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A CASE STUDY OF A THREE-YEAR PILOT PROGRAM ON ONE DISTRICT'S ATTEMPT TO INCREASE THE GIFTED IDENTIFICATION OF DIVERSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS BY HAVING A TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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A CASE STUDY OF A THREE-YEAR PILOT PROGRAM ON ONE  
DISTRICT'S ATTEMPT TO INCREASE THE GIFTED IDENTIFICATION  
OF DIVERSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS BY HAVING A  
TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

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## DEDICATION

To my children, Nicole and Becca, may you always remember to keep the faith and go to your destiny. To Darryl, my husband and best friend, your soul is gentle and true. You are my special gift from God. I love you all.

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# Abstract

## A CASE STUDY OF A THREE-YEAR PILOT PROGRAM ON ONE DISTRICT'S ATTEMPT TO INCREASE THE GIFTED IDENTIFICATION OF DIVERSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS BY HAVING A TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

By Robin Kesterson Franklin

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This case study examined ways elementary school students from diverse populations (minorities and children from low socioeconomic status environments) were included in a talent development program, and determined if that inclusion proved to be beneficial for gifted identification. With intentional regard for the idea of talent development, this study sought to uncover the nuts and bolts of one district's effort to create a program for young elementary school students (K-3). This investigation used interviews, a focus group, document reviews, and standardized achievement measures to study how the talent development program for underrepresented students was created and implemented. A synthesis of data showed that the program resulted in the gifted identification of fourteen out of twenty-eight students by third grade from the program.

The results of the study have important implications for educators desiring researched based strategies for increasing student diversity in their elementary gifted programming. This study suggests that an action decision has to be made by policy makers about those underrepresented in the gifted process or the inequities that have beleaguered the gifted field since the beginning will ensue. Lessons learned from the program are shared to inform practice. A commitment to developing talent in early elementary school students from diverse low socioeconomic backgrounds is a viable option and should be pursued and encouraged.

*“Gifted children are found in the poor ethnic neighborhoods of Chicago and Los Angeles; in the projects of New York and Miami; they are found in new immigrant populations in West Palm Beach and in San Francisco; and along the border towns of Mexico and the United States. Gifted children are found in the trailer parks and homeless shelters. They are found in rural America and migrant camps. Gifted children are found in every city and every state where they reside. They are in every school these students attend”* (Castellano, 2002).

## **CHAPTER 1**

Fifty-five years after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), twenty years after the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 (U.S. Congress, Public Law 100-297), and with the recent 2008 election of an African American as President of the United States, Americans may be ready. When one sifts through these events and the ingredients are blended together, what message will rise to the top? Are these finally the events that will compel Americans to consider that children from diverse populations are gifted and talented at similar rates to whites and when given rigorous educational opportunities can achieve great things?

Many children with gifted potential may be economically disadvantaged or limited in English proficiency or racially diverse. Yet, the overwhelming population of school age students participating in gifted and talented programs across the United States continues to be underrepresented by African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008). One explanation for the phenomenon points to the identification process as being problematic and fraught with practices that leave many students from culturally and linguistically diverse families or those from economically disadvantaged families out of the process (Castellano, 2003).

There is consensus that best practice for gifted identification involves the use of multiple criteria. Multiple criteria identification provides a broad range of research-based guidelines for the selection of gifted students, and is accepted as best practice across many gifted circles (Ford & Harris, 1991; Frasier, M. 1995; Gardner, 1988; Hadaway & Marek-Schroer, 1992; Patton, 1992; Sternberg, 1988). However, even those practices do not fully engage the lack of diversity in gifted programs, and many are still concerned about the disproportionate under-representation of children from some groups in traditional gifted programs (Castellano, 2003; National Research Council, 2002). As a result, some efforts have been made to explore alternative programs for at-risk students that capitalize on the idea of student potential. One such effort was undertaken in a school division in Virginia. The Young Pathfinders program was mature and potentially revealing. Therefore, this study considered the impact that this pilot program intervention in one school division has had on the identification of diverse gifted populations.

### **Brief Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore one particular way students from diverse populations (black students and students from low socioeconomic status environments) were included in a talent development program, and to determine if that inclusion proved to be beneficial for future gifted identification. A close examination of underrepresented groups is vital to the discovery of ways to improve this problem, which is cause for great concern in education circles (Baldwin, 2004; Frasier & Passow, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Educators can no longer look at giftedness through a white middle-class lens. It is vital that educators become more sensitive to the

qualities that indicate giftedness and the processes advocating for students with particular regard to ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This study in particular evaluated a program that was attended primarily by black students living in low SES school communities.

This investigation used an extensive interview process, document review, and a focus group to study how this Young Pathfinder's program was adopted, created and implemented. The use of a qualitative, single case study design allowed the researcher to identify key participants who provided important insights regarding the research questions. This design supported the collection of multiple sources of data related to the goals of the study as well as intensive examination of that data.

### **Study Significance**

The exclusion of some populations (minorities, children from low socioeconomic status environments, students with limited English speaking ability) in gifted programming continues to be a persistent and multifaceted problem and thus cannot be solved with only one solution (Callahan, 2005). Studies of alternative and flexible identification procedures have shown promise but are not the only answer. Ford and Grantham (2003) agree that it is time to look for other explanations and other solutions to this dilemma of underrepresentation. Other ways to target these underrepresented students and make gifted programs more inclusive and varied must be considered. One idea to consider is talent development programs targeting young elementary school students from diverse populations.



This study is important for there is a need for a clear understanding of the specific impact that talent development programs have on the gifted identification of diverse populations of elementary school students. It will attempt to fill in research gaps that currently exist related to the use of talent development programs in early elementary school. Insufficient opportunities for talent development programs can be seen throughout school districts and may be because little is known about the long-term impact of such programs. The data from this study will be important for districts to consider when designing, budgeting, and implementing programs that will broaden advanced opportunities for more students. The results of the study could have important implications for educators desiring research-based strategies for increasing student diversity in their gifted programming.

This study may lead to a descriptive understanding (lessons learned) of what may work and what does not in gifted education as related to African American students and talent development. After analyzing the effects of this talent development program for early elementary school children via qualitative discussions and measuring outcomes using standardized achievement measures, results will be shared with the division staff to inform best practice.

The division and schools used in this study will not be identified in any reports generated from this dissertation, and pseudonyms will be used. Any prior reference to the district will be removed; thus all research data collected from Anderson County Public Schools has no reference embedded in the text of this study.

## **Foreshadowed Problems**

The research began with a foreshadowed problem that helped focus the study and represented the start of official exploration. This anticipated research problem acted as a baseline for the researcher and was refined as the study proceeded. It helped the researcher focus the data and allowed the collection of the data to proceed in a systematic way (Lodico, M., Spaulding D., & Voegtler, K., 2006).

The foreshadowed problem under consideration for this study was twofold: **How was the program implemented?** How were students targeted for inclusion in the program? How did the school district design, commit, and advocate for a program for at-risk students? **What outcomes can be associated with the program?** Were students eventually identified as gifted at the conclusion of the three-year program? How did the program impact the students who participated?

## **Dissertation Chapters**

Following the introduction found in chapter 1 of the dissertation, chapter 2 contains the literature review on gifted education among underrepresented students who are black and living in poverty. Included in the discussion are the attitudes of giftedness and the known strategies that are documented in gifted circles that contribute to best practices in overcoming chronic underrepresentation. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology that was used in this qualitative, naturalistic mode of research. Thorough descriptions will be given on how the researcher collected and analyzed data for this study. Chapter 4 will summarize and analyze the results and offer the reader data details and experiences

discovered during the study. Interpretation of findings will be included in Chapter 5 of the dissertation along with articulated insights and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### Review of the Literature

#### **Definition of Giftedness**

Although there is no universally agreed upon definition of giftedness, gifted education is a term used for specific practices and services in the education of students who have been identified as gifted based on capability and/or talent. In 2002, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Included in NCLB was an expanded Javits Program that offered a modified definition of gifted and talented. It stated, “Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.” Schools were charged with providing services for these students.

Programs delivering such education services are often referred to as Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) or Talented and Gifted (TAG). Gifted and talented children have abilities and needs that are somewhat different than those of the majority of students. Gifted students, as a group, typically comprehend complex ideas quickly, learn more rapidly and in greater depth than non-gifted peers, and ask provocative questions (Berger, 1991). Passow (1982) claimed that the curriculum presented to gifted students should be at a level of difficulty that the average ability students could not master, at a pace which would be too fast for the average ability student, and should include a level of complexity and abstract reasoning which average ability students would find too

demanding. In addition, the work of many researchers (Allan, 1991; Feldhusen, 1989; Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner, 1993; Kulik and Kulik, 1990; Rogers, 1993) shows the benefits of educating gifted children together in their areas of academic strength. There are critics of ability-grouping that use literature to speak to the benefits of mixed-ability grouping of students (Bruner, 1996; Slavin, 1996). Understanding that debate, the researcher chose for this particular research study to accept the programming option of grouping gifted students homogeneously or by ability, thus providing a lens for viewing this research.

Van Tassel-Baska (1992) reiterated that the gifted and talented are clearly a multifaceted group of individuals that have “a right to an appropriate education, one that is grounded in the recognition of individual differences and unique learning need” (p 63). It is vital that gifted students receive services to address their unique instructional needs, yet many current definitions of giftedness are limited in scope due to the wide-ranging interpretations of the concept and many diverse gifted students are left out.

A major study from the U.S. Department of Education on gifted education, *The Marland Report*, discovered educators had too narrow a definition of giftedness (Marland, 1973). Twenty years later similar findings were published in another federal report entitled *National Excellence: The Case for Developing America’s Talent* (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). This report reflected the knowledge and thinking that embraced the idea of talent development and broadened the definition of giftedness. It stated that gifted and talented children are:

children and youth with outstanding talent performance or show the potential for

performing at 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. (p.26)

Both reports found the same gap in gifted education, that too few poor and minority students are included in the process. Many schools limit gifted participation to a narrow population; traditional identification methods tend to do that. (Sisk, 2000; Baldwin, 2005; Vanderslice, 1999; Whiting, Ford, Grantham, & Moore, 2008).

Gifted and talented are fluid concepts and may look different in different contexts and cultures. To increase the representation of diverse students in gifted programs, research supports culturally sensitive theories of giftedness and talent development (National Research Council, 2002). Based on this information, a literature review was conducted on giftedness in students of poverty and African American students.

### **Underrepresented Diverse Populations**

The concern with underrepresented population and gifted education was reflected in the federal Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 (U.S. Congress, Public Law 100-297). This act emphasized major concern over “the identification of gifted and talented students who may not be identified through traditional assessment methods including economically disadvantaged individuals,

individuals of limited English proficiency, and individuals with handicaps” (p. 238).

Research supports that strong academic abilities can be found in all ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups despite socioeconomic status and societal stances (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

With that stated, however, the overwhelming population of school age students participating in gifted and talented programs across the United States continues to represent one predominant societal and economic group. A narrow concept of intelligence, in addition to lackluster attempts toward fair representation of underrepresented groups in gifted education, has contributed to “the most segregated programs in our public schools” (Ford, 2004, p.380). Specifically, African Americans, ELL learners, and students from poverty are underrepresented in gifted education (Callahan, 2005). Ethnic minority students and students living in poverty are often at a disadvantage in gifted identification situations.

Statistics from the *Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey* from the Office for Civil Rights (1998) and the *National Center for Education Statistics* (1997) suggested that the representation of racial and ethnic groups in gifted and talented programs favored some groups more than others. These statistics showed that nationally, African Americans made up 17.2 percent of the total student population, but only 8.40 percent of gifted and talented classes. Whites, meanwhile, made up 62.1 percent of the total student population and represent 75.5 percent of the total gifted and talented classes. Hispanics were documented as 15.6 percent of the student population and 8.6 percent of the gifted and talented classes. In 2002, Donovan and Cross found that gifted and talented

programs were comprised of 73% White, 10% Hispanic, 8% African American, 8% Asian, and 1% American Indian. In regards to minority students, only one half of the eligible students were identified.

### **The Underrepresented and Deficit Thinking**

There is a school of thought that the underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted education can be traced to those who hold a deficit thinking perspective about diverse students (Ford & Grantham, 2003). According to these researchers, deficit thinking is present when educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of the students accordingly. They argue that this way of thinking must be turned around in order for progress to be made for diverse students' inclusion into gifted programming. Gould (1995) and Menchaca (1997) believed that deficit thinking has contributed greatly over the years to beliefs about culture, race and intelligence. The idea of deficit thinking was re-emphasized with the publication of the controversial book *The Bell Curve*, which declared that there are inherent differences in ability among racial and socioeconomic groups (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). This type of thinking leads some to believe that high expectations for all students are unrealistic and ill-conceived. Deficit thinking can impede educators from identifying the gifts and talents of students who present differently than the dominant culture and should be recognized as such (Ford & Harmon, 2001).



## **Giftedness in Poverty**

Among those at risk for non-participation in gifted programs are the children living in poverty. *The National Excellence Report* (U.S. Department of Education, 1993) documented the underrepresentation of low-income students with *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988* data showing that only 9% of students in gifted and talented programs were designated in the bottom quartile of family income. This is a segment of the population that often lacks the resources needed for educational opportunities that have been known to lead to optimal intellectual growth and thus adds to the complexity of the underrepresented gifted situation.

*The National Excellence Report* (1993) pointed out that a child living in poverty faced hurdles such as less access to formal learning opportunities and more environmental barriers that affect their education. Lack of early experiences place students of poverty at a disadvantage for gifted identification. Educators do know that early interventions full of enriched educational experiences are often rewarded with a revelation of a child's hidden abilities. An advanced sense of humor (Shade, 1991), an extensive vocabulary (Borkowski & Peck, 1986), or a keen ability to solve problems (Sternberg, 1985) can all be indicators of a student possessing gifted potential. Clark (1988) also suggested the ability to reason by analogy, to think logically, and the ability to extend or extrapolate knowledge to new situations are characteristics that should be recognized in students with high potential. These discovered abilities could help educators recognize potential often hidden by standardized tests.

If it is a minority-gifted student living in poverty, then the risks for not receiving

gifted services increases. There is substantial data available that shows parent involvement leads to improved student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates, and that these improvements occur regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the family (Flaxman & Inger, 1991). Unfortunately, parent communication about enrichment opportunities is not always a routine part of parent-school connections with many families and the “accrual of educational advantage” is often neglected (VanTassel-Baska, 2003). This may lead to many families of poverty unable to advocate for their children and unable to request that the school pursue gifted identification; thus, confounding the problem. Ford & Grantham (2003) suggested a focus on family education with schools hosting workshops planned to educate diverse parents on advocating for their gifted children.

### **Giftedness in African American Students**

African American students are a population of students often at jeopardy of being left out of the gifted process. The lack of African American students in educational programs for the gifted is often rooted in historical and environmental variables (Baldwin, 1987). These include factors such as poverty, cultural diversity, identification practices, and social and geographic isolation, which often hide the talents of the African-American child (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2002; Morris, 2002; Ford, 1995).

African Americans have struggled to overcome the hardships that have been imposed upon them throughout history. Past studies by Witty and Jenkins (1935-36) and by Proctor (1929) revealed that giftedness did exist among black students in the segregated classroom. Once integration occurred educational practices limited many

African American students from reaching gifted status. *The National Center for Education Statistics* (1998) showed that 36.4 percent of all black children live below the poverty line confounding the dilemma. In addition, in families with female householders only, the percentage of black children living in poverty increased to 54.7 percent.

Children in urban schools that have high-minority and low SES consistently perform below the national average in math and science. With the focus on NCLB and “high stakes” testing, teachers often become skill and drill focused which is a form of teaching that works contrary to learners with high potential (Gallagher, 2004). This cycle often leads to the potential gifted student losing any spark for educational success. Several researchers have shown that minority students’ learning styles may contribute to underachievement as well. Research by Hale-Benson (1986) noted that African American students tended to be visual and concrete learners, so if a school taught more often in verbal, abstract, and decontextualized ways there was a mismatch between learning styles and teaching styles. There is a call for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Gay, 2000). Reversing underachievement among gifted minority students requires an intensive partnership between teachers, counselors, parents, and students.

### **Underrepresented Factors and Jacob K. Javits Grants**

The story of gifted education in the United States continues to be one of widespread underrepresentation for some groups. When the representation is not in proportion to the population, the questions of unfair and discriminatory practices must be considered. (Gallagher, 1995) There are many factors contributing to this low

representation of diverse and/or economically disadvantaged populations in gifted education in the United States. Researchers worldwide recommend many strategies that will improve the underrepresentation of ethnic minority students in gifted education (Callahan, 2005; Ford, Grantham, Whiting, 2008; Passow and Frasier, 1996).

The Jacob K. Javits grants support the development of talent in our nation's schools and focuses its resources on children from backgrounds that have traditionally not been included in gifted education programs. Since its inception, the grants have supported strategies that improve the likelihood that some gifted students will not continue to be left out of the process (U.S. Congress, Public Law 100-297, 1988). Grants are awarded, when funding is available, for initiatives that develop and shore up models serving students who are underrepresented in gifted programs.

Many of the curriculum projects, instructional strategies and best practices developed under the Javits' umbrella are addressing the underrepresented students in gifted education and some are showing promise. The Javits grants have been awarded in the past few years to organizations attempting to find solutions for this lack of representation and many are related to the topics of gifted theories and talent development, the definition and attitude of giftedness, the identification procedures, non-verbal assessments, programming options, and early intervention techniques (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

In addition to the Javits grants, other educational organizations are delving into these topics as well. Each topic will be referenced and explored in the following section because each was used in the creation of the Young Pathfinders Program under study,

and each area must be addressed if the complexity of the underrepresented in gifted education is to become disentangled.

### **Gifted Theories and Talent Development**

Research firmly supports that a broader view of gifted will benefit everyone and, specifically, those that are underrepresented in the gifted process (Sternberg, 1995). A complete consensus for what this definition of giftedness should be does not currently exist. There is, however, support for the gifted theories of Renzulli and Sternberg. Sternberg's theories have been tested in several large-scale studies and were conducted with students mostly from low socio-economic backgrounds and were found to improve student performance (Grigorenko, Jarvin, & Sternberg, 2002). Borland's (2005) research suggested that Renzulli's three-ring conception of giftedness is the most influential conception of giftedness in recent times.

