POTENTIALS LIMITED:
EXAMINING THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF
BLACK STUDENTS IN GIFTED EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

Gifted education is a specialized form of instruction offered to students who attend public schools in Ontario. Typically reserved for students who achieve the 98th percentile (or above) on some form of standardized assessment, the demographics of gifted classrooms reveal an absence of many minority groups—particularly students from African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian backgrounds. Research has shown that students who participate in challenging academic instruction derive cognitive benefit, resulting in higher achievement. Achievement gaps that exist between White students and many minority groups are in part due to differences in exposure to rigorous instruction (known as the ‘participation gap’).

This qualitative case study examines the lives of Black parents who have two children in gifted education [a third child participates in high school Advanced Placement (AP) courses]. In chronicling strategies employed by Black parents to secure gifted placement, the goal is to gain deeper insight regarding minority underrepresentation in gifted education.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the accounts of minority families who participate in elite education. More specifically, a case study framework will be used to investigate the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian parents who have two children enrolled in gifted education programs (a third child participates in an Advanced Placement program at the secondary level).

Parents play an essential role as advocates during the identification and placement of students into elite classrooms. By analyzing experiences of Caribbean-Canadian parents who have secured specialized education for two of their children, the objective is to identify specific strategies that were intentionally used to gain gifted access. How were these children able to gain admission into an area of education that has been virtually inaccessible to students of colour? What can be learned from the parents of students currently enrolled in gifted programs? Can their experiences be used as a template to increase the membership of minority students, or will these voices raise concerns regarding the exclusivity of gifted classrooms in public education?

Background of the Problem

Any educator who teaches in a typical classroom setting quickly realizes that students achieve at different levels. Some students require little if any assistance; others benefit from subtle reminders or a quick review of key points; a few may
need intentional scaffolding or even adaptation of grade level requirements. Educators accept this premise, applying accommodations and modifications to curriculum expectations when necessary. That said, as policy makers devote significant resources to assist those who require assistance meeting curriculum standards, many believe students at the other end of the achievement spectrum do not receive similar consideration. Gifted programs were created to address the needs of high-functioning students. So who is the ‘gifted learner’?

One of the most recognized definitions of giftedness comes from the 1972 document known as the Marland Report. The report, presented by the U.S. Commissioner of Education, was in response to Congress’ question of how schools were meeting the needs of gifted and talented children. The Marland definition is stated below.

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance, including those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas singly or in combination:

- a) General Intellectual Ability;
- b) Specific Academic Aptitude;
- c) Creative or Productive Thinking;
- d) Leadership Ability;
- e) Visual or Performing Arts

These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, & Brown, 2008, p. 94.

Through gifted education, identified learners are grouped together in self-contained classrooms to engage in advanced instruction beyond what was taught in regular programs. However, as gifted education works to address the needs of
its talented population, a disturbing trend has emerged. Classrooms developed to educate the most astute students have become predominately White.

Though the definition of a gifted learner has undergone revisions in an attempt to establish a more inclusive classification (In 1993, the United States Department of Education created a definition that stated outstanding talent existed in youth from all cultures and economic groups), gifted populations remain static.

An extensive study conducted by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented revealed population disparities have become more pronounced over the years. Data (compiled from 1978 through 1992) comparing the representation of some minority groups in general populations to that of gifted populations uncovered these areas for concern:

- Hispanic-Americans were under-represented by 24% in 1978 (accounting for 6.8% of the school population but only 5.15% of students in gifted programs) and by 42% in 1992;
- Native-Americans were underrepresented by 62% in 1978 and by 50% in 1992;
- African-Americans were underrepresented by 33% and 41%.


More recent U.S. figures show that this trend has continued, to the detriment of minority students – Black students in particular. “Reports indicate that Black students are underrepresented by as much as 55% nationally in gifted education; although Black students compose 17.2% of school districts, they represent 8.4% of those identified as gifted” (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, p. 217).
Canadian statistics on gifted populations tell a similar tale. 2006 Student Census Data released by Canada’s largest school board, the Toronto District School Board, indicate students who self-identified as Black accounted for only 3% of the gifted population, even though they made up 13% of total student population. Conversely, students who self-identified as White accounted for 52% of the gifted population, yet made up only 32% of the total population (Brown & Parekh, 2010).

**Statement of the Problem**

Educational and psychological research has revealed on numerous occasions that students from minority groups do not perform as well academically when compared to their White and East Asian peers (Bok, 2003; Archer & Francis, 2006; Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel & Brzustoski, 2009). Although educators have been aware of this dilemma for some time, solutions remain elusive. Those experiencing the most difficulty include students from First Nations, Latin-American and African-American cultures. A host of factors over the years have been identified as root causes for this ‘performance gap’ including, low socioeconomic status, weak parental support, poor academic preparation and limited educational opportunities.

Yet, when background factors are held constant, achievement levels remain significantly lower for students from these populations. Moreover, this gap is virtually non-existent at the start of their academic careers, becoming more pronounced as they progress through the grades. Statistics reveal that the gap
between White and minority students widens by as much as two grade levels by sixth grade (Valencia, 1997). Consequences of this gap become apparent when examining the demographics of higher education. Enrollment rates of post-secondary institutions indicate that most minority students who do complete secondary education do not attend college or university.

Disparities among these groups are even more obvious in the area of gifted education – a specialized area of K-12 education typically reserved for high-achieving students. Although there is general consensus that minority and economically disadvantaged students are underrepresented in gifted programs, the homogeneity of populations within these exceptional classrooms is a recurring theme that continues to plague the field. “…[T]he underrepresentation of non-dominant ethnic groups of children in programs for the gifted and talented (GT) has been discussed in GT educational circles for over thirty-five years…” (Bernal, 2002, p. 82).

So, why are the demographics of gifted education critical to minority groups? James Borland, Professor of Education at Columbia University, offers the following assertions to arrive at a grave conclusion.

Students derive at least some benefit(s) from being placed in gifted education. [Moreover], current gifted programs disproportionately serve White middle and upper-middle-class students. If one accepts these premises, then the following conclusion is a logical necessity: gifted programs are in fact serving to widen the gap between society’s ‘have’s and have-not’s’ and between White and minority families by disproportionately serving the children of the former and neglecting the children of the latter.


In sum, when minority groups do not populate gifted settings their exposure to enriched instruction is restricted, potentially limiting the social mobility of
individuals who belong to these groups. “Under certain circumstances, gifted education plays into the maintenance of the hierarchical structure that undeniably exists in our society” (Cross, 2013, p. 117).

**Significance of the Study**

The achievement gap that exists between many minority groups and the White population has been a persistent challenge for public education. Some believe it is the central issue facing public education today. “[The achievement gap is] the most significant educational problem in the U.S.” (Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, & Ngoi, 2004, p. 127). Moreover, researchers now recognize inequitable involvement in rigorous coursework (known as the ‘participation gap’) as a key contributor to this overall gap in achievement (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008b). “It cannot be denied that racially segregated gifted education classes contribute to the national achievement gap” (Ford, 2012, p. 74). Even though the problem of minority underrepresentation has existed for many years, gifted populations remain virtually unchanged. “…African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students remain poorly represented in gifted education…” (Ford et al., 2008b, p. 290). In fact, some believe underrepresentation has actually increased (Ford, 1998).

Much has been written about factors that contribute to limited minority enrollment in gifted settings. To date, most of the research dedicated to this field of study has focused on attempting to identify causes that contribute to underrepresentation. From a recruitment standpoint reasons include, low
teacher referrals, the use of standardized tests, and limited parental knowledge (Anguiano, 2003; Borland, 2004; Elhoweris, 2008). In the area of retention, many minority students identified as gifted experience difficulty with the program or decline enrollment completely due to, low teacher expectations, separation from peer groups, and the prevalence of a Eurocentric curriculum (Bernal, 2002; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010).

There is no debate that the aforementioned factors have influenced gifted student populations. Nevertheless, in order to comprehensively explore this perplexing quandary, researchers must also examine stories of minority students who have gained access and experienced success in gifted classrooms. As a teacher of gifted learners and member of the Caribbean-Canadian community, I have particular interest in the accounts of parents of gifted learners from African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian backgrounds. The hope is that their narratives will begin to fill the present void in the research regarding the participation of Black students in gifted education from a Canadian perspective. Can their experiences inform families of the strategies required to access this specialized area of education? Can these experiences help educational supervisors develop policies that increase minority representation, or will recollections draw attention to discriminatory practices that maintain homogeneous populations in our classrooms?
Limitations of the Study

Due to the limited amount of research regarding gifted African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian students, much of the information concerning gifted education is from the African-American perspective. Although there are historical truths that differentiate these groups (as well as differences between African-Canadians and Caribbean-Canadians), some generalizations in the area of socialization have been made. The term Black will be used to identify individuals from African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian groups. As well, some of the research in the area of gifted underrepresentation looks at minority groups as a whole. The terms minority and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) are both used to define this group. Of course, Black students represent only part of this larger grouping.

Definitions

Giftedness – an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001: A20).


Black – refers to Canadian and American individuals with African or Caribbean ancestry (Anglin & Whaley, 2006).
Dominant culture – refers to the languages, beliefs, values, religions, customs and rituals that are ingrained in a society, the extent to which these behaviors are considered ‘normal’ for the majority of individuals who live within the society. In the United States, (and Canada) the population that influences [North] American culture is White European Christian [North] Americans who make up a majority of the U.S. (and Canadian) population (Segal & Handler, 1995).

Barbadian or Bajan – refers to a person who was born in Barbados, or is the descendant of someone born in Barbados.

My Connection to the Topic

Growing up in subsidized housing, I learned early on what it meant to be an individual with low socioeconomic status (SES). In addition to limitations on food and clothing, learning opportunities beyond formal schooling were virtually non-existent. Summer camps, vacations with family members, daylong excursions, and visits to museums or art galleries didn’t take place. I say this not to complain – I wouldn’t change my childhood in any way. Yet, I have come to realize that economic limitations severely reduced the amount of experiential knowledge I brought to the classroom.

As an educator, I gravitated to schools in neighborhoods similar to the one I grew up in because I wanted to help youth overcome economic limitations. If students could recognize how vital education was at an early age, it would have an emancipatory effect that could help them overcome uncontrollable disadvantages.
For many years I maintained that formal education was one of the few legal ways an individual could positively impact SES.

My belief that education could be used as a transformative instrument to positively impact social mobility was strong. So strong in fact that I refused to acknowledge the significant role class played in academic achievement. If I, or (God forbid) my students, accepted this truth it would discourage perseverance and promote a defeatist attitude, where apathy and shortsightedness would reside. “It is precisely in these environments where rigorous instruction could have the greatest influence,” I told myself. As years passed, however, I wasn’t witnessing the transformation I had envisioned. Although I was pleased with some achievements, I remained frustrated with the disparity that existed when the achievement of our schools was compared to those in more ‘desirable’ settings. EQAO scores indicated that for all of our accomplishments, we still couldn’t ‘match up’ to the standards set by schools in more affluent neighborhoods. I began to wonder, “Could sound education truly overcome economic inequities?”

Undeterred, I did not accept the notion that SES determined academic fate. “We have become complacent,” I would tell myself. “We are all complicit in lowering standards for ourselves and our students.” Excuses made by teachers, administrators, parents, and students created a toxic environment where learning wasn’t valued. Therefore, solving this dilemma would require exploring possibilities beyond those found in the present setting. The solution – identify a
sector of public education where students exceeded expectations, investigate their educational environment and attempt to replicate it back home.

Was there a place in elementary education where all stakeholders had only the highest of expectations? A place where teachers taught lessons that inspired, students were motivated to achieve, parents supported the educational efforts of their children, and administrators ensured the academic institutions they were entrusted with operated seamlessly? It seemed implausible. Nevertheless, I actively searched for this ‘educational utopia’.

Consequently, when I was given the opportunity to teach in a gifted classroom, I jumped at the chance. Of course, the proposition of teaching gifted learners was daunting at first (images of young savants levitating blocks and bending spoons telekinetically). Nonetheless, I was determined to immerse myself in an environment where achievement was central. The ultimate goal was clear – investigate how gifted classrooms functioned and bring this knowledge back ‘to the hood’.

Now in my eighth year since the switch to gifted education, I continue to teach elementary gifted learners. I do so primarily because of observations made while in this unique educational setting. Students expect me to have an understanding of subject matter beyond curricular expectations (“Actually Mr. Spencer, quarks are not the smallest components of matter – gluons are”); most students exude confidence, bordering on cockiness; parents have an intimate knowledge of student achievement and are continuously on the look-out for the latest enrichment program that will ensure their child’s entrance into Harvard;
and there are no gifted Black students. Moreover, there are no Black teachers of gifted learners. This last statement cannot be stated unequivocally, however, I routinely attend conferences for teachers of gifted students and find myself mindlessly searching for educators with skin tone similar to mine, to no avail.

Ultimately, these last two observations have prompted me to question why Black bodies are nonexistent in gifted settings (my own participation, the result of being hired by a Black administrator). Further, the fact this question is not asked routinely in educational circles leads me to conclude these omissions are expected.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) alleges dominant culture in present-day societies institute collective policies that maintain social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). I contend public education, specifically gifted education, provides discernable evidence that hierarchies do in fact exist and are being maintained within the institution. In a society praised for its diversity, homogeneous populations in Canadian public education – particularly those sections of education where specialized instruction is offered – should be interrogated. In the end, my hope is that research dedicated to investigating sameness in exceptional spaces will shed light on the disturbing phenomenon of Black underrepresentation in gifted education.

**Theoretical Framework**

In developing a theoretical framework, the researcher is asked to specify the lens or lenses used in the identification and critical examination of social
peculiarities. For the investigation of Black underrepresentation in gifted education, the theoretical underpinning used to interpret the qualitative data has been chosen with two simple questions in mind: 1) what barriers exist (past and present) that restrict Black families from accessing gifted classrooms, and 2) what strategies can be used to overcome these barriers, gain entrance and thrive in gifted settings. To tackle the first question, this paper relies heavily on the work of social psychologists Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto in the area of Social Dominance.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) asserts all discriminatory practices in society (racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, etc.) that produce group inequities result from the human need to create social hierarchies. Societal institutions (financial, legal, educational) are then used to maintain these constructed imbalances. By examining the homogeneity that exists in gifted classrooms, the objective is to expose an area of education that continues to create academically dominant and subordinate groups.

In addressing question two, case study data is presented as additional information to be considered when discussing ways to overcome present hierarchies in elite public education. Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and Annette Lareau (2003) contend the social hierarchies that exist in society are partly a function of three things: the affiliations we have with others (social capital), the expectations we have of ourselves (habitus), and familial socialization practices (concerted cultivation). In order for people to positively impact their positions in this social hierarchy, individuals must, 1) improve the ‘networks’ they
have with others, 2) raise personal expectations, and 3) instill familial practices that are preferred by mainstream society. As many minorities view education as a vehicle that can activate social mobility, “it’s the key to climbing the social ladder” (James, 2009, p. 101), this paper investigates whether the behaviors outlined by Bourdieu and Lareau can actually be employed to increase minority participation in elite classrooms.

**Social Dominance Theory**

Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (1999) credit Professor Pierre van den Berghe as being the first to suggest all modern social groupings are based primarily on three stratification systems: *an age system* – where middle-aged people possess most of the social power over younger members of society; *a gender system* – in which males have substantially more social and political power when compared to females; and an *arbitrary-set system*. In an arbitrary-set system, constructed groups based on clan, ethnicity, nation, race, caste, religious sect, regional grouping, or any other imagined distinction, are socially and politically ranked.

Where age and gender systems have some structure in terms of defining young and old, male or female, an arbitrary system is extremely capricious when establishing favoured and eschewed classes. For example, social groupings can be based on religion (e.g., Christian vs. Muslim), social class (e.g., working class vs. upper class), or race (Black vs. White). Moreover, the salient characteristics employed to ‘define’ these groupings are “dependent on cultural and situational context” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 34). Determining when working class
becomes upper class or who is White will differ depending on when and where the question is asked.

In Western and European societies, the arbitrary-set stratification system has succeeded in producing a dominant group. “...[T]he dominant group, the one controlling a disproportionately large share of positive social value, is male, high SES and White. This group holds most of the land, the money, and the political power” (Cross & Cross, 2005, p. 22). Conversely, the larger subordinate group, share negative social value (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and therefore possess disproportionately large amounts of “...low social power and social status, high risk and low-status occupations, relatively poor health care, poor food, modest or miserable homes, and severe negative sanctions (e.g. prison and death sentences)” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 32).

SDT posits that social hierarchies are maintained as the result of various forms of discrimination including Aggregated Individual Discrimination and Aggregated Institutional Discrimination. **Aggregated Individual Discrimination** refers to the simple, sometimes subtle, isolated acts of discrimination committed repeatedly by one individual against another. An example of this could be the refusal to hire or vote for someone based on race, ethnicity, or gender. Over time, the accumulation of these separate discriminatory acts, produce observable distinctions between the individuals who belong to various social groups. **Aggregated Institutional Discrimination** denotes all procedures, rules, and laws carried out by hospitals, banks, courts, and schools that create inequitable amounts of “positive and negative social value” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 41).
Institutional discrimination can be obvious and intentional, or covert and accidental. Minority patients enduring longer wait times in hospital emergency rooms (Pines, Russell Localio, & Hollander, 2009) is an example of institutional discrimination.

Employing SDT as a lens to appraise gifted education provides the opportunity to closely examine historical and contemporary procedures that have been (and continue to be) commonplace in this field. Will this examination uncover inequitable practices that have resulted in the exclusion of minority students (including Black students) from gifted programs? If so, we are obligated to ask questions regarding the purpose and function of gifted education, particularly as it relates to accessibility for all learners.

Social Capital, Cultural Capital and Habitus

“The standards of the school are not neutral; [they] may be laden with the social and cultural experiences of intellectual and economic elites” (Lareau, 2000, p. 8).

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu contends views held by dominant culture permeate all facets of modern life (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). As a result, the values, beliefs, and rights shared by most western societies are primarily based on a Eurocentric, middle-class perspective. In order to prosper in these societies, individuals must not only be keenly aware of what society values – they must have the ability to ‘tap into’ the reservoir of resources controlled by society to improve standards of living for themselves and their families.
Bourdieu categorized the knowledge of and access to society’s ‘assets’ as *social capital*. “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 286). For Bourdieu, the amount of capital an individual could access was dependent upon the following characteristics: 1) the size of the group he/she was associated with; and, 2) the amount of capital each member possessed (Plagens, 2011). Large societal groups with many resources had more to offer than smaller groups with limited resources. Bourdieu also believed that social capital was unique in that if individuals affiliated themselves with affluent groups, the total capital for these individuals exponentially increased, as the resources of the entire network would be accessible to them. Of course, the more social capital one could accumulate, the greater the advantage one had over individuals who belonged to other groups in society. Bourdieu identified this as “class advantage” (Hossain, Watters, Brown, Cameron, Landau, LeTouze, Nigbur, & Rutland, 2007, p. 4).

For those affiliated with privileged groups, social capital can provide benefits such as family support and access to economic resources (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). However, partnership with individuals not favoured by society can have negative consequences, including limited opportunities for upward economic mobility.

