

ASHE CITY SCHOOLS' JOURNEY TO RECOGNIZE, NURTURE, AND RESPOND
TO THE POTENTIAL IN ALL CHILDREN VIA U-STARS~PLUS

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ABSTRACT

Angela Haywood Kern: Ashe City Schools' Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential In All Children Via U-STARS~PLUS
(Under the direction of Dr. Barbara Day)

Culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students are under-represented in gifted education programs. White middle-class children tend to be afforded the opportunity of gifted education services.

This study analyzed Ashe City Schools' journey to implement Project U-STARS~PLUS in order to identify and serve culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students. The methods employed for this research included: analysis of existing data, focus groups with teachers, interviews with administrators and a director, interviews with fourth grade children, and document reviews of AIG plans. Qualitative methods were employed to summarize the effect of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Ashe City Schools.

The purpose of this study was to analyze Ashe City Schools' journey to recognize, nurture, and respond to the potential in all children via U-STARS~PLUS. The data obtained from the focus groups, interviews, and document analysis were analyzed to determine the overall effect of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Ashe City Schools.

Findings indicate that when teachers were trained to utilize systematic observations over time for students, then "at potential" traits emerged. In this study, eighty-three children were recommended for gifted services that would

have otherwise been overlooked over the course of the four year research. Teachers felt that Project U-STARS~PLUS impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential by allowing the teachers to see gifted potential. However, even though possible strengths were noticed, gifted identification still belonged to the student who could score high on a standardized test. Another benefit of this study revealed that science was energized in the classroom through inquiry based methods and hands-on family take home science kits. The written district gifted education plan indicated that Ashe City was intentionally exploring multiple pathways to gifted identification for all children.

This study is important because children from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged households should have equitable access to gifted education services. This study will be beneficial to other school districts facing the same challenges of recognizing and nurturing their brightest children.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students are under-represented in gifted education programs. White middle - class children tend to be afforded the opportunity of gifted education services. Ford and Whiting (2008) note that many low income students do not lack intelligence; they lack the academic exposure and experiences in which to develop their untapped potential. Borland and Wright (1994) found that children from families identified in the upper quartile of socioeconomic status are at least five times more likely to be in programs for gifted students than students whose family's socioeconomic status is in the bottom quartile. Darity, Castellino, Tyson, Cobb, and McMillen (2001) found the achievement gap that exists between white children and children from culturally/linguistically backgrounds coincides with the lower identification of minority children in services of gifted education.

This dissertation examines one school district's journey to explore its current gifted education system so that children from culturally/linguistically diverse families could receive gifted education services. This story is exemplified through the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students – Promoting Learning in Under-served Students). U-STARS~PLUS is Ashe City's attempt to empower change in the gifted education program to meet the

needs of the diverse and changing population and, thus, to afford gifted services to all learners who showed gifted potential.

Ashe City is a city system within a larger county in Central Piedmont of North Carolina. Ashe City houses approximately 4,451 students between five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The ethnic percentages during the 2008-2009 school year include: 47.85% White, 14.58% Black, 31.27% Hispanic, 4.02% Multi, 2.02% Asian, and 0.25% American Indian. The demographics of Ashe City Schools are becoming more diverse. Ashe is a city that was once booming with textiles, furniture, and manufacturing jobs. Economic hardships have slowed down industries, and jobs are not as abundant as in the past. The combination of a shifting and changing demographics and a changing and reduced economy has led to a dramatic change in population of Ashe City Schools. Yet, despite these changes in the students' needs, the gifted education program's capacity and ability to meet these needs has not changed as shown in the disproportionate representation of ethnic groups in gifted education. During the 2008/2009 school year, the ethnic percentages of students identified for gifted services in Ashe City Schools were as follows: 79.06% White, 13% African American, 11.97% Hispanic, 2.14% Multi, and 4.06% Asian. The time is appropriate to look at how best to meet the needs of all gifted children in Ashe City Schools.

Table1

Ashe City Schools' Population 2008 - 2009

Ashe City Schools' Population 2008 - 2009		
	Population	AIG Identified
White	47.85%	79.06%
Black	14.58%	3.00%
Hispanic	31.27%	11.97%
Multi-racial	4.02%	2.14%
Asian	2.02%	4.06%
American Indian	0.25%	0.00%

Elementary gifted services started in fourth grade in Ashe City Schools and revolved around a consultative model. There were three elementary gifted education consultants that rotated to five elementary schools to collaborate with classroom teachers to meet the needs of the gifted identified students. The consultants planned weekly with the teachers to differentiate lessons for the gifted. The consultants also went into math and reading classes for inclusion services and occasionally pulled students out of the classroom for thirty minute time slots for small group instruction. Classroom teachers were responsible for the learning needs of the gifted child with help from the AIG Consultants.

The district worked with Project U-STARs~PLUS funded by the United States Department of Education's Jacob K. Javits Grants. The United States Department of Education founded the Javits program in 1988 due to concerns of under-representation in

gifted education of minorities and students from economically disadvantaged households (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997). The University of Chapel Hill was awarded a Jacob K. Javits Grant in 2003 in order to implement Project U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science Talents and Abilities to Recognize Students – Promoting Learning for Under-served Students). The purpose of Project USTARS – PLUS is to recognize potential, nurture potential, and respond to potential in children who would be missed in our identification for gifted education services.

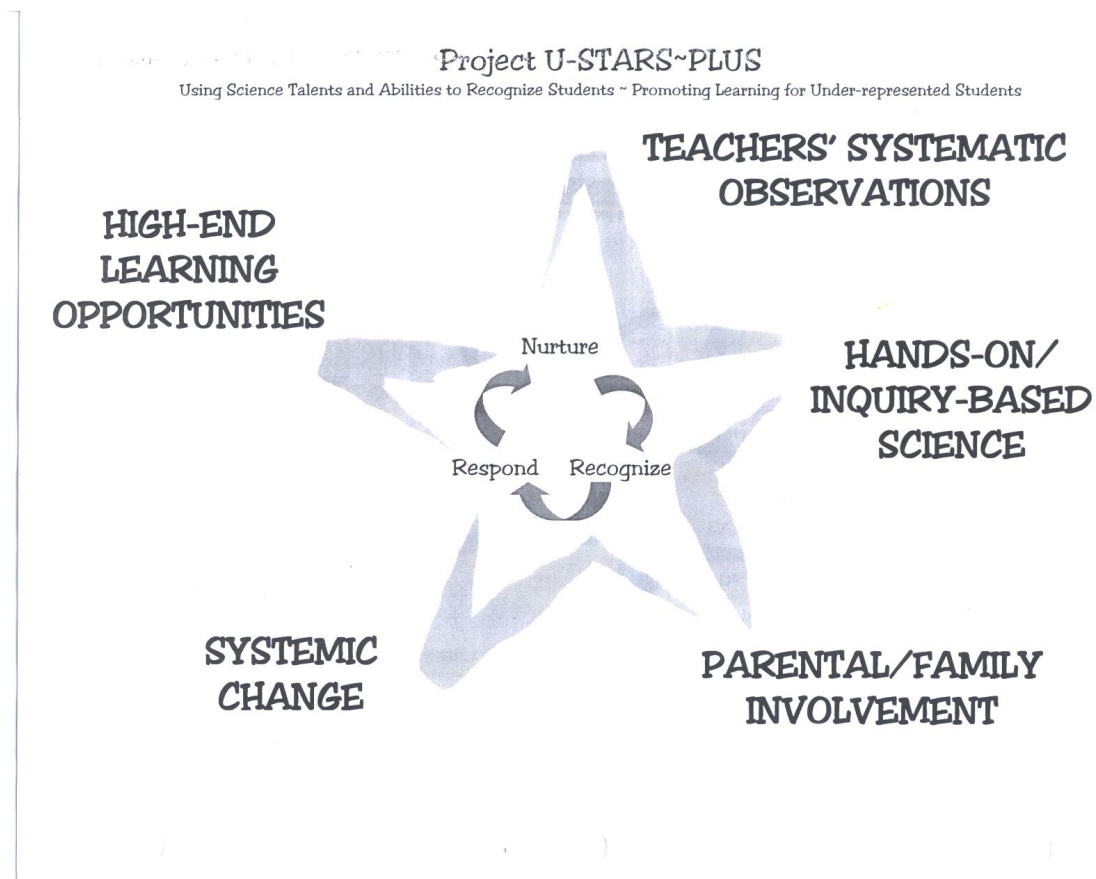


Figure 1. Copied with Permission from Project U-STARS~PLUS. Coleman & Coltrane (2003). *Personnel Preparation Leadership Cadre Materials*.

