THE CONSIDERATION OF DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT TO IDENTIFY GIFTED, EMERGING BILINGUAL LATINX STUDENTS: LESSONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

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Little, if any, research exists that provides guidance for educators on the use of a dynamic assessment as a tool for better identifying Latinx students for gifted programs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of campus principals and elementary teachers as dynamic assessment was being considered as part of the gifted and talented identification protocol. Data were collected through teacher and principal interviews and focus groups, along with an analysis of current practices and protocols within the studied district. The findings revealed several key themes that emerged from educator perspectives on the ability of emergent bilingual students to be placed in gifted programs and how dynamic assessment could or could not play a part in the assessment process. The study provides support and context for future research about dynamic assessment as applied to gifted and talented identification of Latinx students, including (a) the development of a dynamic assessment, (b) the implementation of a dynamic assessment with presentation of data that supports or do not support its use, (c) training to support the implementation of a dynamic assessment, (d) the human capital and time associated with implementing a dynamic assessment, and (e) educator mindset associated with the implementation of a dynamic assessment for students who do not speak English in the home.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Page

Tables

Figures

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Over the past two decades, educational researchers and scholars have highlighted that the number of Latinx students identified as gifted and talented and placed in gifted and talented programs is disproportionate and these students are underrepresented in gifted programs (Hamilton et al., 2018; Sparks, 2015). As noted by Suitts in 2015, at that time, more than half of the students in U.S. public schools were from low-income backgrounds, many of whom were Latinx and other students of color. In that study, students from low-income backgrounds were five times less likely to participate in gifted programming compared to their more affluent peers. Moreover, Latinx students are not identified as gifted and talented (GT) at the same rate as White or Asian students (Siegle et al., 2016).

While there are numerous reasons why this phenomenon occurs, few solutions have been offered, specifically for tools to help educators more equitably identify giftedness in emergent bilingual learners (EBLs). Over time, researchers have recommended dynamic assessments as a tool to better identify giftedness in students who might not speak English well, if at all (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Poehner & Wang, 2021). Most of those authors' recommendations were based on studies conducted in schools where English was primarily taught, giving hope that dynamic assessment could help level the playing field. Despite the recommendations of many and the research of a few, there is little research that supports the use of dynamic assessment for the purpose of better identifying giftedness in students who do not speak English in the home (NCRGE, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of practice investigated in this study is that, as recent as 2019, the National

Association for Gifted Children (2020) reported that Latinx students were underrepresented in gifted and talented programs by 30% in comparison to their White and Asian peers and by 75% if the student has a disability or is learning to speak English. According to U.S. Census data, the Latinx population in Texas grew by over 2 million residents since 2019, accounting for approximately 65% of all growth in the state. Further, within that same timeline, the number of English learners continued to mirror this growth in Texas schools with an even larger percentage of English learners failing to meet language acquisition requirements after five years, thus continually multiplying the number of English language learners (ELLs) in Texas classrooms (Cashiola & Potter, 2021).

Martin (2016) listed several reasons why Latinx students are underrepresented in gifted programs, including the need to improve the identification process and lack of academic support. Also, once identified, retaining the student in a gifted and talented program is a challenge. Further research over time revealed similar findings or categories of reasons why the phenomenon of underrepresentation occurs. Those findings include the idea of deficit thinking (Ford et al., 2020), varying definitions of giftedness, standardized testing, cultural background, and linguistic background (McBee & Makel, 2019; Siegle et al., 2016). As such, the appropriate use of dynamic assessments with fidelity may address several of these factors, including improving teacher training and communication and removing culturally biased assessment instruments, all while supporting the student through use of the current curriculum to identify student giftedness. The findings of this study reveal that, according to teacher and principal perceptions, a dynamic assessment could serve gifted emergent bilingual learners effectively, thus school leaders may have new strategies for supporting those students and their families.

Conceptual Framework

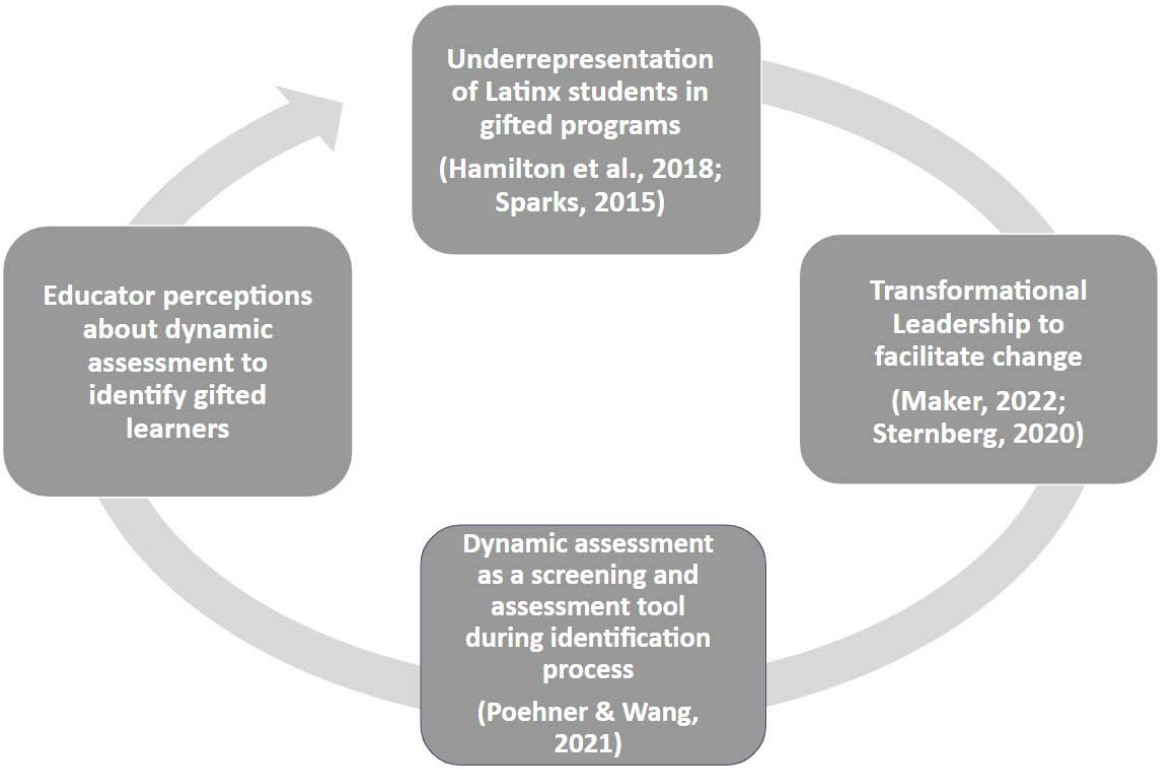
The teaching and writing of Pedro Noguera (2015) called educators to focus on outcomes, while considering that students' paths to learning will not be the same. Noguera stated that educators can become complicit in perpetuating the achievement gaps of minority students by accepting existing processes and without speaking out for better, more equitable systems. Further, a more recent exploratory study by the National Center for Research on Gifted Education (2018) revealed a shift in recent educational literature that aims to focus learning on student strengths and capital as opposed to teaching based on a student's gaps in learning. These ideas are deeply rooted in the writing and teaching of intellectual and educator Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). These ideas taken from Freire establish a theoretical framework by which the equitable education of students requires change, especially for those classified as minority and who do not speak English.

Important components of Freire's (1968) work include several concepts that applied to this study. First, student learning should be shaped by what students already know, not what they do not know. Second, educators must learn how students understand the world then strive to adapt learning to the student's background, language, and culture. Third, the concept of educational banking is a flawed and oppression-driven concept. To further explain, this concept associates the acts of banking with education where students merely show up and take away capital, or knowledge, in the process. This process leaves out any room for adaptation to the needs of the learner and forces the student to only collect knowledge one specific way. The final concept is that students are incomplete beings who are conscious of their inabilities and should strive to become more complete. It is imperative that school leaders understand the impact of those negative ways of thinking.

With Noguera's (2015) work in mind, the conceptual framework (Figure 1) of this case study was designed to document the perceptions of educators and the conversations leading up to the introduction of a dynamic assessment as a tool to better equalize the process for pre-emergent bilingual learners who exhibit characteristics of giftedness.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



As demonstrated in Figure 1, before any change can occur, educational leaders should recognize the pre-existing conditions that led to the current underrepresentation of Latinx students in gifted programs. Second, leaders should then recognize barriers and systems currently in place within school and district policies and procedures that further perpetuate this identification gap. This qualitative case study was designed to identify and describe teachers' and school leaders' perceptions about the possible use of a dynamic assessment, using qualitative

data collected through semi-structured one-on-one individual interviews and focus groups. Figure 1 depicts the variables that comprise the framework conceived to guide this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of campus principals and elementary teachers as dynamic assessment was being considered by the studied district as part of the gifted and talented identification protocol. This study was designed to understand current teacher and campus principal capacity for identifying Latinx students for giftedness and to document how the use of a dynamic assessment could change educator perceptions after introduction and future availability for use as a tool for identifying giftedness.

Research Questions

This qualitative single unit case study explored educators' perceptions as a dynamic assessment was introduced. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do elementary campus principals and teachers perceive the potential for emergent bilingual learners to be identified as gifted?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers and principals about dynamic assessments and their understanding of how to use those assessments for identifying emergent bilingual students for gifted programming?

The primary focus of this research was to explore the perceived impact that dynamic assessments can have, and the possible supports and barriers that already exist for dynamic assessment to be utilized as a tool in the determination of giftedness of elementary Latinx students.

Significance of the Study

Most parents, educators, and students alike would agree that there are many benefits that are associated with being labeled as gifted. For parents, the boost in morale by recognizing that

their child is smart brings comfort in knowing their child is identified and being supported appropriately with students of similar gifts. In educational circles, this idea has long been referred to as the “Big-Fish-Little-Pond” effect (Herrmann et al., 2016, p. 223). Educators also see the benefits of gifted programming in schools as a tide that raises all ships in that what is good for gifted programming is also good for all students. A wide array of studies supports the need for gifted programming as a proven way to benefit and differentiate for the needs of gifted learners, including providing academic rigor, academic engagement, student achievement, and socialization, as well as being a predictor of future success (Loveless, 2022). As gifted students often are given access to a school district’s or campus’s most rigorous curriculum, this often means that identified students are likely participating in accelerated programs in middle and high school. Those programs typically are labeled such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Credit (NAGC, 2018). Further, the NAGC suggested that participating in these types of programs predicts post-secondary success by means of advanced degrees that could result in access to jobs and careers that provide for a higher standard of living. As noted previously, the underrepresentation of cultural and ethnic groups of students within identified programs for giftedness is cause for grave concern in the state of our education system and thus supports the significance of this study.

The significance of this study and primary aim for conducting it is that it adds to the literature about the use of dynamic assessments as a tool for identifying previously unidentified Latinx students for gifted programs. Several researchers have identified dynamic assessment as a better tool to identify giftedness for students who do not speak English in the home (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Poehner & Wang, 2021). However, in comparison to the number of authors and researchers who have studied or mentioned dynamic assessment as a possible solution, there

is very little research to substantially support the idea that it will work when implemented with fidelity.

The National Center for Research on Gifted Education (Mun et al., 2016) offered several key strategies, including dynamic assessment, for teachers and campus leaders to integrate into identification and support of emergent bilingual learners who also exhibit signs of giftedness. In 2007, Murphy was the major contributor to the literature about dynamic assessment. He identified teacher and administrator training as a solution but also a deterrent to the use of dynamic assessments for reasons of cost and manpower to implement and support the assessment. Therefore, an additional aim for conducting this study was to examine the effect that teacher and administrator professional development and discussion around dynamic assessment might have on teacher and school leader perceptions about the use of dynamic assessment. Thus, this study was designed to support or counter the argument by Murphy that the use of dynamic assessment, though good in theory, is difficult in practice.

Delimitations

Within this study, there was projected to be some delimitations in the design of the research and collection of data. The first delimitation could include the rather small sample size, specifically as it relates to the in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews conducted with campus principals. Teacher participants, participating in two focus groups, were limited due to the small number of elementary teachers in the studied district who would be recommending students for testing or those who would ultimately use a dynamic assessment to assess giftedness. Another delimitation was the small window of time data were collected, only in one semester. Finally, this study took place in a medium-sized school district of approximately 350 teachers. However, while the unit of analysis for this study was small, the findings of teacher and

principal perceptions about the introduction of a dynamic assessment were inferential to other districts of all sizes.

Assumptions

Several assumptions guided this study. First, it was assumed that teachers and campus principals would give honest feedback about their perceptions of potentially gifted Latinx students' ability. Second, it was assumed that when interviewed, teachers and campus principals would be honest in providing responses to questions and providing feedback. It also was assumed that a case study research design was appropriate for the purpose of this study. Since giftedness can manifest itself in different ways, it was assumed that alternate forms of assessment may support gifted emergent bilingual learners. As teachers are the most important factor in the identification of students for gifted programs, teacher training, self-awareness, and experience are assumed to play a part in the teacher's skills for identifying gifted learners.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to provide context and understanding for the readers of this study.

Dynamic assessment. Poehner and Wang (2021) delineated between several types of dynamic assessment, including interventionist, interactionist, and computerized. Interactionist dynamic assessment is the type focused on in this study. As such, dynamic assessment is defined as an intervention-based assessment that aids in identifying a student's learning potential as well as current skills. This type of assessment places the focus on ways to scaffold learners to higher mental functioning, much like Vygotsky's (1978) zones of proximal development.

Emergent bilingual learner (EBL). This term is what educators in the past have referred to as English language learners (ELLs), and/or what the federal government calls limited English

proficient students (LEPs).

Giftedness. Taken from the National Association for Gifted Children (2019), this term is defined as when "Students with gifts and talents perform, or have the capability to perform, at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains" (p. 1).

Latinx. A person of Latin American descent. This term is used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino/a. Recent findings indicate a trend towards the use of Latinx, specifically in social media outlets with emerging use within higher education institutions (Cristobal & Lozano, 2019).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the problem and its impact on public education and Latinx students, followed by a summary of the conceptual framework, research questions, purpose, significance, delimitations, assumptions, and key terms. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review of research about the achievement gaps that exist in the identification of giftedness in Latinx students, as well as research about methods educators utilize to counter this gap, including dynamic assessment. Chapter 3 outlines the research design, ethical considerations, the population and sampling strategies, methods and procedures for data collection, strategies for data analysis, and limitations. Chapter 4 provides research findings that are presented in narratives of those interviewed in focus groups or individual interviews as organized to provide answers to the research questions and to highlight the themes that emerged. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, including a discussion of the major findings, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the qualitative single case study designed to discover teacher and campus principal perceptions about dynamic assessments as a viable means to better assess Latinx students for giftedness. A conceptual framework is provided to understand and visually illustrate how this design was best suited to discover these perceptions. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature associated with the topics of dynamic assessment, research-supported reasons about why and how Latinx students are often overlooked for gifted and talented assessment, and components of gifted and English language learner instruction.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review serves to build a foundation for this study, based on the existing research revolving around the topics of gifted education, the underrepresentation of Latinx students in gifted programs, the possible benefits of alternative assessments that can be used to better identify Latinx students for gifted programs, and the use of transformational leadership as a vehicle to support change. This chapter is divided into six major topics: (a) the disproportionality of Latinx students in gifted programs, (b) the overall instructional needs of emerging bilingual students, (c) the overall instructional needs of gifted students, (d) the overall instructional needs of gifted and bilingual students, (e) dynamic assessments as a tool to better identify giftedness in emergent bilingual students, and (f) the use of transformational leadership as a framework to support change.