Adding to the work of Bourdieu, sociologist James Samuel Coleman (1988) and political scientist Robert David Putnam (2000) highlight a critical element
required to secure access and participate in larger societal networks – the ability to

 gain the trust of other group members. “Social capital refers to trust networks that

 individuals can draw upon for social support” (Giddens, 2000, p. 78). Social

 Psychologist Roger Goddard takes this notion one step further, suggesting that

 resources cannot be exchanged among individuals unless trust is established.

 “Social networks provide opportunities for the exchange of information

 that can facilitate outcomes desirable to group members. Without social

 relations, there is no possibility for the exchange of information...[S]ocial trust

 gives group members confidence in the expectation that others will act

 reliably and confidently. Moreover, individuals engaged in relationships

 characterized by high levels of social trust are more likely to openly exchange

 information and to act with caring and benevolence toward one another than

 in those relationships lacking trust.

 Goddard, 2003, p. 60.

 For Coleman, Putnam and Goddard, whether it is the faith someone has in a bank

 or in their best friend – all relationships within a society have to include some

 element of trust for them to be functional. Moreover, individuals gain (or lose)

 trust through their adherence to societal norms, or “...social patterns of

 acceptable behaviour that support[ed] desirable outcomes” (Goddard, 2003, p.

 61). Establishing societal norms provides larger groups with the ability to govern

 the actions of individuals. Thus, if an individual’s actions do not align with the

 shared beliefs of the larger group, their behaviour can result in some form of

 group sanction. The embodiment of shared group norms is defined as cultural

 capital.

 Bourdieu’s (1973) notion of cultural capital refers to the specialized skill

 set– “...knowledge, skills, and competence children acquire from their

 environment (primarily parents, but also peers and schools)” (Lareau &
Weininger, 2003, p. 597). In other words, it is the set of learned skills and ways of acting (often taken for granted) that are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life. The types of activities a person chooses to be involved in and the experiences that result are critical to determining whether the capital obtained will yield positive or negative outcomes. If individuals partake in activities that produce ‘good cultural capital’, they will build knowledge that can be utilized in dominant society.

Bourdieu attempted to identify the various forms of cultural capital that existed among different groups within societies. Specifically, he investigated how cultural capital was employed by elite members of society to maintain positions of power and prestige. This exploration produced the idea of habitus, a nexus of “lasting, transposable dispositions, which function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82-83). Bourdieu believed this class-specific ‘code of conduct’, influenced individual actions in order to preserve systems of dominance.

Through early socialization experiences, we unconsciously internalize external opportunity structures and develop aspirations and expectations – and orient action – toward conduct we deem appropriate for “people like us.” In this sense, habitus plays a major role in perpetuating inequality.

Ovink & Veazey, 2011, p. 373.

Therefore, the type of habitus a person holds determines the kinds of activities they participate in. Consumption patterns, preferences, individual tastes for food or clothing – even the ways individuals ‘carry themselves’, are all examples of habitus people develop within their classes. Thus, the forms of habitus cultivated among the elite form the cultural capital required to reach lofty goals. “Going to
the opera, enjoying classical music, visiting museums and galleries, and owning art...[create positive forms] of cultural capital” (Banks, 2012, p. 62). Participating in these pursuits generate positive cultural capital because these behaviours construct knowledge that is favoured by the dominant group. Alternatively, non-elites develop a mode of habitus that restrains expectations. This socialization fails to create the cultural capital required to successfully function within institutions of the dominant class (Ovink & Veazey, 2011).

As formal education is one of many institutions constructed by society, it is governed by the same rules with respect to capital. The cultural capital held by students and parents directly influence the relationships developed with professionals who work in schools. Positive cultural capital can enhance both teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships and these enhancements may bring students ‘profit’ in the form of student awards, scholarships, and future employment connections. Conversely, negative cultural capital creates strained relationships between the aforementioned groups, producing consequences that can adversely affect a student’s academic experience (Ovink & Veazey, 2011).

Though researchers have attempted to isolate cultural capital as a major contributor to educational inequalities, many have fallen short in clearly “...identifying the process whereby social and cultural resources are converted into educational advantages” (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999, p. 37). With her theory of converted cultivation, sociologist Anne Lareau operationalizes the concept of cultural capital to demonstrate ways families position themselves (or are positioned) within public education.
Concerted Cultivation and Education

In the book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Lareau uses the results of her ethnographic study to reveal how class-based cultural patterns, habits and skills are generated and sustained through parenting practices (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008). “...[I]t is [the] economic and social resources that are key in shaping childrearing practices; as parents’ own social class position shifts, so do their cultural beliefs and practices in child-rearing” (Lareau, 2003, p. 251).

Lareau asserts that middle-class parents use a ‘concerted cultivation’ approach to parenting, which focuses on “...structured activities, language development, reasoning in the home, and active intervention in schooling” (Lareau, 2003, p. 32).

Conversely, Lareau found that working-class parents employ a parenting style she terms ‘accomplishment of natural growth’. Here, attention is focused on ensuring a child’s physical needs are met (e.g., food, clothing, and housing). Children in these families have more autonomy with free time, playing informally with friends and siblings, or watching television. Lareau also identifies variations in the language patterns used by both groups of parents.

Poor and working-class parents generally conversed less with their children, and tended to employ more directives and a relatively limited vocabulary. By contrast, middle and upper middle-class parents had extensive conversations with their children, using long sentences, rich vocabulary, reasoning, and negotiation.


Lareau is careful to stress that both parenting styles have benefits and drawbacks. Nevertheless, she concludes concerted cultivation radically enhances the educational achievement of children in two ways: 1) the approach aligns with the
professional advice that informs pedagogical approaches taken by the educational system; and, 2) the approach aligns with the parenting styles of the educational professionals who work in the schools. With the ‘right kind’ of capital, middle-class parents are well equipped to customize educational experiences that yield maximum results for their children.

Borrowing from Bourdieu, Lareau organizes the concept of concerted cultivation into four areas – cultural capital, habitus, parental involvement, and the organization of daily life. Parents with cultural capital similar to that of teachers place value in the same elements that define them culturally (e.g., art, literature, music, religion). When children bring this knowledge to school, it positively impacts academic achievement; it also strengthens relationships between parents and teachers. Research has shown that teachers who hold middle-class values treat individual students differently according to the class a student belongs to (Condron, 2007; Carter, 2003). Other studies have also found links between cultural capital and academic success (Orr, 2003; Kaufman & Gabler, 2004).

The area of habitus, or “what is comfortable or natural [for a child]” (Lareau, 2003, p. 275), is used by Lareau to gauge the amount of confidence (entitlement) or restraint a child inherits from their family. Children, who come from environments where most family members and friends have attended post-secondary institutions, internalize the notion of education being integral to future accomplishments. Children view college as an attainable goal and aspire to hold prestigious jobs as adults (Dumais, 2002). Consequently, middle-class student
habitus increases success in the classroom. In addition, the habitus *parents* hold (expectations parents have regarding the academic achievement of their children) has also been found to contribute academic achievement (Entwisle, Alexander & Olsen, 2005).

Regarding parental involvement, parents who engage in concerted cultivation are actively involved in all facets of their children's lives (Lareau, 2003), particularly educational experiences. Of course, many studies have linked parental involvement to improved educational opportunities for children (Epstein, 1996; Jeynes, 2003). Most middle-class parents possess knowledge regarding the structure and content of schools. As a result, they are confident in questioning teachers about classroom practice, “more assertive in seeking out ideal school conditions and more proactive in addressing problems” (Redford, Johnson, & Honnold, 2009, p. 30). Moreover, middle-class parents possess the economic capital necessary to avail themselves to schools for volunteering or networking with educational professionals (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008).

Finally, Lareau cites the organization of daily life as the fourth component of concerted cultivation. Here, middle-class parents who take this approach are actively involved with the enhancement of their children’s skills and talents – they register children for co-curricular instruction around interests (including academia if they deem it necessary) and organize structured leisure activities. In this highly planned setting there is little time for free play (Redford et al., 2009). Lareau contends that during these controlled experiences, children learn the behaviours (e.g., initiative, independence, critical thinking, multi-tasking, and
leadership) required for the professional positions already held by their parents (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008).

Though some scholars question the actual impact parental involvement has on student achievement (Redford et al., 2009), Lareau’s look at the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital has made significant contributions in the area of educational inequities.

In studying practices of White middle-class parents, the objective here is to examine characteristics and identify tangible practices of families whose children dominate gifted classrooms. The analysis of these behaviours may provide valuable information that could be utilized in the investigation of Black underrepresentation in gifted education.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined my research question, provided rationale for this research, stated my connection to this field of study and defined essential terms. Furthermore, I have introduced Social Dominance, Social Capital, Cultural Capital, and Concerted Cultivation as the theoretical instruments used to investigate Black underrepresentation in gifted education. Chapter 2 of this paper (Literature Review) outlines existing literature on the problem of underrepresentation. A historical overview identifies past practices that excluded minority students; this is followed by a look at contemporary procedures that limit minority participation. The review concludes with present-day solutions to the problem of underrepresentation that have gained the most traction. Chapter
3 (Methodology) provides an outline of the approach used when conducting this study and discusses strategies applied to minimize researcher bias. Chapter 4 (Findings) provides a documentation of the participants’ early experiences as Canadian citizens and their introduction to Canadian public education. It contains a review of the family’s initial exclusion from gifted education, shares how the parents secured placement for two of their children, and uncovers issues (related to race and class) this family faced in its pursuit of gifted education. Chapter 5 (Discussion) examines the role assimilation plays in gaining access to gifted classrooms. Implications of continuing with current practice in gifted education are also discussed, along with limitations of the study. Recommendations to improve gifted participation for Black students at school and board levels conclude the chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The vestiges of colonialism continue to negatively impact all areas of modern society. “One important question to ask concerns the effect that colonial history has had upon the construction of ‘norms’ and the categorization of different contexts” (Armstrong, 1999, p. 89).

In order to contextualize the issue of Black underrepresentation in gifted classrooms, I begin with an analysis of gifted education’s historical roots. Interestingly, many key psychologists and scholars supported notions of intelligence pyramids based on race. As a consequence, elite education was constructed and reserved for descendants of

...early settlers to North America – literate people who came here in the seventeenth century...in order to obtain freedom for religious ideas...[and not] illiterate peoples who came here in the twentieth century when the country [was already] rich and prosperous...

Hollingworth, 1926, p. 69.

Gifted education’s earliest advocates steadfastly believed newer immigrants produced few gifted children. Primarily referencing the work of Selden (2000), the review starts with identifying where educational hierarchies and exclusionary philosophies were first conceptualized.

Next, I discuss research from Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman (2002), McBee (2006), Borland (2004), and Cobb (2010; 2012) and highlight reasons why homogeneous populations in gifted classrooms persist – namely through the deficit thinking of educators, the continued use of standardized tests, and the failure to disclose information regarding specialized programming to minority
parents. These first two sections are critical to recognizing the historical and systemic forces that have limited and continue to restrict minority participation.

Finally, I cover current solutions to the problem of Black underrepresentation that have been offered thus far. These solutions include, constructing new definitions of giftedness (Borland, 2004), incorporating culturally responsive assessment tools (Joseph & Ford, 2006), and providing multicultural education for teachers (Ford & Harmon, 2001).

**Gifted Education – Past and Present**

In education, the field of psychology was predominately responsible for initial conceptions of intelligence hierarchies. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American psychologists propagated and legitimized the notion that certain cultural groups (specifically those of European decent) possessed superior intelligence (Franklin, 1991), while simultaneously declaring the mental inferiority of racial minorities. Though subsequent research conducted by scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois confirmed these findings as groundless, perceptions regarding race and aptitude continued. Texts like Herrnstein and Murray’s ‘The Bell Curve’ preserved biased principles to the detriment of Black students; this is particularly true when examining areas of elite education. “Gifted education, with its roots in psychology, inherited these perceptions of African-American people, and remnants of this belief continue to germinate within the schooling process and the field of gifted education” (Morris, 2002, p. 59).
The idea of giftedness can trace its roots back to the inception of formal education. The Greek philosopher Plato routinely organized students into groups based on perceived intelligence. Only the strongest students who performed well in advanced studies received further training to become philosopher kings. According to Plato, these students possessed “natural gifts that facilitated their education” (Bloom, 1991, p. 214). Early conceptualizations of giftedness were fraught with notions of white supremacy, which included support for the deplorable practice of eugenics. Sir Francis Galton, viewed by many as a forefather of gifted education, was instrumental in the development of eugenics philosophy. He once said, “[T]he natural ability...is such as a modern European possesses in much greater average share than men of the lower races” (Galton, 1869, p. x). In sharing his thoughts regarding the intelligence of general society, Galton stated, “[E]veryone knows how difficult it is to drive abstract conceptions, even of the simplest kind, into the brains of most people. It is in the most unqualified manner that I object to pretensions of natural equality” (Galton, 1869, p. 14). For him, giftedness was hereditarily distributed disproportionately towards White individuals.

In the 19th century most US eugenicists agreed with Galton’s position regarding heredity in human development. They believed that discoveries made by Australian horticulturalist Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) regarding the transmission of traits in peas could be directly applied to humankind (Selden, 2000). The eventual goal – legislate policies encouraging society’s most able to reproduce (positive eugenics) while concurrently limiting the reproduction of
those deemed ‘less desirable’ through sterilization (negative eugenics). This would end “traits of pauperism, a tendency to wander, moral laxity and feeblemindedness, which are presently being transmitted from generation to generation” (Selden, 2000, p. 235).

Writings from Leta S. Hollingworth further illustrate how eugenics ideology contributed to the formation of gifted education. Hollingworth is viewed by many as one of the most influential researchers in the field of gifted education. In a chapter of a book called ‘The Child: His Nature and His Needs’ (1924), Hollingworth stated that more resources should be focused on the ‘biologically meritorious’, a group identified through intelligence tests as the nation’s best two percent. Professional families were more likely to produce gifted offspring, with few talented children coming from the labouring classes. “The very intelligent are those who rise in the world of competition, and who are also able to produce children like themselves” (Selden, 2000, p. 246). Some suggested that disparities in intelligence scores underlined the need to improve public education. Hollingworth called this ‘uninformed humanitarianism’, concluding, “...little could be done environmentally to improve the lot of these underachieving immigrant children” (Selden, 2000, p. 248).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, schools in the United States were in crisis. Compulsory education laws and an influx of immigrants produced unmanageable student populations. Rising costs and changing curricular objectives (Champman, 1988) only exacerbated the difficulties public education struggled with at the time. How could education tackle the requirements of a new
immigrant populace and simultaneously address the needs of its most advanced learners? The solution – create a comprehensive system that categorized students in order to educate in a more efficient manner. Researchers like Hollingworth called for specialized programs that would cultivate creativity, self-expression, critical thinking, and individualism (Berube, 1994). So how did calls for tiered schooling become realized in public education?

**Intelligence Quotient Testing**

Throughout the 1910s and early 1920s, Lewis M. Terman and other educational psychologists incorporated scientific methods to develop tests that ‘quantified intelligence’. Initial intelligence quotient or ‘IQ tests’ were first used to identify over 1000 high-functioning students. Terman collected data from these students as part of an extensive longitudinal study, created primarily to generate a rudimentary framework for gifted instruction. Unfortunately, the student pool used to create this sample set was not representative of typical school populations, either socio-economically or culturally. “Children of Asian, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Mexican descent were statistically underrepresented” (Borland, 2004, p. 2). As well, there was nearly a total absence of African-American children. Terman believed their performance would be so underwhelming, results would not be “deemed worthy of mention” (Borland, 2004, p. 3).

As a result, the ‘Termites’ sample group was essentially comprised of White youngsters from affluent families. Borland (2004) asserts this detail is critical, as
results obtained from Terman’s initial study spawned fundamental assumptions that continue to influence gifted education to this day.

Terman’s research has, more than any other body of work, constituted the bulk of what we ‘know’ about gifted children, although its influence has, to some extent, been obscured by being incorporated into secondary and tertiary sources that have passed along his findings as the common knowledge of the field...Why is this important? It is important because of Terman’s lasting influence on our thinking about the children who are the focus of our field. If the foundation of our knowledge rests on a study of high SES, mostly White children with high IQs, this knowledge will be translated into practice. For example, authors of teacher checklists will reproduce these findings as ‘characteristics of gifted children’ and children chosen for gifted programs will, to a greater degree than might otherwise be the case, resemble Terman’s sample racially, ethnically, and socio-economically. In other words, I am suggesting that, nearly a half century after his death, Terman’s sample is being replicated in a number of gifted programs across the country.

Borland, 2004, p. 3.

Terman’s initial IQ tests were used to construct the first gifted classrooms in the United States. Since then, “the identification of gifted and talented students has been inextricably linked to intelligence tests” (Brown, Renzulli, Gubbins, Siegle, Zhang & Chen, 2005, p. 69). Most school boards in North America have relied heavily on two instruments to identify gifted learners – the Stanford-Binet (originally the Binet-Simon Test, created by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon in 1905; revised for the U.S. in 1916 by Terman) or Wechsler (created by David Wechsler in 1949) Intelligence Tests. Some of the abilities measured by both tests include, attention, verbal ability, memory, and reasoning. Though the Stanford-Binet and Wechsler tests have undergone a few revisions over the years (Stanford-Binet, latest edition 5th, 2003; Wechsler or WISC, latest edition 4th, 2003), both assessments are employed to do the same thing – produce cognitive ability numerical grades in order to intellectually rank children. Rigid cut-off
scores generate academic groupings, with the highest scores (typically the 98th percentile and above) producing gifted student populations.

Regrettably, when standardized tests are the primary tool used in the identification of gifted learners, the result is an underrepresentation of culturally diverse students in gifted classrooms (Joseph & Ford, 2006). This is because many standardized assessment tools require students to possess knowledge specific to dominant culture and also have strong command of the English language. In the end, the over-reliance on standardized identification tools has been identified as one of the key contributors to the production of homogeneous gifted classrooms. “White students disproportionately comprise gifted education programs” (Moore, Ford & Milner, 2005, p. 52).

In recent years, a number of scholars have become critical of using IQ tests and other standardized assessments to identify talent in linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse populations (Bonner, 2000; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson & Avery, 2002; Naglieri, 2003; Joseph & Ford, 2006). They offer reasons why traditional methods for selecting gifted students do not work (inherent cultural biases; narrow range of abilities assessed) and suggest employing non-discriminatory assessment tools (e.g., nonverbal ability tests) that strive to give fair appraisals and identify student potentials. “Nonverbal tests give students opportunities to demonstrate their intelligence without the confounding influence of language, vocabulary, and academic exposure” (Ford et al., 2008b, p. 300).
Although alternative assessment instruments like the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test, Raven’s Progressive Matrices (Lewis, DeCamp-Fritson, Ramage, McFarland & Archwamety, 2007), and DISCOVER (Sarouphim, 2004) show promise in the identification of underrepresented populations, results from IQ assessments continue to be the preferred mode for detecting gifted learners. “...[G]ifted children have too often been identified through the use of a cutoff score on an intelligence test such as the Binet or Wechsler” (Joseph & Ford, 2006, p. 42). Supporters of standardized tests deem the assessments meritocratic, as they maintain 'high standards’ for this unique group. Professor Jim Delisle argues that augmenting assessment protocols would alter gifted education itself – replacing it with a sub-standard, diluted program. “The result [would be] a watering down of options for students who had once been identified as gifted in the old-fashioned, individually administered IQ way” (Delisle, 2003, p. 12).

