrating on making new friends and navigating the process of being in a new class they can just delve into the school work.</i> 8. <i>Again, being with same children throughout grade school is great. The families have also created friendships and trust.</i> 9. <i>I think its where she should be but I would prefer a smaller class.</i>

	<p>10. <i>If possible would love to have a smaller sized classroom that way they can completely excel.</i></p>
<p>5</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>I learn about the Gifted and Talented program from a early childhood center.</i> 2. <i>The step that I took for my child to enrolled in a gifted program was that I registered him to take a test.</i> 3. <i>What distinguishes the Gifted and Talented program from other programs is that in the gifted program each child is at that same level which make them learn at the same pace whereas in other programs they learn at a slower pace.</i> 4. <i>The reason I apply for the Gifted and Talented program was because I wanted the best education for my child.</i> 5. <i>I prefer my child to be in the Gifted and Talented program rather than the other programs offered in the school because:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) <i>that program is the best program offered</i> (2) <i>they learn at a faster pace in this program</i> (3) <i>more information is taught in the gifted program</i> (4) <i>the children in this program is eager to learn</i> (5) <i>children are more focus</i> (6) <i>in this program most of the kids are well mannered that's why I prefer my child to be in the gifted program.</i> 6. <i>Yes, I believe the Gifted and Talented program was the best for my child because the school that they wanted to put my child in was not good enough for me. I want the best for my child. By him getting the best he should be in a good school that offered program that made him excel in his education.</i> 7. <i>I think the Gifted and Talented program will shape my child future in a positive way because the program will help him to choose a career of his dreams when he gets older. He will have all that basic background that was taught to him while in the program.</i> 8. <i>The cons of the Gifted and Talented program is that sometimes our expectations are too high. We always expect our child to do well. We compare our kids with their peer.</i> 9. <i>No, I would not change my child placement with this program because I will not want him to be place in a school that is doing poor academically.</i> 10. <i>What I would change about the Gifted and Talented program is that</i>
<p>6</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>I was an education reporter many years ago and learned of it then.</i> 2. <i>We bought two workbooks. We would go through a page or two each night.</i> 3. <i>It's hard to say because I haven't experienced anything else. But my son has had incredible teachers and has been challenged. When we were investigating G&T, we were told that the curriculum was the same as taught in other classes, just accelerated. I was also told that G&T parents tend to be more involved than others.</i> 4. <i>We figured it would match what our son was displaying when he was four, as far as being intellectually advanced.</i> 5. <i>I was also interested in the dual-language program, but I'm glad he's in G&T. The teachers have been phenomenal, especially during the non-Covid years.</i> 6. <i>Yes. He was able to do well and be challenged and also be surrounded by classmates who also did well, which he might not have had in another program. My son is very competitive and he had to work hard to keep up with his classmates -- he couldn't just rely on 'being smart,' which is a lesson I'm glad he learned at a young age.</i> 7. <i>My son loves to learn and G&T nurtured that path.</i>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. <i>It's hard for me to say, since I didn't have any other experience. My general understanding is that children of color are often not in G&T programs, but that wasn't the case at 316.</i> 9. <i>I would not change it, mostly because of the teachers, who cared so much about my child. I'm thankful he had experiences with them all.</i> 10. <i>I understand why the state tests are so important and why they were implemented, but in a perfect world, teachers would have more leeway in what they teach and how.</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">7</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>I was in one as a kid, so looked for one for my child.</i> 2. <i>He took the test when he was in pre-K.</i> 3. <i>I don't honestly feel like it's spelled out clearly. I do know that my child is surrounded by other curious kids from stable households, and they seem to push each other forward with their curiosity. I'm not sure how that is different from other classes.</i> 4. <i>I was bored silly as a kid until I was put in accelerated classes. I didn't want my kid to feel that kind of listless, frustrating boredom that leads to either acting out or despair.</i> 5. <i>My hope is that he is with a teacher that understands the need for academic challenges that my kid craves. So far, that has been the case. Because he's only been in G&T since he finished pre-K, I can't say if it's better than any of the other classes in the school, but my hope is that he gets the challenge he needs in G&T. I think there are tons of amazing teachers at 316, and individualized attention, so maybe he would be fine in any class there. But him being in this program has thus far been a great experience, with excellent teachers and sweet, brainy classmates. I'm curious what the teachers experience is.... like is there a difference for them between the conventional classrooms vs. the G&T classes? Is just a socioeconomic difference? We have diversity of race, class, ethnicity in our class, but I am keenly aware of the fact that most of our kids are from two-parent households with stable incomes.</i> 6. <i>You know, it's hard to say. In terms of the experience thus far, YES. But I don't have anything to compare it to. He's only ever been in this program.</i> 7. <i>My hope is that it will surround him with similarly curious people that push him toward his potential. And that he will be in the company of teachers and mentors that encourage his bookishness and creative mind.</i> 8. <i>The racial disparities throughout the city. And even in our school. The G&T classes have a lot more white students than the other classes.</i> 9. <i>I wouldn't. But I wish there was another way than stratified academic tracks. I believe very strongly in public schools, so I would never send him to private school or a charter, so this is the best option for my kid.</i> 10. <i>I would like it to be more arts-focused. There is a lack of opportunity for creative expression and problem-solving that happens when visual, dramatic, and music arts are combined with academics.</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">8</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>From my research into the nyc public school system</i> 2. <i>E took the placement test and was also recommended by his kindergarten teacher</i> 3. <i>Rigor of curriculum and high expectations for the students</i> 4. <i>We want our child to have the opportunity to excel to the best of his ability</i> 5. <i>He has certain intellectual capabilities that g&t can help him foster: writing, mathematics, and especially IB subjects like history and civics</i> 6. <i>Absolutely. He's surrounded by students who take learning seriously and sees value in his intellectual and academic achievement.</i>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. <i>It will give him a grounding in critical thinking and teach him to value intellectual curiosity</i> 8. <i>There are no cons. There should be more g&t programs. G&T should be the model for how the whole system works. We should strive to create a system that raises everyone up to their highest potential, rather than leveling everyone down to the capabilities of the least capable student.</i> 9. <i>Is this a real question? The nyc school system is not known for its success at educating kids. The g&t program ensures that my child receives a quality education. Who in their right mind would want their child NOT to learn?</i> 10. <i>I vigorously support the g&t curriculum. I think you could push the children even harder and develop their writing skills, research skills, and capabilities for nuanced thought more fully. And non-g&t classes, system wide should strive to hold their students to the same rigorous standards that g&t does. Every child should be given the opportunity to learn.</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">9</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>We learned about it when going from Pre-K to kindergarten.</i> 2. <i>none</i> 3. <i>Faster pace, heavier workload</i> 4. <i>Honestly, it had nothing to do with being in G&T; our daughter needed a change since she had been with the same group of kids since pre-k.</i> 5. <i>Again, we don't necessarily prefer it; we liked the dual language program and wish she could do both.</i> 6. <i>For this year, yes. Not sure about upcoming years. There are a lot of kids in the class this year and luckily, they have a teacher who can handle it.</i> 7. <i>She is already seeing that she can accomplish things that she didn't think she could do it will definitely help with her self-confidence.</i> 8. <i>This year, the number of kids in the class make it harder for more one-on-one time with individual kids.</i> 9. <i>Not this year; although our daughter has struggled with her confidence, the teacher has been very encouraging and our daughter is really thriving.</i> 10. <i>Less emphasis on the state test!!! But I suppose that is for all classes.</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">10</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>NYC DOE</i> 2. <i>workbooks that I bought online</i> 3. <i>Strong teachers and fellow students that are eager to learn.</i> 4. <i>Strong teachers and a classroom where (for the most part) students are eager to learn.</i> 5. <i>It seemed to me from DOE teacher friends that they spent a lot of time with unruly kids, disciplining kids and getting the class to behave, which really distracted from the lesson and keeping kids focused.</i> 6. <i>Knowing that my kids do like to learn, and value a calm academic environment with the learning happening at a decent pace, believed it was the best option for my kids. That is, if they scored on the test and were placed in a G+T classroom.</i> 7. <i>Disciplined about school work and assignments, for sure. The care they take with their work. They have also been with other kids in the classroom that are equally invested in learning and going beyond the expected with assignments, etc.</i> 8. <i>Sometimes the pace is tough. If a child misses a day or more of school there is more to catch up on compared to the other classes (as least it appears that way, I could be wrong).</i> 9. <i>In my daughter's case, I wonder if she would be better off in a gen track as in that setting she may have been top of her class and the confidence boost would really help her. Now she is just an average student in the G+T class.</i>