Disproportionality of Latinx Students in Gifted Programs

Despite the growing number of Latinx and emergent English learning students in the United States, Latinx students continue to be underrepresented in gifted programming (Martin, 2016). According to National Association for Gifted Children data from 2019, Latinx students are underrepresented in gifted education programs by 30% in comparison to their peers. Further, if the student was documented to have disabilities or was still learning English, the underrepresentation was 75%. The findings of a study by Hodges et al. (2018) reflected similar results. In their meta-analysis of 54 studies that represented roughly 191 million students, the authors found that approximately one-third of minority students are identified for gifted and talented (GT) programs in comparison to White and Asian students. In Ford's 2014 study, based on a composition index which compares the number of students in a population with the number

of students identified for gifted programs, she estimated at that time that approximately 500,000 Black and Latino students were not identified for GT programs that should have been, in comparison to their White and Asian peers.

According to Martin (2016), research points to the causes of the disproportionate number of Latinx students who are classified as GT. These causes include the need to improve the identification process, a lack of quality curriculum and the academic support therein, and retaining students who are identified as GT. Martin further maintained that the trauma of poverty and the social stress of bias and discrimination are compounding the problem of GT identification in Latinx students. It is important to understand the causes for the lack of identification of giftedness in Latinx students, with topics including deficit thinking, lack of definition of giftedness, standardized testing, cultural background, and linguistic background.

Deficit Thinking

Valencia (1997), one of the seminal writers about potential causes, suggested deficit thinking as a cause, the perception that students will not or cannot be successful in school in large part due to factors that are of no fault of the student or family, such as being poor, not speaking English in the home, and lack of familiarity with typical U.S. culture and customs. More recently, deficit thinking has been described by Reed (2021) as an opposition between merit and diversity where those of color, through cultural or racial biases, will only succeed and receive an opportunity for merit because of their cultural or racial differences. Applied to an educational setting, because standardized testing and screening are historically biased, the identification and support for students of color will not exist without first understanding that deficit thinking exists. Even in 2014, Ford argued that the underrepresentation of Latinx students in GT programs was not a result of statistical chance but the function of ideas and beliefs

grounded in the deficit paradigms of those with power and social capital. Deficit thinking can take the form of testing instruments, policies, and procedures that do not take the intelligence, culture, and academic potential into account that then can result in achievement gaps and underrepresentation of Latinx students. According to Ford, this is a form of human gatekeeping.

Definition of Giftedness

One of the key problems for identification of gifted Latinx students is the sheer number of definitions of giftedness that educating institutions can refer to and adopt as their local standard. According to McBee and Makel (2019), there are four commonly used definitions or themes of giftedness, including a high cognitive ability, multiple criteria definitions, Renzulli's three ring model (Renzulli,1978), and the position statement of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2020). A definition that looks at a high cognitive ability might include basing identification on one assessment of intelligence such as an IQ test. A definition using multiple-criteria definitions would combine several factors in determination of giftedness, such as IQ, grades, and work ethic. Renzulli's (1978) three-ring model, introduced in the late 1970's and for ages considered the model for identification of giftedness, utilized three relevant clusters of characteristics, including above average ability, creativity, and commitment to a task, such that when combined, enabled a better identification of giftedness in students. Although not really a definition, the NAGC published a 2010 position statement that continues to be how districts define giftedness. That statement reads as follows:

> Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (NAGC, 2010, p. 1)

The NAGC's position statement, although seemingly inclusive of many factors attributed

to giftedness, also recommends a cut-off percentage for identification and inclusion of two domains, including symbol systems and sensorimotor skills. McBee and Makel (2019) maintained that although this statement or definition by NAGC is used widely in American schools, the multiple criteria, and combinations of probability within the statement, can lead to different results, depending on interpretation. In their study comparing these four common definitions or criteria of giftedness, they found a range of identification from .5% to 90% depending on the wording, correlations between factors, and populations tested. The authors attributed this to "verbal fuzziness" (p. 9) which, even within an accepted definition, still leaves room for many interpretations and practices.

Standardized Testing

Students who exhibit traits of giftedness can be identified through several methods and tools, including end-of-course tests, standardized testing, portfolios, essays, and oral exams (NAGC, 2020). Further, according to the NAGC, most states, and the local education agencies within the states, include standardized testing measures as a criterion to be considered when identifying a student for gifted and talented education. In a quasi-experimental study by White et al. (2016), the research findings indicated that economic status and race are factors that influence performance trends on academic performance indicators such as standardized testing, language barriers, difficulty in comprehending texts, and the lack of background knowledge, experiences, and vocabulary. As a result, fewer students who do not speak English in the home do well on standardized and end-of-course exams, thus are passed over in the initial GT identification process.

Research by Hodges et al. (2018) identified standardized testing as biased toward the success of White and affluent students who normally have more access to learning at an early

age and in the test language of English. This bias then places minority and poor students at the lower end of any ranking order that could be associated with gifted identification. Further, Hodges et al. maintained that school and district personnel who identify students based solely on IQ and standardized test scores have unintentionally set up a system that takes away the opportunity for students of color to develop their giftedness, specifically those who don't speak English well. Since learning characteristics of potentially gifted English learners are often different from their peers, Siegle et al. (2016) recommended a more holistic approach to testing for giftedness that doesn't necessarily exclude standardized testing but incorporates other assessment criteria, such as non-verbal assessments and teacher training for identification of potential giftedness.

Cultural Background

As one of the seminal authors about student equity and access to gifted programs, Ford (2013) defined culture as the values, beliefs, attitudes, habits, and customs common to a group bound by race, gender, age, geography, religion, income, and/or social class. These factors exist in such variety that it is very difficult to identify an issue with any group of students. As culture relates to intelligence and testing, Sternberg (2020) suggested that Ford's concept of culture offers credence to the idea that intelligence can look differently depending on one's culture, race, and background. Simply stating *Latinx students* is far too broad of a term to offer a blanket solution for issues facing GT identification for members of this group. Likewise, the categorization of students by race is far too broad a category to diagnose universal factors for students who are overlooked in the identification process. Many cultures exist within the term race and many races exist within the term culture. Additionally, researchers have noted that signs of high potential for exceptional intelligence exist in every culture and race and that

identification of giftedness is associated with different behaviors from one group to another (Martin, 2016). According to Sternberg (2020), finding or creating a culture-free or culture-fair test is impossible for all cultures. However, school leaders should strive to find culturally relevant tools for measuring the intelligence and skills of those within any culture.

Linguistic Background

The linguistic background and level of English language acquisition highly affect Latinx students' chances of being recommended for GT testing and ultimately receiving GT services. A student with high ability and talent who recently arrived in the United States is less likely to achieve well on assessments administered in English, due to language barriers (Martin, 2016). When standardized testing and classroom performance are the baseline for GT potential, Latinx students with low reading ability in English are at a disadvantage, regardless of giftedness. Encouragingly, states seem to be taking notice in the last several years. As such, the NAGC in 2020 reported that several states are now specifically listing measures for collaboration, funding, and support for English language learners who could potentially be gifted. This could be the result of the prior NAGC report in 2015 which recommended that culturally sensitive assessments and protocols, including quantitative and qualitative methods, be developed and utilized to determine giftedness in minority students and students who do not speak English in the home.

Instructional Needs of Gifted Students

Studies of gifted students date back to the 1800's, culminating in the creation of the intelligence quotient (IQ) test in the early 1900's to help identify individuals who were gifted with intelligence more than most. The first gifted school opened in Massachusetts in 1901 and the first longitudinal study began in 1921 and extended through the 1950's. By the Makel et al.

2016 study, those authors reported that 20-40% of elementary and middle school students performed above grade level in reading and 10-20% in mathematics. Yet, these researchers indicated that despite the growth of identified gifted students and the number of students performing above grade level, the traditional way of meeting the needs of these students needed to change. Other researchers have expressed concern about the lack of evidence that supports the current effectiveness of how we are providing instruction to gifted students (Siegle et al., 2016: Mun et al., 2020).

With over 100 years of study, research, and literature, consistencies have emerged as to how to best serve the educational needs of gifted and talented students. In the most recent report by NAGC (2020), delivery models were tallied across the United States for the various levels of school from pre-kindergarten to high school. Other research revealed some of the best practices for post-secondary programs at community colleges and universities (Zhbanova & Fincher, 2019; Chan, Chan, & Sun, 2020). Based on reported practice, most common among delivery models at elementary and middle schools were differentiation, acceleration, resource and self-contained classrooms, and advanced coursework, including honors programs. Among high schools, most common were advanced placement, dual enrollment, honors and advanced coursework, and differentiation (NAGC, 2020). Common delivery and support models for community colleges include membership to club chapters that support excellence in schoolwork, priority advising, international experiences, arts integration, and internships ((Zhbanova & Fincher, 2019).

However, looking at what schools and states most often report as the chosen delivery model for gifted education does not necessarily mean that those decisions are correct in practice, theory, or support of gifted learners. It only reports what often occurs with potentially hundreds

of variables that factor into the choices made within each state, school district, and learning institution. As background, in 2007 Rogers summarized previous literature and research that identified and categorized the educational best practices that met the needs of gifted students. Although that synthesis occurred 16 years prior to the current study, the argument is made that the findings from Rogers' synthesis still reign true due to the sheer volume of information compiled and coded, thus those findings should be recognized. Rogers' synthesis included the review and coding of thousands of research studies and thousands of literature articles spanning 150 years. According to Rogers' synthesis, common themes for supporting gifted learning included the idea that gifted students must be challenged daily, and that students should be given independent work and acceleration opportunities, placed in like-ability groups, and provided differentiated instruction to fully blossom their giftedness and potential into achievement and fulfillment. Looking deeper into these five categories of practice, more recent literature sources that support Rogers' 2007 synthesis next are discussed.

Challenging and Rigorous Work

Academic rigor has long been synonymous with gifted education. The recent push for Common Core standards across the United States is a result of the needs of schools to prepare all students for college, careers, and the world. However, some people contend that even these new standards are not enough to meet the needs of gifted learners and note that, in most cases, it is the responsibility of an effective teacher to differentiate learning objectives and tasks to meet the needs of gifted learners (Beasley et al., 2017). Several iterations of gifted curriculum guides exist, most notably from those published and supported by the NAGC as recently as 2019. More current research points educators toward the idea that making learning more difficult is not necessarily as important as differentiating learning for each student, providing for rich

experiences in content, socialization, and application to real world scenarios (VanTassel-Baska, 2020).

Kaplan (2017) claimed that rigor has various types, including institutional, preparatory, societal, and personal. This rigor looks different for each student and thus requires differentiation for each student. Though some criticize the Common Core standards, VanTassel-Baska (2017) recommended that there are several examples derived from the core-based curriculum standards that have shown promise in gifted education. From the earlier work of Dweck (2006), the importance of mindfulness has allowed students time to meditate, think, and build confidence for upcoming tasks. The use of maker spaces and locations for students to build, use their hands, and be creative can support many other standards typically built into STEM subjects. Technology-based products such as videos, advertisements, and three-dimensional displays and visuals, just as examples, have taken the place of prior paper tasks (VanTassel-Baska, 2017).

Independent Work

Independent study has been a mainstay in traditional and gifted education and is an integral component of a school's ability to effectively educate gifted students (Westberg & Leppien, 2018). According to Westberg and Leppien, "Giving students the opportunity to conduct interest-based independent investigations can increase student learning, enhance students' intrinsic motivation, create self-directed learners, and develop creative producers" (p. 1). Further research supports that student choice and independent learning are important to students and provide better conceptions of their overall learning experiences (Mullet et al., 2018). In the Mullet et al. survey of students, students overwhelmingly preferred learning choice, learning presentation, academic safety, and academic freedom to explore topics of value to them.

Acceleration Opportunities

Another common theme for the education of gifted students is providing them opportunities to accelerate in subject and grade level curriculum. This can take the form of early entrance to schools, testing out of certain subjects, university-based programs while in high school, individualized online or correspondence courses, advanced placement and International Baccalaureate courses, dual credit courses, and mentorship opportunities (NAGC, 2020). Although schools have moved away from acceleration as a standard response to the educational needs of gifted students, Assouline et al. (2015) found that the students who participate in acceleration programs tend to be more ambitious for future acceleration opportunities, are academically challenged, and are socially accepted. These students were not as likely to be prey to the boredom that often is associated with highly gifted students who are in like ability courses with their traditional peers. Further, in that study, students who engaged in acceleration opportunities participated and completed graduate programs at a higher rate than school peers who did not participate in acceleration programs. A meta-analysis of 100 years of gifted research by Steenbergen-Hu et al. (2016) revealed that accelerated programs have a significantly higher effect size on the performance of gifted students when compared to the traditional performance of their peers (EF = .70) and older students in the same course (EF = .09).

Like Ability Grouping

The fourth important aspect of gifted education includes homogenous grouping. Homogenous grouping is an instructional strategy that separates students by ability, needs, skills, and interests. In relation to gifted programs, this form of grouping shows far superior results when students are grouped with peers of their own abilities. On average, results of this approach to grouping show an additional year's worth of growth of one-third to three-fifths over cluster

grouping alone. Other studies and meta-analyses have revealed that classes which are ability grouped have an effect size of somewhere between .19 and .30 and classes specifically designed to ability group gifted students have an effect size of .37 (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). Although homogenous grouping has often come with criticism for its negative affect on a student's academic self-concept, studies show that high-achieving students who are grouped for the purpose of acceleration and gifted programs exhibit the same self-conceptions as their peers in non-ability-grouped classes (Preckel et al., 2019). Recent studies have revealed that, on average, students in homogenous groups performed slightly better than heterogeneous groups in reading, mathematics, and science (Kemper, 2020; Wyman & Watson, 2020).

Differentiated Instruction

A common trend in recent research on gifted education and the strategies to meet the needs of learners is the concept and practice of differentiating instruction for all learners (Beasley et al., 2017; VanTassel-Baska, 2020). Studies have found that teachers who studied and practiced differentiation techniques within their professional learning communities and classrooms gained confidence and practice, thus raising teacher collective efficacy (Voelkel, 2022: DeNeve et al., 2015).

To most educators, it would seem reasonable that differentiated instruction is good practice regardless of the student. Differentiation is often included in most standards-based teacher evaluations systems (Williams & Hebert, 2017). The question by recent researchers has been around identifying what is and what is not differentiated instruction. Robinson (2019) reviewed teacher and administrator responses to the definition and application of differentiation and compared the results. The results revealed that most of the examples were viewed by teachers and campus leaders as differentiation although the degree of differentiation was seen

differently due to varying definitions of and ideas about differentiation.

Instructional Needs of Emerging Bilingual Students

The nomenclature for identifying English learners has sometimes been confusing. Formerly known as English as a Second Language (ESL) students, the category changed to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students then became English Learners (ELs). In Texas, the category most recently became Emergent Bilingual Learners (EBLs), as approved by the Texas Senate in August 2021 (Texas Senate Bill 2066, 2021).