Conceptual Framework

The basis behind Project U-STARS~PLUS is outlined in the conceptual framework above. The center of the star represents the heart of the program. The ultimate goal is to allow teachers to nurture, recognize, and respond to potential in children, especially children typically overlooked in gifted education. The means of nurturing, recognizing, and responding is through the five components on the outside of the star: teachers' systematic observation, hands-on / inquiry-based science, parental / family involvement, high-end learning opportunities, and finally systematic change. Aspects of this star will be addressed to tell the whole story in Ashe City Schools.

Teachers' Systematic Observation

Teachers' systematic observation includes the significant and intentional effort on behalf of classroom teachers to see high potential in students, including those from underserved populations. This intentional effort is exemplified through the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*. The *Harrison Observation Form* is a tool available to Project U-STARS~PLUS schools with which teachers intentionally look for an "at-potential" view of all students through the form of a checklist. The tool is intended to be used over time in a variety of settings in order to inform teachers about student behaviors. The *Harrison Observation Form* allows teachers to look at the child through several lenses. Teachers observe ease of learning, advancement of skills, curiosity and creativity, strong interests, advanced reasoning and problem solving, display of spatial abilities, motivation, social perceptiveness, and display of leadership. Teachers are trained to look through various lenses rather than at standardized test scores as indicators of giftedness. The form allows teachers to look for potential instead of lack of potential.

Teachers spend approximately one month observing characteristics of all children in their classroom. After approximately one month, teachers reflect upon the whole class observation to see which students showed consistent traits over the course of time. Those children then receive individual *Harrison Forms*. Throughout the remainder of the year, teachers mark incidents in which children show potential. Near the conclusion of the school year, the Needs Determination Team, the team designated at each school to identify children who are in need of gifted education services, review the *Harrison Forms* to determine how best to meet the needs of the children for the upcoming year.

Hands-on / Inquiry-based Science

One component of Project U-STARS~PLUS is the implementation of hands-on / inquiry-based science in the classroom. Inquiry-based science includes student-centered science activities that revolve around students' interests and occur in a naturalistic setting. Science is integrated with other subject matter, especially literature. Project U-STARS~PLUS includes a reference book titled, *Science and Literature Connection*, that includes approximately twenty-four science and literature connections to be used as a starting point for science experiments. Inquiry-based science leads to experiments that actively involve children in which teachers can observe naturalistic behaviors. Inquiry-based lessons, when started early in a child's education life, focus on exploration and problem-solving, and lead to better scientific understandings. These authentic learning experiences are an ideal setting in which to observe children from culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged homes.

Parental / Family Involvement

Project U-STARS~PLUS advocates for meaningful family involvement. Families are intentionally involved in the academic lives of their children through the initiative set forth by classroom teachers. Family involvement includes open communication with families and opportunities for family activities. Project U-STARS~PLUS includes a reference book titled, *Family Involvement Packet*, written in both English and Spanish, that includes approximately twenty take home family science kits. These fun, family-centered kits are meant to be completed as a family at home and then returned to school for discussion. Materials needed to complete the activity are sent to the child's home so there is equal access to the materials.

High-end Learning Opportunities

Project U-STARS~PLUS advocates for high-end learning opportunities in order to reach the potential in all children. In order for high-end learning opportunities to exist, teachers have to create a climate in which children are actively engaged. This environment must also be emotionally safe so children know they are valued. Strategies promoted to help create this environment include the following: curriculum compacting, tiered assignments, contract work, learning centers, and knowledge of higher order questioning techniques.

Systemic Change

Systemic change involves the change within a school system to nurture, recognize, and respond to culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. This systemic change was supported through project U-STARS~PLUS through summer institutes during the summers of 2004 – 2008. Ashe

City teachers in grades K – 3 were invited to participate in three-day summer institutes which provided professional development in teachers’ systematic observations, hands-on/inquiry-based science, parent/family involvement, and high-end learning opportunities. The teachers that attended returned to their prospective schools and shared their experiences learned at the summer institutes. Teachers that attended these summer institutes also received a professional development book titled, *Personal Preparation Guide*. This guide summarizes key points of Project U-STARS~PLUS. In addition to summer institutes, gifted education consultants from Ashe City were invited to participate in leadership meetings held twice throughout the school year. The purpose of these meetings was to ensure the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS and to generate ideas for possible implementation strategies.

Ford (2008) states that, “Our basic obligation as educators is to meet the needs of students as they come to us with their different learning styles, economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and academic skills” (p. 111), and this study is an attempt to discover if Project U-STARS ~PLUS meets the needs of the children in Ashe City Schools. This research will either help tell the story of the transformation in thinking about gifted education services, or it will tell the inconceivable truth that gifted services still are afforded only to the privileged and middle class.

The Problem

The identification of children for gifted education programs must be equitable and fair and should be representative of all ethnic and economic groups. The absence of culturally/linguistically diverse children and economically disadvantaged children in academically gifted programs results in talent loss which is an overall loss to society.

Hong & Milgram (2008, p.8) state, “Children whose potential talent is unconventional, that is, different from the abilities measured by school grades and IQ tests, may not be identified as gifted and not given the opportunities that might help them develop their potential talent. They may be systematically excluded and not provided with special education experiences that could enhance their potential talent and prevent it from being lost.” Furthermore, Ramirez (2003, p. 131) states, “Children who are conceived, born, and raised in situations of economic privation are at great risk of losing or never developing gifts and talents they and their community could enjoy or benefit from.” Fullen, Hill, and Crevola (2006, p. 1) claim that the lack of access to programs with academic excellence for all children will lead to, “economic and social costs associated with failure to learn and failure to achieve one’s full potential.”

Coltrane and Coleman (2005) indicate that intelligence is the relationship between experiences and capacity for learning. Students from middle class families are often afforded the opportunity for enriching learning experiences that enable their capacity for learning to reach optimal levels. There are children who are not afforded the enrichment opportunities because of the challenges of poverty (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). These children are missed for gifted services when traditional identification methods are employed. The under-representation of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children into gifted education programs is problematic. Hong and Milgram (2008, p. 136) state, “Some children are privileged and have multiple opportunities for success, whereas others born into poor families may not have much chance to even become aware of their potential, let alone realize it.”

The identification of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students for gifted education is often complicated by teacher views. A mysterious barrier often surrounds gifted education. The barrier is the gates to admission. The barrier is often felt to be broken by those of elite social status, not necessarily academic status. Parents, too, often feel that a child is destined to be in a gifted education program because of the family background. Frazier (1991), a founding leader in gifted education, believes that teachers often hold unconscious beliefs which may hinder their ability to look beyond the obvious to see the underlying potential. Braken (2008, p. 19) states, "If identification of gifted students is to be comprehensive, accessible, and fair, then efforts to identify students should be broadened beyond current practices and should systematically investigate new, promising methods and procedures." This dissertation is an investigation of a promising program to nurture the abilities in all children.