Renzulli believes that gifted behavior is an interaction among three clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation), and high levels of creativity. Gifted children are those who have or are capable of developing this mixture of traits and applying them to any area of human performance (1978). Renzulli (1986) tackled the underrepresentation of ethnic and socio-economic groups in gifted programs by advising against identification procedures resulting in pre-selection of students. Renzulli and Reis (1991) stipulated that flexibility in identification and programming is needed so that more students in minority ethnic groups are given more opportunities to demonstrate their potential. Renzulli (1995) insisted that an expanded approach to identify talent potentials facilitates efforts to

include more underrepresented students and consequently, promote equity in gifted programs.

Research by Sternberg (1985) revealed that giftedness should be examined in a broader way incorporating several parts of intelligence. His gifted theory known as the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence suggested that three intellectual abilities are vital to academic and social accomplishments opening the door for more ways to identify intelligence. Sternberg proposed that intelligence discloses itself in at least three ways: (a) componentially, (b) experientially, and (c) contextually. In addition, Sternberg (2007) urged educators to place culture at the center of thinking and decisions when making identification and placement decisions for gifted. His ideas are particularly helpful in developing talent in high ability students from diverse backgrounds. Sternberg's research (1995) showed that when students are measured on a broader analysis of giftedness, a more diverse populace is eligible for gifted services. He suggested that gifts and talents manifest themselves differently across cultures, and educators must be culturally sensitive when nurturing and developing the talents of students who are underrepresented.

### **Attitudes/Definitions of Giftedness**

There is research that offers support for expanding philosophies, definitions and theories of giftedness that accommodate cultural diversity (Frasier & Passow, 1994; Ford, Harris III, Tyson & Trotman, 2002). When focusing on the large population of minority students, the definition of giftedness must be nontraditional, flexible, and diverse. If a greater number of students are to be identified for gifted services among minorities, we

must retreat from narrow definitions of giftedness, which have often neglected and ignored a student's cultural and environmental backgrounds (Hunsaker, Frasier, King, Watts-Warren, Cramond & Krisel, 1995). Talent development in the area of underrepresented populations is a critical issue that could play an important role in closing the gap currently exposed in gifted education. As Borland (2005) states, "'Catching up" is not the goal; it is the development of potential that is too often frustrated by inequities in our society and our schools" (p. 22).

Unfortunately, there is a strong acceptance in the educator population of a narrow conception of intelligence and giftedness (Callahan, 2005). These attitudes that define giftedness must be addressed if gifted education is to be inclusive of all cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Adjustments in thinking that offer a broader view of what it means to be intelligent in the form of multiple intelligences should be embraced by teachers and administrators (Gardner, 1999). These educators can then be the policy makers who develop criteria and procedures for gifted education, which can be deemed inclusive in nature. Based on research by Tomlinson, Callahan, and Lelli (1997), this attitude adjustment included involving parents and mentors. It also included creating curriculum and programs that are flexible and highlights the many ways intelligence can be fostered. This study was conducted in a school district where a high percentage of minorities were not included in the gifted program.

They named the intervention Project START (Support to Affirm Rising Talent). This case study revealed how the values of worth and potential were used to think differently about minority children. Teachers were encouraged to think about children in

more positive ways than negative ways, have a more flexible classroom, and have family outreach by letting parents hear messages from school that their children were worth special investment. In addition, the doors to school were open and inviting, mentors were encouraged to assist the school by spending time with a child, and thus important transformations began to take place. These broadened conceptions of worth made sense to the educators in the study and helped change perceptions and attitudes toward giftedness and students. Optimistic thinking about students led to a greater recognition of students' nontraditional strengths, which led to changed attitudes about what it means to be gifted.

Baldwin (2004) followed through with the idea of attitude adjustments in the gifted realm by including the thoughts that giftedness should be expressed through a variety of behaviors. She thought that a total ability profile is crucial in the educational planning for the gifted child. Baldwin also supported the idea that all populations have gifted children who exhibit behaviors that are indicative of giftedness. To ensure that end, she suggested carefully planned subjective assessment techniques should be used in combination with objective assessment techniques. Baldwin believed that groups who have been traditionally underserved by gifted education would be better served by attention to cultural variability, the use of more varied and authentic assessment, performance-based identification, and identification opportunities through respectful learning opportunities.

Scott, Deuel, Jean-Francois, & Urbano (1996) conducted similar research done with four hundred regular education kindergarten students and thirty-one students



identified for gifted services. The researchers revealed that by using a battery of nine cognitive tasks, more ethnic minority children were identified than before. These researchers appeared to use a more effective method to select minority students who displayed a potential for high academic ability as a result of strongly designed classroom curricular.

### **Gifted Identification Practices**

The literature revealed that giftedness is context-dependent and multifaceted and is much more than simple tests that can be racially and culturally biased. Until the late 1960s, the arbitrary number of 130 was the IQ cutoff score used by school psychologists to create the boundary between gifted and "nongifted" students. This benchmark determined whether the children would get special educational services under the gifted and talented umbrella. While many school districts now use multiple criteria for identification, Sarouhim (2004) noted that 90% of school districts rely on standardized achievement or aptitude tests for identification. Sole use of these instruments leads to underrepresentation of diverse students and students from lower socioeconomic status for inclusion into gifted and talented programs (Cornell, Delcourt, Goldberg, & Bland, 1995; Ford & Harmon, 2001; Maker, 2005). Should a single test be allowed to determine such a label? Many think not and have been longstanding critics of tests that are culturally biased against minorities (Borland, 1986; Gould, 1995; Richert, 1991).

Others agree that a standardized test is the only way to secure equality in gifted identification. This equal treatment, however, often leads to extreme under-identification of learners. A consensus exists that implies that the identification system of gifted

students is a problematic area that should be reviewed carefully for unfair practices (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Ford, Harris III, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). When gifted identification procedures gather criteria on students assuming that they come to school with similar experiences and opportunities, they are being treated equally; however, they are not being treated equitably (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). Tozer, Senese and Violas (2006) defined equality and equity in this way: “Although these terms derive from the same linguistic stem, they carry substantially different meanings. Equality denotes ‘equal’; equity, ‘fair’” (p. 358).

In *State Policy Issues in the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*, a U.S. Department of Education publication, Mitchell (1994) suggested that states take the lead in pushing districts to look beyond the “one size fits all” gifted programs and create state policies and practices that encourage schools to seek exceptional potential among all populations. Efforts are being made to create identification processes that allow trained educators to locate children who may not score high on ability or achievement tests, but have strong gifted tendencies and potential. Some school districts are broadening the process for screening and identifying gifted students, so as to not miss minority students who may need an alternative to standardized tests.

It continues to be the hope and role of some educators to ensure that giftedness can be expressed in many ways and through varied identification techniques and opportunities. The work of Martin, Sing and Hunter (2003) with gifted Native Hawaiian students revealed gifted identification using culturally sensitive interviews and questionnaires; specifically developed behavioral checklists; achievement scores,

problem-solving performance; and immersion in a culturally responsive, enriched environment. This showed a program that attempted to include students who needed unique learning opportunities based on exceptional ability and potential, regardless of extraneous variables. In addition, Barkan and Bernal (1991) documented a 14% increase of minority group participation in gifted programs when a multidimensional approach to identification was employed.

In Broward County Public Schools, Florida, (2008) the district provided every second grader the opportunity to be considered for gifted eligibility. They referred to this procedure as universal screening. This is a large financial commitment on the part of the district and data must be analyzed to determine if this approach is meeting goals for increasing underrepresented students in gifted programs. To date, two years of universal screening of second graders has resulted in the identification of approximately 2,000 gifted students. In 1996, Scott, Deuel, Jean-Francois, and Urbano pointed out that, “In the United States of America, children from culturally different and/or low socioeconomic environments constitute a growing percentage of all students, yet assessment tools that effectively evaluate their academic potential are lacking” (p.147). This leads one to believe that many students who have not been screened for gifted programs due to lower test scores may have been included in the process if additional criteria were employed. It would be neglectful if antiquated identification processes were the cause of such exclusion.

## **Non-Verbal Assessments**

The use of culturally inappropriate assessment instruments place minority students at a disadvantage. Castellano and Diaz (2002) pointed out this glaring weakness of many gifted identification procedures:

Most of the identification procedures used, such as standardized tests, teacher recommendations and grades are really a measure of conformity to middle class academic values and achievement. The more measures that are used and combined inappropriately, the more likely it is that disadvantage students (poor, minority, creative and others that tend to be underachievers at school) will be excluded. Therefore, the use of multiple measures, which may create the appearance of inclusiveness, can actually promote elitism in the identification process (p.100).

This new identification paradigm would recognize the variety of ways in which students display giftedness and would offer a varied and authentic assessment approach. There is a need to use non-verbal assessment tools specifically designed to overcome the cultural bias of verbal tests. Several promising instruments for doing just that include the Matrix Analysis Test, The Ravens Matrices, and The Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test. There is still controversy about the value of tests in general, but culture-fair tests (intelligence tests in which performance is not based on experience with or knowledge of a specific culture) are considered to be a more accurate measure of a student's potential than traditional verbal tests because they "do not have the confounding influence of language, vocabulary, and academic exposure" (Ford, Harris III, Tyson & Trotman, 2002, p.57).

The Matrix Analysis Test and The Ravens Matrices instruments are yielding somewhat different populations of students than the use of traditional intelligence tests where the focus is on verbal tasks (Mills & Tissot, 1995). A study by Saccuzzo et al. (cited in Ford, Harris III, Tyson & Trotman, 2002) discovered that 50% of non-white students who did not qualify for gifted programs using the WISC-R I.Q. test, qualified when The Ravens Matrices was used. Similar findings were reported in literature by Castellano and Diaz (2002).

The other measurement of student ability holding promise for underrepresented populations is the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT). The general purpose of the test is to measure ability without the requirement of reading, writing, or speaking. The test focuses on problem-solving skills and reasoning skills regardless of language, educational or cultural background. Its use with young elementary school children is hands-on and age appropriate. Naglieri and Ford (2003) claimed that African American and Hispanic students were as likely to earn high scores on the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test as white students and to thus identify equal numbers of high-scoring African American, Hispanic, and white students. Research continued to show that the test could predict achievement as well as measures of ability that contain both verbal and nonverbal content (Naglieri, 2003b; Naglieri & Ronning, 2000b).

A Javits funded grant was awarded to Page Unified School District in Arizona in 2005 to the proposal, *Buried Treasure: A Journey of Discovery*. This project was designed to implement identification methods specifically targeting underserved gifted Native American students. It was reported in the Javits Annual Update Report (2007) that

the use of the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test (NNAT) to screen all second grade students showed increased identification of gifted Native American students in that district.

Those seeking alternative standardized tests should be cautious; however, Lohman (2003) advised that there are no culture-free measures and that culture fairness, is very difficult to assert about any known aptitude test. He referred to nonverbal versions of such tests as “a helpful adjunct, but as a measure of last resort” (2003) and also suggested that a more productive direction might be to employ traditional tests only to compare students with similar backgrounds and experiences as a means to identify the minority students with the most aptitude (2006). A sensible plan to increase minority participation in gifted programs may rely less on alternative assessments and rest instead with a well crafted learning environment.

### **Program Development/Learning Environment**

Research has shown that gifted children benefit from specifically designed educational programming (VanTassel-Baska, 1989). As the demographics of society have changed to include greater proportions of minority students in our schools, minority gifted youth must have equal access to the fullest range of services as white students. Students in gifted programs should closely represent the community’s demographics, and students of diverse environments should be fairly represented in regards to ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Ford & Grantham, 2003). We must make diverse Gifted and Talented enrollment a priority. Ford and Harris (1999) stated that by 2020, minority students would comprise 46% of all public-school students. This stated; however,

underrepresented students are not always reflected in gifted education programs. Time is of the essence and some are being proactive in the fight for gifted equity.

In Texas, a position was created and was funded by the federal government in which a person's job was to be the bridge between the gifted and bilingual programs within a district. This individual recruited gifted teachers from the bilingual teacher population and trained the teachers on how to identify low-income and minority-gifted students. As a result, the district had almost tripled the number of bilingual students in its gifted programs in four years. Educators in the program agreed that identifying gifted minority children as young as possible was the key. "The difficulty is breaking some of the stereotypes," said Paul Slocumb, former president of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented and co-author of *Removing the Mask: Giftedness in Poverty*. "It's very difficult to switch a country-club image to a real-world view of giftedness" (Adler, 2006).

The cost for under-identification is high. Research shows that gifted students need to work at higher instructional levels and at a faster pace than non-gifted students (Sousa, 2003). When this does not happen, they work at the same pace as their non-gifted peers, and their achievement levels often drop. In time, this leads many gifted and talented students to experience boredom, dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem. These students can become underachievers and discipline problems as well (Winebrenner, 1992).

Kulik's (1992) research revealed that gifted students benefited least from doing reasonably typical studies in a mixed-level class, and benefited most from learning with other similarly advanced students in accelerated or enriched classes. To engage gifted

students, the base curriculum must be differentiated in order to challenge and motivate gifted learners. Research shows that this is not just good for gifted learners, but offers excellent instructional practices for all students (Smutny, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999).

In addition, students from poverty and other at-risk communities deserve master teachers who provide enriched educational opportunities to help level the playing field. Many schools positioned in challenging neighborhoods are working diligently to help students to “catch-up” with peers. These educators are providing additional support for students’ lack of experiences due to environmental influences; they can now become the advocate who can discover and unleash masked potential (Strip, 2000). Educators can play a key role in helping underrepresented gifted students acquire the skills, beliefs and attitudes necessary to capitalize on their talents. There are specific instructional issues students from poverty face daily and the answer for success lies within a rigorous curriculum and early intervention programs that target talent potential (Callahan, 2005; Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien, & Burns, 2000).

While there is ample literature that offers suggestions for increasing the numbers of underrepresented students, the literature is much more limited in the documentation of the implementation and success of these suggested strategies. There are a few studies on early intervention that endeavor to do just that.



## **Early Intervention**

Of particular importance to children from ethnic minority groups is the need for early intervention of educational opportunities. Research confirms that this early intervention is a key component in successful program for gifted minority students (Karnes and Johnson, 1991; Sisk, 2003). Karnes and Johnson (1991) did a study where higher-level thinking skill lessons were taught to 234 four and five year old Head Start children. Pre and posttests revealed that the 234 children out-scored a control group of 212 children. Of the 234 children, twenty-four students in the intervention program were identified as being potentially gifted.

In addition, Sisk (2003) revealed how Project STEP UP provided a challenging, culturally relevant program to 243 minority, low SES, at risk, high potential students in 14 school districts. Prior data showed that the students would not have qualified for gifted services, but at the culmination of the program over 50% were identified as gifted. Similar results were found in an early intervention study in Palm Beach, Florida of gifted minority students. The accomplishments of a pilot program designed to promote abilities of 75 potentially gifted culturally different students in grades 3-4 were revealed and showed that 30% of the students were considered for placement in the regular gifted program at the culmination of the intervention program (Howells, 1983).

One proposal that was funded by a four year Javits Grant was *Project Promise* awarded to the Virginia Department of Education, in partnership with The College of William and Mary, Greensville County, Martinsville City Public Schools, and Prince William County Public Schools. The goals of the grant were to recognize giftedness and

high potential in kindergarten through grade three students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and to provide students with strategies and skills such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, and integrative content. The vehicle used was a hands-on, problem-based science curriculum for grades K-3. The evaluation of the program revealed that while overall gifted referrals by participating teachers increased during the program, the students referred did not necessarily qualify for the existing gifted program present within each district. The strength of *Project Promise* was the ongoing, hands-on professional development for the teachers and the increased referral for gifted identification of underrepresented populations (Virginia Department of Education, 2009).

Another Javits grant was awarded to the Maryland State Department of Education in 2003 for *Operation Evidence: Potential and Promise in Primary Students*. The purpose was to implement a primary talent development program (PreK-2) in science instruction to nurture and identify high achieving students in underrepresented populations and to increase nominations by teachers for the underrepresented. In the evaluation of the program a quasi-experimental time-lagged study matching schools on demographic variables showed the representation of diverse student groups identified for gifted and talented education made some progress in closing the gaps (Maryland State Department of Education, 2007).

### **Young Pathfinders**

Based on the recommended strategies found in literature for increasing diversity enrollment in gifted education, there was a school district that developed a talent program

in hopes that more students would be given expanded enrichment opportunities. The program was given the name The Young Pathfinders Program. All citations have been removed from this section to ensure anonymity of the district under study. This early intervention initiative served advanced first through third grade students from diverse populations, and recently ended its second cohort of two, three-year pilot programs at two low SES elementary schools. The two cohorts were composed of students from seven elementary schools that were targeted for program implementation due to weak representation in gifted programming within the district.

The two cohort teachers provided an advanced, differentiated curriculum that offered enrichment opportunities to enhance and nurture the academic growth of primary students. This grouping configuration was created to help secure opportunities for underrepresented minority students by providing learning opportunities that required critical and creative thinking. The students were recommended for this program in kindergarten. The cluster-grouped students and teachers remained together as classes through third grade where typical identification of students takes place. This study focused on the first two cohorts that cycled through the program.

Efforts are being made in this district to bring about change for groups of diverse elementary school students, many in low socioeconomic environments. The question remains whether this expanded view of young talent development and targeted programming is making authentic changes in gifted identification for diverse populations or is ineffective in that regard. Although underrepresented students are being targeted by the U.S. Department of Education's Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students

Education Program (2009), limited published research results still exist on self contained talent development programs for diverse students in K-2 elementary school years in low SES environments. This study attempts to add to the current information on this population of early elementary school students and talent development by examining this self contained intervention program in depth via a case study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### Methodology

#### **General Design**

To better understand school programs that seek to boost academic opportunities and gifted identification for diverse elementary school students, it is vital to examine the environment in which the programs are designed and implemented as well as the individuals responsible for the program and the participants. Thus, a qualitative case study design was employed in the evaluation of the Young Pathfinders Program. This provided a framework for phenomenological research, the goal of which was to understand phenomena in a context-specific setting (Patton, 1990).