	<p>10. <i>I wouldn't change anything, except perhaps smaller classes and more "discovery" outings. When I went to primary school I was in an enrichment program which pulled certain kids out of the classroom for 1week per month for field trips to exciting places like Native Indian Reserves, archeological digs, Broadways shows etc and we had to develop a project (or any format) in response to the trip. Of course there are issues of equality and access to consider, however this kind of format would be a tremendously exciting addition to the G+T kids as they are ready to learn and think about the "bigger world" beyond their classroom.</i></p>
<p>11</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Neighbor</i> 2. <i>Applied for g&t test date. Was not aware of prep materials.</i> 3. <i>The diversity at ps316s g&t program is admirable.</i> 4. <i>The g&t program is important to the DOE bc it allows students of various abilities to learn together. Both my children have benefitted tremendously not just educationally --socially too.</i> 5. <i>It has been my experience that g&t teachers have a deep understanding of how children learn and have been superior educators and mentors to both my children.</i> 6. <i>Yes. 1. Growing and learning w the same students from k-5 has been reassuring and has provided a community of families and educators throughout the years. My oldest is currently in 8th grade and thriving bc of the g&t foundation he had in elementary school.</i> 7. <i>Sets them up to thrive in any public school system.</i> 8. <i>I wish the same level of education and services were available to all children.</i> 9. <i>No.</i> 10. <i>Add dual language</i>
<p>12</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>A random lady on the bus</i> 2. <i>Nothing no special books or prep</i> 3. <i>Advanced teaching</i> 4. <i>A teacher stated that it's a good idea for my son to take a gifted exam</i> 5. <i>Advance teaching.</i> 6. <i>Yes. Before he sat in a class bored and not wanting to participate in things that he already knows losing intrest in school. I would get complaints that's he just playing around and thats because it was nothing for him to learn. Kids too get aggravated and lose interest.</i> 7. <i>It motivates them. Pushes him. He knows that knowing that he can accomplish things that may seem to be hard.</i> 8. <i>Sometimes it may be too much for them to do but they feel a big accomplishment</i> 9. <i>No. I wouldnt change it. He loves it. I've asked myself if he would like to go into a different class. His answer was " No mom, I really like my class and I like that I'm challenged. Sometimes I think it's too much but then I get happy that I was able to do it. It makes me feel good "</i> 10. <i>Sometimes kids do need a break. And sometimes they're extra things going on in their lives. Excessive thick homework packets may be too much where it seems like they have no life which can make them also lose intrest in school.</i>
<p>13</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>I learn it from a friend</i> 2. <i>Nothing. We just had our daughter take the test. No preparations.</i> 3. <i>For me, the Gifted and Talented program is for students who excel more above standards, both in academic or non-academic.</i> 4. <i>I want the best education for my kids and in my opinion, this program will help my daughter more to enhance skills, knowledge and be the best of her abilities.</i>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. <i>1) enhance skills 2) gain more knowledge 3) improve confidence</i> 6. <i>Yes. Being in the G&T program, the students will learn more according to their abilities and skills level.</i> 7. <i>The Gifted and Talented program will build more confidence to all the students and encourage them to be the best of themselves in accordance to their interests and knowledge.</i> 8. <i>I don't see any cons in the Gifted and Talented.</i> 9. <i>No. I can see my daughter's determination to be the best or one of the best which makes her confident and sure of what she wants to be in the future. And I am fully contented with that!</i> 10. <i>I just would like the program to really measure the students capabilities and knowledge if they really belong in the program and limited numbers but properly placed in the program. If not, the students needs to be in a different program where they need extra help that they won't feel less of themselves.</i>
14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>My son is in the G&T problem.</i> 2. <i>None. I signed him up for the Teat and he aced it.</i> 3. <i>In my opinion, the G&T Program taps into the overall molding and educating of a child. Children are encouraged and learn how to rely and trust themselves. The program raises the bar tremendously and help children to identify and reach their truest potential not just academically but also as a member of society and their role as an individual within said society. I am extremely please with the young man that my son is growing up to become and how the G&T program and its teachers are helping to support those values being instilled at home.</i> 4. <i>I wanted my son to be the best version of himself and to be constantly challenged academically. I wanted him in an environment that will nurture his development.</i> 5. <i>For all the above reasons mentioned</i> 6. <i>Definitely yes. Having homeschooled my son for the 1st 4 years of his life, I realized that his learning ability war above average and that he responded favorably the higher and higher challenges. I didn't want him in program that would hold him back.</i> 7. <i>Without a doubt, my son will be aware of the world around him, different people, culture, languages, I have exposed him to traveling to different places and countries and experiencing so many different things, that having him on a program that supports this as well as teaching acceptance of our differences will no doubt shape his future into becoming the man that I am molding him to be.</i> 8. <i>The only thing that tickles my brain sometimes is the volume of work that the children are expected to complete but seeing my son take his deadlines and quality of his work so seriously let's me know that he's ok. Still I try to balance his school/work life with other experiences that affords him some fun and rejuvenation.</i> 9. <i>No I would never change it.</i> 10. <i>I would not change anything but I would incorporate a lot more parental involvement in the program so that there a well rounded support system and understanding both at home and school all in the interest of the child's growth.</i>

Upon observing the responses closely, there were a few noticeable commonalities. Several parents mentioned teacher quality in association with selecting the Gifted and Talented program for their child, and several parents mentioned it was a preferred academic environment for their

child because of the challenge it provides, the advanced teaching it offers, and the way the environment (peers and teachers) fosters their child's ability and attitude towards education.