Delisle believes standardized tests are equitable because they provide the same evaluation for all students. “...[P]roponents of these inclusive plans are ignoring mountains of IQ evidence related to the genuine distinctions between those who are ‘truly’ gifted and those (dare I say it?) who are not gifted” (Delisle, 2003, p. 13). Not surprisingly, Delisle references Galton and Hollingworth when discussing identification. Here, merit and standards are code for ‘excellence through exclusivity’. The implication is that increasing the diversity of gifted classrooms might somehow threaten this ‘excellence’. We are reminded that gifted education is in fact viewed as a ‘pedagogy of (divine) privilege’ in reading
the final sentence of Delisle’s article To Be or To Do: “Giftedness is not simply what one does, it is who one is” (Delisle, 2003, p. 13).

Criticisms regarding formal testing have become more prevalent as researchers begin to recognize the prejudicial nature of tests that identify excellence from a culturally dominant perspective.

Intelligence tests have an inherent bias toward emphasizing convergent, analytical modes of thought; intelligence tests measure a limited range of cognitive abilities and do not measure the entire range of abilities that make up intelligence; intelligence tests may not be appropriate to use with culturally diverse students; and intelligence tests may not be appropriate to use with linguistically diverse students.


Deficit Thinking

“While a majority of commentators raise testing issues, we believe that the principal barrier to the recruitment and retention of African-American students in gifted education is the pervasive deficit orientation that prevails in society and its educational institutions” (Ford et al., 2002, p. 53). In the area of gifted education, White, middle-class teachers predominate. During a 2003 survey conducted by The Center for Gifted and Talented Development at Ball State University, it was observed that 93% of the gifted teachers involved were Caucasian (Speirs-Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady & Dixon, 2007). Although the Indiana study is not representative of all gifted teacher populations, research conducted by Ford, Grantham & Harris (1997), Elhoweris (2008) and Ford (2010) identified similar demographics, with White teachers accounting for 86%, 83%, and 85% of gifted faculties, respectively.
Consequently, a Eurocentric perspective becomes the normative standard as educators share constricted, biased concepts regarding student attributes. This ‘consensus’ is especially problematic when it comes to the nomination of minority students for gifted assessment. Students who do not demonstrate a fixed set of observable skills are viewed as learners who will be unsuccessful in the gifted environment. Moreover, these ‘absences’ become focal points for educators, negating the areas where students excel. Deficit thinking focuses on student weaknesses and comes from the belief that minority groups are in some way genetically or culturally inferior to Whites. “...[E]xperienced (gifted) teachers held a narrow conception of giftedness and were not aware of how culture and environmental factors may influence the expression of giftedness in minority and economically disadvantaged students” (Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2007, p. 495).

Ideas teachers have about ‘the gifted learner’ are significant, as many school boards continue to rely on teachers to determine which students are eligible for gifted assessment through teacher referrals. The term ‘gatekeeper’ has been used to describe this vital role, since students may not be eligible to partake in the identification process unless nominated by a teacher.

Most school districts require that a student be referred or nominated before being formally assessed for gifted program placement. Students that do not receive a referral will be unable to enter the program no matter which formal assessment is used. The referral process is an obvious potential source of unfairness in the entrance process.

McBee, 2006, p. 103.

The aforementioned Ball State study can be used to illustrate how teacher bias can lead to Black underrepresentation in gifted settings. The study began with asking teachers to identify the characteristics they employ when nominating
potential students for gifted programming. The top criterion listed was independence. From this response it can be concluded that students whose cultures did not view autonomy as an attribute were penalized. For example, many who are from a Black culture place worth in communalism (Ford et al., 2002), a trait that can be viewed as in direct opposition to independence. Furthermore, other characteristics demonstrated by many Black students including verve (exuberance), and affect (emotion) (Ford et al., 2002) are contrary to ways students typically exhibit independence, namely through self-control and focus. Finally, gifted teachers in the Ball State study viewed attributes favoured by many Blacks students as undesirable. For example, oral tradition was interpreted to be a form of rudeness; kinesthetic ability was viewed as hyperactivity; communalism was linked to immaturity; and affect, a lack of control.

At no point during the study did teachers connect any attributes more common in Black students with gifted characteristics. “The fourth-grade teachers in the present study were able to identify several common indicators of giftedness...however did not mention any characteristics of giftedness that are more prevalent in the minority students...” (Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2007, p. 492). Teachers did not recognize those traits as gifted attributes because they did not personally view them as positive qualities. In other words, giftedness had become “...culturally defined” (Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2007, p. 492). The inability to identify excellence in minority cultures ultimately costs minority students, as teachers consistently fail to nominate them for gifted assessment.
Another study that examined the teacher nominations of more than 700,000 1st through 5th graders in the state of Georgia further supports this claim. Results from the research found that African-American and Hispanic students experience the lowest percentage of teacher referrals (McBee, 2006). “...[R]esults suggest inequalities in nomination, rather than assessment, may be the primary source of the underrepresentation of minority and low SES students in gifted programs” (McBee, 2006, p. 103). Unless teachers are culturally proficient, with the ability to recognize and build on students ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), many culturally diverse students will continue to be excluded from gifted learning environments. “...[I]ntelligence cannot be meaningfully understood outside of cultural context” (Sternberg, 2004, p. 325).

In addition to traditional identification methods and deficit thinking, researcher Cameron Cobb identifies a third factor that limits enrollment of minority students into gifted programs – the lack of institutional knowledge minoritized parents possess regarding gifted identification procedures. “While there was evidence that districts were opening up their identification protocol to multiple criteria and multiple assessment measures, it was less clear that stakeholders understood either the process or the reasons behind it” (VanTassel-Baska, 2006, p. 206).

**Barriers to Institutional Knowledge**

investigated parental involvement in special education, Canadian researcher Cameron Cobb notes, “[L]iterature written on the subject of minorities parental inclusion in special education identification, placement, and program delivery indicates that there is a rift between the minoritized parent community and schools” (Cobb, 2010, p. 5). Cobb’s own investigation of minority parents’ inclusion into and/or exclusion from special education identified the omission of information, language, divergent cultural perspectives and positioning (Cobb, 2010) as barriers that limit the amount information parents who are interested in gifted education can accumulate.

The Gifted Identification Process

In Ontario, the classification of a child as a gifted learner typically begins with the classroom teacher. As students complete grade requirements, their performances are compared to provincial curricular expectations (Bennett & Weber, 2004). Students who routinely surpass these expectations may be targeted by teachers as candidates for programming beyond the scope of traditional classrooms. In some cases the classroom teacher (in consultation with a special education teacher) can offer supplemental curricula that meets the student’s need. Otherwise, the teacher may recommend that a formal discussion, called a School Support Team (SST) meeting, take place. Here, the teacher, an administrator, the special education teacher, and board specialist (e.g., school psychologist) discuss the student’s progress and make recommendations. Parents are informed when SST meetings are scheduled and asked to attend. One
of the recommendations may be that a ‘psycho-educational assessment’ (Cobb, 2010) be conducted to determine whether a student meets the criteria necessary for gifted identification. Usually, this assessment is in the form of a standardized test that produces a raw score; a rating scale is then used to quantify this result. A follow-up SST meeting is then called to review assessment findings. If a student meets the gifted standard, a gifted identification is recommended.

At final stage of this process, an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) is called to formalize the gifted recommendation. Once again, school professionals along with parents review student achievement, assessment findings and the recommendation for identification. The framework for an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) is also discussed. This plan is required, as future curricula will differ from what is typically expected for that grade. Though official identification of gifted learners is procedural at this point, the committee has the final authority regarding identification placement and programming. IPRC decisions can be appealed by parents and are reviewed annually during IPRC review meetings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001).

The gifted identification process is complex and extensive, typically involving a number of educational professionals and a considerable amount of subject-specific documentation. In order to effectively navigate this specialized educational space, parents require accessible information.
Omission of Information

Most minority parents are unfamiliar with the processes involved in specialized programming. As many were formally educated in another country, they are unaware of the policies and procedures that govern special education in Ontario schools. In many cases, classroom teachers, schools – even entire school boards, do not openly offer information regarding alternative programming possibilities. As a result, minority families remain unaware of gifted education. In cases where children are nominated for gifted assessment, minority parents are routinely forced to locate supplemental information on their own. “...[W]hen both mothers searched for answers (regarding gifted identification) on their respective school board websites, neither was able to gather the information they desired” (Cobb, 2012, p. 17).

Language

When information is shared by schools or located by parents, the language used is often too technical to be understood. “...[S]pecial education is a field rampant in terminology” (Cobb, 2012, p. 18). One study that explored the participation of African-American parents in special education stated “unexplained jargon” (Harry et al., 1995, p. 371) compromised parental participation. Another study that measured the reading levels of supplemental special education materials provided for parents found “...more than 90% of Parents’ Rights documents were above the (recommended) 7th to 8th grade level and thus, too difficult for the average person” (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006, p.
Of course, for those who come from countries where English is not the first language, technical terminology exacerbates challenges inherent with language acquisition.

Divergent Cultural Perspectives

For many minority parents, differences in cultural norms that exist between themselves and public schools impact the number and types of interactions that take place.

As stated earlier, a deficit model is one theory used to explain why fewer minority students are nominated as gifted candidates compared to their White counterparts. This theory can also be applied when considering the opinions some educational professionals hold regarding minority parents.

In a study that investigated links between parental involvement and African-American student achievement, Howard & Reynolds (2008) assert many educators presume minority parents have little to offer in the area of formal education. These presuppositions negatively impact parent-teacher interactions, as teachers fail to share possibilities beyond improving achievement within traditional classroom settings.

From a deficit standpoint, (minority) parents are assumed to have little knowledge or capital to advocate on behalf of their children. Parents may also be viewed as the primary reason why children are not better prepared academically, and are viewed overall as a significant part of the problem with school underachievement.

Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 84.

Lareau (2003) suggests that educators naturally gravitate toward parents who hold ideals that align with school policy and teacher beliefs. As a result,
parents who do not hold viewpoints similar to the values that predominate in schools have interactions that are less favorable. “...[E]ducators who do not respect parenting styles that differ significantly from those practiced by middle-class White parents may communicate their disapproval and alienate parents” (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011, p. 1).

Positioning

In his investigation of minority parents’ ability (or inability) to access gifted education, Cobb (2010) also considered the notion of positioning. Simply put, the identification and placement of a gifted learner can be an arduous process – one that requires parents interact with a number of educational professionals. Within these social interactions, individuals position themselves (or are assigned positions) as they work collectively to produce positive outcomes within a larger educational framework. Positions routinely held by teachers, educational consultants, school psychologists, administrators, and other educational professionals, create systems of power that place minority parents interested in gifted education at a serious disadvantage. In fact, through positioning, one can observe how aforementioned barriers (omission of information, language, and divergent cultural perspectives) conflate to further restrict the agency minority parents possess.

The effects of positioning are apparent throughout the gifted identification and placement process. It begins with the limited access parents have to information regarding gifted education. (Note: at the time of this study, the
Toronto District School Board (TDSB) website provided no information specific to gifted nomination, screening, identification, or placement. In calling various departments, I eventually connected with an area coordinator for gifted education who confirmed the information regarding nomination, identification and placement outlined earlier. The only information provided by the TDSB website regarding gifted students – total gifted population for the TDSB; EQAO achievement scores; and, demographic data, including a disaggregation of the gifted population using ethno-cultural classifications). If a parent wonders why their child has not been nominated for gifted screening, the inequitable distribution of knowledge reduces the ability to question. Without access to information outlining nomination protocol, parents cannot investigate this subjective process. In addition, parents are seldom told they can have their child assessed independently (though the cost of independent assessment by a child psychologist may be prohibitive). In this scenario, educational professionals hold positions of power and parents are relegated to being receivers of knowledge. This imbalance continues when students are nominated for gifted assessment.

In his study of minority parents, Cobb (2012) noted that when a parent was asked to provide consent for the assessment of her child, she wasn’t given any information about the test itself. “The school needed parental consent in order for Ravi to take a gifted assessment. But what precisely would the assessment involve? What sort of expectations would her son have to meet in order to be deemed gifted?” (Cobb, 2012, p. 16).
The results of positioning become most obvious when formal meetings (SST or IPRC) are called. Parents are routinely advised, “not to worry if they cannot attend” (Harry et al., 1995, p. 371) as meetings are procedural and documents requiring signatures can be sent home. Late notices, inflexible conference times, conference time length (short), emphasis on empirical results rather than participation (Harry et al., 1995), and “…the adversarial layout of the room” (Cobb, 2012, p. 17) produce unwelcoming environments that silence parents. Finally, in attempting to conceptualize what parents experience during these interactions, Gliedman and Roth (1980) propose disempowering strategies employed by educational professionals in order to maintain control. These approaches include the following: 1) the power of kindness – using goodwill to deter parents from sharing feelings of dissatisfaction; 2) the power of the group – many professionals give opinions to overpower parental attempts at offering opposing views; 3) the power of manipulation – professionals intentionally use knowledge and authority to coerce parental support; and 4) the power of need – parental need for professional assistance makes disagreement virtually impossible. A minority parent who attended an IPRC meeting for gifted identification, summed her feelings up this way.

It was just very brief. You just go in there. They call you. And then the teacher presents the case, saying this and this has been done, he was identified as gifted. Then the members there, they gave some time to discuss something...and then they asked me: “Do you have and questions?” And I didn’t have any questions at the time because I was wondering, “What kind of meeting is this?”

By limiting the amount of information parents can access, educational professionals inhibit parents’ ability to advocate for the admission of their children into gifted classrooms. Though all parents encounter barriers when attempting to access specialized programs, “these same barriers are made more formidable (for minority parents) by racism, discrimination, insensitivity, and cultural unresponsiveness” (Geenen, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001, p. 279).

**Present Solutions to Issues of Underrepresentation**

In reviewing the literature regarding Black underrepresentation, scholars consistently offer the following recommendations to increase the identification of Black students for gifted programs: 1) redefine the term ‘giftedness’ (Borland, 2004; Bonner et al., 2008); 2) utilize culturally sensitive identification tools (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Pierce, Adams, Speirs-Neumeister, Cassady, Dixon & Cross, 2006); and, 3) ensure pre-service and in-service teacher instruction includes diversity education (Ford & Harmon, 2001; Elhoweris et al., 2005; Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2007).

**Redefining Giftedness**

“[Giftedness] is not a fact of nature – it is something that was invented, not discovered” (Borland, 2004, p. 14). Professor James Borland contends this social construction has created pedagogy of privilege for students whose cultures align with the values of mainstream society. In its inception, gifted education was designed primarily to stratify diverse student populations, not identify the
academic potentials of varied learners. Based on the work of researchers like eugenist Francis Galton and psychologist Lewis Terman, early IQ tests created to streamline students also reinforced beliefs that giftedness was in fact a human trait, limited to those who were genetically superior. As a result, intelligence hierarchies were established and rigorous curriculum was not ‘wasted’ on those who didn’t have the capacity for academic excellence. Of course, it was no accident that the students identified as gifted were exclusively of European decent.

Giftedness is socially constructed...[A]s a construct, giftedness is inevitably tied to notions of excellence and potential. In multicultural societies, conceptions of excellence and giftedness are likely to be shaped by the values of the dominant culture or subculture...Thus, in the U.S., intellectual and academic giftedness as it has traditionally been understood and operationalized, has largely been White middle- and upper-middle-class giftedness because the discourse out of which the construct has been created has been dominated by White middle- and upper-middle-class professionals.


The notion of giftedness being defined from a Eurocentric perspective is shared with educational psychologist, Dr. Roland S. Persson (2012), who claims there has been a hegemonic control over notions of giftedness by Western scholars, and this dominance has stifled the development of more culturally sensitive ideas. Truncated definitions that are culturally biased have produced a gifted profile that “all children do not fit neatly” (Bonner et al., 2008, p. 94) and contribute to the formation of homogeneous gifted populations. In order to rupture this dominance, it has been suggested different interpretations of giftedness be constructed – broader conceptualizations that attempt to recognize the abilities of learners from a variety of backgrounds. “...[G]iftedness is a social construct
that manifests itself in many ways and means different things to different cultural
groups” (Ford & Harmon, 2001, p. 143). New definitions must look to
incorporate traits that are favoured by a variety of ethno-cultural groups.

“Different cultures have different conceptions of what it means to be gifted”
(Bonner et al., 2008, p. 93). The goal for those attempting to define notions of
giftedness must be to create a designation that incorporates the many culturally
specific ways exceptional abilities can be exhibited. “Educators should be most
concerned with not excluding any possibly gifted young students with
outstanding promise” (Pfeiffer, 2003, p. 167).

Culturally Sensitive Identification Tools

First and foremost, educators need to be strongly encouraged to identify or
refer students from diverse cultures or ethnic groups who may potentially be
eligible for gifted and talented programming. Once students have been referred
for assessment, nondiscriminatory assessment practices should be implemented.


Researchers advocate for the use of alternative instruments (e.g., nonverbal tests,
authentic assessments) “…to lessen the cultural and social bias often found in
standardized measures, to provide measures for ESL students, and to allow
students to show evidence of potential in several ways” (Pierce et al., 2006, p.
114). Nontraditional assessment tools reduce biases by introducing students to
authentic real-life scenarios where solutions are derived through problem
solving and creative thinking is rewarded. “Research suggests minority and low
SES students score higher on tasks that require fluid intelligence rather than crystallized intelligence” (Pierce et al., 2006, p. 115).

A study conducted by the Center of Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary provides support to this claim. The intent of the study (named Project STAR) was to design a series of performance task assessments that could be added to measurements commonly used to identify gifted learners. Presumably, this increase in the range of gifted assessments would have a positive impact on the identification of underrepresented populations, “particularly African-American students and populations from low socioeconomic backgrounds” (VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002, p. 111).

The assessments, which focused on open-ended problem solving, verbal reasoning and the incorporation of ‘pre-teaching’ (to decrease the impact of students with prior knowledge), increased the number of previously unidentified African-American students by 12% and low income students by 14% (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2002). Other studies conducted by Saccuzzo (1994) and more recently by Pierce et al. (2006) using Raven’s Progressive Matrices assessment, also found increases in the identification of minority students not identified with traditional tests. Researchers from the Saccuzzo study concluded, “the Raven is a far better measure of pure potential than tests such as the WISC-R, whose scores depend heavily on acquired knowledge” (Saccuzzo, 1994, p. 30).

By incorporating gifted assessment tools that measure cognitive ability in a variety of ways, the eventual goal of nondiscriminatory assessment is to increase gifted access for all learners. “Nondiscriminatory assessment is concerned with
fairness in all aspects of evaluating individuals...[It] is a collection of approaches, each designed to systematically reduce bias with the broader framework” (Ortiz, 2002, p. 1324).