One of the seminal writers about emergent bilingual learners is Claude Goldenberg. In 2014, he suggested three major findings from research about learners who are not proficient in English: (a) effective practices for all students are likely to be effective with English learners, and vice versa; (b) English learners require additional instructional supports; and (c) home language can be used to promote academic development. Goldenberg contended that there is a fourth principle not necessarily found in his synthesis of English learner research but is found in other studies: English learners need early and ample opportunities to develop proficiency in English. Goldenberg offered a synopsis of strategies that are proven to help English learners improve their educational experience, as next discussed.

Effective Practices

Goldberg (2014) reviewed numerous research and studies about the attributes of instruction proven to be effective for EBLs. Of importance, those attributes included the need for clear objectives, challenging and age appropriate material, intentionally designed curriculum, support when new skills are taught, modeling during instruction, and active participation. Further findings by Goldenberg demonstrated the need for teachers to provide detailed feedback, the need for students to apply new learning to other skills and situations, a review of instructional

practices for effectiveness, interaction among students in a structured environment, frequent assessment and re-teach, and clear classroom routines and behavioral norms.

Additional Instructional Supports

Goldenberg (2014) stated that sheltered instruction, or a way of modifying and supporting instruction for English learners, contributes to the learning of academic content and skills, but does not necessarily show signs of helping acquisition of English. Goldenberg's proposed supports listed earlier were rooted in helping students acquire content, not always language, and can traditionally be found in other support classes in schools, such as Response to Intervention (Zirkel, 2018) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (Edwin & Barr, 2021) strategies deployed by teachers for students who are struggling. Within Goldenberg's 2014 study, these interventions included building on student experiences, using graphic organizers, using pictures and demonstrations, and giving additional practice time, as well as many other strategies typically associated with teacher best practices. Goldenberg further noted that although these interventions are not necessarily specific to helping with language acquisition, there are strategies, like using cognates, that aide in this process. In his summarization of the research and findings, Goldenberg stated that although we find these strategies commonly used in schools for various reasons and purposes, as of the time of his 2104 article, very little research had been completed to suggest that these strategies did indeed improve language acquisition. Further research into instructional supports for ELs, such as sheltered instruction, found that although school districts are bound by the 1974 Supreme Court's ruling in *Lau v. Nichols*, ELs often are placed in English speaking classrooms only with little change in curriculum to meet their instruction needs (Johnson et al., 2018).

Home Language

The percentage of English language learners grew from 9.2% of total students in the United States in 2010 to 10.2% in 2018, representing approximately 5 million students. Further, Spanish was the home language of 75.2% of all ELL students, equating to approximately 3.8 million students, or 7.7% of all students in public education between kindergarten and 12th grade (NCES, 2021). In his synthesis of research on the subject, in 2014 Goldenberg noted that five meta-analyses conducted between 1985 and 2014 found that allowing English learners to practice reading and mathematics in their home language had better results than English immersion programs. He broke down the use of home language as a teaching tool in two different scenarios: using home language as a tool to teach reading and mathematics and using the home language to provide definitions and cognates of English words in a primarily English classroom. He pointed out that although dual language programs were gaining momentum and popularity in schools at that time, there was little research then to support those programs, other than the outlook seemed promising. However, more recent researchers have provided anecdotal and observational data that support how dual language programs are one way of embracing the differences emerging in classrooms, given the right teaching, community support, and participation of English and Spanish speakers (Mitchell, 2018; Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019; Baker, 2018).

Instructional Needs of Gifted Emergent Bilingual Students

Little research can be found addressing the emotional, social, and educational classroom needs of identified GT students who also are EBLs. Almost all research that exists on the subject addressed the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs, the reasons this occurs, and possible changes that could help alleviate the problem. In the surveyed material, the

factor for underrepresentation that repeats itself is poverty. Hamilton et al. (2018) found a direct association between the level of poverty of students and the number of students identified as gifted. Those researchers found that even when norming for high achievement in mathematics and reading, students categorized as receiving free and reduced lunch were less likely to be identified for gifted programming than their peers. Findings from their research attribute the cause of this underrepresentation to low expectations of students of poverty, lack of resources provided by the district in the form of transportation, and the lack of allocation of district funding. They found that campuses with poorer students were more likely to receive additional forms of funding for remediation rather than for acceleration.

Yet, there are some reports and studies that give educators insight into addressing the needs of gifted and emergent language learners. The National Center for Research on Gifted Education (Mun et al., 2016) conducted a systematic review of the literature associated with providing the educational needs of gifted EBLs. The findings identified four major methods of teaching gifted EBLs: English immersion, English as a second language programs, traditional bilingual education programs, and dual language programs. Of these programs, these authors identified that English immersion and dual language programs have the most benefit to the cognitive development of high ability students, regardless of language. They also noted that heritage language programs (those taught in the home language of the student) probably have the highest ability to help students but few of these programs exist in U.S. schools. Further, researchers found several interventions and strategies that support gifted EBLs, such as mathematical mentoring programs and cluster grouping (Cho et al., 2015).

In 2016, The National Center for Research on Gifted Education (Mun et al., 2016) identified several key factors for practitioners for identification and development of EBLs. Those

factors include the use of multiple assessments that take language out of the equation, focusing on the student's strengths rather than weaknesses or language barriers, providing instruction based on the student's needs rather than on nationally- or state-developed assessments, and using dynamic assessment that allows teachers to work directly with students and assess the speed at which they master concepts. Further factors also identified by the NCRGE included developing skills in the student's home language to foster support at home; consistently evaluating the program, data, and instruction; and allowing gifted identification to occur across grade levels as students acquire language skills.

Dynamic Assessments

According to the National Center for Research of Gifted Education (2016), "Dynamic assessment is an alternative approach to measuring cognitive ability that may be used successfully with low income, minority, and linguistically diverse students" (p. 21). The Center authors explained that dynamic assessment (DA) is a measure of a student's ability to learn and adapt rather than a static assessment that measures knowledge and/or ability at a point in time. The idea of a DA is taken from Vygotsky's (1978) term Zone of Proximal Development which attempts to understand that which a student can learn by themselves compared to what they can learn when given instruction or aid. As such, a DA can be more interactive and provides instruction and accommodation within the assessment and further assesses how a student responds to information, the accommodations, and transfer to new learning. Typically, the DA includes a pretest and posttest with intervention in between and allows time for those giving the assessment to determine the student's response. Dynamic assessment takes many forms with the core function being to allow students to exhibit their ability in ways different from standard assessments like multiple-choice assessments, IQ testing, state assessments, the Measures of

Academic Progress (MAP) testing, and other approaches that allow the student's ability in English to influence the test results. Further, dynamic assessment provides a child some scaffolded help from the examiner to accommodate for a language barrier.

The National Center for Research on Gifted Education (2016) noted that there is very little current research on the practice of dynamic assessment as a tool for identifying giftedness in emergent bilingual learners. A current review of the literature around dynamic assessment revealed similar findings. Although there is much writing about the theory of using dynamic assessment, there is little research about the practice, success, shortcomings, and learning from using a dynamic assessment in schools.

However, some studies have included dynamic assessment for alternatively assessing a student's gifted ability (Popa & Pauc, 2015; NCRGE, 2016; Mun et al., 2020). The most recent researchers and references to dynamic assessment cite the research contained in one paramount study. Although that study is now just over 20 years old, the results were still significant enough to draw attention to dynamic assessment as a viable tool that can help better identify giftedness in minority students. In that 2001 study by Lidz and Macrine, the authors reported a 4% gain in the number of appropriately identified ethnic minority students into a gifted education program when a dynamic assessment was used in comparison to not using a dynamic assessment. More recently, Popa and Pauc (2015) reported a significant difference ($d = .81$) in better identifying potential giftedness in students when using a dynamic assessment when comparing between a control group and an experimental group. However, this study, conducted in Romania, was isolated to 50 students, all of one culture, language, and socio-economic background. Later, Al-Hroub and Whitebread (2019) found that the use of a DA offered a potentially more accurate assessment of a student's mathematics knowledge in comparison to achievement and IQ tests.

According to these researchers, the DA was a much more valid approach to understanding what students knew about mathematics and how to help them progress.

However, dynamic assessment can have drawbacks. Sahragard and Heidari (2017) discussed the benefits of dynamic assessment and suggested that it considers the student's past, present, and future. However, these authors raised concern about how much assistance or mediation should be provided on a consistent basis without altering an invisible line of labeled giftedness in schools. Mun et al. (2016) shared their concern that although dynamic assessment has shown signs of leveling the playing field for minority and bilingual learners, little studies exist to substantiate the idea. Models and studies of dynamic assessment exist but mostly have focused on dynamic assessment as a tool for assessing the strengths of students, despite noticeable weakness known as twice-exceptionalism (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Poehner & Wang, 2021).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is needed for enacting a change that leads to more equity for all learners, including gifted emergent bilingual learners. John Downton (1973) first introduced the idea of transformational leadership in 1973 by exploring the relationship between leaders and followers. A few years later, expansion of this idea brought about a concept of leaders and followers working together to provide solutions of productivity, motivation, and morality, specifically to improve equitable school conditions and outcomes of students who are traditionally underserved (Burns, 1978). Based on that beginning of the construct of transformational leadership, over the last 50 years, much research has been conducted to substantiate the use of transformational leadership in schools.

Guidance for school leaders of transformational change is abundant. Transformational

leadership calls on school leaders to develop a mission and vision that is known by all stakeholders, lead the work by being respectful and inspiring, use data and a growth mindset to question practices and develop solutions, and provide stakeholders support and feedback (Prince, 2021). In an empirical review of 63 separate studies on the use of transformational type leadership, Leithwood (2021) found five components most beneficial, including building productive relationships and communication with families, improving the school's connection with the community, employing collaborative decision making, practicing distributive leadership that involves all stakeholders, and aligning resources to achieve established goals which include appropriate staffing for instructional programs.

Leaders in educational settings must call upon transformational and transactional leadership styles depending on the task or challenge at hand (Atasoy, 2020; Baptiste, 2019). Maker (2022) called on educators to use transformational leadership as a framework for long-term change around equity. This framework allows school leaders to guide, inspire, and facilitate change rather than a transactional leadership approach that directs others to change. The transformational framework allows others to be part of the change process, and allows risk taking, open-mindedness, innovation, and collaboration.

Further, drawing on the work of Sternberg (2020), Maker (2022) stated that transformational versus transactional leadership correlates to a change we should employ in identifying and teaching students with giftedness. Gifted education teaching and screening practices are often associated with transactional exchanges, such as being identified for giftedness, therefore in return, the gifted student should get good grades, go to good schools, behave accordingly, and perform well in special and rigorous coursework (Sternberg, 2020). These practices often have been the root cause of the underrepresentation of certain minority

groups in gifted programs (McBee & Makel, 2019; Siegle et al., 2016). However, if students are identified and taught using a transformational leadership approach that better identifies and, more importantly, cultivates giftedness, educators can more effectively help all students actualize their potential (Maker, 2022; Sternberg, 2020).

Summary

The research indicates that educators have unknowingly created an opportunity gap in the number of emergent bilingual learners identified as gifted and talented. As such, these students do not gain access to the most rigorous curriculum, services to support them emotionally and socially, and future educational opportunities that lead to post-secondary success. One cause for this gap is the screening and assessment practices of school entities that fail to identify gifted students through the veil of their not knowing English. Further data support that even if an EBL is identified as gifted, research does not exist that supports the type and scope of learning that best supports these learners to retain them in the program. The purpose of this case study was to explore educators' perceptions as the inclusion of a dynamic assessment was explored as a tool for identifying gifted emergent bilingual learners. The reviewed literature established a foundation by which to create and study a dynamic assessment as a tool to identify previously unidentified students. Chapter 3 provides details about the proposed methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a description of the research design for this qualitative case study. To describe the research design, this chapter includes a detailed review of the population studied and how sampling was accomplished, including the process for selecting participants to be involved in the study. Next, data collection strategies, data collection processes, and data analysis procedures are detailed and reported. Described next are the important validity and reliability considerations and a detailed account of the limitations associated with the study, as well as a description of the ethical considerations and inherent weaknesses embedded in the study to provide an understanding of how the design provided a level of trustworthiness such that the research findings are meaningful.

The district identified for this study has interest in initiating a change process by introducing dynamic assessment to better identify all potentially gifted learners, regardless of their culture and ethnicity. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine principals' and teachers' mindsets about potential giftedness in Latinx emergent bilingual learners, as well as their perspectives about employing dynamic assessment for identifying students for gifted programming. Research has found that dynamic assessments have been used successfully to better identify giftedness in students, specifically those who do not speak English fluently (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Poehner & Wang, 2021). Thus, in this study, evidence was gathered, common themes coded, and findings reported to document principal and teacher perspectives about including dynamic assessment. It is my hope that others can learn from the process, apply the findings to their own settings, and develop ideas for further research to be considered.

The following questions guided this study as they relate to the process of identifying and exploring a dynamic assessment as part of the battery of assessments for gifted identification.

1. How do elementary campus principals and teachers perceive the potential for emergent bilingual learners to be identified as gifted?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers and principals about dynamic assessments and their understanding of how to use those assessments for identifying emergent bilingual students for gifted programming?

To study these questions, a qualitative case study was employed to explore a real-life system over time through data collection utilizing multiple sources of information, as suggested by Creswell (2018). Based on research discussed in Chapter 2, there is undeniable proof that a gap exists in the number of students who qualify for or are placed in gifted programs if they are other than White or Asian. This study was designed to examine principals' and teachers' perceptions about dynamic assessment. The studied school district mirrors national and state data in the underrepresentation of Latinx students for gifted programs.

Research Design

A qualitative case study was deemed the best approach for documenting principals' and teachers' perceptions about potentially gifted emergent bilingual learners and their related perceptions about a dynamic assessment as a tool for identifying such learners. According to Creswell (2018), a case study can be utilized to explore a real-life system over time through detailed data collection utilizing multiple sources of information. Further, case studies can provide more detail, depth, and meaning when observed during a current phenomenon and can be used to expand on existing theories (Yin, 2017). Using a qualitative approach allows the researcher to synthesize qualitative data in the form of stories, anecdotes, and narratives shared by participants through use of interviews, focus groups, and collection of relevant documents. A qualitative case study helps eliminate biases and weaknesses that can be inherent in only

quantitative methods (Creswell, 2018). Further, Hesse-Biber (2017) argued that a case study offers five benefits, including triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. As such, a qualitative case study was appropriate for gathering the thoughts and feelings of educators as they engaged in the initial stages of a change process while considering the implementation of a new assessment for gifted identification. Finally, a case study was especially useful in recording and accurately describing principals' and teachers' perceptions during this change phenomenon of exploring dynamic assessment. Participants provided perceptions about supports and barriers that exist for a dynamic assessment to be considered for implementation. Data were collected, coded, and analyzed through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document collection and analysis, followed by coding and analysis of data.

The first phase of this case study was the collection of district documents pertinent to gifted and talented education as a backdrop to contribute to the narrative of educator perceptions. Documents collected and reviewed included the district protocol for GT identification, instruments used in GT screening and assessment, campus and district improvement plans, and professional development calendars and agendas.

The second phase included two focus groups in which teacher participants were asked to discuss the series of questions found in the focus group interview protocol (Appendix A). Focus groups can be an important component of qualitative research through use of relatively unstructured and open-ended questions that evoke opinions and viewpoints from participants (Creswell, 2018). These focus groups included two separate clusters of seven elementary teachers from within the studied district: (a) kindergarten through 2nd grade and (b) 3rd through 5th grade. The focus group setting provided teachers the opportunity to share their unique perspectives on how they identify students with potential giftedness and allowed them to provide

their perspectives about the potential use of a dynamic assessment as an alternative way for identification.