The naturalistic mode of research was chosen because it can be used to gain new perspectives on specific situations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This study offers a glimpse into a social setting; a school environment. The method used provided opportunities for rich details and insights from key stakeholders into the newly adopted program for diverse gifted and talented students at work in a school district (Stake, 1978).

Yin (1994) described a case study as empirical inquiry that explores current phenomena in their real-life context. The current study is a single-case design examining a pilot program adopted in one district, in one school zone, involving several elementary schools, and targeting kindergarten students. The examination of the program included the design, implementation, and outcomes associated with the project. The goal was to examine the phenomenon across the given educational setting and report findings for program considerations as related to gifted programming. The interpretations or

assertions gleaned from this specific case study may be called “lessons learned” (Guba and Lincoln, 1985).

The case study design was employed to understand holistically the design, implementation, and outcomes associated with the three-year pilot program designed to impact the diverse populations in gifted education. Yin (1994) also claimed that a case study should include explanatory, exploratory, illustrative and/or descriptive elements. Case study is an appropriate method when seeking “how” or “why” questions. Those were the basis of the research questions for this study, and therefore strong indicators for case study design.

### **Setting of the Case**

This study took place in Anderson County, Virginia, which is a community in Virginia bordering a major city on the west, north and east, and constituting approximately a third of that cities’ metropolitan area. Anderson County has 293,000 residents who live in a community of 244.06 square miles. Within the county there are five magisterial districts. The county is often referred to in terms of West End and East End because of its unique shape.

Anderson County Public Schools has a total of sixty-nine schools of which forty-five are elementary, thirteen are middle, nine are high schools and two are technical centers. The total population of students is 48,256 with 22,008 identified as K-5 students. The ethnic distribution countywide, as of November 2008, is Asian=5.6%, African American=35.7%, Hispanic=4.2%, White=47.8% and Other=6.7%. The economic deprivation is listed as 33.2%. The mission of Anderson County Public Schools

is that in partnership with the community, it will inspire, empower, and educate every student to be prepared for success in the 21st century. With a commitment to student potential, Anderson County Public Schools has a long history of gifted services as evidenced by data records. With that stated, however, there appears to be large percentages of gifted representation among the west end schools and far less in the east end schools.

As documented on the district website, the mission of ACPS gifted services states that students deserve appropriate educational opportunities commensurate with their needs and abilities. The Anderson County Public School system uses multiple criteria for identifying gifted students from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, although overall identification percentages vary greatly from one end of the district to the other. The district provides a qualitatively differentiated instructional program for students from K-12. Anderson County Public Schools also maintains rigorous curriculum content and innovative instructional opportunities. Attention to the social and emotional needs of gifted students and their families is an important component of the commitment to a student-centered program. As a result, the gifted program in Anderson County Public Schools encourages students to maximize their potential.

It is important to note that The Commonwealth of Virginia charges all districts within its state to service identified gifted students, kindergarten through grade twelve. Each division in the state of Virginia is required to submit an annual report, "Programs for the Gifted," to the Virginia Department of Education. The Virginia Board of Education adopted the current *Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted*

*Students* (2005) which outlines the requirements of the local plan for the education of the gifted that school divisions must submit to the Virginia Department of Education for approval. Currently, local plans for the gifted are renewed every five years. The requested information relates to numbers of students served by grade and program area. The annual report requests information on the number and ethnicity of students referred for gifted services as well as information about the school division's teachers of the gifted and the training they have received.

The Local Plan for Gifted Services in Anderson County Public School was adopted in 2005 and is in effect until 2010. The plan went through an intensive review process prior to 2005. The review committee consisted of central office personnel, administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and Gifted Council members. The results were submitted to the VDOE on June 30, 2005 and approved by the Virginia Department of Education. The items required by the plan included defining the term gifted, establishing eligibility requirements, listing programming options, discussing funding, identifying personnel, and reviewing evaluation methods.

The demographics of ACPS should be mirrored in the gifted and talented population. A report from the district revealed that it is not. There have been disappointing numbers of students identified as gifted from diverse groups, especially in schools with a wide range of ethnic, racial, and economic diversity. There is a strong push from within the district to work toward identifying students in diverse populations including African American, limited English proficient, or from low socio-economic status. District wide goals are in place to increase the percentage of students from these



diverse groups in programs for the gifted.

Coleman and Gallagher (1992) reported that 38 state policies on gifted education have been crafted with reference to issues of identifying gifted students from “culturally diverse populations, economically disadvantaged students and disabled students” (p. 11). The state of Virginia is one of those states and suggests that districts have built-in assurances in their gifted plans that show that testing and evaluation materials selected and administered are sensitive to cultural, racial, and linguistic differences. Also included must be identification procedures that are constructed so that they identify high potential/ability in all underserved culturally diverse, low socio-economic, and disabled populations.

Anderson County Public Schools established, in direct response to concerns for underrepresented gifted students, a pilot program known as The Young Pathfinders Program in 2004. Anderson County’s new gifted programming option serves advanced first grade students from diverse populations and has recently completed the second cohort of two, three-year pilot programs at low SES school sites. The program was composed of students from seven elementary schools in Anderson County's east end. The classroom teacher provided an advanced, differentiated curriculum that offered enrichment opportunities that enhanced and nurtured the academic growth of primary students. The cluster-grouped students and teachers remained together as classes through third grade when gifted identification of students in Anderson typically begins. Because some groups of students are underrepresented in the gifted population, ACPS took steps with this program to see if it could begin to reverse that trend.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Guba and Lincoln (1985) provided a rather detailed outline for the qualitative design of naturalistic inquiry. A naturalistic inquirer attempts to understand the realities present within a setting by being non-obtrusive and allowing events to unfurl naturally (Patton, 1990). Using the steps developed by Guba and Lincoln, this study began with a focus for the inquiry, and determination of where and from whom data would be collected. The analysis of previous research studies provided this researcher with the conceptual scaffolding needed to design foreshadowed questions used in the data collection process. To collect data about the Young Pathfinders Program a variety of methods were used including document and records review, one-on-one interviews, and the use of a focus group. A data collection document was designed outlining what data was requested and collected from ACPS (APPENDIX A). In addition, a timeline and sequence for the data collection was developed and implemented (APPENDIX B).

### **First Document Review**

Some data that were used for the study came in the form of document and records review. Documents included past school board presentation documents, gifted advisory notes, teacher-training documents, gifted meeting agendas etc. These existing records were kept during the three-year implementation of the Young Pathfinders program were examined and housed with the Gifted Specialist. Guba and Lincoln (1985) defined a document as “any written or recorded material” not prepared for the purposes of the evaluation or at the request of the inquirer. Documents can be divided into two major categories: public records, and personal documents (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Internal

record review began this investigative study and included demographic information, student selection process notes, program implementation notes, and published data used in a review of literature. These documents were not subject to recall bias and provided a record trail of objective information. Access to records and documents followed all ethical guidelines approved by the IRB and the county of Anderson. All laws were adhered to regarding privacy for access to records (Hodder, 1994). The review of records and existing data helped solidify the interview guide and assist with outlining the topics in advance of the interviewing process. Documented data was needed during the review and all rules of confidentiality will apply.

### **Interviews**

After the initial round of document review, interviews were purposefully conducted to capture the rich perspectives of key project participants associated with the Young Pathfinders program. The method included ethnographic interviews employing an approach of open-ended questions that allowed for individual variations, and included a guide to pace the interviewing and allowed for a more systematic and comprehensive data collection (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The in-depth, one-on-one interviewing, based on a pre-created interview guide was similar to a guided conversation. The interviewer was an attentive listener who worked to shape the process into a comfortable form of social conversation so as to obtain quality of information (Patton, 1990). The interviewer worked to be sensitive to the interviewees and established a non-threatening environment in which the participants felt comfortable. The interviewer worked diligently to develop trust and a relationship with each interviewee. A letter (APPENDIX C) was sent to each

participant explaining the study and requesting consent for participation (APPENDIX D).

Initial interviews with the Specialist for the Gifted Programs Division of Instructional Services for Anderson County Public Schools and the Primary Gifted Resource Teacher for ACPS provided information on the early stages of the program's development and implementation.

The Specialist for Gifted Programs provides professional leadership in the development, implementation and oversight of countywide programs for academically gifted students and students identified in creative and performing arts. This individual also provides leadership for County's involvement in the regional wide Governor's School and summer enrichment programs. The Specialist for Gifted Programs meets the qualifications established for personnel responsible for the administration and implementation of gifted programs by the Virginia State Board of Education. She works cooperatively with principals and teachers but is directly responsible to the directors of instruction that includes elementary, middle, and high school levels. She is responsible for the development and maintenance of a differentiated program appropriate for gifted students in grades K-12.

The Primary Itinerant Gifted Resource Teacher responsible for the elementary schools considered in this study was also interviewed. This is a position that is present in every elementary school once a week in Anderson County Public Schools. Primary Itinerant Gifted Resource teachers support differentiation of instruction in grades K-3. They accomplish this through collaboration and consultation with individual teachers and grade level teams and/or through team-teaching with classroom teachers on designated

grade levels. Collaboration efforts may include tiered lessons, pullout groups, learning centers, problem-based learning, and use of technology. The teacher interviewed was primarily responsible for the initial selection of students for the Young Pathfinders Program. These participants were given the opportunity to offer meaningful perspectives that added to the body of data.

In addition, other interviews included three kindergarten teachers who helped with the initial selection of students who were included in the program and the two teachers who worked with the selected students in the first, second, and third grades via cohort one and cohort two. In addition, an interview was conducted with the teachers responsible for grade four and grade five instruction with the students who made it through the Young Pathfinder's Program and attended the district's zone center for gifted students.

The semi-structured interviews began with a few warm up questions and during the interviews, the researcher considered and was guided by the questions suggested by Patton (1990) and then refined by the initial records review.

*What does the program look and feel like to the stakeholders?*

*What are the experiences of program stakeholders?*

*What do stakeholders know about the project?*

*What thoughts do stakeholders knowledgeable about the program have concerning program operations, processes, and outcomes?*

*What are stakeholders' expectations?*

*What features of the project are most salient to the stakeholders?*

*What changes do stakeholders perceive as a result of the program?*

The researcher conducted all interviews. These in-depth interviews permitted face-to-face contact with the respondents allowing for rich data, details, and new insights while exploring the program extensively. The flexibility of the interview allowed the interviewer to clarify questions and responses but always with high regard for consistencies across interviews. The setting for each interview was in a location that made the interviewee feel comfortable, and which offered privacy and limited disruptions. The potential benefit of this study outweighed any risk associated with participation. However, the individual participants may not have received any personal benefit from their participation; however, the study findings provided for a greater benefit by informing possible program interventions designed to increase the gifted identification of diverse elementary school students. The specific interview guide for adult participants can be found in APPENDIX K.

### **Focus Group**

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, the researcher conducted a focus group of cohort one and cohort two students who participated in the Young Pathfinder's Program and attended the district's gifted zone center for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The focus group session (Patton, 1990) worked to reveal group dynamics and interaction and to generate data and insights from those who went through the program. The researcher organized the focus group based on Curtin's (2001) literature review, which concluded conducting qualitative research with children involves different challenges and research techniques than research with adults. Keeping this in mind, the researcher aimed to seek

the views of children with a “child-centered” approach. The focus group was a gathering of thirteen students who shared characteristics relevant to the research. The participants were invited to attend, and parental permission was obtained in addition to each child’s assent. A letter (APPENDIX E) was sent to each participant’s parents explaining the study and requesting consent for participation from both the parent and the student (APPENDIX F). A second parental follow-up letter requesting participation and student assent was sent two weeks after the initial letter was mailed (APPENDIX G and H). Once permission was granted, the focus group session took place. The session was tape recorded with informed consent and had a written component as well. As always, confidentiality was assured and only students with parental permission to take part in this study were invited to participate.

The objective of the focus group was to obtain high-quality data in a social context where participants consider their own views in the context of the views of others (Greenbaum, 1993). The focus group answered the same type of questions as the in-depth one-on-one interviews except it took place in a social context. A written topic guide was developed and used with the group using specific applications of the questions used in the one-on-one interviews. The topics or objectives included the following:

*Identifying and defining the program implementation*

*Identifying program strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations*

*Obtaining perceptions of program outcomes and impacts*

*Generating new ideas*

The interview topic guide served as a road map for the focus group moderator to

use during the session. First, the focus group participants were asked to consider, reflect and write out their answers to the questions from the interview guide. Next, the moderator asked the students the questions. Participants heard each other's responses and then made additional comments as the discussion ensued. The goal of the moderator was to keep the discussion moving along and to create a fair and balanced discussion. The session lasted no longer than 45 minutes with time consideration given for the interaction of respondents in regards to new ideas and perspectives. The date and time for the focus group occurred during the school day at lunch. Pizza and drinks were provided at the fourth and fifth grade gifted zone school site where students were in attendance. The specific interview guide for students can be found in APPENDIX L.

### **Second Document Review (Outcomes)**

Another source of data that was invaluable to the research was analysis of additional documents and records such as standardized test reports and gifted identification process notes that showed evidence of outcomes. Test results included the results of the Nonverbal Ability Test (Naglieri) and the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT). This data helped determine if the program implemented by the district did what it set out to do, which was to improve gifted participation of the underrepresented. The Research and Planning Department of ACPS synthesized the data from the Gifted Specialist's data of Cohort one and Cohort two with existing testing data so no individual identifiers were used.



## **Data Analysis**

Post activity data management began with each interview being recorded on tape with the permission of the participants and summarized in notes via a field journal. The taping of the interviews allowed the researcher to remain attentive and focused noting body language and making eye contact with the interviewee as well as paying attention to the overall mood during the interview. Once participants gave consent to the recording and were assured confidentiality, the carefully crafted interview guide was used to record the interviewee's responses. When the interview was complete, the interviewer listened to the tape and wrote a verbatim account of everything recorded. This transcription of the raw data included word-for-word participants' responses and was reviewed by the participants for accuracy. It was important that the original research participants considered reports to be accurate and confidential (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To further organize the data, all participants were assigned a unique ID involving initials, and each interview was assigned an identification number. All the lines of the interview text were color-coded which allowed for text cite of interviews by the researcher. All contact information for participants was stored separately from the interview data; pseudonyms were used for participant names as well as the names of the school division and the names of schools. All hard copies of transcripts and consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet. In addition, all computer data files associated with the study were stored using password protected files. The original audiotapes were destroyed after transcription took place to ensure confidentiality.

Recording of the focus group session was two-fold. It was tape-recorded digitally; and in addition to the moderator, a recorder took notes and recorded observations during the session. This allowed the recorder to focus on observing and taking notes, while the moderator concentrated on asking questions and transitioning from topic to topic, facilitating the group discussion, and following up on ideas. Handling the data from the session included compiling the tape-recorded session with the students' written responses and also including all comments on group interaction and dynamics as they informed the questions from the study.

As a backup plan in case response to the focus group was low, an additional permission letter would have been sent to the parents of the students who did respond yes to the focus group asking if his/her child could now switch to an interview in lieu of the focus group. The same interview guide would have been used with the students that was designed for the focus group (APPENDIX L). Parental permission and child assent would have been secured via APPENDIX I and APPENDIX J. This was not used due to the strong participant response to the focus group.

Data analysis included systematically coding and categorizing the interview transcripts to clarify what was recorded and perceived in the different interviews. This process of inductive analysis is where categories, themes, and patterns emerged from the data. A constant-comparative technique (Glasser and Strauss, 1999) was used in developing the topics and categories. The researcher searched for similarities, differences, and consistencies by comparing and contrasting across the data. The

categories were explored for internal convergence and external divergence to guarantee consistency and distinction from one another (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

The additional data collected during the records reviews were analyzed as well. Descriptive statistics were used to provide summaries about the students and their test measures. Frequencies included ethnicity, gender and SES. Means and standard deviation were determined with the test data collected from the NAGLIERI and the OLSAT. A percentage was shown for those students identified as gifted post talent development program.

### **Member Checking**

Kuzel and Like (1991) described a method that researchers can employ during data collection that can increase the trustworthiness and richness of research findings. It is referred to as member checking. While the interview progressed, the researcher restated, summarized and/or paraphrased the information received from the interviewee to ensure accuracy. Once the data was collected, the researcher reported back preliminary findings to the participants and asked for commentary on the accuracy of the results. The researcher addressed the issue of assurances of congruence and trustworthiness between participants' views and the reconstruction and representation of their views and experiences during the study by incorporating these critiques into the findings.

### **Verification of Interpretation**

Methodological triangulation was used to verify the multiple methods used to study the Young Pathfinders Program (e.g., interviews, focus group, document and record review). This approach to data analysis synthesized data from these multiple sources. In

addition to triangulation, steps to ensure trustworthiness were also considered. In this project, the researcher enhanced rigor by utilizing reflexivity, an audit trail, peer debriefing, member checking, and saturation in order to manage the threats to trustworthiness as discussed by Padgett (1998).

### **Rigor of Study**

Constructivist methodology has elements such as audit trails and other component checks that are the researcher's means of accounting for the rigorous nature of the query. Rodwell targeted trustworthiness as a necessary testimony to the quality of the case study and acknowledged its association with traditional positivistic research including reliability and validity (1998). The components of trustworthiness include credibility (accuracy of results and interpretations); confirmability (ability to connect results to the data); dependability (all procedures fall within constructivist methodologies); and transferability (the idea that information gained in one area can have meaning and usefulness in other contexts) (Rodwell, 1998).

“Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 48). Threats to reliability were controlled in this design through the researcher role, informant selection and data collection strategies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

#### **The Researcher's Role**

In this study, the researcher was the instrument that was used to collect data by interviewing and examining records and documents in the research setting. Data was

channeled through the human instrument rather than through questionnaires, inventories or machines. The researcher did the fieldwork and physically went to the people in their natural setting to interview and record information (Merriam, 1988). The credibility of a qualitative research study depends heavily on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field (Eisner, 1991; Patton, 1990). The researcher became immersed and assumed an interactive role in which she recorded data and interacted with participants across the study setting. The researcher currently works as an administrator in the district in which this study applies, and is an active member in the gifted education community; thus, the researcher was considered an insider.