Diversity Education

As teacher recommendations continue to play a vital role in the placement of gifted students, concerns regarding gifted demographics have some researchers questioning whether teachers are equipped to identify gifted learners (Woods & Achey, 1990; Callahan, 2005). One study that investigated the impact student ethnicity had on educational decision making (Elhoweris et al., 2005) found student ethnicity did in fact influence teacher referrals for gifted programming. “Elementary school teachers treated identical information contained in the vignettes differently and made different recommendations despite the fact that the basic student information was identical in all ways except for ethnicity” (Elhoweris et al., 2005, p. 29). Researchers who have investigated reasons why these biases exist found teachers were influenced by three factors: 1) the ethnicity of the student (Salend, Duhaney & Montgomery, 2002), 2) student gender (Siegle & Powell, 2004), and 3) student socioeconomic status (Frey, 2002; Mutua, 2001). It has been suggested that in order to reduce biases towards culturally and linguistically diverse students, pre-service and in-service teachers enroll in multicultural education programs. “Teachers will have to bear a greater responsibility for demonstrating multicultural competence” (Ford & Harmon, 2001, p. 144).
With the aim of increasing cultural competencies, teachers are encouraged to consider four areas: 1) critically examine existing notions they may have regarding the intellectual inferiority of culturally and linguistically diverse students; 2) gather accurate information about various minority groups (e.g., histories, cultural styles, values, traditions); 3) incorporate multicultural perspectives into daily classroom instruction in order maximize the academic and social-emotional potentials in all learners; and, 4) develop partnerships with diverse families and communities (Ford & Harmon, 2001). Pedagogical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings takes it one step further, suggesting all pre-service educators teach in diverse communities for a period of time. Experiences in those settings would give teachers opportunities to understand the lives of minority and low-SES students in context; teachers would also begin to recognize the unique strengths of diverse learners that may otherwise go unnoticed in traditional school settings (Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2007).

**Limitations of the Literature Review**

Although there is substantial literature regarding the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education from an American perspective, aside from the work of Cameron Cobb, research that explores underrepresentation from a Canadian point of view is non-existent.

As well, current research investigating Black underrepresentation is limited in its consideration of Black students who have *successfully* entered gifted programs. More specifically, the roles parents play in the identification of gifted
learners. In most cases, parents are the primary advocates for children who attempt to access specialized programs. Accounts detailing how Black parents successfully navigate the special education landscape would provide valuable insight in the area of Black underrepresentation. The goal of this study is to contribute to the research that presently exists regarding access to gifted programs for Black students from a Canadian perspective.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed literature related to the underrepresentation of culturally diverse students in gifted education programs. Although underrepresentation impacts a number of minority groups, it is especially true for Black students, who coincidentally are overrepresented in special education programs. In reviewing the history of gifted education, present-day practices in the field and solutions to the problem of Black underrepresentation, it was noticed that there is little on this topic from a Canadian perspective. Aside from the work of Cobb (2010, 2012), there was no Canadian literature regarding issues of diversity in gifted education at the time of this study. Canada prides itself on being a country of diversity and opportunity; it is critical that more research is devoted to examining areas of education where inequities exist.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Although the number of Black students in gifted education is small, some Black students have gained access to gifted programs. Any investigation of gifted underrepresentation must also take into account the experiences of Black students who do participate. It is especially important to understand the role Black parents play in securing gifted placement for their children. This study looks at the parents of a Black family with two children in gifted education. As screening procedures typically take place during a child’s primary years (most school boards identify gifted learners in grade three for placement in grade four), parents play an instrumental role as advocates for their children. What do Black parents do to ensure gifted participation? Are there specific practices common to parents of minority participants that differ from minority parents whose children are not given gifted identifications?

Of course, in order to fully appreciate the particular approaches of the participants in this study, we must also consider the epistemology of those behaviors. Specifically, how did philosophies regarding parenting and education evolve? What lasting beliefs or values from indigenous upbringings were preserved for life in Canada, which ones were altered and which ones became obsolete? Furthermore, were any Canadian values ever adopted? Understanding the nature of the participants’ values is also critical, as it provides the underpinning for choices made throughout their childrearing years.
Once the participants identify essential factors that influenced their values, I focus on examining the specific strategies used to secure gifted placement and create an optimal home environment for high-functioning, well-adjusted students – students who continue to excel in an area of education where there are virtually no Black students. A case study research design was used.

**Approach**

In this qualitative study I explore the issue of Black underrepresentation in gifted education by investigating the experiences of Black parents who have two of three children enrolled in gifted education. Although this approach is counterintuitive in some respects (most underrepresentation research focuses on factors that limit participation), the study does extend previous research through the identification of strategies utilized by parents of Black students classified as gifted. Though the third (and eldest child) did not have a gifted identification, he also excelled throughout his academic career and is presently enrolled in a number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses at the high school level.

Case study research “investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Given gifted populations have historically lacked diversity, the experiences of minority families who do participate are vital to this area of study. “Despite a general consensus that minority and economically disadvantaged children are underrepresented in gifted programs, the problem remains unsolved, a concern that has been well
established in the literature in gifted education” (Speirs-Neumeister et al., 2007, p. 479).

**Design**

An intrinsic case-study approach was taken in this study. In an intrinsic study, “the focus is on the case itself because the case presents an unusual or unique situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). In the area of gifted education, few Black students participate; this reality has been evident since the beginning of gifted education and a quick scan of gifted classrooms today reveals little has changed. In studying this family, the goal was to pinpoint strategies these parents used in securing gifted placements for two of their three children.

Although a number of generalizations will be made in the study, the intent was not to produce across-the-board conclusions for minority parents interested in accessing gifted spaces. Rather, it was to record, analyze, and explain the specific experiences of this family and their involvement in elite education. Also, conclusions derived from this study should not be viewed as representative of all Black families who have succeeded in securing gifted placement for their children. Instead, the purpose of this research is to construct deeper understandings regarding the observations made, epiphanies realized, and tactics employed by Black parents who were determined to have their children receive enriched instruction. I concede this family represents an extremely small portion of Ontario’s gifted population; nonetheless, telling their story is critical to the field of gifted education.
Participants

As the number of Black students who participate in gifted programs is small, recruiting participants proved to be difficult. A teaching colleague in another school board, who was aware of my interest in minority education, identified a family whose children participated in gifted education. The teacher contacted the parents on my behalf and presented them with consent forms requesting their involvement.

Data Collection and Analysis

The case study data was gathered in two ways: documents and face-to-face interviews. First, biographical questionnaires identifying age, grade, and academic achievement (most recent report cards) of all three children were collected. Next, initial face-to-face interviews with the participants (both parents) took place. For the participants, questions focused on the following areas: identity, childhood experiences in their native country, migration to Canada, educational backgrounds, educational philosophies, perceptions of gifted education, school involvement, and home routines. A semi-structured approach was used when conducting interviews. The initial interview with both participants lasted approximately sixty minutes. Afterwards, rudimentary coding and analysis of participant responses took place. Emerging themes were gleaned from this meeting in order to guide questions for a second interview with the participants. This approach was reflective, as given responses were utilized to guide the scope and sequence of future questions, increasing efficacy. “With this
method, the researchers were able to add, subtract questions depending on the responses of the participants...thereby allowing researchers to consider the emergent and constantly changing nature of qualitative research” (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

Data from the participants’ initial interview was coded thematically. First, information related to initial experiences as immigrants in Canada was selected. This information was critical in providing context for subsequent data; it also helped delineate core beliefs regarding parental support, education, and identity. Initial data was also organized around concepts of race and social mobility, as I believe these values significantly influenced the participants’ desire to pursue gifted education of behalf of their children. Based on these insights, follow-up questions were created and both parents were interviewed a second time. Days before the second interview, participants received email transcriptions of answers given during the first interview. They were given the opportunity to review responses and make adjustments (if needed) before the second round of questions commenced. Participants were asked if the conceptualized themes developed from earlier responses accurately reflected their experiences; they were then asked a second set of questions. These questions did not replace earlier questions. The intent here was to expand on established themes in order to deepen understandings of the minority experience in a gifted context.

The second interview also lasted approximately sixty minutes. Participants were again given the opportunity to review previous responses. All questions and responses were audio taped and subsequently transcribed. Responses were again
thematically coded in order to identify specific attitudes, experiences and familial practices that emerged throughout this family's participation in gifted education. Following the interviews, I emailed and telephoned participants to review past statements and ask follow-up questions. Participants were asked to provide times that were most convenient before any phone conversations took place.

Coding data collected during the second interview and follow-up discussions revealed that participant responses were addressing two central questions: 1) what resources would the parents require in order to secure elite education for their children; 2) what ongoing familial practices would be required for the children to experience success in gifted education? Answers to those questions were then organized in the following manner: parents’ initial lack of knowledge regarding Ontario’s public education system, their commitment to knowledge acquisition, and the incorporation of Canadian norms into daily life. Issues related to race and class in gifted education also emerged as an area of focus.

Ethical concerns regarding the participants this study was minimal. Any risks that did exist were mainly psychological. For both participants, questions that asked to recall childhood memories, initial experiences as Canadian citizens or questions regarding self-identity could have been uncomfortable. Of course, participants were reminded that all information was confidential. Participants were also informed of the steps taken to increase anonymity: 1) any information that identified the family in any way would not be kept for research purposes; 2) pseudonyms would be used for family members and all other individuals who were mentioned, or who could be identified by virtue of the information gathered.
during the study; and, 3) pseudonyms were used to replace actual school names. Participants had the right to refuse to respond to any question at any time. Finally, participants could withdraw their consent to participate at any time during the study.

As a person of colour who is also a teacher of gifted learners, I recognize there are a number of areas where the ‘bracketing’ of personal beliefs is essential. First, though I identify myself as a Black Canadian, I could not assume the participants in this study also viewed themselves as Black Canadians (participants in a Canadian study that explored preferred ethnic/racial labels study identified with 35 different labels (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000)). In order to address this concern, the participants were first asked to identify themselves in a way that they felt most comfortable (e.g., culturally, racially, religiously). An additional measure used to guard against researcher bias consisted of creating memos (journaling) during the analysis of data. As insights from the data began to take shape, reflections regarding personal observations, hypotheses, and conclusions were continuously documented; memos were then organized chronologically and referred to throughout the study. Finally, all recorded data (once it was transcribed) was shared with parents in order to ensure accuracy.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarized the choices made regarding approaches used in the study. It has also provided rationale for those decisions and discussed measures taken to reduce researcher bias. In the next chapter, I share the experiences of the parents who participated in this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The findings section of this study has been organized into two parts. The first part provides contextual information about the participants. It begins with the participants being asked to self-identify. Next, participants provide a brief narrative outlining memories before migration and early experiences in Canada. Finally, participants are asked to discuss key principles that were employed in their childhood homes. In collecting this information, I attempted to identify seminal experiences, values, and perceptions that helped shape the types of strategies utilized to secure gifted placement.

The second part of this section analyzes various themes that emerged from the collected and coded data:

• The Road to Gifted Education
• Assimilation & Concerted Cultivation
• Overcoming Obstacles of Class & Race

Though I have created distinct themes to examine the collective experiences of a family, the interconnectedness of those themes must be recognized. The process of settling in a new country, securing employment and a home, starting a family, establishing roots, entering public education, creating networks, acquiring institutional knowledge, and securing placement in an elite program is a process that has numerous intersections. I have attempted to categorize this process, however, no one area can be considered without also reflecting on all elements.
Contextual Information

Self-Identification

One of the initial questions asked of the parents was to define themselves using a label they were most comfortable with (e.g., racially, ethnically, culturally, religiously etc.). Deborah identified herself as a Caribbean-Canadian. She was also comfortable identifying herself as Black person. “I am a Canadian who was born and raised in Barbados. I’m a Black person. That I know for sure! No question about that.” Selwyn other the other hand viewed his identity in a slightly different way. “Yeah, I guess I’m considered Black as well as Caribbean. I guess we go with the flow and are identified based on grouping – and in this country we are Black. I don’t have a problem with that.” It is worth noting that while Deborah answered the question from the perspective of self-identification, Selwyn looked at it from the viewpoint of how others saw him – conceding that in ‘this country’ many people of colour are clustered under the heading of Black, even though they may vary in terms of ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Interestingly, the classification where consensus was reached was that they both saw themselves as Canadian. Deborah states, “Yes, I think we’re more on the Canadian side, given that we’ve spent more than half of our lives here.” For Selwyn, Canadian identity supersedes all other forms of classification. “I am Canadian – and by extension I am Bajan.”

The manner in which both parents self-identify is critical to understanding their beliefs regarding assimilation and the roles social and cultural capital play in
securing top tier education for their children. Both will be explained in greater detail later in the findings and discussion sections.

A Brief History

Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury were born in Barbados over forty years ago. “I came to Canada when I was twenty years old and actually, today is twenty-two years since we met!” Selwyn recalls as he smiles and points to flowers in the background. Deborah smiles. “I came to Canada when I was twenty-one, so that was a little while ago.”

The parents and grandparents of both Selwyn and Deborah were also born and raised in Barbados so Barbadian, or ‘Bajan’ roots run deep. Selwyn and Deborah were from the same town ‘back home’, so they were aware of each other as youngsters growing up. As teenagers their paths crossed unintentionally – with long lasting consequences. Selwyn had finished high school and was working as a laboratory analyst at a local mining company. Deborah, who had just completed high school, started an apprenticeship at the same company as Selwyn’s understudy. With daily interactions at work, a friendship began and after a period of time the two began to date.

Over the next two years, their relationship blossomed to the point where marriage had become the logical next step. As they openly discussed the future, Selwyn shared aspirations of leaving Barbados to begin a new life in another country. Life in Barbados had become increasingly difficult, so the two were not
convincing that starting a family there was the best idea. Deborah recalls thoughts about leaving Barbados.

Things in Barbados were ok most of the time but there were also many difficult periods. My father’s job didn’t pay a great deal and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. Even though she held odd jobs on the side, money would be tight from time to time – but it was tough for everyone. A lot of businesses were struggling because people weren’t buying local products. In order to help businesses, the government put limits on the importing of rice, flour, sugar etc. As a result, you had to buy what was offered – which wasn’t much. You couldn’t get things; you had to make do with what you had. It wasn’t easy, but we had a home. Even with the seven of us (five children, parents), there was enough room.

As the two considered various destinations, family members from both sides shared their thoughts regarding possible locals. As part of the decision-making process it was decided that Selwyn, his mother and siblings would travel to Canada to ‘check things out’. Selwyn’s older brother had already established himself in Canada, so he was able to sponsor his mother and her three dependents (Selwyn and two siblings). Selwyn’s mother and father were separated and his father had relocated to the United States. As a result, Selwyn’s father had minimal interaction with the family during Selwyn’s formative years. Although Selwyn did not see much of his father, he acknowledges the role his father played in shaping his identity stating, “I carry the values of both parents.”

Selwyn lived in Canada with his family for two and a half years. During this time, he was able to secure a job and begin his career in the field of telecommunications. Still a young man, Selwyn eagerly wanted to marry Deborah so they could begin their lives in a new country. “It probably isn’t the typical age to marry, but because of the distance between us, I was motivated to consolidate things and have her with me,” Selwyn states.
Initially hesitant about making such a significant move, Deborah’s concerns were put at ease upon hearing Selwyn’s account of this foreign land.

Selwyn lived in Canada for a time and spoke of the things in Canada that were positive, so it was more comforting to hear. Because he had a lot of family in the United States, he was able to compare the two (countries) and felt that Canada would be the better place to start a new family.

After two and a half years, Selwyn returned to Barbados, married Deborah and travelled back to Canada. By this time, Selwyn’s career was in full swing and he also had his family with him in Canada for additional support. As a result, Deborah’s move to Canada was seamless. As soon as Deborah and Selwyn became comfortable in their new surroundings, the two branched off from extended family members to begin their lives as a young couple.

Like Selwyn, Deborah hoped members of her family could join her in Canada. While mother was ok with the idea, Deborah’s dad wasn’t interested in starting over.

My father’s job had required him to travel most of his life, so the thought of settling down in another country wasn’t appealing. My dad said he would be fine and encouraged my mother to go ahead. As we were waiting for my mother’s papers to be finalized, my father was diagnosed with cancer and was only given months to live. When he passed away, it was easier for my mom to make the transition.

Though she missed her father, Deborah has always been thankful her mother made the move, as it provided the opportunity for Deborah’s mother to build relationships with Deborah’s children.

I brought my mom with me but she’s constantly travelling to visit with other family members. Our relationship has its ups and downs like all other relationships, but overall it’s very good. Being the only one in Canada, I am responsible for her care. I also have the job of constantly updating family regarding her health, which I don’t mind. One of the great things about having my mother close by is that she has strong relationships with the children. The kids visit with her regularly, sit with her at Church on Sundays and talk with her on the phone daily.
After Deborah and Selwyn had their first child, Deborah contemplated what she might do. A qualified nurse in Barbados, Deborah’s nursing designation wasn’t recognized in Canada, forcing her to upgrade her qualifications. Ironically, as Deborah worked towards completing her nursing requirements, she realized her commitment to family would necessitate a career change.

My passion had always been nursing but I knew I couldn’t do shift work with children. I decided to become an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) and completed my certification, but then realized it might be better to stay home and take care of the children until the youngest was old enough to go school. It was something we both agreed upon – it was the right move.

Over the next seven years, the Chowdhurys had two more children. As promised, when the youngest started school, Deborah began work as an ECE.

Today, the family of five live in a modest home located in a suburban area of Toronto – their residence bordering a section of the city known for high incidents of crime. The Chowdhurys consider themselves ‘lower middle-class’. “Yeah, that’s pretty much the story, but we’re very active in the community, politically, and within our children’s schools because we feel it benefits them,” Selwyn states.

Key Principles

Once the Chowdhurys had given a brief outline of some experiences pre-migration and a few events as new Canadian residents, the two were asked to share some of the important tenets or principles that were stressed in their childhood homes. They quickly stated that religion played a major role in both households. Although Selwyn and Deborah belonged to different denominations of the Christian faith (Deborah Presbyterian and Selwyn Anglican), they both had
many memories that were affiliated to their churches in some way. Selwyn recalls that

[c]hurch was more involved back in Barbados than here. Back home, you had to go to church! You could do whatever you wanted throughout the week, but once Sunday came you had to find time to attend. All of the holidays – Christmas, Easter etc. were important. Most parents were active in the church; kids were too. There were clubs and other activities that kids would participate in. There were even Bible study programs that ran for six weeks though the summer. They were good – kept you out of trouble (laugh)! Although spirituality was a requirement growing up, it didn’t feel like a burden.

In order to ensure all family members belonged to the same faith, Deborah began attending an Anglican church shortly after she and Selwyn settled in Toronto.

She believes spirituality is approached differently in North America.

Maybe it’s because I was younger there, but attending church was a lot more fun in Barbados. There was more of a community feel. The pace was slower; it gave you an opportunity to really connect with people. There is definitely a different feel here – maybe it’s because we’re Anglican instead of Baptist (more demonstrative)?

In addition to religion, both agree that education was another area stressed in their respective households. “Yes, school was very important. You didn’t mess around where that was concerned!” Deborah knowingly nods and adds,

[j]If you didn’t agree, you got lashes! (Deborah makes a quick, sweeping move with her right hand as she laughs) But seriously, my parents were very supportive of our education – my mom in particular. You know that four out of five children went to the second most prestigious high school in the city!

Deborah takes this moment to share a key strategy her mother employed to make sure the children kept focus in the classroom.

We all went to the same school and my mother was always at school! She was always there and when the next child started to attend, people would see my mother and ask, “Mrs. Sealy, you’re here again?” She was always there, so we had no choice but to do our best. She was going to know everything because she was so involved. If she saw a teacher in the market, she would get an update. My mother would say, “If you don’t have an education, what are you going to do with yourself?” There were also many educated people in the extended family, so we were provided with many strong examples. The message was consistent, regardless of which family member you went to. You had no choice.
Themes

The Road to Gifted Education

Selwyn and Deborah have three children – Thomas (age 17), David (age 12), and Elizabeth (age 10). Thomas (entering grade 12) is presently enrolled in Advanced Placement classes at Uptown Secondary School. David (entering grade 7) participated in the gifted program for three years at Central Elementary School (an out-of-area elementary school). Having received a sizable scholarship, David will continue his studies at a prestigious private school in the fall. Elizabeth (entering grade 5) just completed her first year in the gifted program at Central Elementary. Tables 1a and 1b show the final report card marks of all three for the school year 2010-2011. Results indicate that all are achieving academic success in their respective programs.