Stephens and Karnes (2000, p. 11) cite the latest North Carolina definition of gifted education as produced in 1998 by the North Carolina Department of Education. The definition is stated as follows:

Academically or intellectually gifted students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of the age, experience, or environment. Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or both intellectual areas and specific fields. Academically or intellectually gifted students require differentiated education service beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular education program. Outstanding abilities are

present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.

Outstanding abilities do exist in culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. This study will examine a method to uncover the hidden potential that exists.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze one school district's efforts to reduce disproportionate representation in gifted education for culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children through the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS.

Major Research Questions

The following questions guided the process of inquiry:

1. How many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS ~PLUS that otherwise would have been overlooked? (review of existing data set / *Profile of High Potential Form* as granted permission from Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute U-STARS~PLUS staff)
2. To what extent did Project U-STARS ~PLUS teachers feel that the program impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential? (focus groups of teachers in three schools)
3. What impact did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on the school level? (interview with principals at the three elementary sites)

4. What impressions did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on students impacted by the program? (interview with three 4th grade students currently identified in gifted education that were involved in U-STARS~PLUS from the beginning)
5. What changed in the gifted education program of Ashe City Schools upon the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS? (interview with Ashe City School Exceptional Child Services Director)
6. To what extent did policy, the academically and intellectually academic written plan for Ashe City reflect a change in the nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged households? (side by side document review of Academically and Intellectually Gifted Plans pre and post U-STARS~PLUS)

Through the methods employed above, the researcher will attempt to share Ashe City's journey to appropriately recognize and serve children with high potential from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged families.

Significance

The significance of this study was to examine how Project U-STARS~PLUS impacted gifted services in Ashe City Schools. Provided a difference was made to children in the classroom, in the school, and in the overall school district, then the data are worth sharing in order that other systems may follow to meet the needs of their culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged gifted students. Provided that the results do not support the efforts of Project U-STARS ~PLUS, then

additional efforts will need to be made in order to insure an equitable education for all gifted children.

This study has the potential to empower the powerless and prove that inequity does not have to exist in the public schools of North Carolina. This study also has the potential to allow all children from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged households an equitable education with access to gifted education services. Overall, this study will be beneficial to other school districts facing the same challenges of recognizing and nurturing their brightest.

This study has the potential to advocate for gifted education policy reform regarding identification of services for culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantage children. The results of this study could be used for identification procedure changes.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used for the purpose of this study:

Achievement Test – For the purpose of this study, the IOWA Basic Achievement Test was given to all 3rd graders in Ashe City Schools. Achievement tests measure skills and knowledge learned.

AIG – Academically and Intellectually Gifted

AIG Consultant – The term is used in Ashe City Schools to describe the job of the person who shares differentiation strategies to classroom teachers that teach gifted education students. This person also facilitates the paperwork for identification purposes.

AIG Plan – A written documentation of AIG services offered in a system. This plan is required by the State Board of Education in North Carolina and is to be revisited and reviewed every three years.

Aptitude Test – The CoGat, Cognitive Test of Abilities, is given to all 3rd grade students in Ashe City Schools as one of the criteria for identification of services in gifted education. Aptitude tests measure abilities to acquire skills.

At-potential Lens – A term used in this research to describe the focus of teachers to look at non-pleasing and non-traditional behaviors as behaviors that possibly could demonstrate underlying academic gifts.

DNDT – The District Needs Determination Team consists of the director of exceptional children and the AIG Consultants at each elementary school. The job of the DNDT is to review school wide paperwork and recommendations regarding gifted education.

EC – Exceptional Children

ELL – English Language Learners

ESL – English as a Second Language

Fourth Generation Plan – The written AIG Plan for Ashe City from 2007 - 2010.

Gifted Rating Scale – The Gifted Rating Scale is a form used by homeroom teachers to identify strengths in the following areas: intellectual ability, academic ability, creativity, artistic ability, leadership, and motivation. The Gifted Rating Scale is used as one possible criteria for identification of gifted services in Ashe City Schools.

Harrison Form – A form used by K – 3 teachers involved in U-STARS~PLUS to note observations of strengths in children. The same updated form as the TOPS Form.

LEP – Limited English Proficient

NDT – The Needs Determination Team consists of 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers, a guidance counselor, the principal of designee, and the AIG consultant at each school. The job of the NDT is to review school wide recommendations regarding gifted education services for children at their school.

Nurture – The term used in Ashe City School to describe an intentional focus and look at children who demonstrate outstanding abilities but do not yet qualify for gifted education services.

SES – Socio / Economic Status

Specialty Teachers – Teachers that do not have a regular-education homeroom. Teachers such as music, art, physical education, guidance, English as second language, and academically gifted consultants.

Third Generation Plan – The written AIG Plan for Ashe City from 2004 – 2007.

TOPS Form – Teachers Observation of Potential in Students – A form used by K
– 3 teachers involved in U-STARS~PLUS to note observations of strengths in children.

The older version is known as the *Harrison Form*.

U-STARS~PLUS – Using Science Talents and Abilities to Reach Students ~
Promoting Learning in Under-served Students – A program designed by researchers at
the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to promote learning for the gifted in
under-served populations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Project U-STARS ~PLUS stands for Using Science Talents and Abilities to Recognize Students - Promote Learning in Under-served Students. Project U-STARS~PLUS is funded by the Jacob K. Javits Grant from the United States Department of Education. The Jacob K. Javits program was established in 1988 due to concerns over under-representation of minority students and students from economically disadvantaged households in gifted education programs (Elementary and Secondary Act of 1988). The grant was awarded to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in 2003 in order to implement and promote Project U-STARS~PLUS. The ultimate goal of Project U-STARS~PLUS is to support teachers as they nurture, recognize, and respond to potential in children, especially children typically overlooked in gifted education. The means of nurturing, recognizing, and responding is completed through five components: teachers' systematic observation, hands-on / inquiry-based science, parental / family involvement, high-end learning opportunities, and, finally, systematic change.

The following is a review of the literature on the cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic barriers to identification as gifted and the possibilities that these barriers, along

with their biases, can be corrected. Topics reviewed include the following: definitions of giftedness and procedures of identifying gifted; under-representation of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children in gifted programs; teacher beliefs regarding giftedness and giftedness of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children; characteristics of early indicators of potential giftedness in early childhood education; and beliefs on changing teacher perceptions in order to meet the needs of all students, especially those from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged homes. The literature review also includes the five components of the U-STARS~PLUS approach: the use of systematic teacher observation; the use of hands-on / inquiry-based science as high-end opportunities to reach all children; the engagement of families in high-end learning opportunities; and the complexity of systematic change within a school system. Finally, the literature examines studies similar to Project U-STARS~PLUS and their research results.

Definition and Identification of Giftedness

Identification of the best and brightest is not a new concept in education. It appears that history has recorded several scenarios of cultures showing interest in their brightest citizens (Renzulli, 1986 as cited in Ford & Harris, 1990). Each culture and time defines giftedness. For example, orators in ancient Greece were considered gifted, and in the Italian Renaissance, artists were considered gifted (Gallager, 1985). The Chinese chose their government officials from the ablest of minds as early as 2200 B.C. (DuBois, 1970 as cited in Ford & Harris, 1990). Later, in A.D. 618, Chinese children were sent to the Imperial Court to be nurtured for their giftedness. Children from Sparta with exceptional

leadership and sport skills were defined as gifted (Davis & Rimm, 1989). Time has shown that gifted traits have been valued in various cultures around the world. Today, in the mixture that makes America, not all children are given the opportunities to rise to the academic standards of giftedness due to cultural or economic barriers. Cultural or economic barriers should not hold back the brightest students in America.