What does this say about the program? It is clear that parents find great importance in having a teacher that is not only educated in the area of teaching the Gifted and Talented population but also one who promotes and cultivates their child's academic abilities. Despite the lack of specificity on what makes a "good" teacher from the perspective of these parents, there are some key points to take away. The parents that are connecting quality education with the kind of teacher their child will have or is currently having implies that a "good" teacher equals a "good" education for their child.⁹ A "good" teacher appears to instill trust within the parents and soothes their thoughts and feelings about their child's academic well-being. In addition, parents highlight that a challenge or advanced teaching is a favorable component of the program because, as mentioned by some, they observe their child seeking challenges or holding a capability in handling challenges. This suggests that standardized education is not appealing to these parents and that having a differentiated classroom with similarly minded and strong, skilled peers is the stimulation they believe their child needs for academic success.

However, in addition to seeking a classroom environment that best fits children, one parent openly shares his/her awareness of the racial disparity that exists within the Gifted and Talented program as a whole. Parent 1 responds to questions #6 and #9 with distinct mentions of him/her acknowledging his/her White racial identity and stating that because of this racial identity, a spot may have been taken away from a student of color. Parent 1 responds to question #6 (Do you believe the Gifted and Talented program was the best for your child? Explain.), "Yes. BUT as a

⁹ Black, D. W. (2016). Taking teacher quality seriously. *William and Mary Law Review*, 57(5), 1597+. https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A456988853/AONE?u=cuny_gradctr&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=43b7e755.

white parent I have a lot of conflicting feelings about having my white child in a global majority school. I worry we are taking a spot from a child of color who needs it more.” For question #9 (If you could, would you change your child’s placement with this program? Why?), the parent states, “Very mixed feelings here. Again, I worry that as a white parent we should not have taken a spot in the class. Since this class continues to have lower enrollment, I let that worry go a little over time. The teachers have made it amazing, but the kids just have more or faster paced for vocab and math isn’t the point of GNT to me.”

Parent 1 pulls us back to the controversial conversation that the Gifted and Talented program brings to the table. Yes, for some parents, the choice of having a differentiated classroom environment that fosters and cultivates academic success for their challenge-seeking children is the prime reason; however, for some, they struggle between the systematic issues of inequality and inequity in the education system and choosing what is best for their child. Earlier, I asked if parents who simply want the best for their child and, as a result, choose the Gifted and Talented program despite knowing the racial disparities that exist within it are a part of the problem—the answer, as we can clearly see, is not that simple and thus, is not necessarily true. Yes, realistically, we see, hear, and know the blatant and continuous racial disparities in the education system. *But can we change this?* The answer is it would be extremely difficult to do so. However, it should be acknowledged that parents who choose this program for their child should do so if they believe and observe that their child inhibits learning needs or academic characteristics that would best be catered to by this program.

In addition to acknowledging this reality for parents who are aware of the systematic racial issue in the education system, there are parents who portray the program differently, and to my interpretation, they paint the program as a brand. When we think about brands, our minds naturally

drift off to quality and expensive purchases, the popularity of labels, and, interestingly, the perception of these brands by others.¹⁰ When we purchase an item from a brand, even if it is for a brief moment, we think about what others may think or perceive about us when choosing an item from a brand. Many of us are convinced to purchase an item from a well-known and perhaps expensive brand because of how we may potentially be seen or perceived by others while wearing or owning it. We may seem prestigious, high in power, affluent, and hierarchically better than the common people. I interpreted a few of the parents' responses in a similar way.

For example, parent 6 shares his/her thoughts on how the Gifted and Talented classroom would be the best fit for his/her child. In sharing this belief, the parent states for question #9 (If you could, would you change your child's placement with this program? Why?), "Is this a real question? The nyc school system is not known for its success at educating kids. The g&t program ensures that my child receives a quality education. Who in their right mind would want their child NOT to learn?" To some, it may seem like an understandable response; however, from the perspective of an educator and to parents who have children ineligible for the program, it may come across differently. As shown in Table 1.1, the New York City Department of Education offers a number of programs—General Education, ICT, Dual Language, NEST, etc. When one states, "...The g&t program ensures that my child receives a quality education. Who in their right mind would want their child NOT to learn," we give the impression that perhaps the other programs do not ensure quality education. A parent with a child ineligible for the program may feel discouraged knowing their child does or would not have access to quality education, and are against the odds. To an educator, this also may be problematic and make you question what is

¹⁰ Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand Experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 52–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20619022>

quality. When we think of quality, we think of something measured to be the best compared to the others in its category. In connection to a brand, a brand sells quality and is perceived to be the best.

Is it a stretch to associate the two? In my opinion, no.

We cannot ignore that pedagogically, we have differentiated classrooms to fit the needs of all learners and their learning styles. Arguing that only the Gifted and Talented program ensures a child will receive quality education and if a parent wants their child to learn, this is the program to choose” is an injustice to the other programs and leads me to believe that the program’s perception is based on what seems to be quality.¹¹ Similarly to a brand, when a brand sells a similar item as a low-end brand, there is a possibility that it may not be the quality that they expected. This is not to say that the Gifted and Talented program is ineffective but to show and highlight emphatically that other programs ensure quality education too, and it is based upon the child’s academic and learning needs.¹² Experientially speaking, it is possible for a child to not be successful in the Gifted and Talented program because it does not adequately and effectively cater to that child’s specific needs—whether it may be socially, environmentally, or academically. Every student is different, and regardless of what is claimed to be “quality education,” we must acknowledge first and foremost what the child needs, not just what we perceive is the best. Because there is a possibility that what we perceive to be the best or of quality is actually not the best fitting. The brand’s name or reputation should not only be considered but also the logical needs of the consumer.

Nonetheless, while administering this questionnaire to my parents, I learned a number of things, and in addition to the aforementioned observations, there may be many others. As a Gifted

¹¹ Schmitt, B. (2012). The consumer psychology of brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(1), 7–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45046533>

¹² The Earth Institute, Columbia University, & Ericsson. (2016). ICT and Education. In *ICT & SDGs* (pp. 46–59). Sustainable Development Solutions Network. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep15879.11>

and Talented teacher, what I found relevant from my study was that not everyone is ignoring the racial disparities shown in the program or in the education system. Some do acknowledge them but are stuck. *Should parents decide not to even bother choosing the program because of its controversies, or should they choose what is best for their child based on the academic needs of their child?* Thus, parents who notice that the Gifted and Talented program is an adequate classroom environment for their child find comfort in choosing what is right for their child.

However, from my study, I discovered that in addition to the conflicting feelings a parent who is aware of the problem may feel, there are parents that may be part of why the problem with the program exists. The misconception that the Gifted and Talented program is the “best” education a child can receive speaks negative volumes about the valuable programs that are offered in addition to the Gifted and Talented program. *What are we saying to those children who did find success through perhaps the ICT classroom?* Perhaps that ICT classroom was the “quality education” they needed to find their success in the future. In my experience, I have seen amazing and effective educators teaching in the other programs in my school and have, without a doubt, fostered success in many students. When we paste the label “quality education” on only the Gifted and Talented program, we paint the program as a brand. We ignore the efforts and success that may be cultivated in the classroom of other programs.

CHAPTER 3

What are the Teachers Saying?

From the responses I gathered from my parents, the phrase “quality education” stirred a number of questions in my mind. I felt distraught by the thought that I was teaching a “brand” and perhaps not a differentiated classroom environment. As a result, I decided to dive into the following questions: *What is quality education? What is happening in Gifted and Talented classrooms that other classrooms do not offer or are seen as ineffective towards academic success?* I thought it was time to speak to the teachers.