The second phase of this qualitative study also included semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with elementary teachers and campus principals using the protocol found in Appendix B and Appendix C respectively. Two elementary teachers from each focus group (K-2 and 3-5) were interviewed to gain further insight into teacher perspectives that might not have been publicly voiced during the previously conducted focus groups. In addition, interviews were conducted with four campus principals as these participants are traditionally responsible for leading the campus thinking and mindset for the initial identification of students with potential giftedness, screening students with potential giftedness, and finally identifying students with giftedness for acceptance into the district's gifted and talented program.

The third phase of this study included the analysis and synthesis of data collected from all points. The focus groups and in-depth interviews were audio recorded, with participant permission, then transcribed through Rev.com™ to provide an audio and written version for appropriate coding.

Before going into further detail on the specifics of the three phases, it is important to understand the ethical considerations to be made regarding the proposed research as well as to discuss the population and sample of participants to be considered.

Ethical Assurances

Parsons (2013) maintained that several ethical principles must be maintained when conducting action research, including minimizing the risk of harm, obtaining informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding deceptive practices, and providing the right to withdraw.

Ethical Standards

As the researcher for this study, it was essential that I maintained the validity of the reported data. To do so, I followed all standards, agreements, protocols, and ethical practices in the collection and reporting of data. Specifically, I adhered to the principles recommended by Bryman (2012) that the research or practices cause no harm to participants, provide opportunity for informed consent and consideration for participant confidentiality, and assure that there is no part of the study that is deceptive. Further, I completed ethical human subjects research training, including testing that assured an appropriate level of understanding.

All data collection tools and practices were sanctioned and approved by the university institutional review board, with oversight as needed by my major professor, dissertation committee members, and site district superintendent. Further, all participants were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could stop participating at any point. All participants signed an informed consent document. Approval for this study was granted from the institutional review board (IRB) with a determination that there was no risk of harm to participants' physical or emotional self. Participants were able to decline participation without concern for retaliation and could withdraw their participation at any time. Participants were given the opportunity to look at the transcript of the focus group and/or individual interview and provide feedback; thus, inter-rater reliability was established through member-checking and triangulation of data. During peer review with non-participating colleagues and external educators for field testing of protocols, identifying information about participants was omitted to maintain confidentiality.

Further, all records and artifacts collected in this study remained private and confidential through use of locked storage. To remain secure, all information was stored within a locked

office and clearly marked confidential. Digital information was stored on a portable drive that remained locked with a passcode for the duration of the study. Per federal regulations, all information concerning the identity of the participants will be maintained for three years and then destroyed.

Researcher Positionality

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), researchers bring value to a study, but the researcher should be clear about the values and positionality they bring to the study. As Berger (2015) explained, researchers position themselves in relation to the context and setting of the research, including their social position, personal experiences, and political/personal beliefs. This section provides a context of my position within the study, including life and professional experiences, that could or might influence outcomes of the study. By acknowledging these factors, my purpose was to prevent any biases from factoring into the study and its outcomes.

It is important to recognize that, at the time of the study, I was a practicing principal in the studied district and as such my role could have the potential to sway answers to questions, although there were no teacher participants from my campus. Even so, it was important for me to carefully ask questions in ways that did not lead to certain answers or cause participants to respond less openly. It also was important to account for possible biased answers by participants as well as my own bias in analyzing and coding responses. Journaling was used to monitor bias throughout the study, including analysis and coding of collected data. Understanding this, care was taken to bracket my experiences, roles, and understandings through each phase of the study. Creswell and Poth (2017) described bracketing as when researchers “set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (p. 78).

As the researcher, I am in my mid-40's, White, married, and both my wife and I have served as educators and educational leaders for over 20 years. In that time, I served as a teacher, assistant principal, associate principal, and principal both at a middle school and a high school. I became aware of the noticeably low number of students identified for giftedness, based on state reported data. Further, my observations of gifted student classrooms illuminated for me the disparity in the number of Latinx students within the program. This perception then led to questions, both for me and for fellow campus educators, about the processes by which students are identified for GT services and how those processes are possibly hindering Latinx student participation.

Personally, my walk of faith has also influenced my perceptions of a possible gap in identification of Latinx students for GT programming. For many years, I have participated in mission-based trips to a Central American country. Through those experiences, I observed that the people we interacted with, although looking different and speaking a language different than mine, still exhibit the same forms of communication, needs, wants, skills, and intelligences. The only noticeable differences were that these individuals did not speak English fluently, have access to the same forms and level of education, nor access to work and funding that would or would not influence life decisions made. The importance of education and language acquisition has filtered into my roles as an educator while trying to manage educational policy that benefits all students.

Population and Sampling

This study focused on one north Texas school district referred to as Happy Valley Independent School District (HVISD), a pseudonym used to maintain confidentiality of the district. Permission and support from within the district were agreed upon prior to the onset of

the study. The location of this study was chosen because of the recognized need for a study in this district about the topic of under-identified gifted learners, specifically Latinx students.

Context of the Studied Site

This case study occurred in a medium sized, suburban school district in north Texas. According to the Texas Education Agency, at the time of the study there were approximately 5,000 students enrolled in the studied district with over half of the enrolled students classified as Hispanic. At that time, almost 75% of the students were economically disadvantaged and about half were classified as at risk. As related to this study, of the total enrollment, approximately 25% were English learners with approximately 5% classified as gifted and talented. In comparison, the Texas Education Agency reported that, at the time of the study, school districts across Texas averaged approximately 53% of their enrolled students classified as Hispanic, 20% as English learners, and about 8% as gifted and talented. Of note, Hispanic and gifted categories of students showed evidence of at least 1% growth from the previous year while English learners were reported to grow by 5.5% from the previous year in Texas.

The primary focus of this study was to reveal campus principal and teacher perceptions about student giftedness as well as their respective perspectives about a dynamic assessment as a potential part of a portfolio of tools for educators to identify giftedness. In most instances, school districts begin screening students for giftedness in elementary school. As such, this study included four elementary campuses, including one elementary campus that houses a type of gifted magnet school.

Population

The identified population to which the recruited sample is expected to generalize included campus principals and teachers in districts that serve emergent bilingual potentially

gifted learners. Although the selected site is a medium-sized district, the findings of this study may be reflective of other districts that recognize a disparity in the number of emergent bilingual learners who are identified for gifted and talented programs.

Selection of Participant Sample

Stratified random sampling was used to select seven elementary teachers from within the site district to participate in the two focus groups (3-4 per group). Stratified sampling was selected for this portion of data collection as it provided opportunity within the site district to collect focus group responses from two key groups of elementary teachers: three kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers that primarily screen and help identify students with potential giftedness and four 3rd through 5th grade teachers that teach and support students with potential and identified giftedness. Further, this type of sampling allowed for the possible differences between the responses of each sub-group of teachers from various education levels and ensured representation of ideas and opinions.

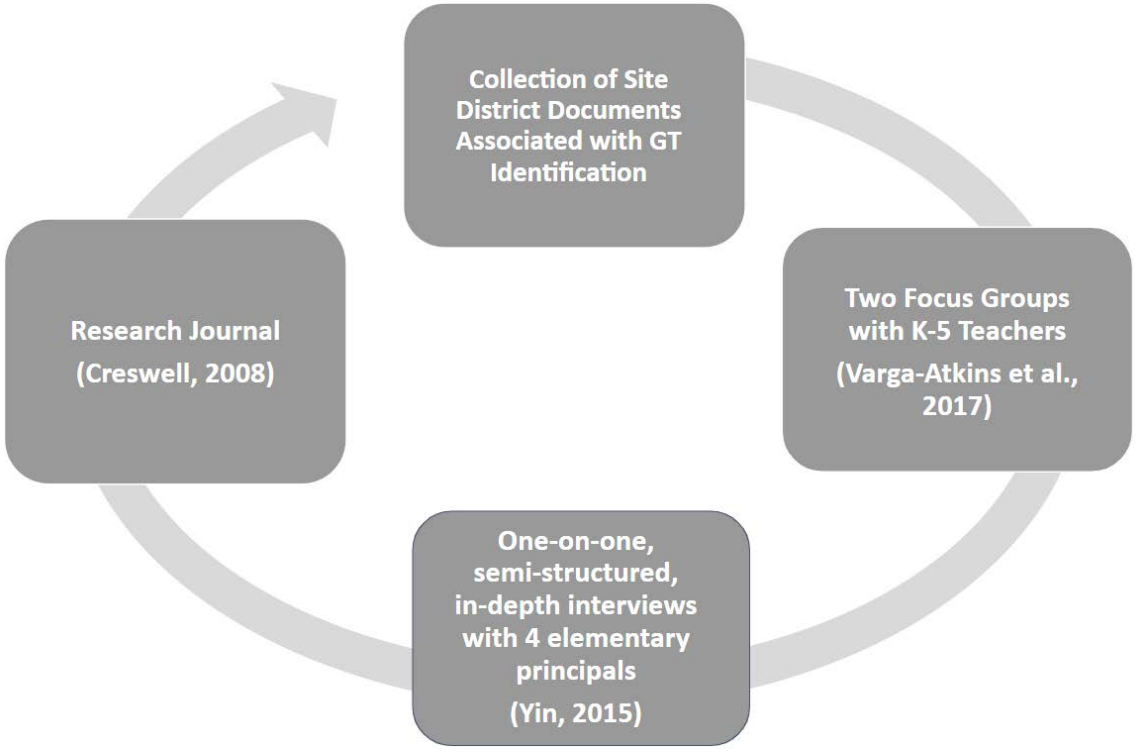
Stratified random sampling also was used to select two elementary teachers to participate in semi-structured individual in-depth interviews. One teacher from each grade level group of kindergarten through 2nd grade and 3rd through 5th grade was selected to provide further insight and context to focus group answers. This type of sampling allowed for differences between each grade level group and to support, or not support, answers provided during the teacher focus groups. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select campus principals who directly influence the gifted and talented curriculum, selection and screening criteria, and the ultimate selection of students into the program. Semi-structured individual in-depth interviews were conducted with four elementary principals within the site district.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data for this case study were collected in several ways, including focus groups, semi-structured individual interviews, and document review. Creswell and Poth (2017) noted that a case study should include a wide array of procedures that include interviews to build depth and context. Yin (2015) listed interviews as one of the key forms of data collection in a case study. Further, the use of focus groups, in combination with individual interviews, can help explore a range of questions and seek more in-depth answers, as well as highlight the difference in opinions of the issues at hand rather than a predetermined answer through a survey. Focus groups also help compile a large amount of qualitative data in a short period of time (Varga-Atkins et al., 2017). Figure 2 depicts the variables that comprised the plan for collecting data for this case study.

Figure 2

Data Collection Framework



At the time that this study was originally planned for another district, as part of a course assignment in the doctoral program, I gathered data that focused on two primary questions: (a) What knowledge and implementation practices are currently in place that involve dynamic assessments? and (b) What barriers exist that hinder the use of dynamic assessments as a tool for GT identification? Several themes emerged that included minimal knowledge and use of dynamic assessments, varying definitions of giftedness by district leaders and campus administrators, and varying identification thresholds of giftedness. Based on those findings, I adjusted my thoughts about data collection to focus on two separate but similar data collection tools, individual interviews with teachers and campus leaders and focus group interviews with campus teachers. The next portion of this chapter provides a discussion of the data collection tools and procedures to be utilized.

Document Review

The first phase of this case study began with the collection and review of district-created documents pertinent to gifted education. These data sources were considered at the onset of the study to gain an understanding of what processes, protocols, and training were in place that shaped the current state of gifted education and identification within the site district. This information provided insight for probing questions within the focus groups and interviews as well as provided supplemental data and understanding to themes determined from the focus groups and interviews. Primary of these sources were district-created documents associated with giftedness and the assessment of gifted students, including district protocols for GT identification, instruments used in GT screening and assessment, campus and district improvement plans, and professional development calendars, agendas, and assessments (including dynamic assessments if used). District documents associated with gifted programming

were reviewed and coded for applicable themes to help supplement data collected from the individual and focus group interviews.

Focus Groups

The second phase of this study was the convention of two separate focus groups and individual interviews. Questions utilized for the focus groups were centered on teacher knowledge about gifted identification, years of experience, gifted training, advantages and disadvantages of current gifted identification procedures within the district, and knowledge of dynamic assessments. The purpose of focus groups was to collect responses from educators that could inform the one-on-one interviews and the analysis of documents collected and reviewed. In an effort to be more convenient for participants, a remote and web-based meeting was conducted using Zoom™. This allowed the meeting to be recorded visually and audibly for future review, with participants' permission. Each focus group was conducted at a time convenient to all participants and lasted approximately one hour. The focus group protocol included questions designed to provide an understanding of the knowledge, experience, and training teachers possess regarding gifted student identification and teaching. Rev.com™ was utilized to transcribe audio-recorded responses from participants for ease of coding that would lead to common themes from all data sources.

Interviews

One-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were utilized to collect thoughts and viewpoints of selected teachers and principals involved in the identification of gifted students. These interviews were scheduled in 45-minute increments to be mindful of the participant's time. However, they were purposefully scheduled to be long enough to provide time for a free-flowing atmosphere and allow interviewees to share their full thoughts. With participant permission,

principal interviews were conducted in person and audio recorded using a digital sound recorder application on a smart phone. Transcription of the recordings was conducted by Rev.com and stored securely for analysis. Teacher interviews were conducted via Zoom™ and were audio and visually recorded followed by transcription using Rev.com and stored securely for analysis. The semi-structured interview protocol was vetted through field testing by fellow classmates then further by district personnel not involved in the study. The same interview protocol was followed for each person interviewed, regardless of school assignment. Briggs and Coleman (2019) noted that this type of interview process allows researchers to probe and elicit elaboration and dialogue from the participant.

Research Journal

Creswell (2008) noted that using a journal, or a personal document to collect data, can be a key way to compile qualitative data during the course of a research study. A research journal was used to record communication, document the research process, identify and code emerging themes found through focus groups and interviews, verify and validate findings, and record the review and coding of documents associated with identifying giftedness. The journal also provided a way for me to continuously monitor any potential personal bias that might arise as I gathered and analyzed data.

Data Analysis Strategies

Creswell and Poth (2017) noted that a case study is appropriate for analyzing and describing a case in its natural setting. Data collected in this research study are provide a chronology of events after analyzing and coding multiple sources of information and presenting them in a way that tells the story of one school district in its potential endeavor to introduce dynamic assessment as an alternate tool for identifying giftedness in students. Careful analysis

was conducted following the completion of focus group interviews, individual interviews, and analysis of documents. Analysis and coding of documents related to the current state of GT programming, training, protocols, and other materials related to the introduction of dynamic assessments were completed to supplement verbal accounts. All data then were collected, coded, and organized into cohesive ideas, struggles, themes, and re-occurring experiences of the participants and observed phenomena. As suggested by Creswell and Poth, these naturalistic generalizations are presented in a singular, synthesized, and chronological narrative that allows readers to make their own generalizations to learn from, apply to their current settings, or transfer to a similar context. Results from the data collected were compiled in a research journal and analyzed using the following steps: (a) collect and code responses from the two teacher focus groups and principal interviews, as well as campus and district documents associated with giftedness identification; (b) review coding and emerging themes from collected sources; then (c) perform inter-rater reliability through member checking.