Today in North Carolina, gifted is defined as the following:

Academically or intellectually gifted students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishments when compared with others their age, experience or environment. Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both intellectual areas and specific academic fields.

Academically or intellectually gifted students require differentiated education services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program. Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human behavior.

[\(http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/gifted/program/\)](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/development/gifted/program/)

Gifted education policies vary throughout states (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2009). Bathon (2004) noted forty-seven out of fifty different state definitions of giftedness, with three states absent any definition at all! Gagne (1985, p. 80) states, “This ambiguity in terminology reflects the conceptual ambiguity of gifted and talented.” Gifted programs are mandated by some states and not by others (Davidson Institute for Talent Development, 2009). In North Carolina, local gifted programs are mandated by state law and partially funded by the state (NC General Statutes – Chapter

115C Article 9B). Each local school district is responsible for determining a screening procedure, identification procedures, and a placement procedure for gifted students.

School districts are also responsible for reviewing their procedures, rewriting their gifted education plans, and submitting them to the state board of education for approval every three years.

The National Association of Gifted Children estimates that 5% of school-aged children are gifted. That equates to approximately three million gifted children in the United States (NAGC, 2008). In this group of gifted children, there is under-representation of children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged homes (Coleman & Southern, 2006; Slocumb & Payne, 2000).

The testing assessment formally used for entrance into gifted education programs is a poor fit for children from non-traditional, white, middle-class households (Tomlinson, 2007/2008). Because of the complexity of identifying culturally/linguistic diverse children, they are often under-represented in gifted programs. Linguistic challenges include the acquisition of second language and English-based aptitude and achievement tests, which masks the child's ability and intelligence (Hong & Milgram, 2008; Slocumb & Payne, 2000). Coleman and Gallagher (1995) note that systems continue the overuse of standardized tests mainly due to state policies that advocate for the ease of use. Renzulli (2004, p. xxv) states, "Schoolhouse giftedness is the kind most easily measured by standardized ability tests and performance in traditional curricular pursuits, and, therefore, the most conveniently used for selecting students for special programs. The competencies young people display on cognitive ability tests are exactly the kinds of competencies most valued in traditional school learning situations." State and local

policies also play a factor in determining the mystery and dilemma of identifying and nurturing potential in all children because states often identify for gifted services using multifarious criteria.

It is really impossible to offer enrichment for all the various types of multiple gifts present in children (Hong & Milgram, 2008). Typically the school serves the cognitive strengths, although there are many multiple intelligences besides linguistic and spatial/mathematical! Other gifts might be recognized if emphasis were placed on multiple modes. The realization that multiple modes of potential exist makes it difficult to measure all the various modes (Porter, 2005). All children demonstrate potential of some type. That potential should be nurtured in order for gifts to manifest. Quality learning opportunities should exist for all children.

Ford and Harris (1990) report several reasons for the lack of identification of minorities in gifted education. There is not a universal definition of giftedness, leaving the definition up to states or even individual schools to determine. Placement into gifted programs typically revolves around the use of intelligence quotias, which is not always culturally fair. Gallagher (2008b) points out that environmental factors influence IQ scores. Often standardized tests were normed on white middle-class Europeans, not consistent with America's diverse population (Ford & Harris, 1990). Borland and Wright (1994, p. 169) note that "economically disadvantaged and minority children score lower on aptitude tests than do middle-class white children." Aptitude and achievement tests often used in gifted education tend to favor middle-class America. Children from families identified in the upper quartile of socioeconomic status are at least five times more likely to be in programs for gifted students than students whose family

socioeconomic status places them in the bottom quartile (Borland and Wright, 1994).

Kauffman and Sternberg (2006, p. 404) further emphasize, “Because minority students perform lower on standardized tests of intelligence, any giftedness program that focuses solely on standardized test scores and academic achievement runs the risk of leaving out a large number of potentially gifted minority students.”

The actual identification of gifted children is complex. There is not a “one-set-fits- all” for the definition or the identification criteria for gifted services. Hadaway and Marek – Schroer (1992, p. 73) state, “Actual ability may not be appropriately measured, and potential for giftedness may be immeasurable. Differing cultures, ethnicity, language background, socioeconomic levels further confound the process of assessment and the identification of giftedness.” The question becomes how one appropriately measures potential giftedness.

It is important to recognize and nurture the potential in culturally/linguistically and economically disadvantaged students because of the wealth of untapped talent (Coltrane & Coleman, 2005; Coleman & Gallagher, 1995; Ford, 1996; Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, & Ngoi, 2004). Coleman (2005) describes the potential in children as an analogy of the growth of an oak tree. The potential that the acorn has allows it to become either a great oak tree or squirrel food. Therefore potential does not guarantee success. Rather, potential is determined by the recognition of and nurturing of the insides. Just as with gifted children, if the potential is recognized, then it can be harvested and nurtured for greatness. If potential is left unrecognized, then it is possible that it is just eaten up by the ordinary.

Under-representation of Culturally/Linguistically Diverse and Economically Disadvantaged Children

The problem of under-representation of children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomic disadvantaged homes is not a new dilemma in education (Coleman, 2003). Many reasons are a factor in the complicated components of under-representation.

Passow (1982) as cited in Frasier (1991a) stated that a factor that contributes to under-served gifted children from culturally/linguistically and economically disadvantaged households is poverty. Children are often subject to issues of poverty. Poverty limits resources which often results in health and nutritional deficits (Kirsh, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007). Physical health can be diminished from poverty, resulting in lack of attention to school and absences (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). Slocumb and Payne (2000, p. 25) summarize the dilemma of under-served economically disadvantaged students by stating, "It is not an intelligence issue – it's an opportunity issue." In other words, the greater the number of opportunities provided at home, the higher academic performance one will make, and the higher likelihood of admittance into a gifted education program. It appears that admittance is a cyclical pattern for the privileged white child. Ford (2008, p. 117) states, "Relative to socio-economic status, children in poverty live in a different culture than children in middle-class families. One has only to look at the enriched educational experiences-mainly due to economic opportunity and higher educational backgrounds-that middle-class families provide their children compared to families that live in poverty." Middle and upper class families often provide early childhood experiences which are crucial for the foundation of later

higher order thinking skills. Pre-school experiences are one noted factor in later identification for gifted services.

Slocumb and Payne (2000) note specific differences between children from poverty and children from white, middle-class backgrounds. These differences attribute to the under-identification of socio-economically disadvantaged children into gifted education programs. Children from poverty are not afforded financial means to supply teacher-pleasing goods for school or projects. These children often have not been taught how to control their emotional responses because they have witnessed adults who are looking after providing for basic needs, not having the time to talk through situations. Children from impoverished homes often lack the mental pre-requisite skills of school that come from books in the house or quality child care programs (Slocumb & Payne, 2000).

Children from poverty often do not know the unspoken hidden rules of society, a trait that middle-class children learn from their parental models but which are often absent in poverty-stricken households (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). When a child experiences any of these factors then the following behaviors usually occur: lower test scores, different behavior norms, lack of goal planning, lack of social skills, and lack of academic skills. Furthermore, there are few books, few stimulating toys, few enrichment trips, few times spent one on one with a caregiver, and / or few lack of overall experiences (Sisk, 2003). All of these factors impede the success of a child from poverty. Slocumb and Payne (2000) emphasize that classroom teachers should be trained to look for symptoms that accompany poverty.

Cultural traditions of children may not reflect the norms of the middle-class white mainstream (Harris, 1993). Social conflicts may place the child in a situation in which

tensions prevent the child from exhibiting his or her true self. On top of all of these stressors, culturally/linguistically diverse children are often in an economic state of distress due to larger family structures and possible lack of legal status (Harris, 1993).