My intentions in hearing from Gifted and Talented teachers consisted of learning what they believed made their classroom successful for children, the advantages and disadvantages of the program, and the experiences that supported their thoughts. I created a questionnaire of 12 questions that I shared electronically for convenience purposes and reached out to my colleagues. I received responses from two colleagues—a current fifth-grade and a former fourth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher. The following questions were asked and answered. Their responses are detailed in Table 1.3. 1) How would you define Gifted and Talented? 2) What is your point of view on Gifted and Talented programs? 3) What are the advantages of the program? 4) What are the disadvantages of the program? 5) Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with students that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population? 6) Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with parents that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population? 7) What makes your classroom different from other classrooms based on your noticings? 8) What makes your classroom successful? 9) What are the components of a **strong** classroom? 10) What are things you make sure to incorporate into your classroom to ensure success from each student? 11) What makes an effective teacher? 12) Do you embody those characteristics?

Table 1.3

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Responses</i>
<p><i>Current Fifth-Grade G&T Teacher</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>How would you define Gifted and Talented?</i> <i>Answer: I define G&T as the possession of a special strength through which students express themselves, taking the form of main stream academics, the sciences, the arts, etc.</i> ● <i>What is your point of view on Gifted and Talented programs?</i> <i>Answer: My point of view is that it brings a sense of elitism among parents and students alike, and indirectly sends a subtle message to other mainstream parents and kids that they are either lesser of value or simply not having the right tools to make their mark on society.</i> ● <i>What are the advantages of the program?</i> <i>Answer: The program generates much intellectual exchange amongst “like-minded” peers, and it also engenders a community of unique thinkers who are basically motivated by their peers in a somewhat competitive “world.” It drives advanced thinkers to do more.</i> ● <i>What are the disadvantages of the program?</i> <i>Answer: The program creates a clear divide amongst the student body. Some kids feel left out from this “special” group of “smart” kids; they believe they are not as smart as the G & T group and are therefore being robbed of the factors that generate rich intellectual exchanges.</i> ● <i>Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with students that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population?</i> <i>Answer: Yes. I have experienced kids who are strongly gifted in math, or art, or in verbal expressions (the precocious), etc. who felt that they were not being challenged in the area of their abilities. For example, the child who is strong in math, wants to do math all the time, even during the time when other subjects are being taught, and so is the child who is strong in Art, etc.</i> ● <i>Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with parents that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population?</i> <i>Answer: Yes, certainly. I experienced parents who had an “entitlement” attitude towards most of what goes on in the classroom. Their unspoken expectation was “My child does not deserve this...he/she deserves...” Even if the child is wrong, they wanted me to go against my principles to grant their child a favor (such as a better grade) in order to keep up the appearances. They will even call me during my private time at home, fighting for the reinstatement of a lost privilege or the need to have the child’s graduation picture photoshopped to make it more attractive. These kinds of requests have never been experienced by me outside of the G&T program.</i> ● <i>What makes your classroom different from other classrooms based on your observations?</i> <i>Answer: My classroom provides exposure to and encourages the development of each student’s unique talent. We have an annual Talent Show during which students present their uniqueness through art, poetry, song, dance, playing</i>

	<p><i>musical instruments, playing unique math games of the mind, recalling specific facts about any topic, etc., etc. My classroom is also a STEAM classroom where students do coding, robotics, study aerodynamics, etc., etc.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>What makes your classroom successful?</i> <p><i>Answer: Student-led discussion and the freedom to express oneself</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>What are components of a strong classroom?</i> <p><i>Answer: Teacher preparation; student-led activities- the ability to play and make mistakes while learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>What are things you make sure to incorporate into your classroom to ensure success from each student?</i> <p><i>Answer: The freedom of expression; accountability; establishing classroom norms; setting personal goals; classroom meetings; having high expectations and letting students know about them; checking in with students to know how they are doing; giving them time to laugh and have fun while learning- enjoying school</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>What makes an effective teacher? Do you embody those characteristics?</i> <p><i>Answer: Just being their for the students whenever they need you. I am striving to be their for them</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Do you think that there are specific things that you bring to a G&T classroom that you don't bring to a general education or special education classroom?</i> <p><i>Answer: My desire to explore and have fun...not sure</i></p>
<p><i>Former Fourth-Grade G&T Teacher</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>How would you define Gifted and Talented?</i> <p><i>The G&T program at a NYC public school is meant for students who are above grade level in several subject areas. The students take an exam to enter this setting so the students who test in meet the necessary criteria for this setting. The definition of G&T is different when you are not working in the NYC DOE.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>What is your point of view on Gifted and Talented programs?</i> <p><i>I have enjoyed teaching the G&T class and I have only had a positive experience with G&T students. As a teacher, I am always excited to teach this class. However, I do feel that students should not be grouped by ability levels. Putting all of the high level students in one room, and lower level students in another room, has its disadvantages.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>What are the advantages of the program?</i> <p><i>For teachers there are many advantages- the parents are more involved, the students complete their work at a faster pace, students come on time and complete homework, and students are excited to learn. For students- the students get to learn beside like minded peers, meaning that the majority of the G&T students are focused on learning. They are natural inquirers and are constantly questioning one another.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>What are the disadvantages of the program?</i> <p><i>The students in the G&T class start to embody that they are the "smartest" students in the school. This can lead to an unrealistic view of the real world, or even middle school where they may not be at the top anymore. Also, some teachers (and admin) treat G&T students and their parents different and give them more of what they want because they are generally more involved. To me</i></p>

this is an unfair treatment.

● *Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with students that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population?*

Yes, in the 5 years that I have taught G&T I have had three difficult students.

One student was very bright but I was not experienced enough to deal with his behavior. He was coming from a situation that he was having difficulty navigating through. His behavior could be unexpected, or he would fall asleep in class. One time he ran around the aud chasing students with his belt off and trying to hit them. Another student was assigned a para for his behavior. One time he took a pair of scissors and cut off a part of the pants he was wearing. The third student was very well behaved but would not complete the work that was assigned to him. I am giving these examples to remind people that G&T does not mean that all of the students will be well behaved. G&T students come with all types of personalities. I stand behind my statement that I have always had an enjoyable time in G&T but you do have to be prepared for students who can have challenging behaviors. Also, students may have difficulties learning as well.

● *Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with parents that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population?*

YES, I had a parent come into school and demand that I change her daughter's math grade. She made me extremely uncomfortable because she was very close to me, yelling about the grade.

● *What makes your classroom different from other classrooms based on your observations?*

I have taught regular education for longer than I taught G&T and my style does not change from class to class. My enthusiasm and effort does not change from class to class. I am always very prepared for any class. In G&T the students set a faster pace and there is more time for extension activities. There is more time for group projects, and more time for student led activities.

● *What makes your classroom successful?*

I spend a lot of time getting to know my students. I spend a lot of time preparing my lessons. I spend a lot of time providing the students with feedback on their work.

● *What are components of a strong classroom?*

planning, preparation, knowing the students well, building a positive and safe classroom community. creativity, humor, consistency, feedback, and respect. Listen to your students.