The researcher in this study has a B.S. degree in Elementary Education, a master's degree in Supervision and Administration, a teaching endorsement in gifted education, fourteen years of experience in teaching and administration in the public schools, and is currently a doctoral student in Educational Leadership. The researcher has had a plethora of experience in gifted education and has had many personal connections to this field as a practitioner.

The researcher had questioned many times what she believed and knew to be true about gifted education and students who are missed or left out of the process. While the researcher could not completely separate herself from the topic/people under study, it was the interaction between the researcher and researched that gave birth to knowledge. Researcher bias entered into the picture even when the researcher tried to avoid it; however, there were definitive ways that the bias was decreased. It involved being as

neutral as possible during the study and being hyperaware of the power that the researcher had in the interviewing dynamic. It also involved allowing the participants to share their stories without requiring an approval or affirmation from the researcher. In addition, it was critical that the researcher not steer the participants in any way, which might have signaled or endorsed a certain response. The data collected and used for this study was un-manipulated and presented in true form.

In order to prevent the research in this study from being a narrative of the researcher's own ideas and beliefs, the researcher recorded field notes, used an interview guide, and examined pre-existing documents and records as ways to deal with any subjectivity in the research design. To enhance reflexivity, the researcher recorded any dilemmas, decisions, and actions in a field journal and self-critiqued by asking herself difficult questions throughout the study. In addition, an expert in gifted education was utilized to review the research and offer feedback.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

The focus of this investigation was to explore the Young Pathfinder's Program via a case study. This required the researcher to examine and analyze one specific program exclusively. The researcher examined in detail each source of collected information. This analysis included all of the interviews, the focus group, and document and record reviews including testing data. While each source was initially studied individually, the researcher in due course looked collectively at all data. The researcher read and reread through each interview and focus group transcription, systematically examined relevant documents and important testing data, made notes, and formed initial codes based on emerging themes.

The transcribed adult interviews were analyzed and grouped into meaningful themes that evolved from the participants' open reflections. The focus group of students shared insights that were compatible with many themes established from the adult interviews, but also revealed unique perspectives. In addition, the analysis of documents revealed data that were grafted into themes. Informed choices were made about the inclusion of representative quotes from the data. These were "useful quotes that can be incorporated into the qualitative story" (Creswell, 1994, p. 155). Finally, the researcher made decisions about the meaning of the data by establishing degrees of related responses that produced patterns and a "logical chain of evidence" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 260).

#### *Research Questions*

The research questions tackled in this investigation were as follows:

1. **How was the program implemented?** How were students targeted for inclusion in the program? How did the school district design, commit, and advocate for a program for at-risk students?
2. **What outcomes can be associated with the programs?** Were students eventually identified as gifted at the conclusion of the three-year program? How did the program impact the students who participated?

### Brief Overview of Data Analysis

An inductive and emergent analytic procedure allowed the findings to surface from a data analysis of the transcribed interviews, the transcribed focus group notes, and document and test data review. The researcher began with a word analysis of all transcribed interviews using a “word/tag cloud.” This weighted list, in visual design, gave greater prominence to words that appeared more frequently in the source text (all transcribed interviews) as shown in Figure 1. This helped set the stage for data analysis.



Figure 1. Word/Tag cloud for Young Pathfinders’ data.



Next, a comparison ensued of themes predicted from the literature review with the common threads woven throughout the participants' words and the documents. "Category names can come from the pool of concepts that researchers already have from their disciplinary and professional reading" (Basit, 2003, p. 144). In addition, the researcher used the interview guides and identified the core topics present within each question to help inform theme predictions.

"Content analysis is qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative materials and attempt to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Following this lead, the researcher set out to analyze the large volume of raw data into manageable categories, thus, requiring the blending and/or reduction of codes. At the beginning of the coding process, the researcher elicited 30 codes and themes from the data. Table 1 contains a list of the original 30 codes:

Table 1

*Thirty Original Codes Present at the Beginning of Coding Process*

gifted/talented/talents/advanced	parents
underrepresented/diverse/minority/urban	going
identification/chosen/criteria/portfolio	information
program/programming	perception/think
young pathfinders	outcomes/results/impact
hurdles/negatives	recommendations
gap/catch-up	students/group/participants
potential/developing talent	changes
equity/opportunities	positives/benefits/worked
early intervention/young/kindergarten	experiences/descriptions
curriculum	school
poverty	classroom/class
implementation/logistics/process	different
district	peers/together/group
expectations/future	teachers

With this as a beginning point, the researcher began to make deeper connections between concepts, discover overlapping categories, and to collapse categories. Through this process codes were added, merged, renamed, or discarded. As Yin (1994) suggests, the researcher looked for plausible explanations between the themes emerging from the variety of sources. This led to a synthesized list of common themes that were transferred into codes. This refining process allowed the codes to evolve into the following organizational framework:

**Theme 1: Background/History**

Code 1 - Data-Driven (Responsive) School District

Code 2 - Underrepresented/Diverse Gifted Students

Code 3 - Potential/Talent Development

**Theme 2: Implementation**

Code 1 = Identification/Selection (Students) - Who?

Code 2 = Programming Components/Logistics - How?

Code 3 = What Worked/What Didn't/What Should Change – What?

**Theme 3: Outcomes**

Code 1 = Short-Term Outcomes

Code 2 = Long-Term Outcomes

To arrive at these codes, the data were analyzed using open coding on a case by case, and line-by-line basis. Different coding colors were placed on the interview and focus group transcripts and pertinent passages from the reviewed documents were flagged and highlighted as well. Pattern after pattern was clearly seen in the documents. As the researcher coded the data, new understandings emerged, creating a need for subtle

changes of the codes. As the researcher discovered an interviewee's quote that applied to one of the themes it was copied and pasted into a coding document. It was color-coded and the interviewee initials were placed with the quote. Categories were collapsed and integrated into stronger abstract concepts during axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This process of open and axial coding revealed concepts and categories and integrated categories, which led to a theoretical framework. Throughout the coding process, a data summary method that allowed for representative quotes and document references to be systematically placed within code sub-sets was used. This allowed for a consistency of labeling and interpreting, adding to the credibility of the study.

Finally, the last steps were to build a "story" that connected findings to a theoretical scheme, relying upon the results of this study and literature review. This thematic structure allowed for comparing perspectives pertaining to the research questions. The analysis and assessment of participant responses revealed a story that can aid and improve understanding. That story is told throughout the remainder of this chapter.

### **Study Findings**

By using an inductive analytical approach to data analysis, the researcher interpreted the data and a unique, organizational framework developed. The major themes of the Young Pathfinder's study were related to the background/history of the program, implementation of the program, and the outcomes associated with the program. The pattern codes capture the connections in the data and offer a thorough explanation about the phenomenon found within each theme.

The codes present in the **background/history** of the program included in order the following: **a data-driven** school district, **underrepresented/diverse** gifted students, and **potential/talent development**. The district was clearly driven by the data showing that some students were underrepresented in the population of gifted students and, therefore, pursued solutions through talent development.

The codes present in the **implementation** process of the talent development program included the questions of **who** (identification/selection) and **how** (programming components/logistics) and the **what** (what worked/what didn't/what should change).

The codes present in the **outcomes** associated with the program included both **short-term outcomes** (gifted id) and **long-term outcomes** (expectations).

Code names were given to all of the adult participants in addition to the student participants. A list of characters follows:

Adult Participants:    The Superintendent: Mr. Hall  
                                  The Gifted Specialist: Mrs. Beck  
                                  The Gifted Resource Teacher: Ms. Hodges  
                                  The YT Program Teacher Cohort#1: Ms. Whitney  
                                  The YT Program Teacher Cohort#2: Mrs. Andrew  
                                  A Kindergarten Teacher: Mrs. Harvie  
                                  A Kindergarten Teacher: Ms. Robbin  
                                  A Kindergarten Teacher: Mrs. Hill  
                                  The 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Gifted Zone Teacher: Mrs. Edwards  
                                  The 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Gifted Zone Teacher: Ms. Ward

Student Participants: Girls: Desiree, Nyesha, Kenya, Nicole, Anna, Renatta,

Justine, Maya, Aleah, Monette, Nica

Boys: Darryl, Ramil

## **Background/History**

**Data-driven (responsive) school district.** Throughout the document review and interview data one theme was obvious; there was an ongoing commitment to use data to drive decisions and inform practice. Anderson County Public Schools continued to experience growth amongst its diverse populations and thus an expanded need for data was evident. On the district website the following information was duly noted, “The division will provide information and statistical data necessary to ensure that the school division accommodates the needs of students.” This process of collecting student data such as academic performance, attendance, demographics, etc. is a way that educators can make decisions that meet academic needs and promote student achievement. This diagnostic tool was clearly used in the decision making process to create the Young Pathfinders Program.

Every five years ACPS submits a *Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted* to the Department of Education in the state of Virginia. The Gifted Plan submitted in 2000 to the state of Virginia for the years 2000 – 2005 was approved but was hard pressed to meet the state’s recommendation of assurances that (i) testing and evaluation materials selected and administered are sensitive to cultural, racial, and linguistic differences and that (ii) identification procedures are constructed so that they identify high potential/ability in all underserved culturally diverse, low socio-economic, and disabled

populations.

Based on this external regulatory review by the Department of Education in the state of Virginia, the district was encouraged to look at ways to meet the needs of the underserved students who were being left out of the gifted process. Responding to this charge, ACPS looked extensively at gifted data and was able to pinpoint a trend found therein and state it in the proposal document presented to the school board in 2004 prior to the adoption of their Gifted Plan for 2005-2010, “Data analysis regarding gifted identification in ACPS indicates the Woodfield District contains a number of schools that are underserved by gifted programs.” The Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, presenting the proposal outlined specifically that “the current mean for gifted identification at these schools is four students as compared to the countywide mean of sixteen.” The proposal to the school board included a chart that illustrated the decrease in gifted identification at the zone center since the school year 2000-2001. See Table 2 presented to the school board on March 17, 2004:

Table 2

*Number of Gifted Students Attending Gifted Zone Center 2000 thru 2005*

Year	Students
2000-2001	23
2001-2002	18
2002-2003	14
2003-2004	13
2004-2005	15

It can clearly be seen that data were used as an ally in ACPS's response to the growing underrepresented gifted student population found within their school system. In the words of Mrs. Beck, the Gifted Specialist, "The District was looking at numbers of students identified as gifted, and found that there was a certain region of the county where students were underrepresented, particularly in the minority populations, underserved ESLs, and also those who are on free and reduced lunch. We decided we needed to do something." The use of timely and accurate data illustrated a clear need for something to be done in Anderson County Public Schools about the problem of gifted underrepresentation among diverse students. The district responded with a program focused on those elementary schools determined by data to be underserved in the gifted process.

The driving force behind the creation and logistics of the talent development program was Mrs. Beck, the gifted specialist for the district along with the elementary education director. With the endorsement of the school board and Mr. Hall, the school superintendent, she was given the reins to proceed with haste. The program was approved in April of 2004 and Mrs. Beck had to have the program up and running by September of that same year. Under her guidance and direction the Young Pathfinders Program was designed and developed to meet the needs of the underrepresented and diverse students in the Woodfield district of the county.

**Underrepresented/diverse gifted students.** The use of the word *underrepresented* was found throughout the data documents and transcribed interviews. The researcher asked for clarification on "who" that referred to in this program in

Anderson County Public Schools. The following descriptors ensued from multiple participants, “low socio-economic, Title one, single-family parents, students that were basically living in poverty, and/or minorities.” Data from the initial schools selected for participation in Young Pathfinders showed that they all fell under the Title 1 umbrella. The schools in the study all had a certain percentage of their students receiving free and reduced breakfast and lunch.

Based on data showing underrepresentation, a decision was made to develop a program in a specific geographic district of the county. As Ms. Hodges, the gifted resource teacher stated, “The students were not being identified, and we were hoping that if we start early enough with the children that we can give them the skills they need to advance themselves and identify more diverse (minorities, low SES) children for gifted programs.” Students were not only screened for the program based on specific criteria as related to the ideas of underrepresentation, but the elementary schools were as well. Only schools meeting the criteria of being located in the Woodfield district, labeled Title 1, and described as underserved by gifted services were eligible for inclusion in the Young Pathfinders program. It began as a pilot program in the year 2005 as cohort one and pulled from five elementary schools. Cohort two began a new three year cycle a year later in 2006 with the addition of two more elementary schools bringing the total to seven elementary schools participating in the two cohorts. “Within these schools they were hoping to capture early,” shared a teacher, Ms. Whitney, “the targeted populations and were trying to increase the numbers,” for gifted services via a talent development program. Once the problem of underrepresentation was identified, the district moved



forward to create and implement a program designed to meet those needs.

**Potential/talent development.** At its inception, The Young Pathfinders Program began with dialogue. Prior to its inception in the school year 2005-2006, there were powerful conversations among the superintendent, central office staff, administrators, teachers, and specialists that set the stage for new ways of reaching and fostering strengths in children from all backgrounds. In a document dated May 29, 2008, a school board presentation, the Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, updated the board on the Young Pathfinders Pilot Program with, “Four years ago, Mr. Hall, the superintendent, began a dialogue with the Division of Instruction about additional instructional strategies we could implement that would serve and support students who are underrepresented in gifted education programs and advanced classes.” These conversations continued and were based on troubling data provided by the Research and Planning Department of the district and confirmed as problematic by the Gifted Programming Department. The conversations continued through the ranks and as one teacher Ms. Whitney stated, “The district felt that if they supported these children early enough in their schooling that they would go on to take honors classes, college prep classes once they got to middle school and high school.” As stated by Ms. Hodges, “It was really the key to capture these students young, support them, give them the curriculum, monitor them, give them the advantages.”

The keystones of the talent development program created by ACPS per a document provided by gifted services were “the program provides an advanced, differentiated curriculum and offers enrichment opportunities to enhance the academic

growth for primary students who have traditionally been underrepresented in gifted education programs.” This early intervention began in the kindergarten year. As one kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Harvie relayed to the researcher, “They were targeted very early in the kindergarten process.” As the students were identified for inclusion in the program, they were invited to attend for their first through third grade years.

There were conflicting reports at times about the true goals of the program. While some felt as if the Young Pathfinders was designed to increase representation in the gifted programs, others were unclear. One kindergarten teacher, Ms. Robbins shared this, “We were cautioned up one side and down the other that this was not a gifted program. This was just an enrichment program.” Another teacher, Ms. Andrews, stated, “I think what they (central office) really wanted to do was to see if they were able to find a pool of students that had talent.” Regardless of the gifted emphasis there was one goal that was clearly stated by Mrs. Beck, from the central office staff, “The goal was to gather students who were more advanced, starting in kindergarten, to capture them early.” Once the decision to have a talent development program was put in place, the learners had to be selected.

### **Implementation**

The second set of categories that emerged from the initial document review and the follow-up interviews pertained to the theme of “implementation” as associated with the Young Pathfinders Program. These categories included data on the identification/selection of the students, programming components/logistics, and the what worked/what didn’t/what should change codes. In simplistic terms, the researcher asked

questions that encapsulated the *who*, the *how*, and the *what* of the program. The researcher asked the participants questions that would allow them to share logistics about the program. As in the data collection on background/history, the participants' perceptions were validated by both the documents reviewed and each other's responses.

**Identification/selection (students) - who?** Since talent development was identified as a means to address the underrepresentation issue, the Young Pathfinders Program was designed to offer underrepresented students in the Woodfield district of Anderson County Public Schools an early opportunity to reveal their talents. The challenge was to recognize and appropriately select those students for participation in the program. The data revealed the process and the initial results of that selection.

**Process.** The process for program selection was outlined in a proposal drafted in ACPS in 2004. Prior to the first class of Young Pathfinders, ACPS developed a kindergarten talent pool from which would come the inaugural members. The proposal outlined that "the gifted programs focused on developing a kindergarten talent pool of advance students at five elementary schools in the Woodfield district." In addition, that talent pool was to be developed "based on a multiple-criteria selection process." The talent pool was to consist of "students who fell under one or more of the following criteria for diverse populations: free or reduced lunch, non-traditional families, and/or member of minority culture."

When it came time at the end of the 2004-2005 school year for student talent pool selection, there was evidence in the data collection of staff development having taken place with the kindergarten teachers to get "everyone on board." They met prior to the

start of the 2005-2006 school year during teacher workweek. One of the teachers, Ms. Hodges stated, “We met. We all used the same techniques as far as identifying the children, because we met as a group to discuss how we were going to do it.” A kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hill, summed it up by saying, “We looked at all sorts of things to make a confirmation to get the top students.”

In particular the kindergarten students were screened for signs of reading and writing ability. One participant, Mrs. Robbins, told the researcher that, “If the child was reading they went to the top. They were looking for the ones who might be reading or who might be ready to read.” Another teacher, Ms. Whitney, explained, “For the writing samples, they were looking for a particular score on the rubric that they set up. So there were benchmarks in place.” A kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hill, attested to the fact that “the (kindergarten) group was fluid. You know, if something came up where we got a student who suddenly jumped ahead or something, we could say, ‘Hey, so-and-so has really gotten on. Would you kind of check on this one?’”

Once the talent pool was in place in the fall of 2005- 2006 (cohort one), the young kindergartens worked throughout the school year, once a week, with a primary gifted resource teacher. The kindergarten talent pool was in place in preparation for the formal identification process for the Young Pathfinder’s Program that took place in the spring of 2006. A portfolio was developed for each child by the homeroom teacher and the primary gifted resource teacher to submit to the identification selection team. The portfolio consisted of multiple pieces including the following according to Mrs. Beck, the Gifted Specialist, “We looked for their grades, we looked for writing samples, we looked

at their PALS scores, and we looked at teacher recommendations, and any recommendations that were made by the gifted resource teacher.” In the beginning, the identification selection team for the Young Pathfinders consisted of central office staff and primary gifted resource teachers. As time went on, the teacher that was hired for the Young Pathfinders group added that she joined the identification team.