Academically gifted students have typically been looked at from a traditional white, middle-class point of view. Children from resources, enriched early childhood to financial security, tend to be afforded the benefits of gifted education. As far back as 1970, Paul Torrance (as cited in Gregory, Starnes, & Blaylock, 1988), the creator of the Torrance Creativity Inventory, noted “the greatest source of untapped talent in the nation lies among the disadvantaged minority population.”

Teacher Perceptions of Giftedness and Giftedness in Culturally/Linguistically Diverse and Economically Disadvantaged Children

There are two main views of intelligence. One view is known as “G” or global intelligence and deals with an unusual degree of strengths across all abilities. Another view of intelligence is more detailed around specific skills. The specific-skills scenario looks at strengths in one or more areas but not necessarily in all domains (Louis, Subotnki, Breland, & Lewis, 2000). Some children exhibit teacher-pleasing characteristics that allow them to show their overall abilities. Other students may manifest a gift in just a certain area that school does not always favor. Due to the accountability model of education, the current two focus areas of giftedness are math and reading because these two subjects are tested over and over again; yet, other areas of giftedness exist (Cervetti & Pearson, 2006).

One view of gifted education is the notion that gifted students tend to come from middle and upper socio-economic families, regardless of cultural status. A similar notion

carried by teachers is that the under-represented in gifted education programs are low in socio-economic status or are poor children (Frasier, 1991). Often there is a mysterious barrier that surrounds gifted education. The barrier is felt to be only broken by those of elite social status, not necessarily academic status (Frasier, 1991). Piirto (2008) says that there is an “elitism” connotation surrounding giftedness. Parents, too, may often feel that a child is destined to be gifted because of the background of the family. Teachers may also tend to unconsciously hold these beliefs which may hinder their ability to look beyond the obvious to see the underlying potential. “Rich” means potentially giftedness, and “poor” means not possibly gifted.

A report prepared for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and submitted to the State Board of Education in 2001 summarized the state of rigorous course offerings for minority students across the state of North Carolina (Darity et al., 2001). Data reported in this research indicated that even when minorities are identified in gifted education, there is often a discrepancy in the end of the grade performance levels. In North Carolina the end of grade reading and math tests are ranked as Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4. Level 1 is the lowest achievement level for the end of grade test. Level 4 is the highest achievement level for the end of grade test. For example, during the 1999 – 2000 school year, 90.4% of white gifted students scored at the highest level – level 4 in reading. This score is compared to only 73.5% blacks and 83.6% Hispanics who reached level 4. The same factors exist in the realm of mathematics. During the 1999 -2000 school year, 96.0% whites, 85.4% blacks, and 93.3% Hispanics scored at Level 4. Even when identified for gifted services, scores tend to remain lower for minority children. This achievement gap is a problem that coincides with lower

identification of minority children in services of gifted education. Teachers believe that closing the achievement gap between cultural groups is a huge concern in education. These beliefs are cyclically processed by the notion of certain cultural groups scoring lower than middle-class whites. Remediation, rather than higher order thinking, is a mindset of teachers in order to level the playing field. It is essential for teachers to help move minority students toward gifted education programs through the use of higher levels of differentiation, which will involve training of teachers themselves on higher levels of differentiation (Darity et al., 2001). Gallagher (2008b) relates that teachers have to realize and understand the potential that exists in children, even when the children themselves have not realized the potential for greatness.

Recognizing Early Indicators of Giftedness

Many gifted education programs formally start in the upper elementary years. Project U-STARS~PLUS is intended to nurture the potential of children in the early elementary years. A rationale for the gifted education of young children is the notion that the brain is more malleable during the early years of life (Porter, 2005). Children taught at an early age seem to develop their natural skills and abilities. Challenging a child at the start of their formal education and meeting their social and emotional needs from the onset only promotes further growth (Porter, 2005). Classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through third grade are often primarily responsible for providing enrichment for children who show strengths (Kitano, 1989). Kitano (1989, p. 63) states, “Kindergarten and primary teachers play a critical role in the development of young gifted children by identifying the gifted children in their class, offering a variety of

activities to elicit and reinforce high-level responding, being sensitive to emotional vulnerabilities, and advocating for appropriate services.”

One subset of children who are at risk for being overlooked for identification of gifted services are those children who did not have a childhood that was enriched with experiences (Louis et al., 2000). Early enrichment experiences do seem to afford greater likelihood of identification into a gifted education program.

According to Young, Wright, & Laster (2005) teachers should rethink the way they instruct and assess their multiculturally diverse students in order to manifest their potentials. Louis et al. (2000, p. 310) says, “Bilingualism is an especially difficult challenge to overcome in the admissions process.” The reason goes back to the notion that standardized tests are normed for English – speaking children. By the year 2020, approximately 46% of the classroom populations will consist of minority populations (Banks, 1991 as cited in Buck & Cordes, 2005). Kindergarten classrooms in America are more diverse, and multiple tools need to be elicited to capture the possible early signs of giftedness. Ford & Whiting (2008) advocate for a talent development model of gifted education. In a talent development model, children are recognized for their gifts in the primary years in order to nurture those strengths so they continue to grow and reach their full potential.

Changing Teacher Perceptions/Beliefs

Since the majority of teachers in the United States are predominately middle-class white, it is important to understand what they think about the possibility of identification of children from different ethnic backgrounds. According to Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway (2005), 80 to 90% of teachers in the United States are middle-

class European-Americans. These researchers wanted to find out how middle-class European-Americans responded to the remaining 10 to 20%. These researchers introduced three differing vignettes of scenarios of classroom situations. One of the vignettes included a gifted European-American child. One of the vignettes included a gifted African-American child. One of the vignettes included a gifted child with no reference to ethnicity. Approximately 207 elementary teachers read the vignettes and classified the child as gifted or non-gifted. Ethnicity was shown to make a difference. Identical information in the vignettes was treated differently depending upon ethnicity. European-American children and children with no ethnicity label were thought of as gifted, while African-American children were not. This study is important because it shows that biases exist within teachers regarding expectations of certain cultural groups. This study is also important because elementary education teachers showed these biases. The elementary years are the formative years when gifted education is put into place (Elhoweris et al., 2005).

Another study used to change teachers' perceptions about under-served gifted students was Project STAR (VanTassel-Baka, Johnson, & Avery, 2002). Project STAR was based on the notion that some children do not test well under the stressful situations of formalized testing. Rather, when allowed to demonstrate potential in meaningful experiences, the under-served children thrived. Project STAR also emphasized the use of multiple modes of data collection such as checklists, inventories, grades, portfolios, and standardized tests. Project STAR emphasized the child in an area of brightness. In order to be identified for gifted services, a child could shine in just one area, not multiple modes. Project STAR allowed manipulatives for use to solve thinking tasks. The project

showed success in the identification of under-served gifted children through the use of performance assessments. This study revealed that in order to witness a change in the numbers of gifted students identified for services, a change in how teachers view assessment for admission for gifted students must occur. Teachers must look at alternative ways to assess children, not just the traditional methods of the past. Teachers must change their thinking to believe that high abilities exist in all children (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2002).

Teacher Systematic Observation of Gifted Children

Naturalistic observation is a reasonable method of assessment because it is something that teachers already do (Anderson, 2003). Teachers observe what is going on in their classrooms. Observations offer immediate results, unlike standardized tests that may take days or weeks to assess (Anderson, 2003). Often the students do not realize they are being observed, which creates a natural context where the child feels free to act normal because he / she often has no idea he / she is being observed.

Teacher observations are relatively quick to perform, and results are generally forthcoming. Popham (2006, p. 86) states, "Such rapid-turnaround assessments yield results during a class period or in the midst of a multi-week instructional unit." Asking a teacher to observe students is not as cumbersome as asking them to administer a standardized test. Stiggins (2004, p. 25) states, "The instructional decisions that have the greatest impact are made day to day in the classroom...not once a year." Classroom observations happen daily. Classroom teachers do what comes naturally, they observe. Each day there is continuous flow of evidence that is waiting to be explored (Stiggins, 2004).