Table 1a: Progress Report Results of Elizabeth and David, 2010-11

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<th>David (Grade 6)</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Media Literacy</td>
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<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Sense and Numeration</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<td>Measurement</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry and Spatial Sense</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Management and Probability</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>Patterning and Algebra</td>
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When asked to reflect on childhood experiences ‘back home’, the Chowdhury family were quick to emphasize the role education played in their lives. “School was very important. It didn’t matter if you were rich or poor – education was a must!” Deborah declares. Selwyn continues, “Education in Barbados was rigorous. As you know, our educational system was heavily influenced by the British, so teachers had high expectations and excuses were not tolerated.” I continued to listen, realizing that these recollections in fact shaped the attitudes and beliefs they hold for their children’s education today. “Education there was taught with zeal. You had to get it. If you didn’t, something was wrong. The teacher would meet with your parents. So for us it was very, very important. You had to do your stuff in order to get by.” Selwyn goes even further.
To me, there was more passion there; teachers were more involved and everyone was more supportive. There was more of a push and punishment was given! And when that occurred, CAS (Children's Aid Society) didn’t go to school to pick up your child. So, as much as society in this part of the world may look at that and say it was draconian or barbaric – it worked! What was it to get the stick or the cane? We didn’t have ‘time out’. It was more a ‘sparing of the rod spoiling the child’ mentality. There was also more community; more of a cohesive effort to make it happen. The resources may not have always been there, but at the end of the day it worked.

Deborah acknowledges that economic realities make it extremely difficult for most people in Barbados to have the same educational opportunities as those who live in Canada. “In Barbados, the money is not always there. Many students wake up in the morning and go to school without much to eat, or you may be wearing the same clothing for some time. So it’s tough there, without a doubt.”

Though both parents believed better opportunities existed in Canada, initial educational experiences with their first child left them wondering about Ontario’s overall commitment to public education. Selwyn is openly critical of the perceived politics that impact teaching and learning and wonders about the effectiveness of educators employed by the public system.

I feel that today, society has us at ransom when it comes to the education of our children, in that you have to be very cautious and careful how you handle your kids. The (public) system is so policed if you will, that it has become consumed with managing various situations instead of schooling our kids. By contrast, in Barbados you were educated by the school but also by the village or town you lived in because everyone was supportive. I do appreciate the model here, that’s not a question. And I’m not saying that we don’t have caring teachers here. However, I think in our experience, they (caring teachers) are few and far between – I mean the ones who really have the interests of your children at heart.

Questions regarding teacher commitment and the overall efficacy of public education arose when Thomas, the eldest child, began attending elementary school.
When Thomas was old enough to start school, Selwyn and Deborah enrolled him in the neighborhood’s home school, Riverdale Elementary. From the moment he began participating in formal education, Thomas excelled. “Thomas was always an outstanding student in elementary school,” Deborah states. Though Thomas routinely received exemplary marks, his parents never witnessed a change in the curriculum Thomas received. Thomas was never introduced to enriched material in an effort to challenge him, nor was there ever any mention of alternative programming possibilities that could better address Thomas’ ability.

“No. We weren’t aware of other options for Thomas, nor were we told. We had no knowledge,” Deborah declares. The Chowdhurys provided Thomas with extra resources at home as a way of keeping him engaged.

Underwhelmed with the level of rigor they saw in their child’s education, Deborah and Selwyn began to wonder if other educational possibilities existed. “As Thomas got older, teachers from my local church who knew Thomas would ask why he wasn’t enrolled in a gifted program,” Deborah states. “In dealing with Thomas at church, they became aware of his abilities.” Nevertheless, given that Thomas was a well-adjusted student in grade five, the Chowdhurys decided not to inquire about alternative programming on his behalf. Instead, they began to increase the amount of time spent at Riverdale. Selwyn recalls this shift in philosophy.

What we learned over time is that when you’re close to what’s going on in a school, that’s what makes the difference. And so, we started living there. Deborah was not working at the time, which was by design so she could be home for the children. She was at school twice, three times a day! As she began to learn the ins and outs and became comfortable with certain key people, guess what – things opened up! We started going to various school meetings regularly and things clicked. We began to realize, once you are
there and become supported by educational professionals, there is nothing you cannot ask for. Once that happened, it was like a light bulb for us and it will never be shut off until such time as we decide to turn it off – that's our theory now.

Deborah increased her visibility and interactions within the school. As she did, she began to enjoy more positive interactions with staff members. This eventually led to Deborah volunteering in Riverdale's primary wing. "I was even able to volunteer with David sleeping in his stroller at the back of the classroom! I believe that through volunteering, I began making connections back then."

Consequently, when David (the Chowdhurys second child) entered grade one, Selwyn and Deborah decided they were not going to make the same mistake twice. Deborah remembers the actions she took.

With David it was much better. We got to know people. We were always there – not in a menacing way but in a supportive way. I began to build a rapport with the teachers. It was at that time that Mrs. Flynn, David's grade one teacher, began to discuss David's potential. She was very big on him. She would say things like, “He's the only one who understands my jokes. He's the only one who can relate to me.” Mrs. Flynn began to inform me about possibilities for David. I started to hear about things like IEPs and alternative programs. She would tell me what I needed to do and even wrote up a recommendation for David – in grade one!

From that point on, David began receiving ‘pullout support’ from a half-time teacher. “They observed him a couple of times in the classroom and then for an hour and a half each day he began working with another teacher. So he started receiving extra support in grade one, though it wasn't called ‘gifted’ then,” Deborah states. During those sessions, David was assigned tasks that were more challenging than the work he received in the regular classroom setting. “His school offered some type of special education program, where he would do work that would keep him engaged,” Deborah recalls. As the formal identification process does not happen until the grade three year (for placement in grade four)
in the Toronto District School Board, David continued to receive informal support for the next three years.

During David’s grade three year, David’s teacher informed the Chowdhurys that a psychological assessment would be given to David to determine whether he would receive a gifted identification. Results from the WISC-IV (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) assessment identified David as a gifted learner. Riverdale Elementary didn’t offer a gifted program, so David was offered placement in a self-contained classroom at nearby Valley Park Elementary School.

As David’s grade three year was coming to a close, the Chowdhurys were informed that Valley Park Elementary would be hosting a gifted open house for families of students attending the upcoming year. Encouraged by the prospect of their child finally entering a specialized program, Selwyn and Deborah (along with the parents of another identified student from Riverdale Elementary) enthusiastically took this opportunity to learn more about the school.

Unfortunately, both sets of parents were not impressed with what they observed.

Selwyn discusses the aggressive search for alternatives.

No, David did not go there at all! He was recommended to attend that school because it was the gifted school in the area. We went to Valley Park’s open house, listened to their presentation and walked away saying the same thing – our children are not going over there! So we came back, put our heads together and made some phone calls to locate other schools that offered gifted programming. We connected with an area coordinator who identified two schools – Central Elementary and Lakeside Elementary. She stated it would be difficult to get in.

Undeterred, the Chowdhurys pressed ahead. Selwyn recalls the process.

We researched both schools on our own, then connected with someone who worked in an administrative capacity at the board. We asked for feedback on Central and Lakeside and were particularly impressed with the comments made about Central Elementary. With this information, we went back to the area coordinator and asked that she consider our circumstance. We said we
were grateful that our children had the opportunity to learn in a specialized program, however, we didn't think Valley Park was the right place. We asked about Central; she wouldn't guarantee anything but suggested we visit. With persistence and patience, we were eventually granted permission to apply to Central Elementary. Essentially, that's how David got there. It was as a lot of work, but we felt it was necessary for our child.

The time and effort invested in securing David's placement at a preferred school would pay additional dividends as the Chowdhurys' third child, Elizabeth, progressed through the primary grades. Selwyn discusses their experience with Elizabeth.

Once we saw what David was exposed to at Central in his grade four year, I approached the principal and mentioned that we had another child in grade two. Based on David's successful transition, the principal was willing to accept Elizabeth during her grade two year! However, Deborah and I decided we wanted this process to go through the way David's had; we didn't want to rush Elizabeth. The principal was very supportive, stating that she would gladly enroll Elizabeth once we were ready. Elizabeth was recommended for assessment and formally identified as gifted during her grade three year – she began her grade four year at Central Elementary. It was a smooth process for her – they definitely made allowances for us.

Assimilation and Concerted Cultivation

Selwyn and Deborah are Canadian. Selwyn asserts, “I am Canadian and by extension I am Bajan.” Although her declaration was not as spirited as her husband’s, Deborah also affirms her Canadian citizenship. “I still try to make sure it’s [her Bajan heritage] a part of me, but I am definitely more Canadian, given that I’ve spent more than half of my life here.” This acceptance of Canadian identity contrasts the position held by many Black immigrants, who typically affiliate themselves with areas that possess large Black populations. This association reveals itself when Black people hyphenate identities to include both the original country and the newly adopted one (e.g., Jamaican-Canadian), or in some cases the new country is disregarded completely (e.g., West Indian)
(Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). In the case of Chowdhurys, defining themselves as Canadians gives a clear indication of their desire to embrace Canadian norms. This desire is further exemplified when Selwyn explains their approach in raising the children.

We would actually consider ourselves fully diversified. We go around and mix with other people, other cultures. And we think it's important that the children get exposed to various cultures because they live in a country where diversity is the norm. We don't want them to become stigmatized; we don't want them to say they're only going to stick to one part of the world. So one of our goals is to encourage the children to explore beyond the realm of what some people tend to expect.

This ‘realm’ refers to behaviours that are assigned to specific ethno-cultural groups. For example, in the area of leisure activities, minority groups are typically not associated with exploring natural pursuits (e.g., fishing, camping, etc.). “African Americans were more likely to use city parks, while less likely to use surrounding regional parks...” (Phillip, 1999, p. 386). Selwyn and Deborah make a point of exposing their children to activities they feel will bring the children benefit long term. “When we tell friends we’re taking our kids camping, some say, ‘there’s no need for that’ or ask ‘how could you do that’? We do it because we want them to experience what other Canadians do; show them the many things that can be done living in Toronto.”

The Chowdhurys are out most weekends, consistently searching for various cultural activities offered by the city. They regularly attend the Royal Ontario Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Ontario Science Centre. They also participate in functions offered at Harbourfront, attend cultural events (Caribana, Taste of the Danforth), and routinely visit community centres. Deborah firmly believes exposure is key and income cannot be used as an excuse. “The city of
Toronto offers many programs that are free or charge very little. For kids to understand their community, they must join in!” Deborah’s passion for participation becomes apparent when she recalls an incidence as a volunteer on a school outing.

When I volunteered at Riverdale we used to go on field trips and the one trip that bothered me was skating. We would all walk to the local community centre to skate. Of course, all of the Black children were lying on the ice because they couldn’t skate! (Long pause) That bothered me so much. You’re in Canada and the kids are young. I don’t expect the parents to skate but expose the kids! Buy them a pair of used skates for $30 and put them on the ice. Community centres offer free ice times. Every winter, just put them out there. And you could see the kids wanted to skate…and they’re just flat on the ice. That used to bother me. (Laughs)

Her frustration highlights a concern the Chowdhurys have that minority parents don’t do enough to engage in events beyond what is traditionally expected by their cultural groups. Selwyn and Deborah believe that children learn many valuable lessons when participate in a variety of activities. Deborah: “Don’t just stick to your Caribbean culture or Black culture – venture out! Give your children the confidence that they can be anywhere at any time and still be successful.”

In addition to actively engaging in a number of leisure activities, adopting Canadian traditions has influenced the Chowdhurys’ home practice. In ‘Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life’, Lareau contends that children who are concertedly cultivated by their parents have highly planned lives (Redford et al., 2009). For the Chowdhury children, ‘planned’ means a great deal of focus on academic achievement.

During a typical school week, the television or video games are not permitted. The children are home by 4:00pm, where Deborah meets them. When the children come home they typically grab a snack then begin homework, read
quietly, or conduct research on other topics they have interest in. Selwyn is home by 5:00pm. He ensures the children are on task while Deborah prepares dinner. Everyone is present for dinner – no exceptions. “If I’m a minute late I’m told!” Selwyn declares. “No seriously, I was working off site a couple weeks ago and called home to say I was running late. David responded by stating I was thirty-two minutes over my time! Every night, I need to be here.” Deborah continues, “We always try to maintain consistency in everything we do. We thought it was the best way to go. Dinner is always at the same time. Everyone is together, so that’s where family conversations take place.” Selwyn reinforces the significant role dinner plays in the household.

Dinner is an important time with our children because that’s when Deborah and I have a chance to converse with them. We ask how their days went, what were the good and bad points and what improvements could be made for the future. It provides us with the opportunity to be inquisitive about their pursuits and challenge their thinking. Our conversations can be intense because we ask the kids to defend their points of view.

After dinner, the children return to finish homework. When homework is completed, they are occasionally asked by Selwyn to demonstrate their mastery of the material taught during the school day. “If you have learned the material, you should be able to come home and clearly communicate that. If you can teach what you have learned, then to me your day was successful.” Selwyn doles out extended work periods on rare occasions when children do not give maximum effort at school. “I used to say to my kids and we still do, ‘If you go to school and play then you have to come home and work!’ Not in a threatening way but that’s the name of the game. If you blow it out there, then we’re gonna do some work here.”
As mentioned earlier, weekends are typically devoted to family outings, with church on Sundays. Television and video games are permitted, but Selwyn and Deborah monitor the time children spend with both. Ironically, overuse is not a problem; children have become accustomed to spending free time studying or reading and are less interested in the majority of television shows. Though expectations are relaxed during summer months, Deborah still encourages strong study habits.

As soon as the children started school, I would always buy the curriculum texts that I saw being used in the schools. I would say, ‘Look, you have all day to have fun. All I need is two hours of the day to work. You can choose when you want those hours to be’. They have always agreed to do that. I let them complete the work then I would check it. I never wanted it to feel like ‘work work’, so as long as they got the general gist, I wouldn’t review it with them. Only if they didn’t understand something would Selwyn or I jump in.

In addition to scheduled study periods during the summer months, the Chowdhurys have their children volunteer at church or look for summer work.

Deborah discusses the children’s approach to securing employment.

Next summer David is going to shadow a camp counselor as part of a training program offered by the city. It doesn’t guarantee a summer job but it guarantees an interview when you are old enough to work. That’s how Thomas got his first job – he completed his training, got an interview and landed a job. The program is open to anyone, so there are no excuses.

Scholars are placing increased importance on structured activities during summer vacation as one way to address the achievement gap in education (Burkham, Ready, Lee & LoGerfo, 2004; Downey, Von Hippel & Broh, 2004; Alexander, Entwisle & Olsen, 2007). Studies examining the learning that takes place over summer months have found learning differences increase dramatically over this period, with high SES students learning more than lower SES students. Ironi
learning discrepancies have a cumulative effect, producing a nine-year achievement gap that essentially tracks students into a college or non-college path” (Redford et al., 2009, p. 30).

This dedicated approach to parenting has resulted in high academic achievement for the Chowdhury children. Naturally, expectations are high for all three moving forward. Selwyn: “We want to make sure our kids identify what success is going to look like for them. And having done so, they are going to go out there and be successful because they are going to seek and acquire the knowledge and tools to do that.” Success has become an expected outcome in the Chowdhury household – the parents anticipate success and this belief, or *habitus*, has been transmitted to the Chowdhury children, who have set high goals for themselves.

**Overcoming Obstacles of Class and Race**

Selwyn and Deborah have demonstrated the ability to dramatically influence the academic careers of their three children in a positive way. Though all three continue to thrive academically, the Chowdhurys recognize their children learn in environments that have historically excluded minority and poorer students. The rest of this section explores notions of class and race in an effort reveal contestations that exist for minority families that participate in gifted education. Although experiences associated with class and race have been divided into distinct categories, it is acknowledged that intersectionality exists and therefore one cannot be considered without the other.
Class and Gifted Education

Though all three levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) play a role in Canadian Public Education, provincial governments and their departments of education are primarily responsible for the public schools within their borders. In Ontario, school boards receive funding through local property taxes; the province then supplements those amounts to ensure totals align with provincial funding formula recommendations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008a). Public Education is therefore a shared cost, paid for by all members of society. As a result, all families should have equal access to public education and all of the specialized programs it offers, regardless of socio-economic status. In the case of gifted education, however, the distribution of specialized education may not be as equitable as theory suggests. Figure 1 is a Toronto District School Board (TDSB) map; it shows the locations of gifted programs offered by the board at both elementary and high school levels. Figure 2 reveals levels of average individual income and shows where these people live across the city.
Figure 1: TDSB Map of Schools with Gifted Programs, 2012-13

Figure 2: Average Individual Income, City of Toronto, 2005

Census Tract Average Individual Income Relative to the Toronto CMA Average of $40,704

- **Very High**
  - < 40% above
  - Avg = $104,000

- **High**
  - 20% to 40% above
  - Avg = $53,500

- **Middle Income**
  - 20% below to 20% above
  - Avg = $39,000

- **Low**
  - 20% to 40% below
  - Avg = $28,000

- **Very Low**
  - < 40% below
  - Avg = $22,500
In comparing the two maps, there does appear to be a positive correlation between the number of gifted programs offered in an area and income levels. Many of the elementary gifted programs in Toronto are located in neighbourhoods where middle and high-income individuals reside. Most obvious is the fact that there are fewer gifted programs in areas of Toronto that have low to very-low income levels. Statistics provided by 2006 TDSB Student Census Data seem to substantiate notions of elite education being reserved for the middle and upper classes. Graph 1 indicates more than half of all gifted learners (56%) come from the three highest income levels, with a quarter of gifted learners coming from the highest income level. By comparison, 11% of all gifted learners come from the three lowest income levels, with only 3% coming from the lowest income level (Brown & Parekh, 2010).

Graph 1: Students in Gifted, Non-Gifted Exceptionalities, and IEP:
By Family Income TDSB 2009-10
Issues regarding program location are exacerbated by the quality (or lack of quality) of gifted education offered by the few programs within lower income neighbourhoods. In the case of the Chowdhurys, the selective nature of gifted education meant the program offered in their neighborhood was sub-standard.

Deborah discusses the discrepancies that exist with gifted programming.

David was identified as gifted and assigned to attend his gifted home school in the fall of that year. However, when we went to visit, we recognized that the ‘gifted’ curriculum was very similar to what was offered in the regular classrooms at Riverdale. And so, you have this second or third tier kind of education...whereas if you move across school boundary lines, it can be a totally different picture.

This ‘second-tier’ programming prompted the Chowdhurys to secure placement for their second child (and third) at a school in an adjacent, more affluent neighbourhood that required bussing. The dissimilarity of two ‘gifted’ programs illustrates the role class plays in elite education – even when education is public. In the end, the Chowdhurys could only conclude one thing, “In certain sections of the city, certain communities are favoured” (Deborah). Even though this conclusion raises countless questions regarding gifted access for students who come from poorer backgrounds, class issues also impact those students from lower socio-economic groups who participate in programs where middle and upper middle-class values prevail.