For cohort one, a kindergarten talent pool was targeted in all five elementary schools within the district. Each school put forth their strongest candidates to the selection team for inclusion in the Young Pathfinders Program. Mrs. Beck, The Gifted Specialist, remarked, “We tried to select at least two to three from each school. Sometimes we didn’t get two or three. We tried to get at least one from each school. The invitation from the gifted department at central office was extended for 22 students to participate in cohort one. A few of them moved out of the jurisdiction over the summer so they were not able to attend.” The selection was challenging and competitive as attested to by one kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hill, “I think, drawing from as many schools as they had and having as few slots as they had, that it was probably a very difficult selection for them to make, because I felt like the school can only take so many. The way they did it, I believe, was that you couldn't take six from one school and zero from another school.” One kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Robbins, added, “It was our students and our school up against students in, I believe, four other schools.” Once the students were picked the selection process was complete. As the teacher of the first cohort, Ms. Whitney, confirmed, “I was told from the very beginning, that nobody would be added to the program (cohort one), that we would stay just our cohesive whole.”

After the selection was confirmed, the parents/guardians were called by the Gifted Resource Teacher, Ms. Hodges, who had worked with the students during the kindergarten year with an invitation for their student to join the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade Young Pathfinders' Three Year Program. The following synopsis was shared by Ms. Hodges, "The teachers called the parents individually and invited them, and then we had an informational session where they could meet the teacher. We talked about what would happen when they come, transportation, and how we would support the program." In addition to the parent/guardians those involved in the parent meetings were the Gifted Specialist for the district, the Gifted Resource Teacher, the Principal of the school site, and the Young Pathfinders' Teacher.

In the fall of 2006- 2007, a second talent pool was created within the Woodfield district, which would produce cohort two. This cohort added two additional elementary schools to the mix making seven schools contributing to the Young Pathfinders Program. These young kindergartens also worked throughout the school year, once a week, with a primary gifted resource teacher just like cohort one had done before them. Overall, the program operated in a similar fashion as cohort one with the primary difference being with the portfolio submitted at the end of the kindergarten year. The kindergarten teachers were asked to add reading assessments in the form of running records to document each potential Young Pathfinders' reading level. This was a lesson learned from cohort one and was needed as an improvement in the student selection process.

**The identified students.** The Young Pathfinders Program in ACPS began with the school year 2005 and continues today with a new class beginning a rotation cycle

each fall. For this study data was collected for cohort one and two. The initial results of the Young Pathfinders Program were documented in data as cohort one participants and cohort two participants. Cohort one attended Young Pathfinders from the years 2005-2008 and cohort two attended from the years 2006-2009. The following descriptive statistics provides summaries about the selected students' demographical information. There were a total of 12 students who made it through all three years of cohort one of Young Pathfinders. There were 16 students who made it through all three years of cohort two Young Pathfinders.

Of the twelve students in cohort one, eight were female and four were male. All twelve students' ethnicity was listed as Black. Six of the students in cohort one qualified for free and reduced lunch. Of the sixteen students who were in cohort two, twelve of the students were female and four of the students were male. Fourteen students in cohort two listed their ethnicity as Black, while two students were listed as unspecified. Eight of the sixteen students in cohort two qualified for free and reduced lunch. Frequencies shown in Table 3 include gender, race, and SES.

Table 3

*Frequency Table: Young Pathfinders in Cohort#1 and Cohort#2 by Gender, Race, SES*

Cohort Name	Frequencies Results by:
Cohort 1 (12 students)	Gender: Female-8
	Male-4
	Race: 12/12 Black
	Low SES: 6/12 (Free & Reduced Lunch)
Cohort 2 (16 students)	Gender: Female-12
	Male-4
	Race: 12/14 Black 2/14 Unspecified
	Low SES: 8/16 (Free & Reduced Lunch)

**Programming components/logistics - how?** Creating a talent development program required multiple layers of planning and attention to detail. The characteristics that emerged from the data in reference to logistics focused on the teachers, the classroom, the class, the curriculum, the transportation and the parents. Each suggests a programming component that should be considered when designing and implementing a talent development program for elementary school students. The data revealed the structure that



was put in place to support academic growth with the Young Pathfinders and attempts to explain the obstacles tackled throughout the process.

**Teachers.** A key component of the Young Pathfinders Program was hiring qualified, experienced teachers. Several participants confirmed that the teachers for cohort one and cohort two were found via an advertisement on the ACPS employment website. The advertisement stated that, “The teacher for Young Pathfinders would loop for three years with advanced elementary school students beginning in grade 1.” The Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, expanded this by sharing, “The teacher did not have to have a gifted endorsement, but we wanted someone who did have teaching experience with advanced and/or gifted learners.” The ideal teacher for the program would commit for three years, would want to work with advanced students, know how to differentiate the curriculum, and move them at a faster pace.

Mrs. Beck, who had been on the hiring panel confirmed, “We wanted the right match for the community and for the school, and for the students.” One of the teachers, Ms. Whitney, hired commented, “I remember in the interview they asked questions about differentiation and successful lessons, and questions about advanced and gifted learners.” Both cohort teachers, Ms. Whitney and Mrs. Andrews, who were hired, confirmed to the researcher that they were given five years to earn their gifted endorsement. Both teachers of cohort one and cohort two were both experienced teachers with over five years of teaching experience. Cohort one teacher, Ms. Whitney, was an approximately thirty-year-old white female, and cohort two teacher, Mrs. Andrews was an approximately fifty-year-old black female.

To provide time for adequate planning, Mrs. Beck shared, “The Young Pathfinder teachers were put on 11 month contracts. The teachers came in August and went through catalogues and curriculum.” There was a financial commitment on the part of ACHS to place the teachers on an 11-month contract. Two dynamic and experienced teachers, who consistently remained with the students throughout each three-year loop, were key players in the program.

**Classroom (location/setup).** Another strategic logistical component of the program was the location for the Young Pathfinders’ classroom. In the spring prior to Cohort 1 beginning, consideration was given to an elementary school within the targeted Woodfield district to house the three-year program. Why was Wyatt Elementary School chosen to house the program? Cohort one teacher, Ms. Whitney, remarked, “I think it was a combination of space, and the administration was willing and accepting to have the program.” This was verified by cohort two, Mrs. Andrews, when she added, “I was told it was simply based on who had the room, and which school within the targeted district that they're pulling from could accommodate another classroom.” When cohort two came along the next year, it was placed at another elementary within the targeted district as well. The trend continues today with four programs in current stages of the looping process within four different elementary schools within the targeted district.

The Young Pathfinders’ class at times worked in isolation from the other traditional classrooms within the school they were placed. Ms. Whitney, the teacher from Cohort 1, described it this way: “I definitely felt like we were just a group by our self. We were kind of treated like the extra class. So, we were never on the same hallway as the

rest of our grade level. The physical location of our classroom made it very difficult.” By the time cohort two began a year later in another elementary school, the experience was different. According to their teacher, Mrs. Andrews, “In first grade, we were in the first grade hall; second grade, we moved down to the second grade hall; third grade, we moved to the third grade hall. Which was actually good to be closer to the other teachers in the grade level, so I could ask them for materials or whatever that I might need.” Mrs. Andrews added, “We went on all the field trips with the other grade levels. We participated in school functions and programs with the other grade levels.”

Within the classroom one Young Pathfinder teacher, Ms. Whitney, described it like this, “I set it up very center-based with a math area, reading area, science area, and social studies area. They were very rarely in their desks. We were always up moving around doing different things.”

The students from cohort one and cohort two who were invited for their fourth and fifth grade year to the Gifted Zone Center School verified their classroom experiences as Young Pathfinders during a focus group with the researcher. Their memory of the classroom facility itself was not unlike a typical classroom found in any elementary school. Nicole remarked, “It looked the same as other classroom even though we moved to different rooms each year.” For most students, they recalled a “large or big” classroom, but that might have been simply related to small class size, which many of them reminded me were twelve students for cohort one and sixteen students for cohort two. The researcher thought Jasmine summed it up best, “Our classroom looked like a home, because that is how much I was at that place.”

**Curriculum.** The participants agreed that the SOLs (Virginia’s Standards of Learning) were the baseline for what was taught, but that is where the extension of the curriculum began. The charge from the Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, to the cohort teachers was as follows, “Move them at a faster pace, give them experiences such as more writing exposure, more what-if’s and not just basic knowledge, but to take it up into the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.” In addition, the researcher was informed by multiple participants that ACPS provided an advanced curriculum framework which was developed by the ACPS gifted department prior to this program’s development and is available throughout the district for use with any student who needs it. The advanced curriculum is based on Bloom’s Taxonomy and incorporates higher level thinking strategies. This was used extensively in the Young Pathfinders program.

A teacher in the program described the curriculum advantages of the three-year looping process (a design modeled after a similar program found within the state). Ms. Whitney shared, “I looked at it as a three-year process. I could say, ‘Remember last year when we did this. Now we’re doing this and that’s why this goes together.’ I had the whole big three-year perspective.” She expanded the idea by offering these thoughts, “I was looking at the end of third grade as the endpoint. Even having the summer time, the kids and I wrote letters to each other. The summer after second grade I spent a week with them and we worked on problem solving and critical thinking for a week together.”

Curriculum integration was mentioned several times throughout the coded data. Other curricular enrichment experiences included such activities as genre studies and children’s engineering. The cohort one teacher explained, “I did a lot of engineering

projects with my kids, a lot of design projects, and invention projects.” Another teacher, Mrs. Edwards, verified this by saying, “I know that they did some of the project children’s engineering orientated kinds of things, and that's good stuff. That's good experimental, hands on stuff.” It was summed up best by a teacher commenting, “Obviously, the academics are challenging, and it's a rigorous curriculum.”

The thirteen students who were in the focus group shared their perceptions of challenging academic activities that they experienced as Young Pathfinders. Ramil began by saying, “On a typical day, we would be doing a lot of work and doing it really fast.” Nica added, “In first and second grade we had work that fifth graders were doing.” Maya remarked, “We had challenging work that was hard, because there was a lot of stuff that was hard to remember, but it was easy because our teacher made it fun.” The focus group brainstormed the following learning experiences that they found meaningful: reader’s theater, logic puzzles, brain teasers, algebra, science experiments, building challenges, collaboration activities, and class meetings. Justine found the curriculum to be “challenging, but not overdoing anything.” She added, “ I knew some of it, but most of it was new.”

**Class (learners/peers).** The data collected for Young Pathfinders described the grouping of the talented students into one classroom setting for instruction for a three-year stint. Ms. Whitney put it this way, “This is the first time that they've ever been in one classroom with everyone who's of similar ability.” According to Ms. Hodges, the students were similar in the following ways, “I think they have a drive, as they're self-driven, many of them. I feel as if they thrive and they want more. They desire more.

They're the ones that say, 'I'm finished, what else can I do?' type of children." Along those lines, each student was reminded by Ms. Edwards, "You're not the only one that has good ideas. You need to learn to listen. You need to work together in groups. You need to learn to share the responsibility and the lime-light."

Students were described throughout the data as creative, confident, and sociable. Mrs. Andrews summed it up by saying, "The students were more advanced, very independent, self-motivated with good problem-solving skills." This cohort two teacher spoke about her class in this way, "It was a good mix, definitely a good blend. They gelled and became a cohesive kind of class. It was almost like family."

Even though students learned from their peers and bonded over being together for three years, the data showed differences among students as well. Ms. Whitney spoke to these differences, "The levels of the children varied greatly. Probably half my class was reading below grade level when they came in first grade." She seemed at ease with this when she remarked, "It was OK that half of them couldn't read yet, because I always kind of felt like the children were diamonds in the rough. It was my job to kind of chip them out." All the participants involved in years kindergarten – third grade agreed that they had come along way by the end of third grade.

The data also showed that the learners in the Young Pathfinders' class did not always present as high achieving upon initial notice. Mrs. Andrews commented, "I felt like that the children were not the stereotypical gifted child that maybe a teacher normally thinks of, and I could see a lot of the kids easily passing through school, without anybody looking deeper in them and seeing their academic needs and how to help that."

In the focus group, students verified this by adding the following perspectives about themselves and being in Young Pathfinders. Aleah gave the following insight, “I felt intelligent and that was a new thing.” Anna also explained how she felt being part of the program, “I felt smart, mature and very special.” Monette agreed, “I felt very smart.” Nyesha went a step further in her description of being included in the Young Pathfinder’s class, “I felt surprised, and I never thought I would be gifted.”

Students in the focus group really spoke favorably about being with peers of similar ability. Maya weighed in by stating, “If you keep the classmates together in the program they work better. Everyday I was excited to see my friends.”

**Transportation.** One logistic component that came to light upon in-depth data analysis was transportation. ACPS is known to have a vast pupil transportation infrastructure. In a given day, the Department of Pupil Transportation operates a fleet of over 600 buses. The county covers 244 square miles and is separated into five transportation zones. The Young Pathfinders Program operated in the zone that covered the Woodfield district. ACPS committed to providing safe and reliable transportation for all eligible students to and from their assigned school even when that assignment was not to their home school. In the case of the Young Pathfinder students, they were picked up from their home and transported to the elementary school that housed the program throughout the three years.

All participants in the study expressed appreciation and admiration for the transportation component of the program. Mrs. Beck remarked, “The busing transportation was never an issue. In this county, they always support any program that is

outside a home school. I know in other jurisdictions that is not the case, and if there are other programs outside the home school, parents have to provide transportation.” Another teacher, Mrs. Edwards, echoed that thought by saying, “I have to give kudos to the transportation department because from my perspective, that has worked very well.”

Initial concerns of the parents about the lengthy transportation routes were overcome. It was relayed to the researcher by Ms. Hodges that, “Parents voiced concerns about the distance. They did all choose to go because they all recognized that this was the best placement for their child academically.” Without the transportation provision the Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, remarked, “A lot of these parents are single-parent families. We found that some of the parents were raising their grand-kids. They had family difficulties. A lot of them were working two jobs. To help with the transportation really helped the family.” Of the thirteen students who participated in the Young Pathfinder’s focus group, ten of them used the bus as their regular form of transportation while three of them were transported to school by a parent/guardian.

**Parents/Guardians.** Data showed that the parents and or guardians of the Young Pathfinders were kept informed throughout the program’s duration. According to Ms. Hodges, when the initial talent pool was put into place in kindergarten the parents were told this, “Your child had been invited for enrichment.” She added, “Some of the students don't come from backgrounds that parents were very aware of some of the opportunities that we have.” Ms. Hodges continued, “Giving those parents that updated piece of information on what we've worked on built rapport.” Documents revealed that parents were invited to an orientation session prior to the start of the first grade year of



the Young Pathfinders Program. This meeting included a teacher introduction, a curriculum close-up, and the logistics of the program including transportation, supplies, etc. As the three-year cycle continued with the same teacher relationships with parents were robust as Mrs. Andrews, the cohort two teacher, revealed, “The parents and I got to the point where we were so close, they would call all the time, email, they have my cell number, and the parents would tell me all the time how much their children love the program, how much they loved it.”

Although the parents were not interviewed as part of this research study, the data on parents, as told by the students, uncovered a strong emotional attachment to the idea of their child participating in the program. During the student focus group Darryl reflected back to the day in kindergarten when he found out he was invited into the Young Pathfinders Program and his mom’s reaction, “I came home from school and my mom had a huge smile on her face. She was holding a piece of paper. I asked her what it was and she told me I was accepted into a special program with more intelligent people. All I asked her was will that mean I am challenged and she said, ‘Yes.’” Monette told of a similar emotional response by sharing about when her mother told her about being invited into the program, “She cried and told me you have been given an opportunity.”

**What worked/what didn’t/what changes.** The data clearly pointed out what worked well, what didn’t work well, and what changes took place over time. The results documented the positives and the negatives of designing and implementing a talent development program for underrepresented students.

**What worked.** The participants confirmed to the researcher that there were many

good and positive things about the Young Pathfinders Program in Anderson County Public Schools. “That they even thought of the program was good. I think that it was needed,” stated Mrs. Edwards. Another teacher, Mrs. Hill, echoed, “I really love what this program is designed to be.” Yet another teacher, Mrs. Robbins agreed, “I’m just really glad they saw that it was necessary.” The positives specifically involved the programming components, looping and the benefits to students.

When speaking about the various programming components, Ms. Whitney shared, “Transportation has been great. The budget has been very supportive by providing materials and resources.” Mrs. Hodges complimented the selection of the students by stating, “What worked well was selecting the students – the process of using portfolios and not just assessments.” Ms. Whitney also spoke to the strength of the program director. “She was a great support, someone I could come to with a lot of questions.”

The idea of looping was mentioned in both a positive and negative way in the research coding. The students in Young Pathfinders looped with the same students and same teacher for three years. The teacher of cohort one, Ms. Whitney, pointed out, “I definitely think looping had a lot to do with the program's success. Simple things like at the beginning of the next year the kids already knew the rules, and the routines and the expectations. The first day of the following year was like the day after the last day. It was really as if no time had passed whatsoever.” Looping offered a consistency for the Young Pathfinders as described by Mrs. Andrews, “The only thing that was different for them every year was the curriculum because it changed from the first to second to third grade.” The most important benefit of looping was mentioned by a teacher in this way, “I

think, in the long run, looping helped nurture their abilities.”

The students weighed in during the focus group on the positives of looping with the same class and teacher for three years. Kenya said, “I liked it because we didn’t have to get used to a new teacher.” Justine added, “I knew everyone and there were no secrets because we were family.” Desiree was surprised that I asked about looping because her perspective was, “There was nothing to dislike.” Darryl totally agreed with her by verifying, “I had no dislike of looping, because I was able to stay with my friends and my nice teacher.” Maya considered looping to be an advantage and put it this way, “What I don’t know my classmates do because we were together so long.”

The largest collection of “what worked well” data was categorized under a sub-category entitled benefits to students. As one teacher described, “I feel that opportunity for the students to achieve and succeed has worked well.” Another participant agreed, “Definitely to have exposure to all the enrichment that they've received,” was listed as a benefit for the students. Yet another teacher confirmed this benefit to the students with, “They were challenged academically with peers at the same level, allowed to be creative, and the curriculum was geared toward their abilities and needs.” Still another comment was, “I think definitely the support for the children. I think that worked wonderfully.”