Maxwell (2013) pointed out that the goal of qualitative research is to help place data into categories for analysis and for re-organizing all information collected into broader themes. As such, several strategies were employed to ensure appropriate and accurate coding and disaggregation of the data collected. After Rev.com transcribed the recordings of the focus group and individual interviews, I listened to each recording while reading the transcript to assure accuracy. Next, each interviewed participant was sent the transcript of the interview, for member checking. Once any changes were made, Nvivo™ Qualitative Data Software was used to aid in the coding process. For interviews and focus groups, inductive coding was used to find initial codes, categories, and emerged themes. This process helped to develop context as to the struggles, fears, challenges, and successes in identifying gifted learners, especially Latinx

students, as well as participants' perspectives about dynamic assessments.

Limitations

Professionally, my role as a principal could have influenced portions of this study that relied on documenting perceptions of principals and teachers. Qualitative research should not seek to prove an opinion or theory, but simply report data as questions are asked. Throughout this process, I was mindful of my personal and professional beliefs. However, it was and should be paramount that as educators we strive to improve policy and processes for the benefit and equitable treatment of students. It was with this premise that the study moved forward, knowing my personal and professional beliefs, asking questions of those participating in the process, reporting the outcomes, and checking my opinions at the door. It should further be noted that my professional relationship with some participants contains different elements of interaction and supervisory requirements. Care was taken to mitigate any potential influence I had on perceptions, answers, and data collected, strict coding guidelines, and triangulation of all data collected. Another potential limitation is the lack of knowledge principals and teachers may have had about the use of dynamic assessment and how it may work to better serve emergent bilingual learners. As this study was conducted in a relatively medium-sized school district, the findings may be generalizable only to districts of similar size or smaller or to districts with little background in using dynamic assessment as a tool for identifying gifted student.

Summary

This chapter presents the methodology used in the design of the study. Decisions about the research design, ethical considerations and researcher positionality, sampling, data devices and collection, and data analysis strategies are discussed. Chapter 4 includes a report of the findings from all types of collected data, with a description of the sample and summary of

themes that emerged from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and review of associated documents.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of campus principals and elementary teachers as dynamic assessment is considered as part of the gifted and talented identification protocol. This study was designed to understand current teacher and campus principal capacity for identifying Latinx students for giftedness and to document how the use of a dynamic assessment could change educator perceptions after introduction and future availability for use as a tool for identifying giftedness.

Overview of the Study

This study was guided by two research questions. Research question (RQ) 1 asked: How do elementary campus principals and teachers perceive the potential for emergent bilingual learners to be identified as gifted? RQ2 asked: What are the perceptions of elementary teachers and principals about dynamic assessments and their understanding of how to use those assessments for identifying emergent bilingual students for gifted programming?

The sample for the study included nine teachers and four principals from within the studied school district. Purposive sampling was used to select teacher participants for two separate focus groups, one of teachers from kindergarten through second grade and the other for teachers from third through fifth grade. Purposive sampling was used to select two teachers who did not participate in the focus groups for semi-structured individual in-depth interviews because they were not available at the time of the scheduled focus groups. Information collected from these interviews provided a narrative from interviewed teachers free from possible opinions and ideas expressed by others within the focus groups, further validating data collected. Purposive sampling was used to select the four elementary principals for semi-structured individual in-

depth interviews. Principals were selected based on their accessibility within the studied school district and direct leadership influence on decisions made at the studied grade levels. Questions for both the focus groups and individual interviews were open-ended and related to participant experience, practice, and opinions related to teaching and leading classrooms and schools that include emergent bilingual learners and gifted learners.

Data collected from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed using Rev.com and cross-case analysis was used to examine the data and establish themes. Additionally, NVivo™ was used to add additional strength and validity to the established themes discovered in the coding process. The cross-case analysis identified numerous themes and similarities in participants' responses to questions regarding access to gifted programs, training for educators, and supports and barriers that exist as the studied district considers the implementation of a dynamic assessment as part of the identification of gifted students.

All participants work daily with students who are both emergent bilingual learners (EBL) and are, or could be, identified as gifted to participate in the studied district's gifted education program. The process of collecting data included approximately 30-minute face-to-face interviews with four principals and two teachers. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with a total of seven teachers from grades K-2 and 3-5. Informed consent documentation and permission to audio or video record were obtained. Audio and video recordings were then transcribed using Rev.com to ensure precise transcription of responses. Transcriptions were shared with participants for their member checking review. The face-to-face interviews and focus groups allowed for direct interaction with each participant and provided the opportunity for follow up questions if needed. Precluding the interviews and focus groups, a thorough review of all district-created documents related to the purpose of the study was conducted; those

documents included a review of district policy and district protocols and timelines for gifted screening and identification. All data collected added to the synthesis of codes and themes for use in this qualitative study in relationship to the two research questions set forth at the onset of this study.

Overview of Participants

The participants in this qualitative study were all licensed and certified educators or administrators in the suburban school district in which the study was conducted. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics of study participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identify of participants.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Ethnicity	Experience	Position	Grade	GT Cert
Teacher 1	White	10	Teacher	K-2	Yes
Teacher 2	White	26	Teacher	K-2	Yes
Teacher 3	Hispanic	11	Teacher	K-2	Yes
Teacher 4	White	31	Teacher	3-5	Yes
Teacher 5	White	22	Teacher	3-5	Yes
Teacher 6	Hispanic	11	Teacher	3-5	Yes
Teacher 7	White	9	Teacher	3-5	Yes
Teacher 8	Hispanic	15	Teacher	K-2	Yes
Teacher 9	Hispanic	7	Teacher	3-5	Yes
Principal 1	White	22	Principal	K-5	Yes
Principal 2	White	11	Principal	K-5	Yes
Principal 3	White	16	Principal	K-5	Yes
Principal 4	Hispanic	22	Principal	K-5	Yes

All teacher participants had received some gifted and talented teacher training through either the local school district or through the supporting regional service center. Similarly, all

four principals interviewed had received similar training for gifted and talented (GT) education and all had worked previously as a teacher in a classroom setting with gifted students. Further, all teacher and principal participants had received training for teaching EBL students. All participants responded that they have or had taught both GT and EBL students simultaneously in the classroom. The range of experience for all participants was 9-31 years in education, either as a teacher, principal, or both.

Teacher 1 taught elementary students in the younger age bracket of kindergarten through second grade and had 6 years of experience within the studied school district with 10 years overall in education. At the time of the study, she was teaching 38 students, with 14 receiving services via EBL instruction and 1 classified as both GT and EBL. Teacher 2 also taught younger elementary students and had 18 years of experience within the studied district with 26 years overall in education. She had 37 students on her classroom roster with 14 receiving EBL services and 1 classified as both EBL and GT. Teacher 3 also taught younger students and had 1 year of experience within the school district with 11 years overall in education as well as 7 years prior as a teacher aide. She had 53 students on her roster with all 53 receiving EBL services and 1 currently recommended for GT screening through the existing district protocol. Teacher 4 taught elementary students in the older age bracket of grades three through five and had 8 years of experience within the studied school district with 31 years overall in education. She had 54 students on her classroom roster throughout the school day. Of those, 30 were receiving services via EBL instruction, three were are classified as GT, and one was identified as both EBL and GT. Teacher 5 taught elementary students in the older age bracket with 5 years of experience within the studied school district and 22 years overall in education. She served all students on her campus as a STEM teacher which also included providing instructional support for GT students.

That included about 580 students of which 202 were receiving EBL support and about 25 were classified as GT. Of those, eight students were classified as both GT and EBL. Teacher 6 taught elementary students in the older age bracket with 3 years of experience within the studied school district and 11 years overall in education. Her 81 students were classified as receiving GT support. Of those, approximately seven were classified as both GT and EBL. Teacher 7 taught elementary students in the older age bracket with 3 years of experience within the studied school district and 9 years overall in education. She had 56 students on her roster with 17 classified as receiving services via EBL instruction, five were classified as GT, with none classified as both EBL and GT. Teacher 8 taught students in the younger age bracket with 1 year of experience within the studied school district and 15 years overall in education. She had 41 students on her roster with seven who were receiving services via ELB in the older age bracket. She had 5 years of experience within the studied school district and 7 years overall in education. She had 39 students on her roster with 15 who were classified as receiving services via EBL instruction, two were classified as GT, and one was classified as both EBL and GT.

Principal 1 was the principal of an elementary campus that serves as a magnet school for students identified as gifted and talented. She was currently serving in her 12th year in school leadership with 22 years of experience overall. She also served as the K-8 Advanced Academics Coordinator for the school district. She described her leadership style as transformational as she seeks to build input from staff, students, and parents to gain perspective and critical mass for change initiatives that benefit the learning experience for students. Although this principal was not familiar with dynamic assessment, she did fully support alternative assessments like dynamic assessment that should be included as part of the screening and identification process for identifying giftedness in students who might not speak English in the home. Principal 2 was the

principal of an elementary campus that serves all students grades K-5. She was in her 2nd year as the principal of the campus and had been in education for 11 years. She described her leadership style as transformational in nature but she sometimes relies on transactional leadership to move forward the work of the school and its teachers for the benefit of students. Overall, she described her work as continually monitoring and adjusting systems and processes to work for the benefit of students and teachers. This participant was somewhat familiar with dynamic assessments and made the comparison to the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for students who have gaps in their learning. Principal 3 was the principal of an elementary campus that serves all students in grades K-5. She was in her 3rd year as the principal of the campus and had been in education for 16 years. She described her work as mostly transformational rather than transactional in that she relies on jointly decided systems, processes, trust, input, and collectively driven purpose by stakeholders for bettering the instruction and school experience for students. At the time of the study, she was not familiar with dynamic assessment or the use of dynamic assessment for identifying students for gifted and talented programs. Like Principal 2, she mentioned a correlation between dynamic assessments for identifying GT students with the use of the RtI process for identifying and bridging the gaps for struggling students. Principal 4 was the principal of an elementary campus that serves all students in grades K-5. He was in his 1st year as the principal of the campus and had been in education for 22 years. He noted that he taught bilingual education for 11 years as a teacher. He described his leadership style as transformational to gain ideas and create a collective vision for the campus through input and collective goals for teachers and students. Although he was not familiar with the name given to dynamic assessment, when described, he noted that much of his bilingual education teaching experience mirrored the dynamic learning assessment process in that instruction was provided in

a hands-on format which provided manipulatives and assessments for EBL students who did not speak English very well, if at all. He stated that these types of assessments "leveled the playing field" for students who do not speak English. He further stated that he was classified as an EBL in school and this was his preferred method for learning and then teaching in his own classroom.

Results

The findings are presented in a way to accurately reflect data collected and in an order that helps understand the process followed. The findings are organized first by research question with findings related to emerged themes within the research questions. This qualitative case study was proposed as the means for documenting principals' and teachers' perceptions about potentially gifted EBLs and participants' related perceptions about a dynamic assessment as a tool for identifying such learners. To provide context for the comments, opinions, and narratives of those teachers and principals, a review of district-created documents, policies, and protocols was performed. Following the review of district-created documents, policies, and protocols, two focus groups were conducted with participant teachers, four principal interviews, and two teacher interviews were conducted.

Review of District Documents, Policies, and Protocols

The first document reviewed was a district guide for providing a protocol for identifying GT students. According to that guide, the district performs an initial screening of kindergarten students for GT identification. A follow up procedure was described that allows older students, those who either were not identified in kindergarten or who transferred in during a later grade level, to be later referred for GT screening and identification for all subsequent grades. The guide also provides information such as the definition of giftedness adopted from the current Texas Education Code, a list of advanced academic opportunities available to students at various ages

in schooling, and procedures for being furloughed and exited from the program should parents and educators see fit.

Based on information taken from the district guide and later information gathered when interviewing principals and teachers, the district uses a combination of assessments and anecdotal evidence to identify students for its GT program. Those assessments include the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test (NNAT), Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing, and state assessment data. Other evidence collected for screening and identification include a parent and/or teacher referral, teacher observation data, and the student's classroom performance. The NNAT is a nonverbal assessment commonly used for screening and identifying giftedness in students using shapes and figures to evaluate their problem-solving skills. MAP testing is an adaptive-based test which provides teachers, parents, and administrators insight into a student's current knowledge of subject matter and further allows them to make informed decisions for future academic growth. MAP testing is conducted within the school district for students in kindergarten through 9th grade. For students in grade 3 or older, state assessment data are also included as part of the student's GT screening portfolio.

Upon review, the district guidelines for screening and identification are replicated in school district policy and district and campus improvement plans within the studied district. Where applicable, district and campus improvement plans include language that replicates district policy for identification and support of gifted learners. Both district policy and improvement plans were replicated in the district's guide for identification and support of its GT program.

The district does provide support for teacher training and preparation to support both GT and EBL students through internal and external sources. All teachers who provide instruction in

English language arts are expected to gain an English as a Second Language (ESL) certification through the state as part of their teacher credentials. Internal support is provided through training programs to gain this certification. GT training is required of all teachers who provide instruction to identified GT students and advanced level classes. Training is provided through the local regional education center through a series of five courses of varying topics, including the nature and needs of gifted learners, models of differentiation, identification, depth and complexity, and research and talent-based instruction. This series of training equals to 30 hours of staff development for the initial completion of the courses with an additional 6 hours of update training required of teachers each year.

Interviews and Focus Groups

As part of the research and collection of qualitative data, four principals were interviewed using the field-tested principal interview protocol found in Appendix C to understand the context of the principal's experience, style of leadership, past and current experiences with identifying giftedness in students, and thoughts, ideas, and experiences related to the idea of a dynamic assessment as a tool, including perceived supports and barriers that exist for future implementation. All principal participants were interviewed within a weeklong period of time. Interviews lasted approximately 25 to 40 minutes and were conducted in person at a time of the principal's choosing. All interviews were recorded with the principal's permission, accompanied by their understanding and signature of informed consent.

In addition, two teacher focus groups were conducted using a protocol with a developed line of questions, found in Appendix A to understand the context of the teachers' experience, students they currently serve, past and current experiences with identifying giftedness in students, and thoughts, ideas, and experiences related to the idea of a dynamic assessment as a

tool, including perceived supports and barriers that exist for future implementation. Both focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted at a time most convenient for the maximum number of teachers who were initially interested to participate. Both focus groups were recorded via Zoom™ with the teachers' permission as indicated by their understanding and signature of informed consent. Data analysis and review were conducted following each focus group and revealed several similar ideas and themes related to the use of dynamic assessments.

Finally, two additional teachers were interviewed using the field-tested teacher interview protocol found in Appendix B to understand the context of the teacher's experience, past and current experiences with identifying giftedness in students, and thoughts, ideas, and experiences related to the idea of a dynamic assessment as a tool, including perceived supports and barriers that exist for future implementation. Both teacher participants were interviewed within a weeklong period of time. Both interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes and were conducted via Zoom at a time of the principal's choosing. All interviews were recorded with the teacher's permission, accompanied by their understanding and signature of informed consent.