Deborah recalls an early experience she had when she once met David at Central Elementary. “Parents and students give you ‘the look’. They know that our children are bussed in, so we obviously don’t live in the area. Parents ask you where you live. They want to know where are you coming from – where is your child coming from.” The term “outsider within” (Collins, 1986, p. 14) has been
used to describe the marginal positions minorities assume when they become a part of elite academic settings. Initially taken aback by this highbrow stance, Deborah and Selwyn believed attitudes changed once the school community recognized David’s ability and observed the Chowdhurys’ commitment to the school.

This superior point of view was also revealed when David first developed friendships with peers from his class. Deborah recalls his first ‘playdate’. “David would talk on the phone with his friends. Over time, friends would request to hang out at each other’s homes. Of course, the time would come where parents would have to discuss details. When I would give the address I could sense hesitation, right?” Deborah laughs then continues, “But the thing is the children couldn’t even control themselves when they arrived. They would say, ‘Oh, this is a nice place.’ What were you expecting?”

Class can influence the number and types of educational experiences some minority students receive when they attend schools in prosperous communities. All parents want their children to have engaging experiences throughout their academic careers. Schools with gifted programs in affluent neighborhoods possess a middle-class habitus that occasionally influences the types of activities chosen for classrooms to participate in. Many families in these neighbourhoods are comfortable financially and therefore, are not concerned when schools suggest activities or excursions that are costly. Conversely, families who do not possess similar levels of disposable income are forced to make tough decisions. If they decide not to pay for an event and their child does not participate, the child
risks possible alienation from peers (which may exacerbate existing feelings of isolation). Of course, if parents comply and pay for the child to participate, they take money away from other budgeted expenses. This has been an issue for Selwyn and Deborah, who have been asked by Elizabeth and David to pay for costly performances and day trips.

Middle-class habitus also affects how/where schools with gifted programs allocate funds. Typically, school boards allocate similar funds to their respective schools unless it has been determined they have unique needs (e.g., more identified students), in which case additional funding is given. The hope is that children in public education will have access to similar experiences, regardless of school location. That said, many schools encourage parents to provide financial support in order to enrich educational experiences.

In order to maintain transparency, schools are required to share with the community (and school board) how much money has been raised through parent contributions. This is usually done through parent council. As parents are solely responsible for contributing these funds, administrators frequently ask parents to help determine how money is spent. Of course administrators have veto power, but their position is tenuous; if they rebuff parental requests, they will probably see a decrease in parental support. As a result, parents make requests from perspectives that fail to consider students who hold dissimilar values. In the end, certain students receive educational experiences they do not connect with. In the case of Deborah and Selwyn, the principal Central Elementary implored them to become members of parent council in order to provide ‘a different voice’.
Finally, the Chowdhurys were uneasy about the effect peers from another socio-economic class could have on David. In moving from one quadrant to another, Selwyn and Deborah were afraid the ‘culture shock’ might affect David negatively. Selwyn recalls the concern he and Deborah felt.

We were worried, so we monitored him for the first few months and diplomatically asked questions. We wanted to know how he was integrating. Was he experiencing difficulties and if so, what were the challenges? What could be the issues for a child with his background going into an environment like that? So we kept a close eye on the situation.

Fortunately for the Chowdhurys, David and Elizabeth have never expressed issues in that regard.

Race and Gifted Education

The Chowdhurys firmly stand by their decision to pursue elite education on behalf of their children. Both Selwyn and Deborah have concluded that gifted education provides their children with the best chance for future success.

“Elizabeth and David’s enrollment in gifted education and Thomas’ participation in Advanced Placement has all been a plus,” Selwyn states. “I mean, there are challenges everywhere with everything, but they have all done really well – academically and socially. No, we’re not going to second guess that.” Deborah supports Selwyn’s comment. “Yes, it was by far the best choice for them. Perhaps the material is similar [to curriculum taught in regular classes], but the pace at which they are taught – they’re challenged. They are challenged to get the work done.” Though both expressed confidence in their decisions regarding education, they acknowledge that gifted programs create additional tensions that must be
addressed. One of those tensions centre around race. Selwyn recalls early concerns.

There was some apprehension when David, then Elizabeth first entered the program. We wondered about how they would be perceived. I would like to say that they are fully blended but I don’t think that will ever happen. I still believe there are some who feel our children shouldn’t be there or that they don’t belong.

Unfortunately, the notion that some believe their children ‘don’t belong’ has merit. This prevailing idea is based on historical views of Black intelligence. “Who gets selected for gifted programs is rooted in enduring perceptions, whether conscious or unconscious, that African-American people might be intellectually inferior to White people” (Morris, 2002, p. 59). Unfortunately, current race-based statistics only fortify these views.

Referring again to data provided by the 2006 TDSB Student Census (Table 2), grade 7 – 10 students who identified as Black accounted for over 13% of the student population but less than 3% of gifted identifications (Brown & Parekh, 2010).

Table 2: Self-identified Race and Special Needs

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<th>Racial Groups</th>
<th>Special Needs Status October 31 2006</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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This dearth of gifted Black students also impacts the few who do participate in
gifted programs. Black students must contend with deficit ideology (Ford et al.,
2002), isolation from other minority students, and an absence of diverse content
(Ford, 2008b). In addition to these internal issues, gifted Black students may be
forced to deal with criticisms that come from Black peers not enrolled in gifted
programs. Accusations of ‘acting White’ (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) may arise for
students who are Black and pursue intellectualism. Students who avoid the use of
slang, wear fitted clothing and care about academic achievement could be viewed
by non-gifted Black students as “...uppity, stuck up, and not embracing Black
culture” (Henfield et al., 2010, p. 19).

Racial Socialization

Selwyn and Deborah have not experienced any overt forms of racism in the
gifted setting and believe the same applies for their children (“nothing blatant”).
Nevertheless, they have always been sensitive to the potential conflicts that could
arise in this exclusive setting. To mitigate the effect those conflicts could have on
their children, the Chowdhurys have employed forms of racial socialization in
order to equip their children with the skills required to navigate raced-based
inequities inherent in education and beyond (Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2011).
“We have always told the children who they are and remind them to work harder
because they are not privileged like other cultures in society,” Deborah states.

The notion of minorities having to work harder to attain the same things as
their White counterparts has support. In a study that examined the upward social
mobility of Caribbean immigrants, James (2009) found that education levels most immigrants had attained were not commensurate with their degrees of economic success. “African-Caribbean Canadians tend to have the same, in some cases, higher rate of participation in the education system, resulting in similar or higher educational credentials as in the general population; even so, their earnings are less” (James, 2009, p. 99).

Selwyn adds an additional tenet consistently recited to his children. “We also have told them not to worry about external perceptions people may have and embrace what is right. My eldest played badminton and was reminded by others that he was the only Black player. So what? I encouraged him to continue because he enjoyed it!” Both Selwyn and Deborah realize that issues regarding race will continue to exist in spaces where few minorities reside. By bringing some of these matters to light, the Chowdhurys teach their children to seek positive outcomes in spite of the barriers that may exist.

Racelessness

I am Canadian – and by extension I am Bajan. From the moment Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury came to Canada more than twenty years ago, they have embraced the notion of being Canadian. All beliefs and values held by members of the Chowdhury family and all actions that resulted from these principles, have been significantly influenced by this simple premise. As a result, if one were given the opportunity to observe the daily practices of this family, the spectator would conclude that the Chowdhury family has fully assimilated with Canadian culture.
In addition to the many activities they participate in (skating, camping, visiting a
cottage), the Chowdhurys have adopted other aspects of Canadian culture,
including food and music. At the same time, Selwyn and Deborah have gradually
distanced themselves from Barbadian culture. Below, Deborah discusses the
move away from their roots.

Yes, I would say our family is Canadian. For us, it didn't seem to make sense
to hold on to things that weren't going to help us here. One example is food. When Selwyn and I were first married, we lived with his family. Selwyn's
mother loved to cook, so naturally it played a big role in the lives of everyone
in the home. The stove always seemed to be on. The curries, the dhal – it was
always there. The thing about it is, that food takes a long time to prepare; you
have to be in the kitchen all day! When Selwyn and I bought our own home
and started our family, I realized I couldn't cook like that all the time because I
had the kids. The food was great, but it wasn't practical. You know, once and
a while I'll do it and it's heaven for the kids. Whenever I bring out the
traditional West Indian food, like pepperpot or fish cakes, they rip it apart
(laughs)! It's like Christmas! But over the last ten years or so, I only cook
those meals on special occasions.

The time commitment required to cook authentic Barbadian meals while
managing a home and raising a family had become too much for Deborah. As a
result, she began to cook meals that took considerably less time. Deborah states
that this cultural shift also occurred in other areas of life.

Music – not so much (laughs). Whenever Selwyn and I would play our music
the kids would ask, “what are they saying, mom? What is that?” You know
the language is so fast (laughs). So now we only listen to that style of music
when kids are not home (rare), or if we go to a friend’s house. It has definitely
changed over the years.

Selwyn believes that the gradual change in a number of cultural practices has
been necessary in order to thrive in Canadian society. He felt it was necessary to
discontinue certain behaviours and begin new ones in order to develop the [right]
kind of capital his children could utilize beyond the home.

Once upon a time we used to frequent Barbadian functions. We would bring
the children and socialize with others but we don't anymore because it's no
longer our style. Deborah and I decided that we couldn’t be bothered with those types of gatherings because they were backwards for our children! We want to take our children to environments where they can learn how to think critically and make decisions in a fast-paced society. We try our best to provide our children with experiences that will enrich and we felt this wasn’t happening at these events.

In order for minorities to achieve success in Eurocentric societies, Fordham (1988) claims they must give up ties to former communities and assimilate to dominant culture. “In an effort to minimize the effects of race on their aspirations, some Black Americans have begun to take on attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that may not generally be attributed to Black Americans” (Fordham, 1988, p. 58). This concept of racelessness was initially employed by Fordham to help explain how some Black students were able to participate (and even excel) in elite universities that were predominantly White. For Fordham (1991), this notion of becoming ‘un-Black’ was required in order to exist in the discriminatory environment of exclusive schools. “Black students are forced to relinquish aspects of their identity and distance themselves spatially and psychologically from their cultural group. Racelessness is a strategy that makes possible the attainment of vertical mobility in a society where Blackness is devalued” (Smith & Lalonde, 2003, p. 144).

Although this theory has been used primarily to highlight strategies Black students employ, it can also help describe the steps Selwyn and Deborah have taken for themselves and their children. By adopting Canadian customs and values, Selwyn and Deborah were able to acquire the social and cultural capital required to successfully advocate for their children. Their lifestyle practices have also yielded capital that can be used by their children in the future.
Assimilation for the Chowdhury family hasn’t come without cost. Through the process of becoming ‘more Canadian’, they have detached themselves from friends and acquaintances that have accused them of ‘acting White’. Below, Deborah describes a time when she attempted to mobilize other Black parents at her neighborhood elementary school.

Riverdale will always be important to us. It’s the neighborhood school where all the children first started. Selwyn and I put in a lot of time at that school, which was our pleasure. At Riverdale, the population is mostly Black, so because of our experiences we would try and reach out to other parents in the community – you know, share ideas and give suggestions to help improve education for our children. Parents would ask, “Who do you think you are?” Look, it’s not that I think I’m anything – I’m just trying to share this knowledge. I would be outside handing out flyers, trying to get parents together but no one would come. Some would tell me off and I would tell them off right back! I think the mentality was, “You think you’re better than us.” I tried to let parents know that it wasn’t for me – I was just attempting to let people know what was out there. As a culture, it doesn’t help if I keep this information to myself. Funny thing, now we have friends calling on behalf of their children, asking, “What should I do?” What? You can’t do this now – the kid is 17!

The Chowdhurys would see new families (recent immigrants from the Caribbean) at their local church and attempt to inform the parents of various activities that could help their children down the road. “I would suggest outings like Pioneer Village or Black Creek to increase exposure, but it was tough. People would say we only wanted to do White people stuff,” Deborah states. Fordham acknowledges that one consequence of racelessness can be estrangement from minority groups attempting to maintain cultural integrity. “[W]hat kind of support can be expected by Black adolescents whose behaviours and values in the school context appear to be at odds with the indigenous organization of Black people?” (Fordham, 1988, p. 81).
For Selwyn and Deborah, even though allegations of abandoning their culture have at times slowed down their efforts to activate community members, they still remain committed to the goal of increasing the educational funds of knowledge available to Black parents. Deborah states, “You know, we don’t have all the answers either – a lot of times it’s trial and error, but we need to create networks within our communities so we can learn these things together!”

**Conclusion**

In reflecting on the experiences of Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury, I was struck by the levels of effort, dedication, and passion demonstrated throughout their journey. When parents do not possess knowledge of the educational system, it is extremely difficult to ascertain what information is required to effectively advocate on behalf of their children. Of course, this difficulty is magnified when one belongs to a marginalized group. Race, income, home practice, and relationships all play significant roles in determining who is able to access specialized programs in public education.

In the final section of this paper, key findings, implications and limitations of the research, as well as recommendations to increase Black participation in gifted education will be shared.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

The previous section of this paper chronicled the experiences of a Canadian Black family whose children participate in elite academic programs. It specifically provided detailed explanations of strategies Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury employed to gain entrance and promote success for two of their children in classrooms for the gifted. In sharing the strategies of this unique family, the goal was to explore gifted underrepresentation from a different perspective and suggest new areas of research for those investigating ways to increase Black participation in gifted education.

Key Findings

Social Capital, Cultural Capital and Public Education

Through the experiences of Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury, we observe how the social capital (the strength of association individuals have with larger groups) and cultural capital (the knowledge individuals gain from their environments) gained from interactions with middle-class educational professionals and parents intersect to play pivotal roles in securing gifted placement for David and Elizabeth Chowdhury.

When Thomas Chowdhury began his educational career, Selwyn and Deborah were unaware of the agency they possessed as parents of a student in the Toronto District School Board. Consequently, when their eldest son showed promise early on, they did not know they could approach his teacher and make
inquiries regarding the curriculum he was receiving; they did not realize that through dialogue with the teacher, requests could be made for more challenging material. The Chowdhurys were also oblivious to specialized programs (including gifted education) that existed in the board.

In an effort to learn more about elementary education, Selwyn and Deborah significantly increased their participation at Riverdale Elementary School. Frequent school visits led to volunteering at the school; becoming members of parent council followed volunteering. As the Chowdhurys increased interactions with Riverdale staff, relationships were built. Initial benefits of these relationships came when Deborah was given the opportunity to volunteer while her son slept at the back of the classroom. “With David being allowed to sleep at the back of the class, I was able to assist the teachers. That’s how the system was more accommodating because David was really a sleeper (laugh)!” Later, increased contact with David’s grade one teacher provided opportunities for informal conversations about David’s progress.

The positive impact of affiliations with educational professionals continued when the Chowdhurys were deciding on David’s grade four placement. Although David was formally identified as a gifted learner, Selwyn and Deborah where concerned about moving David to a new school – after all, he was receiving additional informal support at his home school. When David’s former grade one teacher conversed with Deborah and detected hesitation, she pulled Deborah aside and suggested Deborah reconsider. “The teacher said, ‘I don’t think you should keep David at Riverdale. Gifted programs offer a different style of
teaching that would be good for David, so give him the opportunity,”” Deborah recalls. In addition to the teacher, the Vice Principal of Riverdale also offered expert opinion regarding gifted programming – advice Deborah gladly accepted.

Educational affiliations also influenced David’s academic career through a connection that was made with a parent from school council. As this parent’s child had also received a gifted identification, the Chowdhurys were able to work in concert with the child’s family in two ways. First, Deborah was able to partner with another parent and collect information about other schools during the instructional day.

We worked as partners. We would make appointments to visit during the day – if one couldn’t make it, the other would attend. We did that a few times because we were pushy (laugh)! We did that for both schools then we compared notes. The fact that she was a teacher helped; she was able to be more critical regarding how and what the teachers taught.

Second, this relationship provided the support needed to approach the gifted area coordinator and request an alternative placement – something the Chowdhurys may not have had the confidence to do had they been on their own. It cannot be said that an increase in social capital was solely responsible for David’s participation in the ‘pull-out’ program and David’s early nomination, identification, and placement in a gifted program. Nevertheless, efforts made by the Chowdhurys to nurture educational relationships did produce positive parent-teacher, parent-parent and parent-administrator alliances, which resulted in increased access to knowledge regarding educational possibilities.

Finally, the capital accumulated by the Chowdhurys while David attended Central Elementary (Chowdhurys were also members of Central’s Parent Council)
resulted in Elizabeth being offered a spot at Central Elementary when she was in grade two. The principal was unaware of Elizabeth’s achievement, however, the Chowdhurys’ good standing with educational professionals in the building (including the principal) and David’s successful transition resulted in a spot being offered to Elizabeth. Selwyn and Deborah refused the early informal placement, waiting instead for Elizabeth to be identified formally in grade three and enrolled at Central as a grade four student. Still, relationships that were built during David and Elizabeth’s participation in elementary school, led to an acquisition of educational knowledge and a level of privilege that was non-existent during Thomas’ years as an elementary student.

For as much as relationships with parents, teachers, and administrators helped secure places for two of their children, David and Elizabeth’s gifted enrollment would not have materialized had it not been for the efforts the Chowdhurys made in educating themselves about special education and school policy.

Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital describes knowledge children acquire through the various activities they participate in. It can also be used to describe the knowledge parents construct to be productive in dominant society. It is assumed middle-class parents from dominant culture already possess this ‘preferred knowledge’, which is why they are able to construct profitable interactions with the various institutions of society (banks, government, schools). Minority parents, like Selwyn and Deborah, initially do not have the knowledge to broker favourable positions within the field of education for their children.
Ultimately, the Chowdhurys made determined efforts to acquire the educational knowledge necessary to increase their agency. Deborah states, “We were always involved with the schools – always running from one meeting to the next. We made sure we were part of every council of every school the kids attended.” As active members of school councils (Selwyn became treasurer for one council and co-chaired another), the Chowdhurys began to understand how schools operated from a systems level. Selwyn reviews his increased involvement in education.

I was a fixture in the schools. I started sitting on the councils – did a few years of co-chairing at a couple of schools as well...and you know, we got real serious. I became involved with a number of educational forums around this city with the school board and conversations became larger and more far-reaching. We tried not to miss anything we felt would help us with the children. You know many nights we would be at 5050 (TDSBs Head Office) listening to meetings or participating in forums. We became entrenched in the school system beyond the boundaries of the school, becoming passionate about how we were going to make it better – not just for our kids, but for all students.

As they became more aware of educational policies and procedures, they gained the insight and confidence to “maneuver and customize their children's school experiences” (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999, p. 44). Deborah discusses this change in confidence.

We were never afraid to approach people and ask questions if we weren't certain. We attended various meetings that had to do with education, jotted stuff down and then went home and shredded it. When you went to these functions consistently, you would see the same people because of their interests. During conversations you would hear things 'by the way'. You still had to research some information, but being out there definitely helped – it's where the connections were made.

The Chowdhurys (new immigrants and first-time parents) did not initially realize the value social and cultural capital held in education. Over time, they began to recognize the importance of developing relationships. Consequently, both parents made conscious efforts to connect with educational professionals
and other parents in their schools. Selwyn and Deborah transitioned from ‘standoff type of participation’ and worked on ‘getting to know people’. With a focus on nurturing relationships, the Chowdhurys increased social capital among those who had a direct impact on the educational careers of their children. The Chowdhurys volunteered, visited schools on a consistent basis, conversed with teaching staffs and administrations, actively participated on parent councils, and cooked the occasional Caribbean dish (“the teachers always asked for curry and roti” – Deborah).