The teacher observation form has its strengths. In the United States, intelligence and aptitude tests have been used since around 1920. Nielson (2003, p. 206) states, “For almost as many years, scholars and educators have noted that children from minority populations, or those who have grown up in poverty, in rural areas, or who speak a different language from the dominant population seldom have scores as high as mainstream children.”

Taylor (2003, p. 11) states, “Systematic observation is an objective means of gathering data that can be employed to understand, correct, or change a situation or individual’s behavior. Data generated from systematic observations are also used to make educational decisions and evaluations of instructional and other school-related experiences.” Taylor continues, “Many standardized tests do not provide the means to measure many of our educational goals or to permit comprehensive assessment of programs’ effectiveness; consequently, systematic informal assessment may be employed to supplement their use” (p. 11).

One noted strength of the use of teacher observations is that observations can enhance or reinforce teacher concepts and reduce the discrepancy of teacher subjectivity because the teacher actually witnesses a particular event (Bouchamma, Godin, & Godin, 2008). By consistently using an observation protocol, the teacher can show when and under what context the specific behavior occurred.

Observations are natural, relatively easy to give, and offer evidence of specific academic or behavior issues in a short time frame. Teacher observations are one method of informal observation in the classroom. The actual reading of student actions is a notion called “withitness”. “Withitness” is the ability to look at a situation and gage

beyond it at what might be true (Anderson, 2003). Some teachers just naturally read their students better than others. Some teachers can see strengths in one child and yet cannot get past barriers to see strengths in another child. Therefore, observations can be subjective in nature. However, a teacher observation tool, if used correctly, allows all teachers to look at the same traits and focus their attention to certain specifics if used correctly. So, subjectivity can be somewhat softened (Taylor, 2003).

One noted weakness of teacher observation is that the human factor is always present. The teacher's beliefs may influence the way he or she perceives the situation (Tousignant & Morissett, as cited in Bouchamma et al., 2008). Past experiences, or experiences with other siblings, or experiences with family members may cloud judgment. Certain notions sometimes cloud the bigger picture. Bracken (2008, p. 22) states, "Because of the emotionally charged reactions to legal and illegal immigration within the United States and consequent ethno- and linguistic-centric protectionist beliefs, some Americans have taken a view that a high level of English proficiency is the defining characteristic for being considered as gifted."

Evertson and Green (as cited in Anderson, 2003) noted several potential concerns of using informal teacher observations. The following are possible flags of which to be aware: primacy effect, failure to acknowledge self, observer bias, logical generalization errors, and student faking. Primacy effect is similar to the notion that first impressions are lasting. Primacy effect means that a teacher's initial impression has such an impact that moving beyond to what else might reasonably be true is confounded. Failure to acknowledge self is the notion that teachers set up the scenario in the classroom and, therefore, influence the reactions of students. Teachers often have to look beyond and

see the student interaction in other situations, absent from their own physical presence. The opposite notion is logical generalization errors which occur when a teacher assumes that the observed incident takes place in other realms as well. Classroom environments can make a difference. Student faking takes place when students are wise enough to act in accordance to what the teacher wants to observe. Pointing out these possible obstacles to teachers will make them more aware of unintentional biases in observing students.

Teacher observations can be used as the starting point of a more comprehensive assessment of student strengths. Formal assessment typically deals with precise information, using a highly structured information gathering system, which is observable over time (Anderson, 2003). Teacher observation can be the starting point of this type of evaluation. The teacher, absent of any biases, is the one who witnesses potential strengths in students. The teacher can advocate for further formalized testing after observations. The purpose of a comprehensive assessment program is not to catch a child in what they do not know, but to access strengths of what the child does know (Tomlinson, 2007/2008). A comprehensive assessment program first allows the teacher to observe performance of students. This performance informs teachers of what to do next in the classroom. The next step in the process is that the observation ultimately results in determining what a student will learn next (Tomlinson, 2007/2008). The classroom teacher then adjusts the curriculum to fit the needs of the child.

There is synergy in using both standardized testing results and classroom assessment (Stiggins, 2004). The information combined together shows a bigger picture of potential strengths! Assessment used as a whole can, “help teachers and students discover gifts they didn’t know they had” (Stiggins, 2004, p. 27). The use of daily

formative assessments, such as teacher observations combined with summative assessment data, can be used to see a bigger picture of a child's ability. The teacher becomes more acutely aware of each student's strengths and needs (Tomlinson, 2007/2008). The teacher can then act on the needs of the child. The uses of both qualitative and quantitative measures are necessary to demonstrate sufficient information regarding potential giftedness (Ford & Baytops et al, 1997). The "one-shot" identification does not lend itself to serving the culturally/linguistically and economically disadvantaged children (Coleman, 2003). These children tend to have the inability to score the right test score, but they have strengths and abilities that do not manifest well when standardized (Frasier, 1991).

Teachers have to be trained to recognize signs of potential and trained how to nurture that potential once noticed (Coleman, 2003). This training could take place in forms of professional development for teachers to help them recognize those that have historically been missed by traditional identification practices (National Research Council, 2002).

Teacher observation allows the teacher to accentuate and focus on a student's positive strengths. The teacher recognizes the potential qualities in which a child can thrive (Tomlinson, 2007/2008). In order for a child to be successful, a teacher has to build on what the child can do....not what he/she cannot yet accomplish. Coltrane and Coleman (2005) describe three components that are essential for systematic teacher observation. First, the teacher has to know for what he is looking. The teacher must also create a learning environment that is conducive to drawing out the best in each child. Finally, teachers must learn how to respond in a manner that supports emotional well

being as well as focuses on high – end learning. Fullen et al. (2008, p. 33) states, “The fundamental point is this: Instruction is powerful only when it is sufficiently precise and focused to build on what students already know and take them to the next level.”

Through the use of teacher systematic observation, teachers are focusing on students’ strengths and are better able to understand exactly where a child stands and where that child needs to go.

Hands-on Inquiry-Based Science as High-End Learning Opportunities

Science inquiry is about phenomenas that surround everyone in their daily lives. Science can take place in the home, backyard, and community. The exploration of science is an activity in which parents can become involved because of the wonders that surround. Dyasi (2006, p. 3) states, “Science inquiry is about phenomena of nature, and phenomena of nature abound.” The natural phenomenas are best explored through dialogue with another (Hall, Callahan, Kitchel, Pierce, & O’Brien, 1998).

Children have a natural curiosity for science. At an early age they tend to have strong ideas and interests about the natural world, and science sparks the glimmer of curiosity about the world that children possess (Hall et al., 1998). Yet, science is often neglected in order to focus on the more highly-demanded, tested subjects. Cervetti & Pearson (2006) note the fact that federal policies have basically wiped science off the slate of importance in order to focus on other tested areas.

Lee (2005) emphasizes the need for teachers to cross cultural boundaries in order to make science accessible to all students. Bernhardt, Hirsch, Teemant, & Rodriguez-Munoz (1996) further emphasize that culturally/linguistically diverse children can typically understand far more science than they can articulate. Brendzel (2005) explains

that inquiry-based science results in better understanding and retention of science concepts because the student is involved in using problem-solving skills in an enjoyable manner. Moreno & Tharp (2006) describe a program which was implemented in urban school districts called Environment as a Context for Opportunity in School. This program introduced science to non-native speakers of English language through inquiry-based units. The results indicated that pre-tests between native speakers and non-native speakers show no difference. However, post-tests show increased gains in content knowledge of science, especially for the non-native English speaker, indicating that inquiry-based learning is beneficial.