Coded Themes

Following the completion of each focus group and interview, transcripts were produced using Rev.com, corrected for clarity if needed, and released to participants for member checking. Each transcript was read through at least three times as an initial review of possible codes, categories, and themes. Putting pen to paper on the transcripts themselves, initial codes were developed and then categories. Following a hand coding of all documents, the transcripts were uploaded into Delvetool.com™, an online-based transcription tool to help digitally mark and organize responses into codes and then categorize those codes. Each batch of data for focus groups and individual interviews was analyzed and coded with the digital organization tool to

inspect for further categories and themes.

Next, transcripts were then uploaded into NVivo™ for continued analysis and discovery of categories and themes that could have been missed during manual analysis. All transcriptions were auto coded and manually coded using the tools in the software. Coding all transcriptions again helped provide comparative feedback between digitally coded data using the software and manually coded data done by hand, through Delvetool.com, and through NVivo. This process produced 26 codes that emerged from the principal interviews, 22 codes from the teacher focus groups, and 15 codes from teacher interviews. All data batches for teachers and principals were kept separate during this coding process.

Coding tables were created that represent and organize the initial codes into categories and subsequently possible emerged themes. Three tables are displayed in Appendix D that present initial codes, the number of references in individual interviews or focus groups, and the subsequent category assigned.

Finally, the categories were combined into emerging themes by quantifying the number of codes within each category and then the number of categories into similar threads of responses. To verify that emerged themes were consistent with participants responses, all coded responses were then organized into spreadsheets for review, using Excel, Delvetool.com, and NVivo. All participant responses were then read for consistency within each category and named theme. Any responses that were not consistent with the associated theme were moved to a separate category and reapplied to quantify the number of codes and categories within each theme. Table 2 represents the emerged themes with the number of codes and categories within each.

With emerging themes identified, the next section of the findings is organized by research

questions according to participants' answers to individual interview and focus groups questions and categorized within each emergent theme.

Table 2

Emerged Themes

Theme	Coded Responses	Categories
Importance of IQ and Talent-Based Assessments Including Screening and Identification Process	80	3
Improve GT Communication, Referral, and Screening and Identification Process	87	4
Mindset Associated with EBL GT Identification and Support	31	4
Training for Dynamic Assessment and GT Identification	27	1
Language as a Barrier to GT Identification	28	1
Concerns with Dynamic Assessment	5	1

Findings Related to Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand how principals and teachers perceived the gifted potential for EBLs and how a dynamic assessment could be used to identify them for gifted programs. To answer those questions based on the qualitative evidence collected, each research question is provided with contextual and narrative evidence categorized utilizing the emergent themes noted in Table 2. Table 3 provides a summary of how the emerged themes relate to the research questions that guided the study.

The first research question centered on the potential for EBL students to be identified as gifted. Two themes emerged from individual interview and focus group questions that specifically addressed students' potential, including (a) the importance of IQ and talent-based assessments included in the screening process and (b) the need to improve the communication, screening, identification, and support of EBL students for gifted programs.

Table 3

Emerged Themes for Each Research Question

Research Questions	Emerged Themes
RQ 1: Potential of EBLs for GT programs	Importance of IQ and talent-based assessments included in screening and identification process
	Improve GT Communication, Referral, and Screening and Identification Process
RQ2: Perceptions of Dynamic Assessment	Mindset Associated with EBL GT Identification and Support
	Training for Dynamic Assessment and GT Identification
	Language as a Barrier to GT Identification
	Concerns with Dynamic Assessment

The second research question centered on participants' perceptions about dynamic assessment and how they can be used to identify EBL students for gifted programs. Four themes emerged from individual interview and focus group questions that specifically addressed dynamic assessments, including the (a) mindset associated with EBL GT identification and support, (b) training for dynamic assessment and GT identification, (c) language as a barrier to GT identification, and (d) concerns with dynamic assessment.

Research Question 1

> *How do elementary campus principals and teachers perceive the potential for emergent bilingual learners to be identified as gifted?*
>
> Findings for each of the two themes that are related to RQ1 are next reported.

RQ1 Theme 1: Importance of IQ and Talent-Based Assessment in the Screening and Identification Process

Overwhelmingly, principals and teachers stated they believed that EBL learners have the potential to be identified for and participate in gifted programs. Numerous teachers noted that, at the time of the study, numerous students in their classes exhibited some or all the traits of

giftedness but were not identified for gifted education due to several reasons. Those reasons included a language barrier, lack of language-based or hands-on testing opportunities, and communication about the identification process with students and parents. Both principals and teachers stated that they have observed students who are good at problem solving and hands-on activities but lack the English language skills to perform well on current assessments used for GT screening and testing. Both groups mentioned numerous times that it seemed that the testing utilized for GT screening and testing lacked the equity and differentiation needed to produce enough evidence for those students to be identified for and supported in a gifted program. Examples of participant responses are provided below to correlate emergent themes with data and narratives collected.

In the interview, when asked what perceptions the principal had about potentially gifted emergent bilingual learners, Principal 4 made this comment:

> So especially if we [are] talking about Latinx students, any students with any language barriers where English is not your first language, the research says that hands-on visuals or any items that they can make a connection will be a benefit for them. So, giving them a project or hands-on problem to solve, I think it gives them a better opportunity to show their talents or their problem-solving skills. It's leveling the playing field for everybody when it becomes a kind of project based or a problem-solving model.

Much like what Principal 4 stated, Principal 2 offered this statement:

> We almost have to have an investigative approach to be able to identify all students who are potentially gifted. We also have to look at not just their achievement, but their ability to respond to problem solving. If we have a dynamic assessment approach coupled with cognitive ability data and some other pieces, I think that will give us a full picture of the puzzle for all students.

Likewise, Principal 3 expressed a similar belief:

> Yes. If language is a barrier, we're limiting access to students who are potentially gifted and talented, all because of language and all because of the way we choose to assess. So, we're possibly under-representing a population due to language with our choice in the way we assess.

In the interviews and focus groups, when asked what participants perceived about potentially gifted emergent bilingual learners, Teacher 4 expressed a perspective much like what principals said. That teacher explained it this way:

> I see that teachers think because they [students] can't speak English fluently, that they may not have the intelligence. Maybe teachers aren't identifying the intelligence or the giftedness that these bilingual or emergent language students have. I've noticed it in the past with generations of teaching when I would suggest or have other people suggest that maybe (an EBL) is GT and it was kind of like, "Well, we can't test them. We don't know for sure, or they can't speak English, or they scored low on this test or that test and there's it." It's very confusing for teachers to understand that they can be gifted even though they don't speak English fluently.

Teacher 6 added this perspective:

> I'm not sure what tools are out there, if there are any tools that we can have in place to help the language barrier. And, also, about the creativity part, I don't know if there are any tools out there where those two things can merge together to break the barriers for the language.

RQ1 Theme 2: Improvement of GT Communication, Referral, and Screening and Identification Process

The second theme related to RQ1 was about improvement of GT communication, referral, screening, and the identification process. This theme emerged in response to interview questions about the gifted potential of EBLs. Participants responded that there should be continuous improvement in the way all students are referred, screened, and identified for GT programs. Principals and teachers mentioned on numerous occasions that testing practices in their current and prior school districts did not adequately adjust for a language barrier. Current testing practices rely heavily on teacher recommendation and English-based assessments as an initial screener for consideration. Participants noted that the process of screening and identification lacks a rubric for all assessments and considerations along with a portfolio of student work to demonstrate creativity. As mentioned previously in a review of the current

district protocols for identification, the only differentiation for a language barrier currently utilized is offering the NNAT in Spanish for students in grade 3 or younger. Participants also mentioned on several occasions the importance of being more vigilant to include parents in the identification process, including communication about what the gifted program is and its benefits, how the process works, how students will be tested and why, and how parents can participate in the process by providing context and student work that can be included in the portfolio. Examples of participant responses are provided below to correlate emergent themes with data and narratives collected.

In the interview, when asked about perceptions as they relate to identifying students for gifted programs, specifically if the student doesn't speak English in the home, Principal 1 stated, "I don't know that we've ever taken into consideration, other than making parents aware that they can nominate their students or teachers can nominate their students who may speak or may not speak English." This principal continued by saying, "I think, again, I think we are making great strides and making it more equitable. However, we still have a way to go." Principal 2 offered a similar comment, by stating, "From a parent's perspective, I know that once a year a Google form is sent out and I can request that my child be tested or looked at as the potential to be gifted."

In the teacher focus group, when asked to share their experiences with dynamic assessment or other assessments involved in gifted identification, Teacher 1 explained it this way: "But when we're identifying kids right now, especially I know in kindergarten, they're looking at MAP data and DRA data and that is not a good data piece for our EB students." Teacher 4 expanded on that statement by saying, "And I think that we're missing even a lot of those students by not maybe doing a different assessment." When Teacher 6 responded to these

points, this teacher spoke about creativity, saying, “About the creativity part, I don’t know if there are any tools out there where those two things can merge together to break the barriers for the language.”

Research Question 2

> What are the perceptions of elementary teachers about dynamic assessments and their understanding of how to use those assessments for identifying emergent bilingual students for gifted programming?

Data analysis for the second research question resulted in four themes. Findings for each theme are next reported.

RQ2 Theme 1: Mindset Associated with EBL GT Identification and Support

The first theme that emerged related to RQ2 was about the mindset that is associated with EBL GT identification and support. Numerous comments were made by participants who noted the importance of a change in mindset associated with how a district identifies for gifted programs students who do not speak English fluently. Most notably, participants commented that a dynamic assessment, or other assessment measures that differentiate for language barriers, should also come with a mindset of all educators to identify students underrepresented in gifted programs to help them reach their potential. Further, participants offered examples of district measures and protocols that would display this mindset through tangible measures, such as training, personnel to administer such assessments, time for personnel to learn and implement the process, and budget allocations that allow for the appropriate time and training needed. Examples of participant responses are provided below to correlate emerged themes with data and narratives collected.

In relation to this theme, during the interview, Principal 2 spoke about what is best for students, stating,

> I think there are going be teachers out there that want what's best for kids. And they have that mindset of all kids have the potential to be identified for gifted and talented. So, I would even say there's a number of teachers in the district and just general staff members that would be in support of [a dynamic assessment]. Teachers have to have the mindset of all students can be gifted. Not just my White affluent students. I think all students' teachers are going to have to have that mentality that all students, whether they're Spanish speaking, whether they're an African American male or female, all economically disadvantaged students, all students have the potential to be identified for gifted and talented. Right now, I'll just be honest, we don't sit in a culture where that is a mentality among all teachers.

In response to the question about the possible implementation of a dynamic assessment, Principal 1 stated this perspective: "Just the time that it'll take for me to learn what it is and how to assess." Principal 4 spoke about the need for clarity, explaining their perspective this way:

> I don't think that we have true clarity of what gifted and talented means and think that's where we first need to start. What is the true definition of gifted and talented? What does that look like? And then going from there, how can we then really identify our students and use some type of dynamic assessment.

In the teacher focus group, several teachers expressed their views about mindset. Teacher 1expressed the opinion that the greatest constraint is time for teachers. This teacher said: "And then the biggest constraint is time for teachers. It's hard. So, adding one more thing to our plates is almost daunting for sure." Teacher 2 added: "The barrier is going to be time because we only have so much, especially in kindergarten. We're so heavily focused on making sure they can all read that time's going to be a big factor." In response to questions about how EBL students are identified for giftedness, Teacher 5 stated, "I don't want it to seem like we as teachers make judgment, but yet we kind of do because we don't have the evidence to support them in GT."

RQ2 Theme 2: Training for Dynamic Assessment and GT Identification

The second emerged theme for RQ2 related to the need for training for using a dynamic Assessment for GT identification. When asked about their perspectives regarding the identification of EBLs for gifted programs and the potential use of a dynamic assessment,

participants mentioned the need for proper training required to assist teachers and principals. Participants noted that most had participated in required or voluntary training for identifying and supporting GT students but had not used or been trained to use a dynamic assessment. Participants noted the lack of appropriate training, including training for alternate assessments, that provide evidence of giftedness, specifically in EBL students and then how to support them in the classroom. Notably, no teachers nor principals used dynamic assessment as a tool for identifying EBL students for gifted programing in their current or prior school districts. Examples of participant responses are provided below to correlate emerged themes with data and narratives collected.

In the teacher focus group, when questions were asked about potential training and support, Teacher 1 made this comment:

> I think that it's very easy to miss these kids. They're overlooked. And I just think there's a lack of training, not just with our gifted, but with our ESL program overall. We don't have the adequate training to do that in continuing training. You get your ESL certification and you're just kind of thrown into the classroom. So, I do think it's a lack of training a lot.

When asked about potential barriers to using a dynamic assessment, Teacher 5's comment reveals the need for removing barriers. This teacher stated,

> I believe a barrier would be training of all the assessments and an in-depth training, not surface level, which is a lot of times due to time constraints, what we get, get surface level. If we don't have a deeper understanding, it's really hard for us to not only provide the assessment but be an impartial piece to that assessment.

Teacher 2 suggested that: "Training would be a big support. And then I think that training would help us also see others who we might [be gifted] after we tested a couple with the dynamic testing." Then Teacher 3 added this:

> I also think that there's always room for improvement. As far as teacher training on how to do it, I don't think there is one. And I've asked around to several people that I know that are in bilingual education that are in other districts. And, so, no one seems to know if

> there is a specific training for bilinguals and how to identify them. So, I think we can do better, but also, I think that just comes with time and if we're doing better to service our bilingual community as far as our students. Hopefully that also gets better in identifying them.

RQ2 Theme 3: Language as a Barrier to GT Identification

The third emerged theme related to RQ2 was about how language is a barrier to GT identification. Participants named the lack of mastery of the English language as a significant barrier for placement into gifted programming, along with the lack of assessments that help differentiate for students' lack of understanding of the English language when participating in assessments for gifted programming. Participants cited examples from their schools and classrooms in which a student could very well be gifted but it was masked by their inability to communicate effectively with the student to understand their full intelligence and potential.

When asked about language being a barrier, in an interview, Principal 3 stated that, "If language is a barrier, we're limiting access to students who are potentially gifted and talented." In Principal 4's interview, this principal had the following comments:

> So especially if we [are] talking about Latinx students, or any students with any language barriers where English is not your first language, the research says that hands-on visuals or any items that they can make a connection to will be a benefit for them. So, giving them a project, or a hands-on assignment, or a problem to solve where you're not language is not [an obstacle]. I think it gives them a better opportunity to show their talents or their problem-solving skills. It's leveling the playing field for everybody when it becomes a kind of project-based or a problem-solving model.

Principal 4 also stated,

> Just being in education and in districts with high Hispanic populations, there's a struggle to teach them when they don't know the language. So, it's kind of hard when you're trying to assess for giftedness and language becomes a barrier. It's really difficult to identify anybody who is gifted. Some of the ones that you'll notice are the ones who try to work hard and try to figure out their own solutions. And that is a way, but it's very difficult to identify when you're just using set standards and one language. They're not providing any accommodations or differentiation because language is not a measure of intelligence or talent for that matter.

Principal 4 went on to use personal school experience as an EBL student, recalling what happened in school. This principal stated,

> So, with my own experience, I learned that I could do various projects as good as, if not better than, people who spoke the language. And so, having gone through that, I wanted them to learn that too - the students that I taught. And I said, if I take this barrier away, can you still do it? And most of them were able to do it.

In the focus group interview, teachers also responded with their perspectives about language as a barrier. Teacher 5 explained it this way:

> My classroom is a classroom in which a lot of creativity comes from. And in speaking with a teacher about a student who showed a lot of creative thinking processes, I tried to explain that I believe [the problem is] the language barrier and she'll see more of a creative process once he's able to overcome that. So, I think if we were able to train our teachers and use that process, we would more correctly identify our students overall.