As the participants truly reflected on “what worked well” with the program different thoughts emerged. One teacher, Mrs. Robbins, reminisced in this way, “I did go to the school board meeting where The Young Pathfinders presented. They were awesome! It was incredible to watch these youngsters get up in front of a packed school board meeting, and it was literally standing room only, and talk about their program, and

what they were doing and how they did it.” The Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, recollected a talk with the Superintendent, Mr. Hall, in which the following was discussed, “The superintendent asked me ‘Did we touch some kids we would not necessarily have touched?’ And the answer is ‘Yes’ and I think that says it all.”

After the researcher spent time with thirteen of the students from cohort one and cohort two, it was obvious that the program had worked to their advantage. As a group they were articulate, bold, honest and confident. Thirteen out of thirteen focus group participants when asked, “Would you do it again if you got to choose?” answered emphatically, “Yes!” As they grew more comfortable with the researcher after a few minutes they shared how Young Pathfinders helped them in their current schoolwork. Kenya remarked, “I am more confident about my work because of Young Pathfinders.” Anna added, “Now, I am amused by a challenge.” Nica said it simply, “I am smarter because of Young Pathfinders.” Justine was reflective when she remarked, “Young Pathfinders has helped me cope with challenges.”

The students were full of positive words to describe the Young Pathfinders Program and thus the researcher compiled the following list: challenging (listed 5 times), fun (listed 5 times), awesome (listed 3 times), exciting (listed 2 times), intelligent, abnormal, wonderful, super, educating, terrific, hard, great, and creative. The students’ perception of the program as described by single words was strongly supportive.

**What didn’t.** While the program, according to the adult participants and student participants, had components that worked well there were also things that they felt didn’t work well. As Mrs. Beck commented, “I think it's been a great program; we've touched a

lot of kids. It hasn't worked for some kids. But I think that's any program. It's hard to say, but I believe the data will provide us with information regarding future program planning and implementation.”

In that regard, the data revealed several areas of concern in relation to the student selection process, teacher training and input, looping, and lack of understanding about program goals. Those interviewed spoke freely about the need for change or improvement in these areas. The first topic unanimously mentioned for what didn't work as well as they had hoped was the student selection process in kindergarten.

Due to a rather quick rollout of the initial Pathfinders cohort one, the concern for student selection was described by the Gifted Resource Teacher, Ms. Hodges, in this way, “I think that was the biggest concern - did we select the right students? We didn't have lot of work samples at that time. We weren't able to sit down and really review information and talk extensively with the classroom teachers.” The process for student selection appeared in the data to be vague and resulted in some students who would go on to struggle with the advanced curriculum. Mrs. Edwards lamented, “These are my frustrations. I had kids who needed remediation to keep up with the class work that we were doing. And then I had kids on the other end.” She expanded, “We did have to have some conferences with parents, and the parents knew that they were struggling, and so we did have to make some recommendations of placement, that this was not the right placement.” Even a fifth grade student, Renatta, commented in the focus group, “Those who picked the students for the class should be more careful choosing kids.” She was specifically speaking about the students who left the program during the three-year

looping cycle. She felt badly for them.

Other items that appeared under “what didn’t work well” were related to teacher training and input. A kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Harvie, involved in the initial talent pool process mentioned, “I would have liked at the beginning to have more training on what I should've been looking for with the kindergarten students. I did not have any gifted training before I got involved with Young Pathfinders. Gifted education was a paragraph in a graduate class.” Ms. Whitney also spoke to this issue, “I have spoken to kindergarten teachers in at least three schools that children are pulled from. In all three schools, all three kindergarten teachers voiced to me that they felt like they were not included in the process of what children are invited to be brought to the program.”

The topic of looping was mentioned in both negative and positive ways. As the teacher of cohort two, Mrs. Andrews, suggested, “Three years is a long time. The first two years were great. We could just pick up where we left off and keep moving. By year three, the kids were so used to each other. They did a lot of picking.” The three years of being together appeared to create a difficult transition into fourth grade for the students. The teacher who had the Young Pathfinders for fourth grade, Mrs. Edwards, remarked, “I feel like if they were not together that long and hadn't developed that sense of dependence, really, on one another that they would have then been able to develop some of their own independence and become more willing to take risks and more willing to step out.” In retrospect, their first through third grade teacher, Ms. Whitney agreed, “I would say that's probably one of the biggest things that I hadn't anticipated enough. I knew it was going to be difficult for all of us to separate.” This teacher had recently seen

a former student who had moved on from the Young Pathfinder's Program and she shared, "I saw a child maybe a month or two ago. She's like, 'Everybody wishes we were back with you. We miss you.'" In addition Justine, a student participant, told the researcher during the focus group, "I will be devastated if we ever are torn apart." With middle school approaching that seems to be a valid concern.

Another area showing up as a "what didn't work well" was linked to program goals. When the researcher asked participants about the goal for Young Pathfinders, a multitude of answers were given. Specifically telling were the answers such as, "I'm not really sure" or "I don't know." There was a lack of shared vision among those who were integral to the process. Some of the interviewees thought the goal was to identify underrepresented students for gifted services at an early age, another thought the goal was to have more sub-populations represented in the middle and high school advanced classes, and some simply didn't know. There appeared to be a bit of a mystery as to the reason the program was created. In examining documents containing the original proposal, the goal was clearly stated, but not adequately understood among all stakeholders.

The students in the focus group thought long and hard when answering the question about what didn't seem to work to well in the Young Pathfinders Program. Only one of the thirteen students responded with a suggestion. Renatta, a current fifth grader, shared the following very mature answer, "It wasn't fair that because we were gifted meant they always thought we had to meet higher expectations especially with our behavior. We are just kids like everyone else. They should work on that."

**What changes/recommendations.** A question was asked in the interview guide about changes or recommendations for the Pathfinders Program. With that question came a host of suggestions from the participants for policy makers to consider when examining the programs for possible changes and were coded as such. The recommendations included teacher collaboration, student selection, a program pamphlet for parents, and program expansion.

As the Young Pathfinders Program has matured, there are now four cohorts of students cycling through at one time in four locations. The data revealed the call for teacher collaboration. As the Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, commented, “I think one of the things that we need to look at is the support among the four sites - getting them together more often, collaborating with each other, what's working, what's not, so that they feel like they have support.” The Gifted Resource Teacher, Ms. Hodges, verified the need by saying, “How one teacher does grades one, two and three and how the counterparts coming behind are doing, one, two and three even though it's the same curriculum, it's totally different.”

On close examination of the data a need for teacher collaboration was documented from three adult interviews. Many of the students who attended Young Pathfinders for grades one, two and three transitioned into a Gifted/Advanced Zone Center for fourth and fifth grade. This transition was difficult for several students in cohort one. One area of concern was the lack of continuity from the Young Pathfinders program (grades one, two and three) to the Gifted Zone Center (Grades four and five). The teacher for fourth grade, Mrs. Edwards, suggested a need for teacher collaboration so



as to provide curriculum alignment. She offered, “If you're really grooming this group, this is where a lot of them are going to end up; it would certainly be beneficial to them to know what is coming.” Specifically she shared, “If you really want to nurture that ability and groom that, lets' get together because there's been no communication between here and there about “What is the curriculum? What are you doing? What am I doing? How do we prepare them?”” This pointed to the need for curriculum alignment and communication across the transition from one program to another.

Suggestions were also given for student selection and the data verified that many of those changes have been put in place as the program has evolved post cohort two. The Gifted Resource Teacher, Ms. Hodges, described, “We have improved how we identify those students because we've seen the need over time, and we're more product driven. We're asking teachers for input and work samples. It gets better each year.” One critical change in student selection involves reading ability. A kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Robbins, confirmed, “Now they want us to do a running record for reading. In the beginning we did not. I think that's probably where they ran into some difficulty, because the reading abilities were a little diverse.” Yet another teacher, Ms. Hill, echoed the changes in student selection, “I mean, definitely, I think there's more structure as to what children are chosen to be in the program.”

Due to the quick implementation of the Young Pathfinders Program there was minimal time for detailed planning involving long-term steps. The teacher of cohort one, Ms. Whitney, was at times unsure how to answer parental questions concerning details about the program and where students were headed at the end of the three-year cycle. She

suggested, “Maybe some sort of brochure or formal letter or something kept at the schools explaining the ins and outs of things would be helpful for parental communication. I know the first three years, things were still being worked out.”

Regardless of the obstacles faced while implementing this talent development program, the data was supportive of the need for a program for diverse populations. Mrs. Andrews, teacher of cohort two agreed, “It was overall, just a great experience.” Yet another teacher, Mrs. Edwards, expressed it this way, “The kids who came through Young Pathfinders, I think they got a lot out of the program.” One teacher called for program expansion and summed it up, “I would like to see it expand. I really would. I think it's a worthwhile cause and we are meeting the needs of new students.” A teacher echoed that sentiment with, “I just think they need to expand it. I think there are more students out there.” There was a consensus among those interviewed that making the program available to even more students would be valuable.

Students from the focus group offered up the following words for those in charge of the program. Nicole shared, “Thank you for choosing me.” Aleah urged, “Keep doing the program because it is fun.” Nyesha offered up these positive words, “Keep up the good work.”

### **Outcomes**

The third category that emerged from the final document review and the interviews focused on the “outcomes” of the Young Pathfinders Program. The codes present in the outcomes associated with the program included both short-term outcomes (gifted id) and long-term outcomes (expectations).

**Short-term outcomes.** While identifying students as gifted at the end of the Young Pathfinders was not the sole purpose for the program, one participant put it this way, “If they are identified 'gifted' that would be something that would be the icing on the cake because then they would have opportunities.” Testing data and gifted identification data for cohort one and cohort two were analyzed and reviewed to determine the yield for gifted identification. It was revealed that a portion of the Young Pathfinders’ cohort one and cohort two students were indeed identified gifted by the end of the first through third grade cycle.

Of the twelve students in cohort one, six students were identified gifted by the end of third grade. Five of the students were found eligible under the intellectual aptitude identification (both math and language arts) while one student was found mathematically gifted. Of the sixteen students in cohort two, eight students were identified gifted by the end of third grade. Four of the students were found eligible under the intellectual aptitude identification (both math and language arts), two students were found mathematically gifted, and two students were found gifted in language arts.

Combining data from cohort one and cohort two revealed that of the twenty-eight students who cycled through the program, fourteen were identified gifted by the end of third grade. This would equal fifty percent of the students. Each student was given the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test at the end of his/her first grade year. Based on that test and the multiple criteria portfolio, several of the fourteen identified students were captured early in the process and identified gifted. At the end of second grade and third grade the students were given the Otis-Lennon Ability Test which added evidence to the

multiple criteria portfolio process needed to declare gifted identification.

The standard gifted identification process used throughout ACPS was used in the gifted identification of the fourteen students. Student data that reflected the identification criteria was collected and annotated on a standard ACPS Identification Team Summary form. No single instrument, score, or criterion was used to include or exclude a child for eligibility. The recommendation of the school Identification/Placement Team was sent in writing to the Educational Specialist for Gifted Programs who was responsible for system-wide record keeping and for promoting consistency among schools in the use of identification guidelines. The identification process was complete when the Educational Specialist for Gifted Programs signed the Identification Team Summary form to indicate to the school and the parents that the criteria had been evaluated correctly.

The fourteen students from cohort one and cohort two identified gifted included nine females and five males. Nine of the students were identified with the gifted label *intellectual aptitude* signifying a dual identification in math and language arts. Three of the students were identified as *math only* and two of the students received the *language arts only* identification. Of the fourteen students found eligible for gifted services, thirteen were Black and one was listed as Unspecified. All the students came from schools classified as Title 1. Of the fourteen students, six of them were identified as Low SES - indicating students receiving free and reduced lunch.

The testing data was used as a secondary data source to enrich the understanding of the qualitative data gathered from interviews, documents, and the focus group. The results were compiled for each of the twenty-eight students from cohort one and cohort

two and included the Nonverbal Ability Test (Naglieri) and The Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT). The Naglieri was administered to the students while in first grade and the Otis-Lennon was given in both second and third grades. Means and standard deviations were calculated on the three sets of test results by both age percentage and grade percentage. The descriptive statistics results appear in Table 4.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations on 3 Sets of Pathfinders' Test Data*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
NaglieriAge1st	27	9	99	73.22	27.14
NaglieriGrade1	27	31	99	71.59	18.98
OtisAgeTotal2	28	27	99	71.71	20.05
OtisGradeTotal2	28	38	99	77.86	15.19
OtisAgeTotal3	28	29	99	78.82	17.82
OtisGradeTotal3	28	33	98	80.14	17.72
Valid N	27				

In addition, the three test session scores were examined across students who were identified gifted and the students who were not found eligible for gifted services for means and standard deviations. Next, the same data was analyzed using an independent samples t-test with a 0.05 level of significance comparing the Young Pathfinders identified as gifted and the Young Pathfinders who were not found eligible for gifted services. The results of the statistical analyses appear in Table 5.

Table 5

*Means, Standard Deviation and Independent Samples t-test of Pathfinders' Test Data*

Test Name	Identification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value (sig.)
NaglieriAgescore	Not Gifted	13	53.23	25.80	.000
1st	Gifted	14	91.79	9.39	
NaglieriGradescore	Not Gifted	13	59.00	16.70	.000
1st	Gifted	14	83.29	12.55	
OtisAgeScoreTotal	Not Gifted	14	60.43	19.55	.001
2nd	Gifted	14	83.00	13.35	
OtisGradeScoreTotal	Not Gifted	14	70.07	14.87	.004
2nd	Gifted	14	85.64	11.29	
OtisAgeScoreTotal	Not Gifted	14	66.64	17.72	.000
3rd	Gifted	14	91.00	5.14	
OtisGradeScoreTotal	Not Gifted	14	68.64	18.76	.000
3rd	Gifted	14	91.64	3.97	

Upon examining the results, the researcher could see that across the 28 students, the mean score on every standardized test was clearly higher for students who were eventually identified as gifted. They showed stronger scores on the standardized testing across the board. There were statistically significant differences between the two groups of students (gifted and non-gifted students) on the Naglieri test given in first grade and on both of The Otis-Lennon School Ability (OLSAT) tests administered in grades second and third, noting that the obtained *p*-values from the *t* tests were all clearly less than 0.05.

The original proposal to the school board included a table (See Table 2) that illustrated the decrease in gifted identification at the zone center (fourth and fifth grade) since the school year 2000-2001. Table 6 reveals the updated data, and it clearly shows

an increase in students attending the zone center for gifted students many of which are students who were Young Pathfinders in the years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

Table 6

*Number of Gifted Students Attending Gifted Zone Center 2000 thru 2010*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Students</u>
2000-2001	23
2001-2002	18
2002-2003	14
2003-2004	13
2004-2005	15
2005-2006	20
2006-2007	22
2007-2008	24
2008-2009	36
<u>2009-2010</u>	<u>34</u>

*The non-identified students.* Fifty percent of the first two cohorts of students did not meet the qualifications for gifted identification at the end of the three-year Young Pathfinders' cycle. What became of those students? In good faith, ACPS notified the parents of each of those children to plan a reentry into the regular classroom setting at their home school. One participant remarked, "It was important to me that these students not be considered failures for not moving on to the gifted program, so I met with them

and told them it was not the best match for them.” If applicable, students were cluster grouped together and monitored by the Gifted Resource Teacher assigned to their home school to ensure a smooth transition and to offer advanced curriculum help for their assigned teachers.

**Long-term outcomes.** Will the Young Pathfinders Program produce significant long-term changes for the students who experienced the three-year talent development program? When one compares the long-term outcomes of the program to its intended purpose, time will be the ultimate auditor. The original intent for Young Pathfinders was as the Gifted Specialist, Mrs. Beck, put it, “Not necessarily to be sure that they were identified gifted; it was for long-range.” The plan was more far reaching. She went on to say, “One of the goals was to watch these students as they get into their middle school years and into high school to see that they take these advanced and accelerated classes.” Another teacher, Ms. Hodges agreed by stating, “The goal was to prepare them with an advanced curriculum and also to have them start doing some advanced and acceleration in middle school, and then to prepare them to also be able to handle the rigor of AP classes.” While long-term outcomes are yet to be determined signs of hope thread through the participants’ voices as discussions of high school, college and a future prevail. The participants (both adults and students) had much to share with the researcher about the possibilities.

**Expectations per adults.** As each adult was interviewed for this study, expectations for the Young Pathfinders were discussed. The overriding theme under expectations centered around one word... options. The teacher of cohort one, Ms.



Whitney, shared, “I just want my children to have as many options as possible. That’s what I always tried to emphasize to them, too. I said, ‘You can choose to be anything you want. I want you to have a choice.’” She went on to say to her students, “I don’t want you to be forced into something because you didn’t get all the schooling you need to do.” Cohort two teacher, Mrs. Andrews, emphasized tangible goals such as, “They will have high SOL scores, strong problem-solving skills, be cooperative learners, and be high-ability learners.” This glimpse into the future could also be seen from yet another teacher, Mrs. Edwards, who asked herself, “What are they going to need to be successful regardless of the type of study they pursue?”

The thoughts of middle school, high school and college found a voice in the discussion on expectations as well. Mrs. Beck, The Gifted Specialist, pointed out, “We are encouraging them to take those advanced classes and those accelerated classes particularly when they get into middle school, and make sure the schools are monitoring and checking in on them.” Looking beyond middle school into high school one teacher, Ms. Hodges, declared, “I see these kids being in advanced classes and AP classes. I think many of them are going to apply for, and probably get into, the IB (International Baccalaureate) program.”