○ *What are things you make sure to incorporate into your classroom to ensure success from each student?*

What I listed above.

● *What makes an effective teacher? Do you embody those characteristics?*

Same as what I listed above but I would include a lot of self-reflection. I am constantly asking myself, what can I do better? Also, teachers should never be afraid to learn from others who work in education. We should learn from more experience teachers but also the less experienced teachers who bring in new and fresh ideas. YES, I am an effective teacher and always learning and

growing.

● *Do you think that there are specific things that you bring to a G&T classroom that you don't bring to a general education or special education classroom? I answered this above. You have to be the best in any setting, not just for G&T.*

Looking closely at the teachers' responses, there were a number of observations. A point to be noted is that both teachers have prior experience in teaching programs other than the Gifted and Talented program. Both teachers taught in a General Education classroom and an ICT classroom. This was strategically done so that the teachers could better compare their experiences and limit their biases when responding to the questions. Similar to parents, the teachers found that the program offered the stimulation that gifted students need and, therefore, worked towards cultivating a classroom environment where goals, student voice, and challenge were enforced. Both teachers showed effectiveness in the area of lesson planning and differentiating their lessons to fit the needs of their students, and did not treat the classroom environment or its students vastly different from the other classroom environments they have taught.¹³ Lastly, both teachers shared similar thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of the program—that the program evokes a motivated environment for like-minded students, but its population created a division in the school's student body. Current fifth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher shares that students from other programs did not perceive themselves as "smart" because they were not in a specialized program called the "Gifted and Talented" program. These students may have had difficulty reaching their full potential because of this internalization of not being smart enough. In addition, former fourth-grade Gifted and Talented teacher shares that because the students perceived themselves as very smart and are in this "specialized" program, the gifted students may have

¹³ Chval, K. B., & Davis, J. A. (2008). The Gifted Student. *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, 14(5), 267–274. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41183133>

experienced challenging moments in the forthcoming years of their educational journey because they may have realized that there is a greater population of gifted students in the “real world” and “they may not be at the top anymore.”

In addition to the mentioned commonalities between the two teachers, the teachers shared experiences that I found both interesting and significant to acknowledge. Both teachers shared experiences of “entitlement” from parents, which was a different experience from when they taught other programs. The fifth-grade teacher answered question #6 (Have you experienced difficult/challenging moments with parents that are specific to the Gifted and Talented population?) by saying, “...I experienced parents who had an ‘entitlement’ attitude towards most of what goes on in the classroom. Their unspoken expectation was my child does not deserve this...he/she deserves...” Even if the child is wrong, they wanted me to go against my principles to grant their child a favor (such as a better grade) in order to keep up the appearances. They will even call me during my private time at home, fighting for the reinstatement of a lost privilege...” Similarly, the former fourth-grade teacher shares, “YES, I had a parent come into school and demand that I change her daughter's math grade. She made me extremely uncomfortable because she was very close to me, yelling about the grade.”

What do these responses reveal? Well, first to acknowledge is that entitlement can be perceived in different ways, and more often than not, it is perceived to be negative. When one shows attitudes of entitlement, one exercises a sense of power over others.¹⁴ As seen in the fifth-grade teacher’s response, the person who feels entitled may even go as far as forcing the other

¹⁴ Harvey, P., & Martinko, M. J. (2009). An empirical examination of the role of attributions in psychological entitlement and its outcomes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30(4), 459–476.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41683845>

party to go against their principles to accommodate or give into what they feel is rightfully theirs. In both teachers' instances, parents who felt "entitled" fought for a "better grade." This speaks volumes to my claim of the Gifted and Talented program being painted as a brand.

When we think about a brand we purchased from, especially a well-known and expensive brand, we may believe that because of the amount of investment used to gain access to it was tremendous, by right, we are able to complain if things do not go as expected such as a deformity in a purchased item or service.¹⁵ In the case of both teachers experiencing parents fighting for a grade, it is clear that there was an expectation from the parent's perspective that was not met. It is implied through their reaction of wanting their child's grade to be changed that the parents expected their child to have a grade that was clearly different than what the teacher believed was appropriate for the child. As an educator in the Gifted and Talented classroom, I have also experienced similar situations.

For example, at the beginning of every school year, in November, public elementary schools conduct parent-teacher conferences to review the first-marking period grades and to discuss glows and grows—pedagogical terms for what a student is strong in and what are areas the students should improve in. Our grading system is based on a 4-leveled system. Level 1 states that the student is performing below grade level in a particular area, level 2 is approaching grade level, level 3 states the student has met grade level in the area, and level 4 is above grade level. Because September to November is the span of only two months where students are transitioning from a two-month long summer break and are readjusting to the expectations of their new teacher and classroom setting, students may not perform their best in the first marking period. Every year, I

¹⁵ Gunter, B. (2016). What is a brand? In *Kids and branding in a digital world* (pp. 11–21). Manchester University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18dzrjq.4>

have a handful of parents making a statement of “I notice there are no level 4’s on my child’s report card,” or “There are so many 3’s on my child’s report card, _____ is accustomed to getting 4’s.”

Similar to my colleagues, I, too, feel this sense of entitlement and a disregard for my expertise and reasoning behind grades. There have been many moments when I felt nervous or anxious when completing report cards and hesitant to enter grades because I knew the conversation that would evoke from it and the amount of explanation, data, evidence, and observation I would have to provide to prove my case. Arguably, this entitlement, from my perspective, stems from parents having the expectation that if their child is in the Gifted and Talented program, he/she should have grades that correspond to this title or “brand” —that because the Gifted and Talented program labels my child as being intelligent or highly capable, all grades should automatically be at a level 3 and/or preferably at a level 4. However, this may not be true.

As any individual—child, or adult—we all have areas we can improve in. Through reflections and goals, we continuously grow and improve in various areas. If, for argument's sake, I entered level 4’s as the grade for a child whose parent is claiming he/she deserves it, although I know through my expertise the child is not there yet, how am I helping the child by entering a level 4? The possible disregard of this point by certain parents underlines a detrimental issue within the Gifted and Talented program. The program does not automatically grade students’ academic performances as level 3’s or 4’s. However, it is also important to note that it is possible for a gifted student to perform academically at a level 3 or 4 within a short time, such as the first marking period. A keyword to be used when grading academic performances is “earn.” *Did the student earn this grade?* Students earn grades based on what they have exemplified in the classroom.

Through formal and informal assessments, participation, and teacher observations, holistically, teachers grade academic performances or should be grading in this form.