Teacher 2 spoke about the potential for different testing procedures to address the concern about language being a barrier. This teacher commented:

> I'm also excited that we get to see a different type of testing because I think the type of testing that we've been doing, students who may be exceptional, may not be able to do the testing because of the language barrier. And I'm happy to see a more hands-on type of test for them.

Teacher 2 gave their perspective about barriers to identifying EBL students for gifted programs: "We just overlook them because the perception is, Oh well, they can't speak English very well, so they're not going to be able to keep up with the rigor that's required of a GT student." Teacher 7 expressed a similar perspective about language being a barrier, by stating,

> It compares to whenever we do special ed testing. How do we know that special ed testing is not because of the language barrier? The same thing goes for GT. How can we say that a student is not GT if they have a language barrier? So, I don't think the academic testing that we do gives the students a real chance for success because they may not be gifted in reading, but they may be very creative. But we are not able to see that because of the language of the test and how we are actually testing our students.

RQ2 Theme 4: Concerns with Dynamic Assessment

The fourth emerged theme for RQ2 was how principals and teachers were concerned

about dynamic assessment. Overall, the topic of dynamic assessment was met with a positive response from participants. As stated previously, participants see first-hand the students in their classrooms who could be identified as gifted, but for various reasons are not included in gifted programs due to a language barrier. However, a few concerns were voiced when participants were asked about any barriers that they perceived might be present if a dynamic assessment was implemented. Their responses included the time needed for training staff, time needed for assessing students, how to ensure impartiality by the test administrator, and the idea that a change process can be difficult and met with opposition from various stakeholders and for various reasons. Examples of participant responses that correlate with emerged themes are paired with data and narratives collected.

In the teacher focus group interview, in response to questions about potential barriers to using a dynamic assessment to better identify EBL students as gifted, Teacher 5 stated,

> I believe a barrier would be training of all the assessments and an in-depth training, not surface level, which is a lot of times due to time constraints, what we get, get surface level. If we don't have a deeper understanding, it's really hard for us to not only provide the assessment but be impartial [when giving] the assessment.

Teacher 2 added this suggestion:

> The barrier is going to be time because we have so much, especially in K through 1, K through 2 because we're so heavily focused on making sure they can all read that time's going to be a big factor.

In a principal interview, Principal 1 expressed this view about barriers:

> Just me not knowing that much about [dynamic assessment], it's not something one person can do. And if I would need to pull teachers who are like [names teacher], a barrier may be who's covering her class while I'm pulling her to help me with testing. Change is always something that people have to take with their beverage of choice, be it a Dr. Pepper or water or something stronger.

Further, in a teacher interview, Teacher 2 stated the following:

> The barrier is going to be time because we only have so much, especially in K through

> two because we're so heavily focused on making sure they can all read that time's going to be a big factor.

Of note, two responses (omitted quotes to ensure confidentiality) from principals included the idea that parents of non-EBL students might not be accepting of the use of dynamic assessment due to the idea of inclusion of potentially non-English speaking students in gifted classrooms. Further, there was concern about support for teachers who have traditionally not been required to differentiate for language variances within the gifted classroom.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis performed, connects the analysis to the research questions, then presents narrative evidence that consistently supports the emerged themes. Overall, 13 participants were interviewed for the qualitative study. Interview and focus group questions were crafted to understand teacher and principal perceptions about EBL students as potentially gifted, as well as about dynamic assessments. All participants were educators within the studied district and reported experience in working directly with students who are classified as EBL and potentially or currently labeled as GT. Nine of the participants were teachers and four were principals. All participants, regardless of position, expressed the need for GT assessments that differentiate for talent regardless of the student's language, as well as about considerations needed for educator mindset and training associated with such assessments. Concerns were also noted about the potential for dynamic assessment to be included as a measure within a GT screening and identification process.

Consistent with qualitative research, analysis was performed of educators' responses using Delvetool.com and NVivo and included the development of codes and categories. Additionally, constant comparative analysis was utilized to discover relationships between codes and categories that led to emerged themes. Six themes emerged from this study and summarized

the participant educators' perceptions of EBLs and the use of dynamic assessment as a tool to identify them for gifted programs. The emerged themes were: (a) the importance of IQ and talent-based assessments included in the screening process; (b) the need to improve the communication, screening, identification, and support of EBL students for gifted programs; (c) mindset associated with EBL GT identification and support; (d) training for dynamic assessment and GT identification; (e) language as a barrier to GT identification; and (f) concerns with dynamic assessment.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the six themes that emerged from the study. The chapter also includes conclusions drawn by the researcher, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter includes a summary of the study along with important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. Also included is a discussion of the implications for actions based on current literature and collected data, along with recommendations for continued research.

Summary of the Study

The problem investigated in this study centers on the underrepresentation of Latinx students identified for gifted and talented programs and how current and predominantly used assessments could be contributing to this underrepresentation. As recently as 2019, the National Association for Gifted Children (2020) reported that Latinx students were underrepresented in gifted and talented programs by 30% in comparison to their White and Asian peers. Further, as the population of Latinx students has continued to grow, so has the number of emergent bilingual learners, thus contributing to the ongoing underrepresentation in schools (Cashiola & Potter, 2021). As such, perceptions of an alternate assessment called a dynamic assessment were collected from teachers and principals then analyzed for determining themes. Although little research exists, dynamic assessment has been named as a possible assessment that could be utilized to more accurately screen and assess giftedness in students who might not speak English in the home (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Poehner & Wang, 2021).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of campus principals and elementary teachers as dynamic assessment was being considered as part of the studied district's gifted and talented identification protocol. This study was designed to understand current teacher

and campus principal capacity for identifying Latinx students for giftedness and to document how the use of a dynamic assessment could change educator perceptions after introduction and future availability for use as a tool for identifying giftedness. As such, the study focused on answering two primary research questions:

1. How do elementary campus principals and teachers perceive the potential for emergent bilingual learners to be identified as gifted?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers and principals about dynamic assessments and their understanding of how to use those assessments for identifying emergent bilingual students for gifted programming?

The primary focus of this research was to explore the perceived impact that dynamic assessments can have, and the possible supports and barriers that already exist for dynamic assessment to be utilized as a tool in the determination of giftedness of elementary Latinx students.

Review of the Methodology

A qualitative case study was deemed the best approach for documenting principals' and teachers' perceptions about potentially gifted emergent bilingual learners and their related perceptions about a dynamic assessment as a tool for identifying such learners. The first phase of this case study was the collection of district documents pertinent to gifted and talented education as a backdrop to contribute to the narrative of educator perceptions. Documents collected and reviewed included the district protocol for GT identification, instruments used in GT screening and assessment, campus and district improvement plans, and professional development calendars and agendas. The second phase included two focus groups in which elementary teacher participants were asked to discuss a series of questions. This second phase also included semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with elementary principals and teachers to gain further understanding and context. The third phase included the analysis and synthesis of data collected

from all points. The focus groups and in-depth interviews were audio recorded, with participant permission, then transcribed through Rev.com to provide an audio and written version, followed by coding using Delvetool.com and Nvivo to develop major themes and findings.

Discussion of Major Findings

An initial review of district GT identification processes revealed that, like most districts, a combination of assessments is used to screen and ultimately identify students for GT programming, including the NNAT MAP test, state assessment data, teacher referrals, teacher observation data, and the student's classroom performance. Through conducted interviews and focus groups, several themes emerged when considering the research questions at the outset of this study. Two themes emerged from interview and focus group questions that specifically addressed students' potential (RQ1), including (a) the importance of IQ and talent-based assessments included in the screening process, and (b) the need to improve the communication, screening, referral, and identification to support EBL students for gifted programs. The second research question centered on participant perceptions about dynamic assessment and how they may be used to identify EBL students for gifted programs. Four themes emerged from interviews and focus group questions that specifically addressed dynamic assessments (RQ2), including (a) mindset associated with EBL GT identification and support, (b) training for dynamic assessment and GT identification, (c) language as a barrier to GT identification, and (d) concerns with dynamic assessment.

The next section describes the findings and compares, or contrasts, cited literature previously mentioned at the onset of this study. The section includes a discussion of major findings related to leadership practices for GT identification.

Leadership Practices: GT Identification

There is significant research that points to the contributing causes of the disproportionate number of Latinx students who are identified as GT, including the need to improve the identification process (Martin, 2016). Research conducted within the site found that the district utilizes several assessments and other data points to help screen and best identify GT students, including IQ tests, teacher referrals, and classroom performance. A review of those identification practices and data points revealed that IQ tests normed for language are given to students in earlier grades by utilizing tests that are considered non-verbal type assessments. Further, the district uses a universal screening process that aligns with current research by the National Center for Research on Gifted Education (NCRGE) that supports this recommended practice (Gunnins et al., 2018). However, despite the use of numerous assessments and universal screening practices, participants in this study noted that there is an underrepresentation of Latinx students identified for GT programs within their school, which supports previous statements and research presented at the onset of this study that the problem is systematic across district, states, and the nation (Hamilton et al., 2018; Siegle et al., 2016; Sparks, 2015). Participants noted that although the identification process utilizes these tools for screening, students often are passed over in the referral process due to language acquisition concerns, the concern of future support in GT classes if they don't speak English very well, the lack of a portfolio of student work that demonstrates creativity and talent, and because some assessments for older age students disqualify them in the initial screening process, such as state assessments and MAP testing data. This sentiment by participants aligns with a study by the NCRGE (2018) that identified the need for culturally sensitive assessment instruments that account for language differences, consider the speed of language acquisition as a factor for future learning opportunities and support, and

use other identification tools and rubrics, including portfolios of students' work that demonstrate creativity and talent.

Importance of IQ and Talent-based Assessments

Prior research available at the onset of this study noted that race and economic status are factors that influence performance trends on standardized tests due to language barriers, difficulty in comprehending texts, and the lack of background knowledge, including experiences and vocabulary (White et al., 2016). Further, Hodges et al. (2018) maintained that school and district personnel who identify students based solely on IQ and standardized test scores have unintentionally set up a system that takes away the opportunity for students of color to develop their giftedness, specifically those who don't speak English well. Study participants mirrored this sentiment and cited recent training for GT and EBL support as their source for understanding the problem and how to differentiate in their classrooms. Numerous participants noted that although current screening and identification practices include IQ assessments that are normed for language, other screening measures do not, thus potentially excluding students from the process. As a result, study participants noted the need for culturally relevant assessments, like dynamic assessment or a portfolio with a rubric, that consider talent, how quickly students achieve mastery in learning, and/or language acquisition. Current research on the identification of GT and EBL students supports this sentiment spoken by studied teachers. Siegle et al. (2016) recommended a more holistic approach to testing for giftedness that doesn't necessarily exclude standardized testing but incorporates other assessment criteria, such as non-verbal assessments and teacher training for identification of potential giftedness. Similarly, Gubbins et al. (2018) found that the best practice for identifying EBL students for GT programming includes numerous data sources for each student, including using ability tests that are given in the

student's home language, utilization of assessment instruments that are culturally sensitive and account for language differences, and utilizing portfolios to supplement the universal screening and identification process.

Importance of the Identification Process for EBL Students

When asked questions about the potential for EBL students to be identified for gifted programs, participants named systems and processes that currently are in place within the site district that are designed to provide an avenue for EBL students to be identified but don't seem to be leveling the playing field for access. Participants stated that the process had improved significantly over recent years and included numerous assessments and data points in the identification process, such as a universal screener, a non-verbal assessment, test data, classroom data, and teacher referrals. However, participants stated the process still was not identifying Latinx and EBL students at the same rate as other student groups. The sentiment from participants was the need for a different assessment, especially for older students, that normed for language barriers and that does not automatically disqualify them from the process if they perform poorly on assessments, especially if those assessments are only offered in English. Further, participants voiced the need for continued improvement in communicating with and including parents in the assessment process, along with allowing the identification process to be ongoing across the school year instead of just once or twice a year. Numerous research supports the sentiments of participants and recommends best practice by schools and districts. District-level identification processes should utilize a variety of instruments, including measures and rubrics, along with input from parents, and identification criteria that are culturally responsive and consider the needs of EBLs (Gubbins et al., 2018; Mun et al., 2020). Munn et al. (2020) also called for further support of those identified EBLs so that once they gain access to GT services,

they are not set up for failure due to the level of rigor and expectations placed upon them.

Mindset Associated with EBL GT Identification and Support

A common theme that emerged from participants' responses to protocol questions was the need for a district's screening and identification process to include ongoing support for EBL students who are ultimately identified for gifted programs. While site district support systems and training provide a mindset that EBL students possess a wealth of prior experiences, skills, and abilities, participants noted that current GT training at state and regional certification programs lacks strategies to support those same students in the classroom once they are identified. Because of this, participants expressed a concern regarding instructional differentiation for EBLs who are placed in GT programs while maintaining rigor, engagement, and behavior for all students in the classroom. These participant comments seem to be supported in the research, or lack thereof, mentioned earlier in this study.

While numerous research studies exist about the need to support students who are identified both as EBL and GT, little research was found that specifically addressed the emotional, social, and educational classroom needs of identified GT students who also are EBLs, and by extension, how teachers in the classroom can directly support them (Mun et al., 2020). The alignment between ideas expressed in the review of literature and those of participants in this study appears accurate and consistent.

Training for Dynamic Assessment and GT Identification

Murphy (2007), a major contributor to the literature about dynamic assessment, noted that training would be a key factor in using a dynamic assessment but also could be a deterrent due to the cost and manpower needed to sustain it effectively. This idea was mirrored in the responses and statements by participants. Teachers and principals noted overwhelmingly that

training would need to play a key factor in the introduction, use, and sustainability of utilizing a dynamic assessment. However, numerous participants noted their concern with the current lack of time for training, the alignment of that training with current practices, and the human resources needed to conduct a dynamic assessment, without bias, for each student. Thus, this current study supports the argument by Murphy that the use of dynamic assessment, though good in theory, could be difficult in practice for reasons of providing appropriate training and the time and manpower needed to use it effectively.

Language as a Barrier to GT Identification

Participants named the lack of mastery of the English language as a significant barrier for placement into gifted programming, along with the lack of assessments that help differentiate for students' lack of understanding the English language when participating in assessments for gifted programming. Participants cited examples from their schools and classrooms in which a student could very well be gifted but it was masked by the teacher's inability to communicate effectively with the student to understand their full intelligence and potential. As a response to this, participants cited that a dynamic assessment, as promoted in this study, should be considered as a viable option for assessment, offered in unison with other data points, to better identify EBL students with signs of giftedness. This idea is mirrored in current research although little research exists in the application of a dynamic assessment for potential giftedness in EBLs. Numerous researchers have found that the use of a dynamic assessment is and/or could be a viable option for identifying giftedness if a language barrier is apparent (Popa & Pauc, 2015; NCRGE, 2016; Mun et al., 2020) and that it offers a potentially more accurate reflection of talents and intelligence that are otherwise masked by the lack of knowing English (Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Lidz & Macrine, 2001; Popa & Pauc, 2015).