Many of the students in the Young Pathfinders cohorts had not previously been immersed in a college-bound culture as evidenced by the data collected from several adult participants. Knowing that college can be a gateway to economic opportunity and social mobility there were questions embedded into the interview guide about it. Ms. Whitney shared her perceptions in this way, “They don’t have that role model, that legacy

in their family. I don't see that college culture.” Although the lack of a college culture was often the case for the Young Pathfinders, the expectations from their teachers were, “I see college for most of the students, I really do,” and “We have conversations about college only because I brought it out. I don't know if they would have ever had that type of conversation. We talk about college often. I definitely see that for their future.” The long-term expectations for the Young Pathfinders were echoed in the voices of the students themselves.

*Expectations per students.* All thirteen students participating in the focus group were extremely engaged with the researcher when the discussion turned to future educational plans, and candidly revealed theirs. Thirteen out of thirteen children spoke about careers that required a college education or spoke of specific universities. They saw college in their future. Desiree is going to college to be a nurse. Nyesha is going to college to be a vet. Kenya simply said these powerful words, “I want to go to college.” Nicole has her sights set on Spelman. Ramil is going to be an astronaut. Anna plans to attend Harvard or Spelman. Renatta wants to be a lawyer after attending Harvard Law. Justine wants to have good grades so she can go to college. Darryl is hoping to attend Virginia Tech. Maya wants to get into college and become a photographer. Aleah is going to college and even medical school. Monette plans on going to Duke in the future and Nica thinks her good education will take her to Harvard.

In addition to the college culture that was present throughout our focus group conversation, there were also specific references to middle school and high school expectations per the students. Anna, Renatta, Justine, and Maya all mentioned the IB

(International Baccalaureate) program that is offered in ACPS in the middle years and in high school. Darryl even said, “My future plans are to stay in advanced classes through high school.”

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The case study of the Young Pathfinders Program produced a body of data from which consistent themes emerged. These findings were revealed in the prior chapter. This chapter will begin with the rationale and purpose of the study and continue with the following objectives: (a) to summarize, and frame the findings within the research questions and the literature review; (b) to discuss the findings relative to the larger research policy context; (c) to consider the implications and recommendations for a talent development program; (d) to reveal the limitations of the findings; (e) to suggest areas for future research.

There are ongoing concerns throughout education circles over the lack of representation of minorities in gifted education. It is critical that educators advocate for students' inclusion in gifted education with particular regard to ethnic and socioeconomic status. Researchers have deliberated over possible factors contributing to the problem of underrepresentation. Those factors include faulty gifted identification issues, social and economic issues, and lack of educational opportunities. It is vital to discover ways to improve the lack of representation and to examine the contributing factors in detail for possible solutions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study focused specifically on expanding educational opportunities for a group of diverse elementary school students via a talent development program. The

purpose of this dissertation was to examine how students from diverse populations (minorities and children from low socioeconomic status environments) were included in a talent development program, and to determine if that inclusion proved beneficial.

### **Research Design and Questions**

This research study employed a single case study design of one school division's talent development program. Phase one used document review and in-depth interviews of eight adult stakeholders selected by the researcher. Phase two concentrated on a focus group of thirteen former Young Pathfinder students who now attend a gifted zone center for fourth and fifth grade and documents of outcome indicators including standardized testing data.

Upon identification of the adult participants, an introductory letter was sent to each participant that served several purposes. The letter sought to identify the researcher, explain the purpose of the study, and to request participation. Prior to the confirmation of an interview, an informed consent was obtained. The interview was scheduled at a convenient time and location for the participant. Questions were asked from an interview guide that focused on the topic of study. The interview audio-recordings were transcribed by the researcher and then submitted via e-mail to the participant for review, clarification, and edit. The transcripts were then used for the final data analysis. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout the process.

Every member of the first two cohorts of Young Pathfinders who stayed with the program for the three-year cycle and continued with gifted/advanced programs into fourth and fifth grade were invited to take part in a student driven focus group. The total

number of students invited was twenty. Thirteen students agreed to participate and met with the researcher for one 45-minute session. An introductory letter was sent to each student participant and his/her parent/guardian. The letter was similar to the adult participant letter and identified the researcher, explained the purpose of the study, and requested participation. Permission was obtained from both the parent/guardian and the student. The students were given an interview guide in written format and were able to use that document to assist them during the audio-recorded portion of the focus group. The researcher focused on listening and hearing what the children participants were saying and paid careful attention to the ways in which they shared their insights ensuring that they were actively involved in the discussion. Another trained IRB approved researcher collaborated with the researcher during the focus group and took detailed notes.

Throughout the data collection timeframe, documents were provided by the district's gifted programs department and the research and planning department of the district. This data was reviewed and grafted and coded into emerging themes as related to the interviews and the focus group. The testing data was used to address the outcomes associated with the talent development program.

### *Research Questions*

In an attempt to contribute to researched ways to improve the underrepresentation of specific groups in gifted programs, this study was guided by the following research questions focusing on the Young Pathfinders' talent development program:

1. How was the program implemented?

2. What outcomes can be associated with the program?

### **Discussion**

Upon dissecting the “word/tag cloud” used as a precursor to the start of data analysis, there were words that appeared frequently from the text of the interviews. That list captured the following key words and/or phrases that would go on to be quite representative of the data: expectations, gifted identification and students. That would prove to be a valuable list and set the stage for the data analysis. The Young Pathfinders talent development program offered high expectations for the underrepresented students who participated. Within those high expectations many students were identified for gifted services by the end of the program and gained educational confidence. In addition, the research revealed that many parents and students viewed this enhanced educational endeavor as an opportunity.

The major findings of this case study have implications for elementary educators attempting to be inclusive of underrepresented students in gifted programs via a talent development program. First, the data from the programming background results unveiled an intentional decision to create a program based on available district data with the primary goal of advancing the possibilities for a targeted group of students. Second, the data revealed the need to communicate an intentional purpose for the program frequently and with all stakeholders. Third, the data suggested careful consideration must be given to who will be included in the program and the logistics of how it will operate. Fourth, the study participants and document data also revealed that a talent development program was much needed and indeed created both short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes.

The program, girded with high expectations, had a positive impact on the students. One half of the students exited the first through third grade program being identified gifted and with high expectations for self. The findings will be examined and discussed linking data with the related research questions and noting congruence with the related literature.

### **Research Question – How was the Program Implemented?**

Drawing from the findings in this case study, implications to be considered for designing and implementing a talent development program by practicing educators and district policy makers are readily apparent. In looking closely at the talent development program, Young Pathfinders, it was created for some of the district's youngest students for a distinct purpose. Being that it was a new endeavor for the district, the initial design and implementation was a bit sketchy and a work in progress. There was a definite commitment to the idea, but many unknowns as well. A lack of a communicated vision to all participants beset the beginning years of the program. Time and experience have been kind to the mechanics of the talent development program in ACPS with many lessons learned along the way.

### **Implementation**

While the idea of a talent development program was thoroughly discussed and sanctioned by the school board, the implementation was fast-paced and loose in format. Many lessons were learned in the process. You don't know what you don't know. Knowledge was gained in this study regarding starting a talent development program from the ground up all in order to help with the unique challenges faced with underrepresentation in gifted programs. Described below are suggested practices for



implementing a high quality talent development program in early elementary school for underrepresented populations.

**Divisions need to examine district wide data and target specific populations.**

Although the background/history of the Pathfinders Program was not included as an initial research question, data revealed rich insights that occurred within the district prior to its implementation. District data was critical to the process when discussing the creation of an early intervention elementary school program; thus, the importance of a data-driven decision making division cannot be overlooked. This theme was not considered by the researcher prior to the investigation, but was revealed through the document reviews and the adult interviews. The use of high-quality program data clearly pointed to a problem of underrepresentation of diverse students as described by Callahan (2005). There was also agreement in ACPS with the research that strong academic abilities can be found in all ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups despite socioeconomic status and societal stances (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). There was concern similar to Castellano's (2003) about the disproportionate underrepresentation of children from diverse backgrounds. This led to a crisis of belief among key school personnel in the central office of the district... to act or not to act?

Once the problem was revealed via data, this school division sought to understand the scope and nature of the problem within their district and formulate a plan to target specific areas for improvement. This entailed much dialogue and many discussions. The discussions focused on one particular region within the district where the problem of underrepresentation was of greatest concern. The idea of a talent development program

came out of the conversation. Using research as a confirmation and guide, Anderson County decided early intervention was the direction to pursue which was in alignment with Karnes & Johnson (1991) and Sisk (2003).

**Communicate an intentional purpose for the program.** When designing a talent development program, districts need to articulate a clear and concise purpose for the program. Particularly evident in this study was the importance of all levels – the district office staff, the school site, and all teachers speaking about the goals of the program in one accord. A shared vision breaks down when not all understand the mission. The program’s mission should be communicated clearly to the public. Although further removed from the program implementation level, the district’s gifted education administrator must play a key role in leading efforts for system-wide coherence, equity, and procedures to ensure program quality.

**Consider who will be included in the program - “the who.”** There must be consistent, flexible, and researched ways to identify students for inclusion in a talent development program. As Sternberg’s (1995) research suggested, the goal was to make the selection process for Young Pathfinders more equitable and sensitive to diverse populations, which was consistent with a plethora of research on gifted identification (Sisk, 2000; Baldwin, 2005; Vanderslice, 1999; Whiting, Ford, Grantham, & Moore, 2008). Talent identification for diverse kindergarten students must be based on a multiple criteria portfolio and including a non-verbal ability test score would be helpful. The non-verbal ability test should be used as a universal screening tool for all kindergarten students within the selected school, which this program did not do. There

would be a cost commitment attached, but assure that no one was overlooked for inclusion.

Teachers should be trained on the signs of emerging talent in diverse student populations and have confidence in the process. The identification of the students for the program should be a process and not an event and should occur over the entire kindergarten year which is in agreement with Renzulli and Reis (1991) and their belief that students in minority ethnic groups should be given more opportunities to demonstrate their potential. A multiple criteria portfolio was used for selecting the students for inclusion in the program, which supported Barkan and Bernal's (1991) multidimensional approach. Over time, reading assessment data was mentioned in the findings as a needed part of the multiple criteria portfolio.

**Consider the logistics - “the how.”** The research findings uncovered some strategies to consider when considering the logistics of a talent development program in regards to teacher selection, classroom setup, peers/learners, curriculum, transportation, and parents. Attention to detail in these areas will help contribute to the quality of the talent development program and offers a framework for educators and policy makers to consider.

**Teachers.** The findings showed the importance of securing a teacher for the three-year talent development program that was experienced and would commit to looping with the students for all three years. It was important that the teacher hired for the program be skilled at differentiation as well as the ability to recognize individual differences and learning styles as described by Van Tassel-Baska (1992). Having the teacher on an

extended contract (11 months) allowed time for planning and curriculum design. Insisting on staff development in the area of gifted education for the Young Pathfinder teacher helped ensure an ongoing commitment to instructional strategies that differentiated educational opportunities for the students.

***Classroom/Location/Setup.*** The data uncovered the need to have the talent development program housed in a school where the administration was receptive. It was also important to have the classroom located on the same hallway with the other grade level classrooms and not isolated in a remote part of the building. This would require moving the classroom each year so as to be in close proximity to the appropriate grade level. Every effort should be made to ensure that the talent development program students participate in the school activities for their grade level as well as school-wide activities. Recess, lunch times, music performances and field trips should be with grade level peers. This would allow for teacher collaboration, student interaction, and a sense of camaraderie and community. The culture of the school is key to avoid the stigma of elitism that often plagues gifted education.

***Peers/Learners.*** For the purpose of this study, the approach of homogenous grouping (same ability) was used as the gifted programming option; thus, mixed-ability grouping was not considered in the findings or the discussion. However, it should be noted that there are proponents of heterogeneous grouping (mixed ability) of students (see e.g. page 7-8 in the literature review). They speak to the benefits of teaching students of different ability levels together in the same classroom (Burner, 1996, Slavin, 1996). This grouping practice is undergirded by efforts to assure high academic standards and to

allow access to high-level instructional practices for all students. Again, though, the program under study here utilized homogenous grouping and the findings and discussion are presented in that light.

The findings in this study were in alignment with the work of Kulik and Kulik (1990) and Rogers (1993) that homogeneous grouping children of similar abilities in a classroom full-time with instruction geared to their academic needs appears to have a positive effect on high-ability students. Students in a talent development program learn from each other. They delve into subjects of interest on deeper levels and should have opportunities to share and exchange ideas and interests with others of similar abilities. The support network of being together for a three-year cycle creates meaningful bonds and affirms the benefits of educating children together in their area of academic strength (Allan, 1991; Feldhusen, 1989; Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner, 1993).

***Curriculum.*** As Passow (1982) suggested and the Young Trailblazers' results confirmed, students in a talent development program must interact with a rigorous curriculum and be challenged to make their own discoveries about how the world works. In alignment with Sousa (2003) and Kulik (1992), students should also be held accountable for state standards, but at a faster pace and with higher instructional levels. An advanced curriculum should provide ample opportunities for students to engage in higher-level thinking where all students are learning new things daily. The students, many lacking in educational experiences, were provided additional scaffolding as supported by Strip (2000) in an early intervention program targeting their potential (Callahan, 2005; Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien, & Burns, 2000).

***Transportation.*** The district in the study provided free transportation for students attending the talent development program even though it was not their home school and required a longer transportation route. The data confirmed the benefits of that free transportation from the participants' home to the school site and should be considered best practice for any talent development program. This form of coordinated transportation service assures that all students who qualify for the program can attend regardless of parents/guardians' ability to transport. This takes into account and supports *The National Excellence Report* (1993), which pointed out the hurdles that children living in poverty face when environmental barriers affect their education.

***Parents/Guardians.*** The communication between home and school was critical in the early stages of the talent development program. Effectively engaging parents/guardians in the educational choices of their children was important to the program's success so as not to neglect the educational advantages of connecting with families as described by Van Tassel-Baska (2003). Those key educators who made the effort to engage the parents in the process and make them feel comfortable strengthened levels of trust and paved the way for student success. The staff connected with Young Pathfinders believed that the students would achieve more with parental involvement (Flaxman & Inger 1991). For expanded parental outreach, it is also recommended that a brochure or handbook outlining in detail the talent development program be created. This would be beneficial to the family of the participants. It would also be helpful to have these documents and others prepared in multiple languages and presented in multiple

modalities as needed. In addition, a parent survey is recommended for development by ACPS in order to evaluate Pathfinders' parents' perceptions of the program.

**Research Question – What Outcomes can be Associated with the Program?**

Like other intervention programs for culturally diverse students described by Sisk (2003) and Howells (1983), the Young Pathfinders Program proved effective in increasing the gifted identification of students in first – third grades in the Woodfield district in Anderson County Public Schools. Of the twenty-eight students in cohort one and cohort two, fourteen of the students would be identified as gifted by the end of third grade. In addition, the trend in the Woodfield district of the county where the program implementation took place showed a dramatic increase in students attending the gifted zone center for fourth and fifth grade.

What were additional outcomes for the Young Pathfinder participants? Three words came to the forefront....opportunities, expectations and confidence. The students in this study are now aiming high in regards to future education plans and are anticipating the opportunities that await them. The focus group revealed college talk and plans for careers involving college preparation. They expect to be in advanced programs and attend college. The findings are especially significant for the underrepresented group of students for which the program was designed. The teachers spoke of limited to no college culture present within their classroom at the start of the program. After three years with highly able peers and teacher led discussions the evidence of college talk was present in the focus group.

The student participants exhibited confidence during the focus group session as well. All thirteen students participated and shared insights into their experiences as Young Pathfinders and were very self-assured during the discussion. There is confidence and security of being with the same teacher and the same peers for three years and it was evident to the researcher. They were comfortable with each other and often operated as a collective whole while in the classroom environment and during the focus group as well.

The educators involved in the Young Pathfinders Program had positive and high expectations for the students as well. Similar to the educators in the Project START research by Tomlinson, Callahan, and Lelli (1997), the optimistic thinking and broadened conception of worth led to a greater recognition of students' nontraditional strengths. The adult participants all spoke of the value of the program and the high hopes/expectations that they now had for the students who had been part of Young Pathfinders. Their expectations went beyond the immediate and extended into middle school, high school, college and beyond. They told of extended opportunities that were previously not on the radar screen for the majority of students in the program.

Limited data was collected on the parental piece and their involvement with Young Pathfinders, because only school personnel and students were involved in this study. However, from the perceptions of the adult participants and the student participants, there appeared to be a family commitment mentality present with the Young Pathfinders. Multiple families demonstrated a commitment to the talent development program. They decided to send their students away from their home school to be bused several miles away because they saw the program as an opportunity for their children.



Their family commitment to the three-year program conveyed confidence and an expectation for academic success for their students.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study revealed the value of a talent development program for underrepresented elementary school students. In lessons learned from ACPS's program, the talent development program should be organized, specific, and targeted to reach and meet needs of those often overlooked for gifted services. Results supported qualitative findings in the literature, (Karnes & Johnson, 1991; Sisk, 2003) suggesting that educational interventions in the form of a talent development program can be effective in increasing gifted identification for underrepresented students. With that stated, the underrepresentation of diverse groups in gifted programs is complex and is not readily resolved with just one intervention approach or strategy. To address the issue, a multi-step approach is recommended including flexible identification procedures, teacher training, and talent development programs. With intentional regard for the idea of talent development, this study sought to uncover the nuts and bolts of creating such a program for young elementary school students and confirm the outcomes.

Specific recommendations related to the findings are outlined in the following section. A key recommendation for all school districts is to work towards inclusion of students in gifted education in regards to race and socioeconomic status. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need for districts to delve deeply into the data and ask the tough questions. If the data reveals a clear case of underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted programs what actions should be considered? Is there a readiness in place to

have courageous conversations about equity and opportunities for all students? And with those conversations, will an action plan be put into place to expand opportunities for targeted populations?

The program in ACPS focused on talent development for African American students from low socioeconomic status schools. It is recommended that other diverse populations of students within ACPS be considered for talent development programs as well.

There was a commitment on the part of ACPS to keep in close contact and nurture the Young Pathfinders as they matured through their upper school experiences. The recommendation is that be true of both the students identified gifted and the students who did not meet the gifted qualifications as well. Their shared experiences as Young Pathfinders were unique and capable of bringing about long term change and thus, keeping track of all those involved would be advisable and advantageous for review.