Those positive relationships facilitated the transmission of the “right kind of cultural capital” (Redford et al., 2009, p. 28). In the case of Deborah and Selwyn, there was the ‘open exchange of educational knowledge’ – knowledge that assisted them in securing gifted placement for both David and Elizabeth.

**Becoming Canadian**

Deborah Chowdhury strongly believes that embracing the cultural norms of an adopted society is a natural consequence of immigrating to another country. For Deborah,

[i]t can be a drawback when you stick to a particular mode. You know, you’re molded a certain way and you don’t evolve. I believe you cannot stay there – you really can’t stay there. That doesn’t mean you’re going to lose it. I cannot lose it – that I know for sure! But for my kids, I don’t want to bring them back to where I was. They need to move forward because they need to break that cycle.

Selwyn shares this opinion, stating the shift to a Canadian identity is critical if he and his family hope to be affluent, productive citizens within Canadian society.

In this household, we are all Canadians. Knowing this is important because we are trying to build a strong sense of belonging. Like I have said before, we
try not to raise our kids like they are typical West Indian kids. I say that meaning when they come home they don't come to a Barbadian home. We own some of that culture because we were born there but we don't preach the cultural doctrine here. I could never raise my children the way I was raised; if I did that I will have failed them. My children are Canadian – they must be proud of this country and what it has to offer. They must also make a significant contribution. I want them to be engaged politically. I want them to aware of what's happening around them.

In 1971, Canada became the first country to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. In doing so, Canada established itself a world leader in promoting the multiple ethnic origins, languages, and religions of its diverse population. Indeed, Canada has always been viewed as a democratic mosaic – a place where immigrants are encouraged to maintain their unique cultural identities. The province of Ontario best illustrates this diversity, with visible minorities representing approximately one-quarter of the province’s total population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Still, as immigrants continue to move to Canada in record numbers, one wonders about the impact cultural diversity has on social mobility in this country. Can immigrant populations retain cultural practices that ‘do not align with shared beliefs of the larger group’ and gain access to favoured positions in society? Can individuals from various ethno-cultural groups create authentic trust networks (key component of social capital) with those from the dominant culture, or does non-conformity restrict privileged membership? New Canadians are encouraged to retain indigenous heritages, but at what cost?

Selwyn and Deborah and their children are Canadian – not Barbadian-Canadian but Canadian. They feel that embracing this notion is critical because full potentials cannot be realized if minorities do not assimilate to the values and norms of their adopted country. In an educational context, both Coleman (1990)
and Lareau (2003) cite the importance of holding beliefs similar to those valued in schools as a key component in developing positive relationships with educators. For Selwyn and Deborah, assimilation to Canadian norms facilitated the transmission of vital educational information. As parents, teachers, and administrators recognized values and principles that were similar to their own, trust networks were established and capital was shared.

In order for their children to be comfortable and thrive as Canadians, their Canadian identities must be celebrated. Selwyn and Deborah do not attempt to preserve traditions and beliefs from their country of birth because the cultural capital of Barbados does not hold currency in Canada. The Chowdhurys believe that when minorities remain focused on maintaining native cultures, they lose sight of what can be gained as new Canadians. Selwyn and Deborah have employed the parenting practice of concerted cultivation through a Canadian lens. As they immerse themselves and their children in Canadian pastimes and embrace Canadian traditions, the Chowdhury children build cultural resources that can be utilized in this country. Below, Selwyn discusses the evolutionary process he thinks is required for success.

My wife and I did not have an adult lifestyle in Barbados so we didn’t come with a number of Bajan principles to be applied here. We brought some fundamental values that our parents gave us and we have refined them over time so that they are applicable here. We had to because some of those ways are no longer applicable. Did spanking work at one time there, yes. Would it work now, no. So, I would like to think we are combining some traditional principles with things we have learned here and attempting to be a bit more sophisticated in raising our children. Remember, we are preparing our kids for the next sixty years, not the next six.
Though many ethnographers struggle with the notion of immigrant populations relinquishing indigenous traditions, others support immigrants eventually assimilating to the cultural norms of an adopted country. In studying the ethno-political identities of migrants from the Caribbean Diaspora, researcher Anton Allahar asks, “At what point do the Caribbean people in London become assimilated into English society and cease thinking of themselves as Caribbean people? (Allahar, 2010, p. 13).

**Implications**

**The Impact of Social Capital**

The fact that social capital has currency in educational settings is not surprising, as formal education relies heavily on relationships in order to transmit knowledge. When teachers are able to ‘connect’ with students, achievement is affected in a positive way. The importance of this association is obvious. That said, this study has also revealed the significant role *parental* relationships play in the academic experiences of a child. Parent interactions with teachers, administrators, other parents, other educational professionals, and educational stakeholders not mentioned can significantly influence student outcomes because the educational knowledge that is shared (or not shared) is dependent on these interactions. Parents must be tireless in their attempts to establish trust networks with those connected to the academic careers of their children. Obtaining educational knowledge is critical, as it supplies relevant data and exposes the hidden sites where parents can effectively advocate on behalf of their children.
The Impact of Cultural Capital

The types of activities children become involved with outside of schools impact levels of success within schools because those tasks impart cultural capital that can be utilized when students are asked to demonstrate levels of ability. A Eurocentric curriculum coupled with teachers who hold dominant perspectives create student expectations that favour White, middle-class values. When students are engaged in activities that are also grounded in these values they accumulate a cultural currency that can positively influence academic achievement. Members of society who are new to the country are unaware of the potential capital certain activities hold. As a result, many minority parents overlook these behaviours to the detriment of their children.

For Deborah and Selwyn, their assimilation to Canadian culture meant they became aware of favoured activities over time and looked to immerse the children into ‘all things Canadian’ whenever opportunities arose. Evidence of the children acquiring the right kind of cultural capital may have been provided by David’s grade one teacher who claimed, “he is the only one who gets my jokes, the only one who understands me.” Perhaps David’s specific co-curricular pursuits provided him with a distinct advantage over his grade one peers. Of course this brings to light the biases that teachers possess in the classroom. Although expecting educators to bracket all cultural dispositions is unrealistic, the role teacher subjectivity plays in favouring some students while limiting others must be explored.
The Role of Habitus

Selwyn states, “We make sure our kids identify what success is going to look like for them. And having done so, they are going to go out there and be successful because they are going to seek and acquire the knowledge and the tools to do that.” In providing a structured home life, initiating critical conversations, exposing children to activities that hold middle-class values, and securing placement in gifted education, Selwyn and Deborah have attempted to construct an environment where success is expected. Those expectations are then transmitted to children. Selwyn shares an example of how preferred behaviours are transferred from one child to the next.

They look at each other, wanting to know what the other is doing. It feels like a train in this house at times – one starts to do homework, then the second turbine turns and naturally the third recognizes the efforts of the first two, so they have no choice but to start moving. It becomes less of a management issue, though we are always present. It becomes automatic. They motivate one another to reach their potentials.

Class and Education

Presumably, wealthy parents who want to provide exclusive schooling for their children will devote some of their income towards select private institutions. The educational divide that results from economic disparities between the affluent and poor is an inevitable consequence of capitalism. Nevertheless, a troubling outcome revealed in this study is the possible link between socioeconomic status and instructional challenge within public education. TDSB Student Census Data revealed that the majority of gifted learners come from the highest income levels. This, coupled with the fact that the academic rigor of gifted instruction varies according to where the school is located (affluent vs. working-
class neighbourhoods), paints a bleak picture for those who rely on education as a way to improve social standing. We look to public education as a mechanism to liberate the underprivileged. In reality, public education may actually play a role in the subjugation of this group.

The Hidden Program

In his book *Ideology and Curriculum* (2004), Michael Apple discusses the role public schools play in maintaining social inequalities through the transmission of a 'hidden curriculum' that caters to middle and upper classes. When examining the role capital plays in determining who is aware of the specialized programs offered within public education, the notion of a hidden curriculum takes on a more literal meaning. Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury tell a story that is all too familiar to many minority parents – public education’s lack of transparency regarding gifted programming removed any possibility of gifted participation for their first child. Though it cannot be said unequivocally, Thomas’ success in advanced placement coupled with the achievement of David and Elizabeth provides compelling evidence that Thomas may have also excelled in gifted education if given the chance.

Accessing knowledge about the inner workings of gifted programming in public education is extremely difficult. At the time of this study, the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) website offered little in regards to gifted education, other than outlining IPRC and IEP policy and providing a map that identified the gifted schools within the board (Planning Division TDSB, 2012).
The York Region District School Board’s (YRDSB) website was better but still lacked detail. It provided the following information: a brief introduction about the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC); locations of schools that delivered gifted education; an explanation of a gifted learner; characteristics of gifted students; a general definition regarding the elements of a gifted classroom (including ambiguous statements about depth, breadth, and independent study); schooling options for gifted learners (home schooling, a once-a-week withdrawal program, or self-contained gifted programs at designated schools); and, type of assessment tool used during Grade 3 screening (the Insight Cognitive Abilities Test) (York Region District School Board, 2013). In both cases, parents who would like to know more about gifted education are forced to inquire at local schools that offer gifted programs. For those parents not already affiliated with a gifted school or who feel they do not possess the knowledge required to converse with professionals about gifted education, this omission of information significantly diminishes educational agency.

By comparison, the Durham District School Board (DDSB) provided similar information, but also included critical specifics regarding how a student is identified. The site shared a comprehensive description of the process, which included the following details: a description of each assessment phase (three phase process); dates when each phase began; the types of assessment tools used; and, the cut-off scores for each phase of testing. It also provided a ‘frequently asked question’ section for parents (Durham District School Board, 2013). (Note: Durham School Board recently changed their website and screening process. The
board site now provides less specific information regarding gifted assessment (e.g., cut off scores have been removed). Also, similar to the York board, Durham has switched to using the Insight assessment tool).

The fact that two of Canada's largest school boards (and recently a third) do not have comprehensive, accessible on-line material on gifted programming may be a simple oversight. Nevertheless, the exclusion of gifted information limits academic possibilities for families with fewer educational connections. When school boards offer little information regarding specialized programs, they cannot be questioned about nomination, identification, placement processes; nor can boards be asked about the nature of gifted programming and how it differs from regular instruction. This practice also discounts parents who do not possess the social and/or cultural capital required to walk into a school and dialogue with educational professionals. In sum, school board websites that exclude specific information regarding gifted identification and placement policies severely limit possibilities for families interested in pursuing elite programs.

**Teacher Nominations**

The TDSB and DDSB still depend on teacher nominations to determine which students are eligible for testing, though the Durham Board website did mention that parents can nominate as well (YRSB offers a standardized gifted assessment to all students during the grade three year). Relying on teachers to identify potential gifted learners brings with it an element of subjectivity that excludes students who don't exhibit 'gifted characteristics'. Once again, issues of
race and class arise when teachers employ ‘culturally bound’ rationale to
determine which students are assessed and which ones are not. Thomas
Chowdhury excelled in the regular program but was never nominated. As
Thomas continues to flourish in Advanced Placement and Enrichment courses,
one wonders if educators failed to recognize his ‘gifted’ potential. When
juxtaposing this oversight with David’s informal grade one nomination, inherent
difficulties with teacher nomination become blatantly clear. We can only hope the
criteria used to identify David went beyond his comprehension of the teacher’s
jokes.

Similarly, when educational professionals use their authority to ‘hand pick’
children for gifted programming, the ability for a student who lives out-of-area to
attend a more desirable school is limited. David’s smooth transition into Central’s
gifted program and his parents’ participation in Central’s school activities
prompted the principal to suggest Elizabeth enter the school in her grade two
year. Typically, most schools conduct gifted assessments in students’ grade three
years and begin programming in grade four. By selecting students before grade
three, this principal is able to determine who populates limited spaces when
‘formal’ gifted programs begin. Out-of-area students who are identified in grade
three are told the school cannot accept additional enrollment requests as
programs have already reached capacity. In the end, gifted classrooms in affluent
neighbourhoods maintain a gifted demographic that is preferred.
Limitations

Theoretical Tools

Along with Bourdieu, a number of scholars have examined possible links between social capital, cultural capital and academic achievement (Goddard, 2003; Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999; Harris & Graves, 2010; Tramonte & Willms, 2010). Although there is acknowledgement that both social and cultural capital can impact educational experiences, critics argue that attempts to substantiate these claims with empirical data have been unsatisfactory. “The translation of [Bourdieu’s] theoretical model into ‘variables’ has often decontextualized key concepts from the broader theoretical mission” (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999, p. 38).

In addition, some contend theories linking these forms of capital to educational outcomes are deterministic, falling to acknowledge that differences exist between acquiring capital and activating it. Moreover, supporters fail to account for those individuals who acquire forms of capital but are then rebuffed when they try to utilize it. For example, minority parents and White parents with similar levels of cultural capital may still have different experiences with a teacher during parent-teacher interviews (Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999).

Finally, some critics challenge Lareau’s theory of concerted cultivation on the grounds that the study’s sample size was too small for results to be considered representative of broader class and racial patterns (Dumais, Kessinger & Ghosh, 2012). Other concerns relate to when the data used in the study was
collected (1988), as family practices have changed significantly over the past twenty-five years (e.g., Internet) (Redford et al., 2009).

**Terms Used for Identification**

Due to the inadequate amount of Canadian research regarding Black underrepresentation in gifted programming, much of the material used in this study is from the United States. There are limitations with this approach. First, distinctions can and should be made when discussing the status of Blacks in North America. Although African-Americans share many traits with African and Caribbean-Canadians, differences that do exist could potentially produce a number of distinct sub-groups within a larger North American Black grouping. For example, African-Americans form approximately 13.1% of the population in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2012), whereas African and Caribbean Canadians account for only 2.9% of Canada’s total population (Statistics Canada, 2011). Numbers alone would indicate a variance in perspectives (particularly with respect to power), with Blacks in Canada viewing themselves as an even smaller minority within Canadian society in relation to their American counterparts.

One consequence of this is many Black Canadians prefer to affiliate themselves with countries that possess large Black populations “such that a claim to nationality may imply a claim to race (e.g. Jamaican, Trinidadian, Bajan)” (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). In addition, some believe the term ‘Black’ inadequately captures the unique characteristics of both African and Caribbean
Canadians. A study by Sharon Boatswain asked a group of Black Canadians to assign themselves a label they were most comfortable with. A number of responses in addition to Black were given, including, Canadian, West Indian, Black-Canadian, African-Canadian, Jamaican, African, Jamaican-Canadian, Afro-Canadian, and West Indian-Canadian (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). Moreover, the fact that each label garnered multiple responses again demonstrates the complexities that exist within Black Canadian populations regarding identity. As many Black families who reside in the United States can trace their lineage as American citizens back several generations, fewer distinctions among African-Americans are made.

In a similar vein, using the term White to identify an entire group is problematic as well, as one name has been used to classify a variety of descendants from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Of course, people from these regions may differ vastly from one another. Also, many individuals commonly classified as White prefer to identify themselves in a number of ways. The terms Caucasian, European-American, and Anglo-Saxon, or Anglo are commonly used with self-identification, as well as country of birth (e.g., Italian, Irish etc.), or religious affiliation (e.g., Jewish). “Although White is typically used to refer to those with European history...the terminology used to describe white populations has varied throughout [U.S.] history, and there remains no consensus as to the optimal term one should use to describe descendants of European and Middle Eastern immigrants” (McDermott & Samson, 2005, p. 247).
Other Limitations

First, this research only considered perceptions of minority parents involved with gifted education. The opinions of all stakeholders including teachers, support staff, administrators, and policy makers would provide invaluable perspectives in the appraisal of gifted access for Black students. Most importantly, the voices of Black students within gifted programs should be part of any study investigating Black underrepresentation.

Second, I am aware of high-achieving students who passed the gifted assessment but chose not to enter the program. Research in this area should locate the parents of high-achieving Black students who received gifted identification but refused gifted placement. Why would parents refuse to place their children in settings that provided enriched, rigorous educational opportunities?

Finally, the voices of East Asian parents and students are critical to this examination. The East Asian population is identified because they, along with the White population represent groups that are overrepresented in gifted education. Although the experiences of those who have emigrated from East Asia may vary from African or Caribbean immigrants, East Asian experiences as minorities in gifted education could provide insight and offer possibilities that may not have been considered.
Recommendations

Increase Positive Capital in Minority Populations

Selwyn and Deborah Chowdhury believe the reason their first child, Thomas, did not have an opportunity to participate in gifted education was the result of two things: 1) a lack of educational knowledge (cultural capital) about gifted education, particularly regarding gifted identification and curricula; and, 2) a lack of educational supports (social capital) that could be called upon to discuss educational possibilities and receive advice. As they increased participation at their local school (in a concerted effort to learn more about public education), the Chowdhurys made connections with educational professionals and parents. This ‘educational network’ supported Selwyn and Deborah in a number of ways: 1) it provided information about specialized programs offered by public education, specifically gifted education; 2) it created a resource of ‘educational allies’ who further supported David and Elizabeth’s transition to gifted education (e.g., arranged classroom visits, recommended educational resources, provided ongoing advice). The network also provided insight regarding the type of knowledge that was favoured in public education. This information was then used to help inform home practices that promoted academic success.

The Chowdhurys’ experience with gifted education demonstrates the impact increased social and cultural can have for minority families in public education. Two studies that explore links between student achievement and increased forms of capital, further illustrate the significance of both in public education.
The first study examined connections between levels of cultural capital and school achievement of African-American boys. It found a significant correlation between the reading levels of African-American boys and their participation in certain activities that involved their parents. “African-American 5th grade boys with high reading achievement were 1.26 times more likely to participate in *parent supervised activities that transfer cultural capital* than their low-achieving peers” (Harris & Graves, 2010, p. 451). The study posits that parents who regularly visit libraries, museums, and zoos with children immerse them in learning environments that foster educational discussions. During these visits, parents transmit values regarding learning and achievement.

Resources that show relationships between cultural capital and achievement must be shared with minority parents in order to reveal approaches that can help children academically in this society. “[T]here is likely a lack of awareness of how these activities contribute to children’s cognitive development” (Harris & Graves, 2010, p. 455). The study concluded with the following recommendations: 1) increase awareness of the benefits associated with visiting libraries, museums, plays, orchestras, and aquariums; 2) engage parents in open discussions about increasing their positive educational strategies and practices; and, 3) provide opportunities for families to visit places that facilitate intellectual conversations among family members.

The second study looked at an intervention program aimed at minority students who were science majors at the university level. Many minority students are first-generation university students and therefore “less likely to have access to
resources that would transmit such forms of cultural and social capital...to ensure that [they] are on par with their majority counterparts” (Ovink & Veazey, 2011, p. 387). The Biology Undergraduate Scholars Program (BUSP) at the University of California Davis attempts to close this gap by providing additional supports for minority students. Students receive supplemental instruction during summer months; they are also given opportunities to interact with fellow students and professionals who have pursued careers in science (e.g., doctors, lab technicians, pharmacists). Opportunities to socialize with like-minded scholars and mentors give students the ability to seek advice and discuss the ‘soft skills’ (i.e., professionally appropriate ways of behaving) required to be successful in the field of science (Ovink & Veazey, 2011).