Concerns with Dynamic Assessment

Important to this study was the need to reflect teacher and principal perceptions of dynamic assessment. Although the perceptions of a dynamic assessment were met with generally positive responses from participants, several key concerns with dynamic assessments also emerged. Participant concerns consisted of the time needed to train staff members, time needed for assessing students, and ways to ensure impartiality when administering a dynamic assessment, all coupled with the idea that for educators right now, the change process can be hard and viewed as another task added to their already-full plate. Participants also asked questions within the focus groups about which person would be responsible and the time that would take away from their current responsibilities.

Research suggests that concerns expressed by teachers and principals are aligned with other studies centered on dynamic assessment. Studies revealed that although dynamic assessment provides insight for promoting language development, results were difficult to track because those providing the dynamic assessment were not experts in its implementation and needed more training (Herazo et al., 2019). Training in the utilization of a dynamic assessment could be difficult to acquire due to the lack of previous use for potentially gifted EBL students, specifically on how it is defined and how the skills and abilities of those responsible for giving the assessment are developed (Green & Birch, 2019). Further, Green and Birch voiced concerns with dynamic assessment in a study they conducted where they found difficulty naming standards of training and practice when implementing a dynamic assessment tool and providing support for participants. They claimed that is because a dynamic assessment can be considered so broad that there is a lack of established guidelines and regulations for the training, supervision, and the practice of dynamic assessment.

Surprises

Outcomes from the research left few surprises. However, certain aspects of conducting the research, collecting stories, and the stories themselves were found to contain elements of surprise in pockets. Most surprising was the commonality found in individual principal responses to questions in comparison to responses recorded in the teacher focus groups and the individual teacher interviews. Although answers differed in wording and point of view, common themes were relatively easily found since many answers were similar, if not identical, across participant responses. Further, those same participants had positive outlooks on the future of education and served to benefit all students while speaking to promote equity for those underserved. Teachers and principals, overall, found it surprising that research was being conducted on the topic and purpose of this study. Numerous participants reflected how they felt that anything that was researched to help students was beneficial, especially in the area of the disproportionality of Latinx students having access to gifted programming. I was pleasantly surprised to find numerous teachers and principals willing to participate in the research to share their opinions and experience.

Application to Current Practice

Whether by nature or by policy, educators are constantly forced to change and adapt to the current needs of our students. Regardless of ethnicity, culture, color, or demographic, it is our responsibility as fellow educators to recognize areas where equity doesn't exist, identify those areas by name, and work to provide solutions to fix them. The findings of this study result in naming a nationwide inequity, its possible causes, and seeks to take a step in the right direction of providing equitable access to gifted programs for Latinx students. However, the inequity continues to exist for numerous demographics, most specifically for Latinx and Black students as

well. As such, this study, with the help of numerous participants to provide perspectives, highlights numerous gifted identification practices that could benefit students. And, as reviewed earlier in this chapter, those practices are often to have already been supported by research.

In this study, I sought to hear the voices and perspectives of teachers and principals on their ideas about EBLs and potentially gifted learners, along with their ideas on the potential benefit of a dynamic assessment. Although participants were not as familiar with dynamic assessment, how it works, or when to use it, they did have strong opinions and stories that served to provide support for the continuation of research-based practices that should be included in the screening and identification process for all students. Participants felt strongly that students should be assessed using instruments that not only look at their intelligence but also reveal their individual talents as well. Participants cited a dynamic assessment, or a similar assessment that accounts for students' talents, as a possible solution. Other examples from participants included the use of portfolios, examples of classwork including writing and artwork, teacher recommendation forms, and interviews with parents to discuss the talents of their child that are possibly not revealed in a school setting.

Further, participants voiced the need for a rubric that weighs and balances for various data points to be collected in the screening process, including IQ scores, student portfolios, teacher recommendation forms, parent questionnaires, grades, and standardized tests. Key to this point, from participants' perspectives, was the need to lower the weighting for which a student's standardized test score is considered in the screening and identification process. Participants stated that language was indeed a barrier for students to have equal access to the gifted program in their current and prior school district and, as such, standardized testing all but disqualified students from consideration. Participants also associated this problem with educator mindset. As

an example, numerous participants cited the student nomination process and felt that many students were not recommended for gifted screening in older grade levels because the teacher knew that the student's standardized test score was not high enough to even be considered. And further, the student's score was low because they were still acquiring the language used on the assessment. Finally, participants voiced the importance of including parents in the identification process. They cited the need for clear and frequent communication with parents so parents knew what the gifted program was, how it serves students, the benefits of the program, and most importantly what they can do to support their student before, during, and after the screening and identification process.

Recommendations for Future Research

At the onset of this study, it was revealed that little, if any, research exists on the use of a dynamic assessment to assess students more equitably for giftedness, specifically if that student does not speak English in the home (NCRGE, 2016). However, researchers have identified a dynamic assessment as one way that districts and schools can more equitably assess students for giftedness (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019; Poehner & Wang, 2021). Initially, this research study was intended to offer a dynamic assessment as one part of a district's screening and identification process and document the results for presentation. However, with so little research available to justify its use, it was necessary that I changed the study to seek educator perspectives on a dynamic assessment, along with other considerations that could affect its use and need, to then provide context and support for further research.

As such, I recommend future research on the development and integration of a dynamic assessment as part of a school or district's gifted and talented program identification rubric. There are numerous facets to this research that include: (a) the development of a dynamic

assessment, (b) the implementation of a dynamic assessment with presentation of data that supports or does not support its use, (c) training to support the implementation of a dynamic assessment, (d) the human and time resources associated with implementing a dynamic assessment, and e) educator mindset associated with the implementation of a dynamic assessment for students who do not speak English in the home.

Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of campus principals and elementary teachers as dynamic assessment was being considered as part of the gifted and talented identification protocol. This study was designed to understand current teacher and campus principal capacity for identifying Latinx students for giftedness and to document how the use of a dynamic assessment could change educator perceptions after introduction and future availability for use as a tool for identifying giftedness. During this study, I came to understand the numerous causes for the lack of identification of Latinx students for gifted programs. After a lengthy literature review, based on the available research, those causes included a lack of access through biased assessments, deficit thinking, and lack of a standard definition and understanding of giftedness. Through interviews and focus groups, participants cited similar experiences, as spoken in their own words and experiences as principals and classroom teachers. Further, participants in this study validated the processes within their school district that seek to counter the lack of identified Latinx students in its gifted program. However, participants revealed that despite their school district's effort to seek equity, many Latinx and other students still are not being identified.

It is my hope that this research emboldens the idea for future research to seek equity in the gifted and talented identification process. The answer may not be solely based on the use of

dynamic assessment, or some other type of alternate assessment, but certainly the evidence of the current literature and educator perspectives presented in this study give credit and justification to the need for continued research on the topic.

Finally, on a personal level, I firmly believe that this research study changed me from a spectator to an advocate for equity among all students. As educators, we see so many areas that need improvement for the benefit of the students we teach with so little time to investigate, identify the problem, and find a solution. The value I take away from this learning experience can easily transfer to other areas that need improvement in our education system, districts, and schools. I hope that my new knowledge of the subject, and the process by which I discovered it, will help me continue to advocate for those marginalized to seek solutions that are based in research, practice, and collaboration with others. My prayer is that others will be inspired by this work and do the same.

APPENDIX A

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Description of Project: The purpose of this study is to understand and synthesize educator perceptions as a school district considers the introduction of dynamic assessments into the testing portfolio for students who are tested for giftedness and their subsequent placement in a gifted program. Some research exists that identifies dynamic assessments as a tool to better identify giftedness in students who might not speak English very well, if at all, although they are enrolled in primarily English taught schools. This study is designed to add to the knowledge base on the potential effectiveness of dynamic assessments and how educators perceive a change in protocol for identifying non-English-speaking students for giftedness.

For the purpose of this focus group, I will read a question and everyone is encouraged but not required to respond. For questions 1-5, I will ask the question and we will work around the room to collect responses. For questions 6-10, you are free to answer freely or in response to someone else's answer if it provides context. Our ground rules for our time are as follow:

- Participate actively.
- Before speaking each time, please state your assigned pseudonym.
- Speak one at a time.
- Treat everyone's ideas with respect–don't criticize.
- Minimize side conversations.
- Keep focused on the topic or question.

With your permission, your responses will be audio recorded and you will have an opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy of your statements.

1. Including this school year, how many years have you been teaching in this school district? *(Context)*

2. How many students are you currently responsible for teaching in your classroom? *(Context)*

3. Of that number, how many are labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) and/or receive support through ESL services? *(Context)*

4. Of that number, how many are labeled as Gifted and Talented (GT)? *(RQ 1)*

5. Of that number, how many are labeled as ELL and GT? *(RQ 1)*

6. In your view, what perceptions do teachers have about potentially gifted emergent bilingual learners? *(RQ 1)*

7. In your view, what effect, if any, might the introduction to and training of teachers on the use of dynamic assessments have on educator perceptions? *(RQ 2)*

8. Please describe the supports and barriers you believe exist for teachers in the potential implementation a dynamic assessment for identifying giftedness. *(RQ 2)*

9. Please describe any training and support you have received for identifying and teaching students who might not speak English in the home? *(RQ 2)*

10. Please describe the training and support you have been provided for identifying and teaching students who might be classified as gifted and talented? Why or why not? *(RQ 1 and 2)*

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to say about your knowledge of or experiences with dynamic assessments or with gifted identification? *(RQ 1 and 2)*

APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of Project: The purpose of this study is to understand and synthesize educator perceptions as a school district considers adding dynamic assessments into the testing portfolio for students who are tested for giftedness and their subsequent placement in a gifted program. Some research exists that identifies dynamic assessments as a tool to better identify giftedness in students who might not speak English very well, if at all, although they are enrolled in primarily English taught schools. This study is designed to add to the knowledge base on the effectiveness of dynamic assessments and how educators perceive a change in protocol for identifying non-English-speaking students for giftedness.

1. Including this school year, how many years have you been teaching in this school district? *(Context)*

2. How many students are you currently responsible for teaching in your classroom? *(Context)*

3. Of that number, how many are labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) and/or receive support through ESL services? *(Context)*

4. Of that number, how many are labeled as Gifted and Talented (GT)? *(RQ 1)*

5. Of that number, how many are labeled as ELL and GT? *(RQ 1)*

6. Please describe any training and support you have received for identifying and teaching students who might not speak English in the home? *(RQ 2)*

7. In your view, what perceptions do you have about potentially gifted emergent bilingual learners? *(RQ 1)*

8. Describe your past experiences with identifying potential students for gifted and talented programs, specifically for students who might not speak English in the home? (RQ 1 and 2)

9. A dynamic assessment is a way to give students a problem or task, observe them, provide support or teaching, then see how they respond. Describe any instances where you used this type of assessment before. (RQ 2) Probes: Have you used that type of assessment for

English learners? With how many students did you use this type of assessment? How many students were then identified as gifted? How effective was the tool in identifying giftedness in emergent bilingual learners?

10. In your view, what effect, if any, might the introduction to and training of teachers on the use of dynamic assessments have on educator perceptions? *(RQ 2)*

11. Please describe the supports and barriers you believe exist for teachers in the potential implementation a dynamic assessment for identifying giftedness. *(RQ 2)*

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to say about your knowledge of or experiences with dynamic assessments or with gifted identification? *(RQ 1 and 2)*

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of Project: The purpose of this study is to understand and synthesize educator perceptions as a school district considers adding dynamic assessments into the testing portfolio for students who are tested for giftedness and their subsequent placement in a gifted program. Some research exists that identifies dynamic assessments as a tool to better identify giftedness in students who might not speak English very well, if at all, although they are enrolled in primarily English taught schools. This study is designed to add to the knowledge base on the effectiveness of dynamic assessments and how educators perceive a change in protocol for identifying non-English-speaking students for giftedness.

1. Please describe your role within the district? (background) How many years have you been in this current role? (background)

2. Do you describe your type of leadership as transactional or transformational? Probe: Please give an example of how you employ that type of leadership. (RQ 1)

3. Describe your past experiences with identifying potential students for gifted and talented programs, specifically for students who might not speak English in the home? (RQ 1 and 2)

4. If applicable, please describe some examples of how you struggled in the past with how to assess giftedness in students who are not fluent in English. (RQ 1 and 2)

5. A dynamic assessment is a way to give students a problem or task, observe them, provide support or teaching, then see how they respond. Describe any instances where you used this type of assessment before. (RQ 2) Probes: Have you used that type of assessment for English learners? With how many students did you use this type of assessment? How many students were then identified as gifted? How effective was the tool in identifying giftedness in emergent bilingual learners?

6. If you previously used this type of assessment, how were you introduced to dynamic assessment? (RQ 1 and 2) Probe: What aspects of that type of assessment were useful to you and your students? Tell me about your experience as you were trained or learned more about administering the dynamic assessment. (RQ 2)

7. Based on your experience and/or knowledge of dynamic assessment and the needs of students in the district, is there a need for the district to support and implement dynamic assessments? (RQ 1)

8. What supports exist for implementing a dynamic assessment for identifying giftedness? (RQ 1)

9. What barriers exist for implementing a dynamic assessment for identifying giftedness? (RQ 1)

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to say about your knowledge of or experiences with dynamic assessments or with gifted identification? *(RQ 1 and 2)*

APPENDIX D

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW CATEGORIES AND CODES

Category Assigned	Code with Number of References
Principal Interview Categories and Codes	
GT Screening, Referral, and Communication Process	referral for GT (2), nomination (1), committee (3), screening (18), parent (1), rubric and portfolio (5), definition of GT (3)
IQ vs. Talent Based Assessments	intelligence and talent (4), problem solving (2), hands on learning (2), student need (1), IQ based assessment (3)
Alternate Assessment	dynamic/additional assessment (12), project based (3), differentiation (6)
Time and Resources	time (2), budget (2), personnel (6), training associated with dynamic assessment (3)
Tests Not Suited for EBLs	norm based assessment (4), underrepresentation (6), missed students (5), equity/inequity in testing (9)
Mindset	mindset (4), change process (1)
Parent/Teacher Communication	parent Survey (1), portfolio (2)
Language Barrier	language Barrier Associated with GT Identification (14)
Support for EBLs Once Identified	Concern with support for EBLs once identified (1), reaching potential (1)
Similarity to SpEd Identification	GT and SpEd identification process (2), comparison to response to intervention (5)
Teacher Interview Categories and Codes	
GT Screening, Referral, and Communication Process	teacher referral (1), multiple assessments (4), alternate assessment (9), map testing (4), screening process (6)
IQ vs. Talent Based Assessments	bias in assessment (2), problem solving (2), IQ testing (1)
Alternate Assessment	looking at whole child (2)
Mindset	mindset (2), teacher responsibility (2)
Training	training (6)
Parent/Teacher Communication	communication with parents (4)
Language Barrier	language barrier associated with GT identification (6)
Time and Resources	time, personnel, and training associated GT identification and dynamic assessment (2)
Teacher Focus Group Categories and Codes	
GT Screening, Referral, and Communication Process	Overlooked students (1), identification (3), improve screening process (5), GT screening (9), survey (2), rubric/portfolio (6), confusion associated with identification process (8)
IQ vs. Talent Based Assessments	Hands-on learning and assessment (1), IQ assessments (2), creativity (4)
Alternate Assessment	dynamic/additional assessment (1), lack of lasting (7)
Time and Resources	time (3), training (6), certification (3), lack of training (1)
Mindset	Labelling students (2), differentiating for EBL students (1), impartiality (1)
Language Barrier	language Barrier Associated with GT Identification (8)

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