Furthermore, the Gifted and Talented program should not have a significant emphasis on the grade a child is performing at. The program was originally established to acknowledge learners who have exemplified certain abilities in specific areas in which are noticeably stronger when compared to peers their age, and this strong area may not be an academic area—for instance, the child may be noticeably strong in the area of art or performing arts.¹⁶ As a misconception, we should not perceive that all gifted students are academically strong. It may be a case that the child is strong in other areas, and we must acknowledge that part of the Gifted and Talented program.¹⁷ In my experience, I have met outstanding students whose strong suit was not in the area of academics, but I noticed they were “gifted” in creating abstract art, their distinct way of expressing themselves in art, creating intricate musical beats, their breathtaking acting abilities in skits, and plays, and their exceptional ability in giving speeches about political or social causes. As a Gifted and Talented teacher, should I state that these children are not gifted or undeserving of this program because, in the area of academics, they are not as strong? Therefore, it is extremely important that we, including parents, must always revert to the original intention of the Gifted and Talented program—that it is a differentiated classroom for children of various needs.¹⁸ The program is not

¹⁶ Clark, G., & Zimmerman, E. (1998). Nurturing the Arts in Programs for Gifted and Talented Students. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(10), 747–751. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20439333>

¹⁷ Roach, P., & Bell, D. (1986). Identifying the Gifted: A Multiple Criteria Approach. *The Clearing House*, 59(9), 393–395. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30186585>

¹⁸ Grantham, T. C., Frasier, M. M., Roberts, A. C., & Bridges, E. M. (2005). Parent Advocacy for Culturally Diverse Gifted Students. *Theory Into Practice*, 44(2), 138–147. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3497032>

a label or “brand” that eliminates any possible area of weakness—it is a program that caters to the needs of a specific kind of learner.

CHAPTER 4

My Experiences as a Gifted and Talented Teacher

From the responses to the teacher questionnaire and the immediate connections I made, I organically felt the need to share my experiences too. Yes, the program inhibits great advantages, especially for the needs of these children; however, the challenges that my colleagues and I experienced every year continuously initiate this question of is gifted education and its program a brand. *Is the Gifted and Talented program shifting from a differentiated classroom environment to a reputable brand that immediately stamps “smart and successful”?* With this question in mind, I began writing down my experiences—experiences that provide evidence that, yes, there is a reputation and sense of “branding” that is tied to the program and perhaps was always there.

There are a number of challenges I have experienced over the five years of teaching that are specific to what we will identify as the “brand” of the Gifted and Talented program. One common challenge I have faced and continue to face is when parents of children in the Gifted and Talented program are not receptive when I try to talk to them about possibly transferring or considering their child to go to another program that is offered in the school to better cater to their child’s academic or social needs. When I have suggested to a parent that his or her child is strongly exemplifying struggles in academic and/or social areas, I have noticed that in all instances that the parent was either hesitant or resistant to the idea. In response, the parents would state that they would work with their child in those areas of struggles and would find other kinds of support and did not proceed with a change in the classroom environment for their child.

When I notice a student is consistently struggling to manage the expectations set in the classroom, the rigor and challenge that is presented, the intensity of either the workload or concepts

being taught, and even collaborating with peers in various intensive projects, I voice my concerns to the parents. My concern stems from what I believe can potentially create a detrimental internalization of oneself. I want my students to feel empowered, capable, and proud of themselves. However, when there is a consistent struggle that I notice among certain students, I fear that they may potentially believe they are not “smart enough” as they may notice or consider their friends to be, which I have experienced on multiple occasions over the years. When I express my concerns to my parents, they, understandably, respond in a defensive manner. Prior to any conference, I gather my thoughts, observations, evidence, and probable solutions to present to a parent so that the parent is well-informed and would find the conference useful rather than an “attack.” However, the conference, in all instances, did not ever result in the solution I have suggested, which is to change the classroom setting and have the student enter a classroom that will have more support, specifically more teachers, and/or the teacher-student ratio is smaller in size.

In my second year teaching a Gifted and Talented classroom, I had my first experience encountering a student for whom I believed the Gifted and Talented classroom was not suitable, which we will refer to as R. R was a 9-year-old African American student who was very quiet, yet hardworking. She noticeably struggled in Math and due to the capability of her peers in the subject area, R shied away from participating. With even the support of differentiated and scaffolded strategies, R struggled tremendously, which I believed was due to a self-consciousness she was building from within while interacting with her peers who exemplifies a strength in the subject area. During classroom discussions in all subject areas, R felt most comfortable listening to her peers rather than sharing her ideas. I noticed, as her peers were showcasing their successes across the board, R became gradually quieter and more reserved in the classroom. Soon, the pandemic

occurred and as a class, we transitioned abruptly to remote learning. R continued to noticeably struggle and began consistently leaving her camera off during ZOOM sessions, not completing her online assignments, and would rarely share her thoughts when called on to participate. This was an evident difference from her classmates' behaviors.

Concerned, I reached out to her parents. It was the end of the school year, and due to the pandemic, virtual parent-teacher conferences were taking place. Teachers had been asked to identify students who would have benefited from summer school to help close academic gaps that may have increased due to the pandemic. I told R's parents that R was struggling academically throughout the school year, which was mentioned in the previous conferences, and that gradually, socio-emotionally, I noticed a decline in her peer relationships during group activities and class discussions. I shared my concern of what R may be struggling with internally and that because of the consistent struggles in both academic and social areas, I believed summer school would be helpful. I also took the opportunity to share that they might want to consider R for the NEST program. I suggested that the NEST program may be the best fit for her due to its small class size. In the program, students receive more individualized attention due to the class size and the two-teacher setting. The program also invites and welcomes students with high abilities and can be a "model student" for students who are on the spectrum. I shared with the parents that I believed that in this setting R would receive more individual and socio-emotional support, provided within the program. The parents responded stating that they would not be okay with that choice and that they would rather handle the situation by working more closely with R or would get tutoring services to help support her in all subject areas—thus, making it clear that changing the classroom setting was not an option for R.

Initially, R's parents' decision was not alarming. I believed it was promising that the parents decided to work closely with R and consider tutoring. However, my opinion shifted upon speaking with my colleagues who previously taught R. Ms. L, was the third grade Gifted and Talented teacher. Upon nonchalantly sharing my situation about R, Ms. L stated that she had a similar conversation with R's parents during her end-of-the-year parent-teacher conference. Ms. L stated that she noticeably observed R struggling academically in the class and that the academic gaps were widening. Ms. L also suggested to R's parents about transitioning to the NEST program for fourth grade, and the parents' responses were similar. Listening to this, I had mixed feelings and did not know how to feel about my conference with R's parents. What I believed was a natural and promising response by R's parents was now a question of what their intentions truly were. I had a number of questions. One was, were R's parents saying that they would work closely with her and consider tutoring as a way to "shut down" my concerns and suggestion of a different classroom setting. Another was, were R's parents shutting down both Ms. L's and I's suggestion of a different classroom setting because in their mind, their daughter being in the Gifted and Talented program was a necessity and that they believed their child's labeling of being gifted was being taken away from them? I did not know what to think.

In the following year, I, of course, had my new cohort of students, however, periodically I would check in with my graduating class to see how they were doing. Mr. W, the fifth grade Gifted and Talented teacher shared many thoughts and experiences with what is now his cohort of students. He shared what he noticed about certain students—the strong learners and the students that were struggling. While sharing, Mr. W mentioned R. Immediately, I noticed that Mr. W was also experiencing the same situation with R. However, to my surprise, his conference with R's parents was not as smooth as mine and Ms. L's. Mr. W. stated that R was performing academically

very low and because she was a remote student, she would barely be present on ZOOM. Mr. W shared that R would be on ZOOM, but would not be on camera majority of the school hours, participation was not voluntary and assignments were rarely completed. Because of these observations, Mr. W. suggested that R would perhaps benefit from counseling to work on the probable struggles of remoting learning. R's parents were not positive. Mr. W. shared that the parents reacted as though offended by the suggestion and shared that counseling was not an option for their child. In their opinion, R was okay. When Mr. W. shared with me this experience, I proceeded to share Ms. L's and I's experiences with the parents. We were puzzled by the similar responses R's parents gave to Mr. W, Ms. L, and I. R was consecutively struggling academically for three years and after the pandemic, R seemed emotionally withdrawn, being a remote learner. We, as the teachers, saw that immediate attention or action needed to be taken. We were worried about R's academic performance and social wellbeing. However, because R's parents chose to not change R's classroom setting or consider counseling, we do not know what progress or change could have been made.