Results of the program indicate minority students from the BUSP program “outperform both non-BUSP minority students and White/Asian majority students in basic science courses, chemistry and calculus” (Ovink & Veazey, 2011, p. 394). Although this study highlights the importance of receiving additional instruction, students stated that the true benefit of the program came from their affiliations with professionals and other students who shared a scientific focus.

Ready access to a community of like-minded peers decreased the sense of alienation many alumni felt when they arrived at UC Davis. Moreover, this powerful subculture’s rituals, role expectations, and specialized vocabulary generated a set of culturally-sanctioned behaviours and practices that transmitted important forms of social and (sub)cultural capital alumni could rely on as they passed through their undergraduate program.


Many minority parents who would like to act as advocates on behalf of their children undoubtedly experience feelings of alienation similar to those felt by the
minority students at UC Davis. Selwyn states, "Being newbies the first time around (with Thomas), it was more of a standoff type of participation." This is a stance commonly taken by minority parents, especially those who are new to the country. Some minority parents have limited English language skills and most have educational experiences that differ from the experiences of their children. In addition, many minority parents feel their role in the educational process is to make sure their child’s basic needs are met, homework is completed and the child goes to school prepared to learn. In other words, they leave the educating to the professionals. Finally, a number of minority parents are working class and therefore cannot visit schools during the day to build relationships with school staff. Educational professionals who do not consider the aforementioned factors conclude minority parents are less interested in school life than parents who belong to dominant culture.

In the same way UC Davis provided supports to ‘level to playing field’ for minority students pursuing science degrees, public education should make greater efforts to engage minority parents, perhaps through parent council meetings and/or other social events. During these gatherings, parents should be given opportunities to learn about a variety of educational topics, including, classroom instruction, specialized programming, how to support student achievement and various school procedures as they relate to board policies. In addition to sharing educational information, these events should provide opportunities for minority parents to create social networks with educational professionals and other parents, thereby strengthening social capital. All parents
would be invited, however, the emphasis should be placed on involving parents who typically may not attend traditional school functions. Invitations in multiple languages could be sent home; surveys that asked parents about the kinds of information they would like shared could also be created. Interpreters should be asked to attend and of course, the timing of these events must be carefully considered, particularly for those parents who do not have the flexibility to visit school during the day.

**Clarify Gifted Objectives**

Gifted instruction varies from one school to the next. In the case of the Chowdhurys, the gifted program offered at a nearby school was inadequate, forcing Selwyn and Deborah to secure gifted placement at an out-of-area school. Although we understand that no two classrooms are alike (nor should they be), the Ontario curriculum, with specific expectations, creates a framework that teachers must follow. Teachers of gifted learners are expected to follow this curriculum, however, they must also address intellectual needs that are beyond the scope of curricular expectations. At this point, Canadian policy makers in gifted education have been unable to reach consensus regarding how those needs should be met. How do teachers craft learning experiences that address requests for depth and breadth beyond what one would expect in a regular classroom?

With no clear directive, teachers are left to develop programming based on personal notions of gifted education. This is problematic for all teachers, particularly those who teach in areas where they lack a cultural understanding of
the students they teach. When notions of achievement based on personal values do not align with student output, deficit thinking results.

In order to address the issue of inequitable instruction within gifted spaces, we must first create gifted pedagogical frameworks that incorporate Ontario curriculum expectations but also clearly show how to address gifted needs. Do teachers accelerate through curricular expectations, potentially teaching students material from higher grades? Do they focus on enrichment, providing opportunities for students to think critically and make connections to other knowledge? Should creativity or other individual strengths be emphasized? Regardless of the path chosen, all teachers of gifted learners must employ similar instructional frameworks when constructing learning experiences for their students. Of course, any framework that is used must have the ability to recognize talents of students who are culturally diverse. In this way, we can ensure all gifted educators are working towards providing rich, engaging curriculum – irrespective of who the learner is or where the program is located.

Establishing a comprehensive gifted curriculum creates clear, transparent objectives and pedagogy that can be recognized by those within and outside gifted programming. Teachers who nominate students can base future referrals on the student’s ability to perform observable skills demonstrated in gifted classrooms, increasing referral accuracy. As well, parents interested in having their children pursue gifted education can see how these specialized classrooms differ from traditional classrooms, increasing their understanding of gifted programming.
Address Issues with Teacher Nominations

In attempting to tackle the matter of Black underrepresentation, there must be research conducted in the area of teacher nominations. As most teachers of gifted students are White and middle-class, dominant values create blind spots when it comes to recognizing minority talent. Regardless of a teacher’s background, the subjective nature of teacher nomination creates possibilities for teachers to overlook potential candidates. “Teachers, primary nomination sources for gifted referral after achievement scores, are not always aware of what to look for in potential gifted students...” (Jordan, Bain, McCallum, & Bell, 2012, p. 244). A number of studies from the U.S. have looked at the efficacy of rating scales in helping teachers determine gifted eligibility (Jarosewich, Pfeiffer & Morris, 2002; Matthews, 2007). There should be continued research from a Canadian perspective, with specific focus on the criteria used to create these scales. Many assessment tools presently utilized in gifted education still employ criteria that create exclusive profiles of gifted learners. We must develop broader criteria that recognize potential in various cultures.

In addition to assisting teachers in recognizing talents of diverse learners, school boards must also increase the number of minority teachers in gifted classrooms. New teachers can assist tenured staff with shifting traditional thinking in order to recognize a variety of potentials; they will also increase the comfort level and confidence of minority learners who already participate in settings where few minorities reside.

[T]he mere presence of diverse physical bodies in schools represents a ‘structural hegemonic rupturing’ and power sharing... All students want
teachers who are knowledgeable and caring. However, what African Canadian youth find problematic is the idea that the only competent teachers happen to be members of the dominant group.


**Link Gifted Policy with Equity Initiatives**

The underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education is an issue that persists in school boards all across North America. Moreover, this problem has existed ever since Terman’s first gifted classroom was created. The fact that gifted education is offered in public schools and its classrooms do not mirror demographics of the population at large must be viewed as an equity issue. In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education created an equity and inclusivity framework to be followed by all public schools in the province. Entitled, *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, the document outlined a comprehensive four-year plan specifically aimed at reducing the barriers to learning experienced by students from marginalized groups.

In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that barriers can be removed when all education partners create the conditions needed for success.

Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b, p. 8

The strategy recommends a number of ways to remove these barriers, including, strengthening partnerships with school communities, identifying and removing discriminatory barriers that limit student and parent engagement, formalizing religious accommodation guidelines and sharing them with communities, identifying and addressing bias that may exist in the ways student work is
evaluated, and putting procedures in place that would enable students and staff to report incidents of discrimination in a safe manner (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Although these and other goals mentioned in the document attempt to address many of the issues minority students and parents face in public education, the document fails to consider the glaring inequities that exist with student populations in specialized programs. This oversight is unacceptable and underscores a severe blind spot as it relates to “raising the bar for student achievement and...reducing achievement gaps” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 5). In the document, the importance of equitable hiring, mentoring, and promotion practices are highlighted as ways to better meet the needs of a culturally diverse community. If it is clear that diversity is paramount when looking at the professionals who work in public education, why is it not just as critical inside our classrooms? I contend that it is of greater importance to ensure all students have the ability to reach their greatest potentials and pursue gifted programs if they (and their families) so choose. Only when we achieve this objective, will we be on our way to “making Ontario’s education system the most inclusive in the world” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 3).

Conclusion

The underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education is an issue that has persisted ever since the inception of the program. Over the years a host of reasons have been offered to account for this absence – some focus on the
learner; some identify parental practices; some isolate socioeconomic status; and, some point to the systemic issues inherent in public education to explain this phenomenon. Regrettably, as explanations continue to be assembled, Black learners remain on the outside looking in. This, coupled with the overrepresentation of Black students in special education classrooms magnifies the dire position Black students in public education hold.

In this study, we learn of Black parents who have left indigenous roots behind in the hopes of securing many of the advantages this prosperous nation has to offer – including elite education for their children. For some, this move is unconscionable, as it represents the submissive erasure of history, language, culture – identity. However, as we continue to construct rules for the game of identity politics, one thought must be considered. Social psychologists Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto believe we live in a hegemonic society based on Eurocentric principles. The educational system of this society is founded on tenets designed to suppress those who are not part of dominant culture – statistics on minority achievement in public education corroborate this claim. Consequently, in order to gain access to elite public education, minority families must assume beliefs espoused by those who make up mainstream society.

Is it possible that a mental shift in the minds of minority groups must take place in order to increase membership in gifted spaces? Some may say that too much is lost in a transaction of this nature. The reply? How do minority families gain access to privileged classrooms today as they wait for systemic change that is forever promised but never actualized?
References


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http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/specedhandbook_e.pdf


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Dear _______________,

Thank you for being open to the possibility of participating in this study after initially discussing the idea with (teacher's name). I would like to share more specific information about myself and my area of research. I am a teacher of gifted students for the York Region District School Board and a part time student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Over the last few years my study interests have focused on the experiences of minority students in gifted programs. The purpose of this project is to explore why so few Black students are in programs of this nature. This study is supervised by Dr. Lance McCready and is to fulfill the requirements of a Master's of Arts degree. The purpose of this letter is to provide the information necessary to help determine whether or not you wish to participate in this case study. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, any or all of you are free to withdraw at any time. If any family members have concerns about the research, I can be reached at (905) 477-2047 or wayne.spencer@yrdsb.ca. Dr. Lance McCready can be reached at (416) 978-0183 or lance.mccready@utoronto.ca.

As you may or may not know, minority populations in gifted classrooms are alarmingly low when compared to minority populations in regular classrooms. This is particularly true when looking the participation of Black students in these specialized settings. Your family is unique in that two of your children are presently enrolled in gifted programs and the oldest child takes Advanced Placement courses. In order to gain insight in the area of Black underrepresentation in gifted classrooms, I would like to ask you and your spouse some questions about your experiences with gifted education. My hope is to conduct interviews with both of you, then be given the opportunity to ask follow up questions. Interviews will be audio-taped with the permission of each participant and will occur at a place and time that is convenient for everyone. The reason why you are being asked to participate is that you have expressed an interest in contributing to research in minority education.

If you agree to participate, individual interviews will be approximately 60 minutes. While comments made by family members during the interviews will be audio-taped, the names of you, your children, the schools they attend, or any information that could identify any family member as participants in this study will not be published. All information received will be considered confidential. The only people who will have access to the study will be my research advisors and me.

You will be free to stop participation at any time and can withdraw even after agreeing to participate. In addition, either participant may decline to answer any question they are uncomfortable with. Recordings will be destroyed after the research has been presented, which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks for those who decide to participate in this research.
All information collected from interviews and the focus group will be used for the research project. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be presented to Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in order to: further research in addressing the needs of Black students presently in the gifted program, and improve the recruitment and retention procedures of Black students for gifted programming.

I am very excited to conduct this research and to have you participate. To compensate you for your time and as a token of appreciation, I will provide you with compensation in the form of a gift card to Chapter’s valued at $125 dollars. I would like to reiterate that participation is completely voluntary. You should not feel obligated or pressured to participate. There is also no need to decide now. In fact, please take some time to consider this offer and I will check back in a few days.

If you would like further information regarding your rights as research participants, please contact the Office of Research Ethics.

Office of Research Ethics
University of Toronto
ethics.review@utoronto.ca
(416) 946-3273

If you are comfortable with participating in this study, please sign the attached form. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Wayne Spencer

Consent to participate:

I have read the above information about ‘The Under-representation of Black Students in Gifted Education Programs’ and have had sufficient time to ask questions to clarify what my participation involves.

I, __________________________ give my consent to participate in this study

☐ Yes

☐ No

By signing this consent form, I also give permission for my interviews to be audio-taped.

______________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant(s)             Date
Hello, my name is Wayne Spencer. I am a teacher of gifted students for the York Region District School Board and I am also a graduate student pursuing my Masters of Education at the University of Toronto. As a teacher of gifted students, I have wondered many years about the experiences of Black students in the program. One of the main questions I have is “why are there so few Black students in gifted classrooms?” My hope is that your experiences will help me gain insight in this area. I would like to invite you to participate in individual interviews followed by a group discussion.

During the interviews and focus group, I will ask you questions regarding: feelings about the gifted education, your educational backgrounds, and educational philosophies. Questions about your children will focus on: positive and negative feelings about the gifted program, relationships with other students and teachers, and thoughts about academic achievement. Will it be ok for me to use a tape recorder to record our discussions? I will listen to the recordings to see what general themes develop from our conversations.

Remember, if you don’t feel comfortable with any of the questions or if there is something said that you do not want on tape, share your concerns and the recorder will be stopped immediately. Do not feel any pressure to answer questions or have your responses recorded. Your comfort during this process is extremely important.

You can request to review tape recordings at any time, whole or in part. You may also request to have your contributions erased if you are not comfortable with the information shared. Finally, all participants will receive a copy of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations at their request.

Everything shared with me during both the individual interviews and the group discussion will be confidential. The educational institutions your children attend will not be notified about this project, nor will any information collected be shared with these schools. Actual names will not be included in the research.

I am very excited to conduct this research and to have you participate. To compensate you for your time and as a token of appreciation, I will provide you with compensation in the form of a gift card to Chapter’s valued at $125 dollars. I would like to reiterate that participation is completely voluntary. You should not feel obligated or pressured to participate. There is also no need to decide now. In fact, please take some time to consider this offer and I will check back in a few days.

I will gladly answer any questions you might have regarding the study. You can contact me via email at wayne.spencer@yrdsb.edu.on.ca

I thank you for your time and look forward to connecting with you again soon. Goodbye.
APPENDIX C

Parents of Black Students in Gifted Programs

Interview Questions

1. Where are both of you from?
2. How do you identify yourselves (culturally, racially, religiously)?
3. Briefly share your educational experiences.
4. Based on parental influences and personal experiences, discuss your educational philosophies. What does educational success mean to you?
5. How did you come to know about gifted programming as an option for your children?
6. Why was the choice made to enroll your children in gifted education?
7. Briefly discuss how your children were given their identifications.
8. Given current gifted populations, did you worry about your children feeling culturally ‘out of place’, particularly at a young age (students are usually tested in grade three, enrolled in grade four)?
9. In your estimation, how have your children benefitted from being identified as gifted?
10. Has there been a cost to being enrolled in this program for your children?
11. Have there been cultural curricular opportunities for your children in gifted classrooms?
12. Why do you think your children have been successful in the gifted program?
13. Do you think the gifted experience has been different for Elizabeth than for David?
14. In your opinion, why do you think there are so few black students in gifted classrooms?
15. David has recently been accepted to attend a private institution. Why do you choose for your son to attend a school with so few minorities?
16. When you look at Black culture, Caribbean culture, do you think there are certain things that you are doing that others aren't in terms of the success of your children?

17. Are there any traditions from back home (Barbados) that you feel you've held on to in order to pass them on to the children? What do you think you have brought back culturally to extend to them? When you look at your Barbados background, do you think there are some things that you have focused on in order to instill in them (children)? What do you think you are passing on to them culturally?

18. You've discussed the idea of working hard and also the notion of being respectful – are there any other things that you feel you have instilled in your children to be successful in Canadian education?

19. Have you or your children been accused of trying to be White?

20. As participants in the gifted setting, have you or your children ever had to deal with forms of racism?

21. Would you say overall, even with the incidents that you have mentioned and the pressures that come along with AP or gifted, elite education was the best choice for your children?

22. Do you feel that over the years, you have become more Canadian and less Bajan? Do you see yourselves more now as Canadian? Less Bajan?

23. How do you see Bajan culture fitting into your identity as a family?

24. Now that all three [children] have been in the school system for a bit of time, you mentioned that some people were surprised to find out that Thomas did not have a gifted label like his siblings. What did you mean when you made that statement? Do people feel that he displays gifted characteristics now?

25. Do you have any regrets that Thomas did not experience the gifted program like his siblings did?

26. You mentioned that both of you grew as a team and worked together with what you learned from Thomas...wondering as well, from a systems point, from a school perspective, do you feel like there was a change in the amount of information that you had access to when David was in the early grades?

27. How did you become aware of David’s progress in school?
28. Even though you had a teacher state David was a strong student in grade 1, you had to wait two years before he could be formally identified as gifted? As you were waiting for the assessment in grade 3 to kick in, was there anything that you did above and beyond to address David’s academic needs?

29. Do you remember the identification process with David? Was there a teacher questionnaire, a meeting, psychological assessment? Please share all the steps involved with his identification.

30. How did the transition occur from Riverdale to Central Elementary?

31. You were supposed to go to a gifted program in your community however, you determined that the program wasn’t up to standard. How were you able to get your child to where you wanted him to go?

32. Was the process of identification and placement the same for Elizabeth as it was for David?

33. What are some of the things offered in gifted classrooms that are not offered outside of the program?

34. Deborah being home for the early years of the children’s education – was that by choice? Did you decide that this would be best for the entire family?

35. Please discuss Deborah’s move to work in education? Do you feel you have gained insight to the processes that take place at school as the result of Deborah’s role as an ECE?

36. Could you tell me some of the things you have been involved with on a political level with schools or the Board?

37. Where were your parents born? Are they still alive? Do your parents still live in Barbados?

38. How would you characterize your relationship with your parents/extended family? Past/present?

39. What was your family’s economic status - lower class, lower middle, middle, upper-middle, high class?

40. What were the important tenets or principles that were followed in your childhood home?
41. You mentioned that education was important growing up? How was that stressed?

42. What role did your parents play (if any) in the decision you and Selwyn made to move to Canada (emotional, economic, etc.)? Was the intention for them to stay in Barbados?

43. What was your education in Barbados? In Canada?

44. Why did you both come to Canada? Were you married in Barbados then came as a couple, or were you married here? Were there any reservations about leaving Barbados?

45. How have your lives changed as a result of your move? Economically? Socially? Culturally? Have there been any negatives?

46. Describe your children’s relationship with their grandparents?

47. How would you describe your family's present connection with Barbados?

48. You mentioned the idea of evolving...holding on to some elements of Bajan culture (discarding elements that are not helpful) as you learn from other cultures. What elements of Barbadian culture to you hold on to? What did you feel you had to ‘let go’?

49. When/how did you meet Selwyn?

50. What resources (if any) were available that allowed both of you to make the move to Canada?

51. Where are your parents?

52. You both came in your early twenties – not too early? Who were the supports back then (economic, etc.)?

53. Do you presently have any connections to Barbados (family or otherwise)?

54. Please discuss the educational paths you both took to get to your positions today.

55. What were your experiences with the Canada’s educational system?

56. What factors have given you the ability to transition to the ‘Canadian way of life’ so seamlessly?

57. What economic class do you consider yourselves?
58. Be specific as to the people beyond the classroom (principals, supervisory officers, etc.) that assisted you with getting your kids to preferred spots in education. How were those connections made?

59. What was the scholarship that David received in order to attend private school? What was the process?

60. What were some of the things you discussed with educational professionals once you became comfortable with them?

61. Do you remember the types of assessments David and Elizabeth received for gifted identification?

62. Discuss your relationship with the other parent of the gifted child who was identified at the same time as David.

63. Discuss the steps you took in getting David placed at an out-of-area school.

64. Be specific about the types of activities you have involved the children in; the types of things you have done as a family.

65. Any issues regarding class that you have experienced in gifted circles?