Another recommendation brought to light is related to the sheer mechanics of the program. There lacks quality early talent development programs to use as models when designing and implementing a new program within a district. Research on early intervention programs is very limited. It is a recommendation that other existing talent development programs be formally evaluated and shared for districts to consider; thus, eliminating or avoiding stumbling blocks to implementation suffered for lack of experience. This study attempts to initiate the beginnings of that body of knowledge for others to build upon.

## **Limitations**

It is important to review the limitations of this research study. This study reflects the experiences and perceptions of the adult participants and students focus group in one district in one state. It is a single case study of a specific program, and it would be inappropriate to generalize with respect to the findings since they may not necessarily reflect the data and demographics of other districts in other settings. However, inquiry into a single case study can lead to a deeper understanding and stronger implementation of a similar program.

Another limitation inherent in interpretation of the findings includes the researcher's insider role as an administrator within the district in the study. To combat research bias or positionality, the researcher controlled for bias by carefully keeping a field note journal which included asking the tough questions. In addition, understanding one's bias from the conception of the study helped the researcher analyze the data from a third part base point of view.

An additional limitation was the confounding variables of teacher looping and student looping present within the design of the Young Pathfinders Program. The process of teacher looping that occurred over the three-year cycle of the program may have been a strong determiner of the program outcomes. Having a caring, committed, and experienced teacher for three years cannot be overlooked as a player in the positive results. Likewise, the comfort of having the same peers in the classroom throughout the duration of the program may have contributed to the outcomes as well.

Another limitation could have been that the adult participants were all active in the development or implementation of Young Pathfinders and inherently had a positive outlook about their involvement in the program. This positive outlook was also true of the student focus group. Because the children were used to adults' authority, agreement and an over-eagerness to please must be considered limitations as well. To help combat this and gather data beyond the positive, the researcher embedded questions in the interview and focus group guides that focused on what didn't work well or asked for recommendations and/or suggestions that could enhance the program design or execution. These questions were well-received and provided thoughtful insights from the adults. The students were at times overwhelmed with the idea of being critical of the program and were a bit hesitant with any question that they may have perceived as negative.

Another limitation was that the study was conducted over the course of six months and much of the interview data collected was based on the participants' memories and recollections of experiences from three to four years prior. To combat this, the document review helped fill in the gaps of memory and verify information related to timeframes and statistical data.

Finally, the research acknowledged that the number of participants in the study was small. There were eight key adult stakeholders asked to participate and all agreed. Working as a researcher in one's work locality assisted with gaining access to critical documents and in professional relationships. Of the twenty possible student participants, the researcher received permission to hold a focus group with thirteen of the students.

“Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth-unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27).

### **Implications for Further Research**

The choice to actively engage the problem of underrepresentation in gifted programming in Anderson County Public Schools via a talent development program met with 14 out of 28 students being identified for gifted services by the end of third grade. Although the program accomplished some of the short-term goals it set out to do, the program has room for improvement in identifying students to include and meeting the needs of the learners over time.

Further research should begin with districts that are already implementing early talent development programs in elementary schools documenting their program and adding to the body of knowledge. There is a need to create common understanding within the gifted field considering research models for such programs. This research can be a starting point for the development of a common, shared research model for an early elementary talent development program for diverse populations.

In addition, further research is needed to explore the impact that talent development programs have on other diverse populations since this study focused on African American students from poverty. There is a particular need to focus on students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Castellano, 2003). The lack of

research demonstrates a need for additional study of talent development programs on students from all underrepresented populations.

Another research need to be studied is the effects associated with teacher and student looping. These confounding variables proved so intertwined with the talent development program results that it was impossible to examine them in isolation. It would seem beneficial for additional research to be conducted to determine the effects of teacher looping and student looping on talent development.

The problem of underrepresentation is widespread and daunting. There is still much room for study and experimentation to determine a variety of methods that will work to include more into the gifted ranks (Callahan, 2005). Many districts continue to struggle to include students from diverse and low socioeconomic backgrounds. Data-driven decision making demands action and must play an active role in policy decisions addressing the issue. Many districts ignore existing data in favor of operating within the status quo. Movement in the direction of equity requires a commitment of resources and is not always well received by all stakeholders. This study suggests that an action decision has to be made by policy makers about those underrepresented in the gifted process or the inequities that have beleaguered the gifted field since the beginning will ensue. Continued attention to data and creative researched interventions such as a talent development program for those who are left out of the gifted process should be considered. A commitment to developing talent in early elementary school students from diverse low socioeconomic backgrounds is a viable option and should be pursued and encouraged.

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**APPENDIX A: Data Requested and Collected from ACPS**

The following data was requested and collected:

Students enrolled in program

**\*Names**, **\*address**, ethnicity, gender, NAGLIERI scores, OLSAT scores, County Test scores, Gifted Identification (if applicable)

Teachers' names involved in program

Specialist for Gifted Programs, Kindergarten Teachers, Primary Gifted Resource Teacher, Program Teachers 1-3, Gifted/Advanced Teachers 4/5

Documents recording any history, description or implementation of the program.

\*Addresses and names of children were not requested by the researcher. Researcher gave parent correspondence to the Gifted Specialist to be mailed; thus, no addresses or names were required.

The above information was collected from the following person/department:

**Gifted Specialist**

Ethnicity, gender, NALIERI scores, Gifted Identification (if applicable)

Teachers' Names involved in program

Kindergarten Teachers, Primary Gifted Resource Teacher, Program Teacher 1-3, Gifted/Advanced Teachers 4/5

Documents recording any history, description or implementation of the program. Only used to answer research questions that aided in triangulation. These documents were found with the Gifted Specialist describing the program to parents, invitation for participation etc.

**Research and Planning (County Scores, OLSAT Scores)**

Testing history of students (non-identifiable) who went through Young Pathfinder's Program in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Cohort 1</u>	<u>Cohort 2</u>
2003-2004	K	-
2004-2005	1	K
2005-2006	2	1
2006-2007	3	2
2007-2008	4	3
2008-2009	5	4

**APPENDIX B: TIMELINE AND SEQUENCE OF STUDY**

Data Collection Events & Activities

Prospectus Shared (**April** 2009)  
 IRB Application (**April** 2009)  
 Pending Approval – Research began June 2009

Document Review (June 2009)

-Gifted Specialist Documents

Students enrolled in program

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Cohort 1</b>	<b>Cohort 2</b>
<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>2004-2005</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>K</b>
<b>2005-2006</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2006-2007</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

Names, address, Ethnicity, age, NAGLIERI scores, OLSAT scores, SOL scores, Gifted Identification Portfolio (if applicable)

Teachers’ names involved in program

Kindergarten Teachers, Primary Gifted Resource Teacher, Program Teacher 1-3, Gifted/Advanced Teachers 4/5

Documents recording any history, description or implementation of the program

Interviews (June/July 2009) – individual interviews at the convenience of the Interviewee (30-45 minutes)

- Gifted Specialist
- Kindergarten Teachers (2 to 3 of them)
- Primary Gifted Resource Teacher
- Program Teacher (Grades 1-3)
- Gifted/Advanced Teachers (Zone Program 4-5 Ward)

Focus Group or Interviews (September 2009)(30-45 minutes)

- Students who attended program & now in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> (5-8 of them)  
 Flexible date and time – during lunch at school site.  
 June /July/August/September – Data Analysis

### **APPENDIX C: LETTER TO ADULT PARTICIPANTS**

Dear *(insert participant's name)*:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a research study I am conducting as part of my Doctorate degree in the Department of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. This study is a dissertation project and the results will be shared with Anderson County Public Schools staff to inform best practice. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore ways students from diverse populations can be included in talent development programs, and to determine if that inclusion proves to be beneficial for future gifted identification. This investigation will use an extensive interview process to study how the Young Pathfinder's program was adopted, created and implemented in your district. I believe that because you were actively involved in the Young Pathfinder's Program, your insights would be most helpful.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 30-45 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. Identification of all participants involved in this study will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (804) 270-7139 or by email at rkfrankl@. The final decision about participation is yours.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Research Review Committee of Anderson County Public Schools. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Office for Research VCU at 804-827-2157.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to you, the division directly involved in the study, and other organizations seeking to study gifted diversity. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. Please complete the attached permission form, whether or not you agree to participate, and return it in the enclosed envelope (by date).



**APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT/OPT-OUT FORM/ADULT**

Please read the following, answering the questions appropriately. Then sign and date the **form**, and return just this portion of this **form** to the primary researcher as indicated above.

Do you wish to participate in the interview portion of the **research** project as described in the cover letter?

- YES NO

Do you give your permission for the session to be tape-recorded

YES NO

Do you understand the methods by which you may **opt out** of the study?

- YES NO

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX E: LETTER TO PARENTS**

Dear Parent(s) Or Guardian(s):

I am writing to ask your permission for your child to participate in a study of the Young Pathfinder's Program that he/she was part of in Anderson County Public Schools. The study I am conducting is part of my Doctorate degree in the Department of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. This research study is a dissertation project and is not being conducted by Anderson County Public Schools; however, the results will be shared with Anderson County Public Schools staff to inform best practice. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your child's involvement would entail if you give permission.

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify and evaluate the benefits of a talent development program. Children, with parental permission, will meet in a small focus group with the researcher and other Young Pathfinder participants on one occasion only to discuss and offer insights into their experiences in the program.

The project in which your child has been invited to participate will require less than 45 minutes of time during lunch on **(insert date)** at the school site. Pizza and drinks will be provided for your child. However, the decision about participation is yours.

Only children who have parental permission, and who themselves agree to participate, will be involved in the study. Also, children or parents may withdraw their permission at any time during the study without penalty by indicating this decision to the researcher. There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. Identification of all participants involved in this study will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (804) 270-7139 or by email at rkfrankl@. The final decision about participation is yours.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Research Review Committee of Anderson County Public Schools. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Office for Research VCU at 804-827-2157.

I would appreciate if you would permit your child to participate in this project, as I believe it will contribute to furthering the knowledge of gifted education and advancing opportunities for students. Please complete the attached permission form, whether or not you give permission for your child to participate, and return it in the enclosed envelope (by date). After a week from this date, I will be sending a follow-up letter to verify your child's involvement in the study.

**APPENDIX F: PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM/CHILD ASSENT FORM**

**FOR FOCUS GROUP**

Please answer the following questions. Then sign and date the form, and return just this page to the primary researcher in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Do you wish your child to participate in the focus group part of the research project as described in the cover letter?

- YES NO

Do you give permission for the session to be tape-recorded?

YES NO

Do you understand the methods by which you may opt out your child from the study?

- YES NO

\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name of Parent(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\*\*\*\*\*

**Student Participation**

I would like to participate in this study describing my experiences in the Young Pathfinder's Program.

YES NO

**Student Assent**

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX G 2<sup>nd</sup> NOTICE OF STUDY – LETTER TO PARENTS**

**(Sent 1 week after 1<sup>st</sup> notice)**

Dear Parent(s) Or Guardian(s):

This is a letter sent as a follow-up to the letter sent on (Insert Date). I am writing to ask your permission for your child to participate in a study of the Young Pathfinder's Program that he/she was part of in Anderson County Public Schools. The study I am conducting is part of my Doctorate degree in the Department of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. This research study is a dissertation project and is not being conducted by Anderson County Public Schools; however, the results will be shared with Anderson County Public Schools staff to inform best practice. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your child's involvement would entail if you give permission.

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify and evaluate the benefits of a talent development program. Children, with parental permission, will meet in a small focus group with the researcher and other Young Pathfinder participants on one occasion only to discuss and offer insights into their experiences in the program.

The project in which your child has been invited to participate and will require less than 45 minutes of time during lunch on (insert date) at the school site. Pizza and drinks will be provided for your child. However, the decision about participation is yours.

Only children who have parental permission, and who themselves agree to participate, will be involved in the study. Also, children or parents may withdraw their permission at any time during the study without penalty by indicating this decision to the researcher. There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. Identification of all participants involved in this study will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (804) 270-7139 or by email at rkfrankl@.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Research Review Committee of Anderson County Public Schools. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Office for Research VCU at 804-827-2157

I would appreciate if you would permit your child to participate in this project, as I believe it will contribute to furthering the knowledge of gifted education and advancing opportunities for students. Please complete the attached permission form, whether or not you give permission for your child to participate, and return it in the enclosed envelope by (insert date).

**APPENDIX H: 2<sup>nd</sup> NOTICE PARENTAL  
PERMISSION FORM/CHILD**

**ASSENT FOR FOCUS GROUP**

Please answer the following questions. Then sign and date the form, and return just this page to the primary researcher in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Do you wish your child to participate in the focus group part of the research project as described in the cover letter?

- YES NO

Do you give permission for the session to be tape-recorded?

- YES NO

Do you understand the methods by which you may opt out your child from the study?

- YES NO

\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name of Parent(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date

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\_\_\_\_\_

**Student Participation**

I would like to participate in this study describing my experiences in the Young Pathfinder's Program.

- YES NO

**Student Assent**

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX I: FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO PARENTS (If Response is Low to  
Focus Group/Requesting Interview Consent Letter/Assent Letter – Parent)**

Dear Parent(s) Or Guardian(s):

I am writing this letter as a follow-up to your interest in allowing your child to participate in my dissertation research study. The purpose of this dissertation is to identify and evaluate the benefits of a talent development program. I would like to ask your permission for your child to participate in an interview with me about the Young Pathfinder's Program that he/she was part of in Anderson County Public Schools. This would be in place of the focus group.

The focus group in which your child had been invited to participate in has been changed to interviews instead. It will require about 30 minutes of time during lunch on (insert date) at the school site. Pizza and drinks will be provided for your child. However, the decision about participation is yours. Your child will meet with me on one occasion only. In this session, he or she will be asked to share his or her experiences from the Young Pathfinder's Program.

Only children who have parental permission, and who themselves agree to participate, will be involved in the study. Also, children or parents may withdraw their permission at any time during the study without penalty by indicating this decision to the researcher. There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. Identification of all participants involved in this study will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (804) 270-7139 or by email at rkfrankl@. The final decision about participation is yours.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Research Review Committee of Anderson County Public Schools. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Office for Research VCU at 804-827-2157.

I would appreciate if you would permit your child to participate in this project, as I believe it will contribute to furthering the knowledge of gifted education and advancing opportunities for students. Please complete the attached permission form, whether or not you give permission for your child to participate, and return it in the enclosed envelope by (insert date).

Thank you in advance for your interest and support of this project.

**APPENDIX J: PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM/CHILD ASSENT FORM**  
**FOR INTERVIEW. (Backup Plan for the Focus Group)**

Please answer the following questions. Then sign and date the form, and return just this page to the primary researcher in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Do you wish your child to participate in an interview with the researcher as part of the research project as described in the cover letter?

- YES NO

Do you give permission for the session to be tape-recorded?

- YES NO

Do you understand the methods by which you may opt out your child from the study?

- YES NO

\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name of Parent(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date

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**Student Participation**

I would like to participate in this study describing my experiences in the Young Pathfinder's Program.

- YES NO

**Student Assent**

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX K: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT FOR ADULTS**

(Interview Guide (Semi-Structured) for Adult Participants)

(Questions will be used as applicable)

There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in what you think.

1. How was the Young Pathfinders program implemented?

- a. Why did this district seek to establish this program? Why was it needed?
- b. Where does the funding for the program come from?
- c. What were the expectations of Young Pathfinders?
- d. How did you find the teacher? What was the criterion for the teacher?
- e. How did you find learners? How were they chosen? What was the criterion? How were they different than their peers?
- f. How did you decide where to establish the program?
- g. How did you find and decide on the teaching materials, the curriculum?
- h. How is this classroom different than a regular elementary school classroom?
- h. What were the major logistics of the program?

2. What outcomes can be associated with the program?

- i. What has worked well? What has not worked well?
- j. What aspects of the program have changed over time?
- k. Are there changes you are planning to make in the near future?
- l. What are the expectations that you now have for the children that attended the program?
- m. What are the benefits for the children who participated in the program? Impact?
- n. Were any students identified as gifted at the end of the program?
- o. Is there anything else you would like to share?



**APPENDIX L: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT FOR STUDENTS**  
(Focus Group Guide for Students) Semi-structured; collecting data about children's thoughts, feelings and experiences.

There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in what you think.

1. How was the Young Pathfinders program implemented?

- a. Tell me what your classroom looked like in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade?
- b. Describe a typical day as part of the Young Pathfinder's Program.
- c. How did you get to school everyday when you were in 1,2 and 3rd?
- c. How did you feel about being in the Young Pathfinder's Program?
- d. Was the school work hard or easy in the Young Pathfinder's Program?  
How was it hard? How was it easy?
- e. What did you dislike about being in the program?
- f. Tell me about a learning activity you experienced in the program.
- g. How did you feel about going to school each day?

2. What outcomes can be associated with the program?

- h. What words would you use to describe the Young Pathfinder's Program?
- i. What was the favorite thing you learned about when you were in the program?
- j. Your class size was small. What was that like? Do you think that was a good thing? Why?
- k. You stayed with your classmates for several years. What did you like about that?
- l. Do you believe it helps you now in your schoolwork to have been in the Young Pathfinder's Program? How?
- m. Would you do it again if you got to choose?
- n. What recommendations do you have for those in charge of the program?
- o. What plans do you have for your future education?
- p. Is there anything else you would like to share?

## VITA

Robin Kesterson Franklin was born on March 15, 1963 in Knoxville, Tennessee. She graduated from Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee with a B.S. in Elementary Education. Upon moving to Richmond, Virginia, she completed her Masters of Education in Educational Supervision at University of Richmond. She began working as a fifth grade teacher in Henrico County Public Schools at Short Pump Elementary School in 1995. She then taught at Nuckols Farm Elementary School in Henrico County Public Schools from 1997-1999 and then served as General Resource Teacher at Nuckols Farm Elementary School from 1999-2004. Her studies continued at University of Virginia with an endorsement in Administration and an endorsement in Gifted Education. In 2004, she began a gifted program for fourth and fifth grade students at Rivers Edge Elementary School. Most recently she was selected to serve as the Assistant Principal at Rivers Edge Elementary School.