From this experience, there were a few thoughts that crossed my mind. It was possible that R's parents responded the way they did for three consecutive years because of their unconscious belief in the Gifted and Talented brand. It had crossed my mind that perhaps the parents were not pleased with having their child in a special education classroom as the NEST program instead of a specialized program such as the Gifted and Talented program. Perhaps the parents believe that the Gifted and Talented program, similar to what certain parents shared in my questionnaire, was the only form of quality education and that another program such as the NEST program would not offer that despite the numerous supports it provided. Lastly, it had also crossed my mind that the Gifted and Talented brand was valuable to have for R's parents. Therefore, having R fight through

her academic and social struggles for consecutive years and remain in the program appear to be the chosen option rather than changing the classroom setting to one with more academic and social support to see what may have improved. Unfortunately, these thoughts and questions remain unanswered and are based on my opinions, as an educator.

Another experience resides in my current Gifted and Talented classroom. As there are many students of varying abilities and talents, there is a specific student of concern in my class whom I strongly believe the Gifted and Talented classroom setting is not suitable—for whom we will refer to as M. M is an African American student, age 9, who shows a strength in the subject of Math, loves playing video games and dreams of being a soccer player in the future as his career. However, M faces challenges in the classroom academically and socially. In the classroom, M is very quiet. He speaks very minimally with peers during group activities and discussions and rarely participates voluntarily. When called on to answer questions, many times M has answered correctly, especially in the subject of Math; however, will speak at a very low volume. When speaking directly to M, his volume remains very low, and his eye contact is minimal. Many times, he lowers his gaze or avoids eye contact. When asked to give eye contact, M will give eye contact momentarily but will eventually look away. Academically, M is perceived to be low in the subjects of Reading, Math, Writing, and Social Studies. I use the word “perceive” because M is not leveled to be low based on performance but rather due to his lack of turning in home and class assignments and projects. Habitually, M does not submit homework packets, projects, in-class assignments, and completed assessments. M has submitted on a few occasions online Math assignments. Socially, M has a few friends in the class; however, during group activities, M contributes minimally to the group task, and as a result, peers will approach me in a respectful manner to share their frustration with M’s lack of contribution and more than often, decide to move forward with the task goal without the

contribution of M, but will make sure to let M know what they are doing in case the task is being presented or shared in class. Noticeably, M's peers speak to him kindly despite the challenges and try to incorporate M into group activities to the best of their ability. Lastly, M is required to attend counseling twice a week due to his social challenges.

Upon my observations, I decided to approach M's mother, who is to my knowledge, the only active and/or present parent, about my concerns of his minimal verbiage and lack of submitting assignments. After stating the aforementioned concerns and observations, M's mother's responses consisted of her not understanding why M does not complete assignments, that she consistently speaks to him about his habits of not submitting work, his amount of talking at home is far more than what he shows in the classroom, and that he is smart, but is very confused as to why he is unable to show it. From the span of September 2022 to March 2023, M's mother and I have had approximately 5 to 8 phone conversations addressing my concerns regarding his lack of submitting work and the challenges he is showing when working with his peers. The responses have been similar. In addition to addressing my concerns, I have suggested M's mother to consider doing an evaluation for M to see if there are any learning disabilities, considering additional counseling or therapy to cater to any possible emotional needs M may be struggling with, and possibly changing M's placement in the Gifted and Talented program to the NEST program (Table 1.1). I shared that the NEST program may be a better fit for M due to its smaller class size, the emotional support that is provided within the program such as social clubs, and the two-teacher setting it offers. I attested that these supports might be very beneficial for M being that the Gifted and Talented classroom consists of only one teacher, and the class size can extend to a maximum of 32 students. Under these conditions, M may not be receiving the support or tailored environment he needs. Despite these suggestions and rationale, M's mother has not yet verbally expressed an

agreement with this suggestion for the following school year. M's mother has stated that she tells M that if he continues to not do well in the class, he will be removed and that he would not be with his friends for the following school year if he does not improve. She has been clear throughout that she does not want M to enter a different classroom setting and is both confused and very frustrated by his attitude toward work and social relationships. This response leads me to question why M's mother is hesitant or resistant to changing M's classroom placement for sake of his academic and social needs. My answer leaned towards perhaps M's mother's perception of the reputation and branding of the Gifted and Talented program.

From what I have observed, because M's mother did not and has not agreed to the change of the classroom setting for M, I am led to believe that M's mother prefers him not to be removed from the Gifted and Talented program, perhaps because of the reputation it holds. The sound of one's child being in a Gifted and Talented program may be a proud statement for a parent and may even feel good to share with others. Through conversations with parents over the years, the program is highly regarded and has been shared as an accomplishment for a child. More than often, based on the way parents describe the program, I picture the acceptance to the Gifted and Talented program as a student's acceptance to an Ivy League University that has limited seating and is reserved for only the best. From what I have observed, the Gifted and Talented program confers pride within parents, and arguably, parents may feel angry, disappointed, or embarrassed to have their child removed from this specialized program.¹⁹ It is as if we are saying the child is no longer the best, and we are removing his/her label or "branding" of being the best publicly in the education system.

¹⁹ Sue Ann Bartchy Reinisch, & Reinisch, L. (1997). One Year at a Time: Parents' Perspective on Gifted Education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72(3/4), 237–252. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1493047>

CHAPTER 5

Solutions

With all evidence pointing to the flaws of the Gifted and Talented program, the conversation fades when discussing the positives of the program as a differentiated classroom for specific learners and solutions to attempt to smoothen its flaws in the education system. Over my years of educating elementary students, I have reflected on the effective practices that I have implemented in my Gifted and Talented classroom and developed a strong belief that it is highly possible to implement these practices within all classrooms to limit the divisions of the education system. The following are possible ideas of solutions I believe can help the education system:

Project-Based Learning (Project-Based Learning)

Teachers should engage and educate students in the classroom through Project-Based Learning. As an educator in an International Baccalaureate elementary school, Project-Based Learning has provided all students, regardless of their respective programs, the opportunity to undertake a task that requires them to address a challenging subject or solve a real-world issue. As a result, students gain profound topic understanding, critical reasoning, teamwork, creativity, and communication skills through this approach to learning.²⁰

Furthermore, the goal of Project-Based Learning is to engage students with practical issues.²¹ It is an integrative approach since it is uncommon for real issues to be handled using knowledge or abilities from just one field of study. Applying information and skills is necessary

²⁰ Bell, S. (2010). Project-Based Learning for the 21st Century: Skills for the Future. *The Clearing House*, 83(2), 39–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20697896>