Engaging Families in High-end Learning Opportunities

Family involvement takes on many definitions. Family involvement for the basis of this study means family helping children learn (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). Lewis and Forman (2002, p. 60) state, "Educators desire parent participation." Too often parent participation is looked upon as an act only sufficiently demonstrated by the middle class. Lewis and Forman (2002) explain that the cultural resources and materials available to the middle class are favored by educators. Castellano, Faius, & White (2003) advocate for schools to create a climate in which to involve families. Hong and Milgram (2008) further emphasize the notion that parents may want to be involved in their child's education, but lack the know-how to facilitate the process.

Typically, teachers and administrators have specific views of parents' abilities to help out and influence their children's education due to the perception of parents' socio-economic backgrounds (Bloom, 2001). These specific views are not always beneficial to the well-being of the child. Social class is not always a predictable indicator of a parent's

willingness to advocate for his/her child, because lack of resources does not mean that a parent wants any less for his/her child (Lewis and Forman, 2002). Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore (2002, p. 2) state, "Teachers must reach out to students' families in ways not traditionally imagined, in ways that help bridge the ever widening gap between home and school, in ways that help students realize they are known, cared about, and expected to achieve."

Systemic Change in a School System

In order for systemic change to occur regarding the placement of gifted children, a shift in thinking must take place. Ramirez (2003, p. 135) says, "As a matter of practice and policy, move from an education deficit model for poor children to a child development model. The current orientation to students from economically impoverished homes views the student as deficit and in need of fixing. Unless poor children are viewed with the basic dignity and respect due all students, progress toward fully involving the most able among them in gifted education will be impeded."

Fullen et al., (2006) says that in order for full system change to occur that everyone has to move away from what always been done. In order for change to occur in the identification of gifted children, teachers must learn to look differently at children. The old ways of recognizing special gifts and abilities do not fit the new day and age.

In order for change to take place in a school system, like Ashe City, it must start at the heart of the system, in the classrooms. Fullen et al., (2006, p. 13) states, "A breakthrough will be achieved when virtually all students are served well by the public education system. This can happen only when the pieces required for systematic success are creatively assembled in the service of reform that touches every classroom." Beyond

the classroom, there must be a strong supporting administration. Fullen et al., (2006, p. 95) states, "Change and sustained improvement are impossible without good educational leadership." The teachers and principals are both at the heart of change in a school building and ultimately in a school district. Fullen et al., (2006, p. 96) continues, "The role of the district is to help cause whole-system change." Change is possible in a system when the stakeholders are united with a moral purpose (Fullen et al., 2006).

Similar Research on Culturally/Linguistically Diverse and Economically Disadvantaged Programs

Project Break Through was an innovative project that involved throwing out the traditional definition of giftedness and giving all children a gifted curriculum (Swanson, 2006). The focus on Project Break Through was rigor in curriculum and instruction. The main tools were science and literature units created by the College of William and Mary. The results of the study indicated that all children benefitted from an advanced and higher level curriculum. Children of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged families especially benefited from the enrichment. Teachers involved in this project experienced a breakthrough in their traditionally held beliefs about disadvantaged children. Teachers noticed a change in what children were capable of accomplishing. The percentage of children identified formally for the gifted program in these schools was greater after the implementation of Project Break Through (Swanson, 2006). Hong and Milgram (2008, p. 103) state, "The methods and materials used by teachers to enrich and/or accelerate the education of children by providing a differentiated curriculum and individualized learning experiences are immediately beneficial to other children in the classroom." Project Break Through emphasized that the

materials and instructions usually used for high-end learners and gifted learners can be beneficial for all students.

A similar study was also conducted in Palm Beach Florida in which a 1994 complaint to the Office of Civil Rights resulted in an overhaul of the gifted education program (Castellano et al., 2003). The study, documented from 1999 to 2001 included the following: professional development and training of K – 2 teachers of historically under-represented populations, summer institutes for English Language Learner teachers to recognize the needs of gifted learners, week-long workshops on best practices in gifted education such as alternative assessments, interest inventories, learning styles, grouping, curriculum compacting, problem solving, creative thinking, higher order thinking skills, differentiation, and a follow-up course on best practices in gifted education. Next, every K – 2 child was screened using various instruments, including achievement tests, gifted behavioral checklists, classroom performance, and IQ tests with a matrix assigned for points. In addition, all parents in the school system were sent a copy of the new gifted education plan for the system. The gifted education plan was translated in all languages represented in the community. The open communication lines allowed for many parents to ask questions about the gifted education program that was previously unattainable or unknown to them. All children who received the pre-determined number of points were admitted into the gifted education program. It was estimated that around 400 children were afforded gifted education opportunities that would have otherwise been overlooked by traditional methods (Castellano et al., 2003).

Another project with similarities to U-STARS~PLUS involved action research on preparing teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners in science classrooms (Buck &

Cordes, 2005). This action research design involved teaching teachers how to teach science to children of diverse backgrounds. This study focused on providing teachers with experience using science so they were comfortable with the topic. This study also focused on strategies to teach students from multicultural backgrounds by allowing teachers to gain experience teaching inquiry-based science at a community-based center. At the conclusion of the project, nineteen out of the twenty original participants felt that they were better prepared to guide inquiry-based science in their classrooms and better able to instruct children of minority backgrounds (Buck & Cordes, 2005).

The Minority Gifted Student Project which took place in inner city Newark, New Jersey was another Jacob K. Javits grant funded by the United States government (Feiring, Louis, Ukeje, Lewis, & Leong, 1997). The goal of the project was to identify minority children in kindergarten through second grade. Another goal of the program was to identify these children as early as possible to provide early enrichment in order to build the background necessary for higher level thinking skills later in the school years. Prior to the implementation of this screening program, only .2% of children entering first grade were identified for gifted services. After screening through multiple modes, 2% of the rising first grade population was identified as gifted. The successful screening modes were the Brigance K – 1 Screen, a gifted screening scale administered by teachers, and the McCarthy Scale of Children's Abilities, which both were cost effective screening tools for potential services (Feiring et al., 1997).

PADI, or Program of Assessment, Diagnosis and Instruction, was another program designed to identify culturally/linguistically and economically disadvantaged children in gifted education (Gregory et al., 1988). There was not a one-size-fits-all

strategy for identification of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. PADI incorporated three components to reach the targeted population. First, PADI emphasized non-traditional assessment. Following assessment, children's academic and thinking skills were nurtured. Teacher training was a major component to the success of this program. After a five year period with over 8,000 children screened, 1,000 were nurtured for potential giftedness (Gregory et al., 1988). The success of the three steps of PADI is similar to the efforts behind Project U-STARS ~PLUS. Project U-STARS~PLUS focuses on the need to recognize potential, nurture potential, and respond to potential.

The Project STEP-UP, Systematic Training for Education Programs for Under-served Pupils, goal was to find children that would traditionally have been overlooked by the existing system (Cline & Schwartz, 1999). From 1990 to 1993, professionals from three universities worked with twelve school districts in four states to provide additional teacher training, materials for parents to become involved at home in their child's education, and a perspective at alternative tools for use for admittance into gifted education programs. A total of 216 children received gifted services that would have otherwise been overlooked (Cline & Schwartz, 1999).

Borland and Wright (1994) researched the implementation of multiple testing criteria for identification of gifted services in Public School 149/207 in Harlem. The research conducted during the 1990 to 1993 school years allowed for multiple pathways to gifted education services. The screening took place during kindergarten play time. The researchers observed the children at play time during which they looked for potential indicators of giftedness. The researchers recorded their observations. Then all

kindergarteners were exposed to enrichment activities. During the enrichment activities, researchers recorded notes on possible indicators of giftedness. Next, a “notable moment card” was sent home for parents to indicate any strength witnessed while their children were at home. After all of the data were collected, teachers then were given the opportunity to nominate specific kindergarten children whom they thought showed natural potential for giftedness. Again the data were collected and, a team was compiled to evaluate multiple components. The next step was to employ a variety of diagnostic tests to conclude where each child stood academically. Finally, a one-on-one sit-down interview with each child took place in which the researcher could ask a variety of questions to determine levels of thinking. These children were then given opportunities for summer enrichment programs. Of the kindergarten class, 5% of the population qualified to receive services. This study showed that even in schools deemed as failing, there are children with academic gifts to nurture (Borland & Wright, 2004).