²¹ Lattimer, H., & Riordan, R. (2011). Project-based learning engages students in meaningful work: Students at High Tech Middle engage in project-based learning. *Middle School Journal*, 43(2), 18–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23024494>

for Project-Based Learning, not only remembering or recognizing them. This approach to learning evaluates how learners use a range of academic materials in fresh settings. The teacher's job description, through this approach, changes from information deliverer to facilitator. And through the Project-Based Learning process, learners participate more autonomously and/or collaboratively, with the instructor only offering help as needed.²²

Increase in Social-Emotional Learning Using PBIS Practices

Time and time again, students have shown significant improvements when the environment cultivates positivity through encouragement, love, and care. Therefore, all classrooms can benefit by implementing Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) practices. PBIS is the deliberate, systematic process of establishing suitable behavior supports throughout the school. Based on a team-based problem-solving approach that considers both processes and results, PBIS implements evidence-based initiatives, policies, and techniques for all children to boost academic achievement, promote safety, reduce undesirable behaviors, and create a good school climate.²³ The foundation for establishing a multi-leveled, culturally sensitive, and egalitarian system is intended to improve young children's emotional and social skills.

Furthermore, motivation is thought to be crucial as a fundamental differentiator between academically gifted students, as mentioned in the responses from the teacher questionnaire, who optimize their academic potential and students who underperform. Therefore, if we implement or

²² Schmitt, C., & Goebel, V. (2015). Experiences of High-Ability High School Students: A Case Study. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 38(4), 428–446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162353215607325>

²³ Ennis, R. P., Schwab, J. R., & Jolivette, K. (2012). Using Precorrection as a Secondary-Tier Intervention for Reducing Problem Behaviors in Instructional and Noninstructional Settings. *Beyond Behavior*, 22(1), 40–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24011885>

instill this motivation through all learners by positively enforcing them through PBIS practices, students can potentially participate more in all classrooms and exemplify a pique in their enthusiasm and interest in education.

Resources (Technology)

Resources have been proven to significantly impact learners and, in my experience, since the pandemic has taken place, learners have improved in their abundance of knowledge and productivity level when using technological resources effectively.²⁴ Literacy in multimedia, information and communications technology, is a component of education, media, and technological skills. By implementing technology, teachers may provide all students with customized teaching and an intellectual and artistic avenue to dive into a number of inquiries. As technical tools are all around children in the 21st Century, students can take advantage of technology to access numerous perspectives. Media literacy enables all children to engage with individuals from various cultures, practice speaking of their own culture, and demonstrate cooperation and inventiveness. Therefore, technology makes it easier for all children to have elevated levels of drive to learn independently or collaboratively by giving them information resources.²⁵

Increase Exposures to Topics That Engage Students with Critical Thinking

Differentiated critical reasoning techniques are crucial for educators to engage and push all students with. Practical essential thinking exercises are also beneficial for children who are

²⁴ Cher Ping Lim, Yong Zhao, Jo Tondeur, Ching Sing Chai, & Chin-Chung Tsai. (2013). Bridging the Gap: Technology Trends and Use of Technology in Schools. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 16(2), 59–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jeductechsoci.16.2.59>.

²⁵ Morris, Jerome E. "African American Students and Gifted Education:the Politics of Race and Culture." *Roeper Review* 24, no. 2 (2001): 59–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783190209554130>.

generally developing because they enable them to link concepts from different fields, allowing them to grasp concepts more profoundly and with better academic rigor. Children may use analytical reasoning when given suitable problem-solving chances in any subject area. When given the opportunity to engage in critical thinking, students independently or collaboratively apply reason and logic to astonishingly reach new conclusions. This also increases their potential to develop original, and valuable solutions to presented challenges.

Effective questioning is vital for differentiating and instilling critical thinking in intellectually demanding learning situations. When centered on questions demanding a thorough understanding of content, knowledge may be transformed into an attractive, thought-provoking educational background for learners. Inquiries may help children to reflect more deeply, pique their curiosity and interest, and generate new ones.²⁶

In addition, adding decision-making opportunities to the curriculum offers another way to increase intellectual rigor among all students.²⁷ For example, to thoroughly and productively consider the options involved in making decisions, learners can be instructed to assimilate questioning techniques. Students can examine the alternatives offered before making certain conclusions depending on the task and proceed to make claims with supported facts. In the process, students may engage in outlining the pros and disadvantages of every option and creating profound thoughts and rationales—therefore, showing that when provided with opportunities to exercise or engage in critical thinking activities, all students have the capability of showcasing their version of thinking and applying logical reasoning to make a claim.

²⁶ Rimm, S. et. al. (2017). *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (7th ed.). Pearson. 94.

²⁷ Rimm, S. et. al. (2017). *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (7th ed.). Pearson. 91.

Workshops for Parents on How to Cultivate Different Forms of Intelligence

Parents should attend seminars to help their children develop many types of intelligence. Parental attitudes and the immediate surroundings impact children's development and behavior in addition to personal traits. The foundation and environment instilled by parents shape a child's temperament and traits. This affects how well students do in school. During the early years of a child's existence, while developing their personality traits and other social qualities, the first contact takes place in the family. Each student possesses many bits of intelligence, and these abilities should be cultivated from a young age.²⁸.

Workshops would aid the parents in understanding how a child might examine his/her abilities and capabilities. Parents are one of the closest role models for children since they can lead by example, provide direction, and help them achieve their goals. Children are naturally equipped with a trigger that can sharpen their intellect in any subject to develop various bits of intelligence. In this instance, it is possible to start from a young age, when a kid is considered in prime time; parents play a big part in guiding and shaping their child.

²⁸Ford, D. Y., Moore, J. L., & Scott, M. T. (2011). Key Theories and Frameworks for Improving the Recruitment and Retention of African American Students in Gifted Education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(3), 239–253. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41341131>

Conclusions

Is Gifted Education and its program a brand? From the responses I have collected from parents and teachers, and the experiential knowledge I have accumulated over the years, the answer to this provoking question is yes. Despite the Gifted and Talented program being a form of a differentiated classroom for students of certain needs, a shift in how it is perceived and treated has been shown.

Yes, Gifted Education provides identified students with a stimulating classroom environment that will meet their intellectual, pedagogical, and social needs and opportunities of challenges and exploring their gifted and talents are given. However, despite its advantages, Gifted Education and its program is constantly questioned for how equitable or equal it truly is. As data shows, for many years, the program has served certain racial groups, indicating both the program and the education system are cemented by racial disparities. The controversy behind Gifted Education and its program has yet to determine the permanent eradication of itself from the education system, showing that the program is wanted. The program remains in existence because of its reputation as a “brand” and its perception of being quality education in the public-school system.

However, acknowledging that the Gifted and Talented program has developed into a brand for many, solutions are not impossible. To remove this stamp of a brand, if all classrooms implement some of the effective practices that take place in Gifted and Talented classrooms, there is a possibility of blurring the line of division between the Gifted and Talented program and the other programs the Department of Education offers. By increasing Project-Based Learning, Socio-Emotional Learning, critical thinking, resources, and parent involvement in all classrooms, we

may possibly see that quality education exists in all classroom environments, not just in the Gifted and Talented program.

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