In conclusion, studies such as Project Break Through (Swanson, 2006) emphasized that culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children benefit from a rigorous curriculum. Studies such as the one that took place in Palm Beach, Florida, from 1999 to 2001 resulted in 400 additional children benefitting from gifted education services by re-examining the existing gifted education program (Castellano et al., 2003). The Minority Gifted Student Project (Feiring et al., 1997), Project STEP-UP (Cline & Schwartz, 1999), and Harlem Public School 149/207 Project (Borland & Wright, 1994) emphasized alternative screening tools, rather than the traditional assessment tools in order to identify children for gifted education programs. Previous studies exist that support the research efforts of Project U-STARS ~PLUS.

Summary

The under-representation in gifted education programs of children of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged households is a problem and has been a challenge in education for a number of years. Teachers tend to believe the notion that middle class white children are gifted. Models exist that indicate the change of teacher perceptions can happen through multiple modes of instruction and through understanding cultural norms. The research also indicates that gifted children are found in all socio – economic and cultural backgrounds.

Coleman and Gallagher (1995) relate that new policy does not necessarily need to come from a huge number of stakeholders. Only a small number of people are needed to relay the notion that change can occur. It is time for educators to see all children as the acorn of potential. The untapped potential is waiting to grow into an oak. Once provided an appropriate education, these children can flourish into great forests of potential. An appropriate education must match all learning styles, ability levels, and interests (Louis, Subotnik, Breland, & Lewis, 2000), and must educate culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children to meet their untapped potential. It is time for teachers to take a different look.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate one school district's efforts to reduce disproportionate representation in gifted education for culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children through the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS.

Major Research Questions

The following questions guided the process of inquiry:

1. How many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS ~PLUS that otherwise would have been overlooked? (review of existing data set / *Profile of High Potential Form* as granted permission from Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute U-STARS~PLUS staff)
2. To what extent did Project U-STARS ~PLUS teachers feel that the program impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential? (focus groups of teachers in three schools)

3. What impact did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on the school level?
(Interview with principals at the three elementary sites)
4. What impressions did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on students impacted by the program? (interviewed three 4th grade students, one from each school site, that were identified in gifted education and were involved in U-STARS~PLUS from the beginning)
5. What changed in the gifted education program of Ashe City Schools upon the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS? (interview Ashe City School Exceptional Child Services Director)
6. To what extent did policy, the academically and intellectually academic written plan, for Ashe City reflect a change in the nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged households? (side by side document review of Academically and Intellectually Gifted Plans pre and post U-STARS~PLUS)

Conceptual Framework

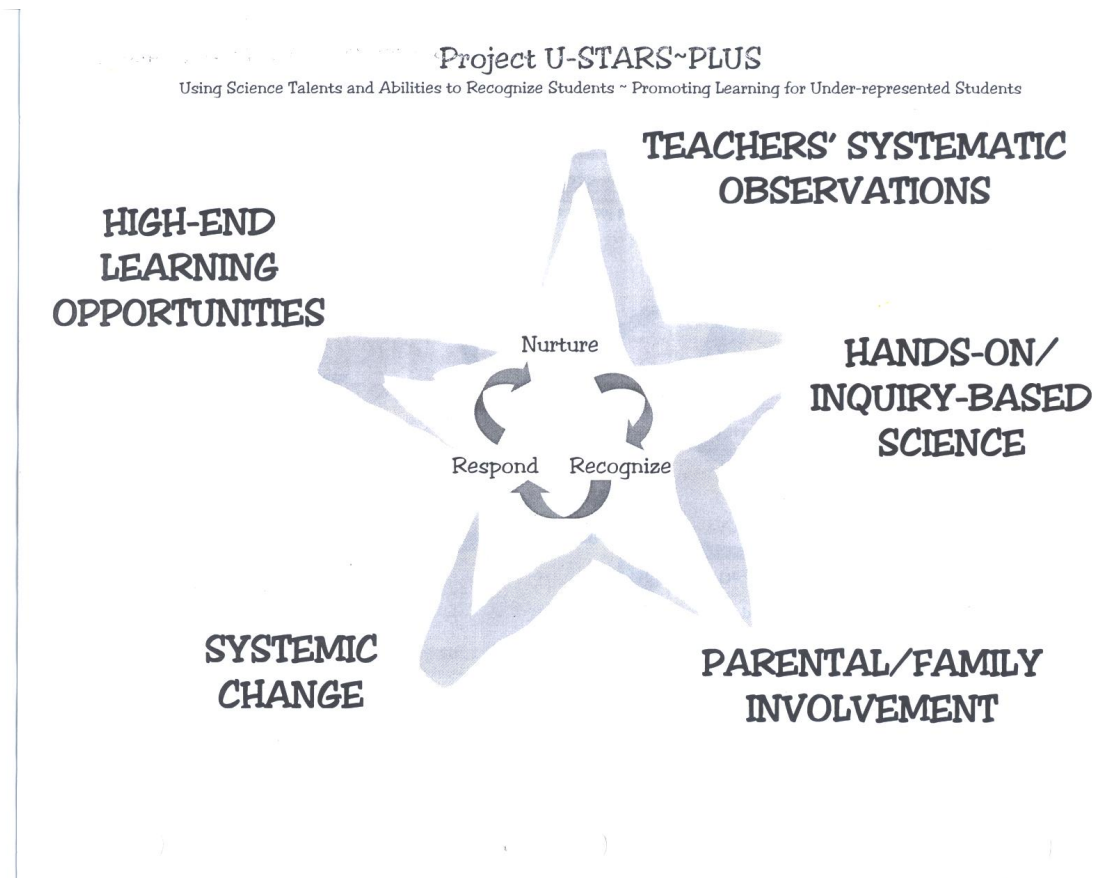


Figure 1. Copied with Permission from Project U-STARS~PLUS. Coleman & Coltrane (2003), *Personnel Preparation Leadership Cadre Materials*

Figure one represented the conceptual framework of Project U-STARS~ PLUS. The middle of the star was the basis for the research. Inside of the star showed that nurture, recognition, and response were all important components in a cyclical process that link back to each other. This cyclical process was the backbone of Project U-STARS~PLUS.

The researcher focused on all aspects of the star since the entire star represented the whole U-STARS~PLUS program as it was implemented in Ashe City Schools. The

researcher studied the classroom level through analysis of existing data sets known as the *Profile of High Potential Forms*, focus group interviews with teachers, and interviews with three identified gifted students. Additionally, the researcher looked at the school level through interviews with administrators, and at the district level through interviews with district level administrators and through the comparison of the old plan versus the existing academically and intellectually gifted education plan. The researcher hoped to tell a success story of the implementation of a promising program. The researcher expected to see an increase of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children referred to and / or identified for gifted services and a change in thought regarding gifted services to more inclusive services within Ashe City Schools.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

Qualitative research was the best method of research for use with this study for several reasons. First, the researcher was a participant observer. The material collected supplemented other data that existed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe a participant observer as one that entered the world of the research. The researcher was part of this research due to the nature of her job as an academically and intellectually gifted consultant for Ashe City Schools. Creswell (2008) further explained that qualitative research is conducted in a real setting where people work. The teachers and administrators in Ashe City lived and experienced the implementation of a program that hoped to strengthen a gifted education program. The participants and their words determined the findings. These teachers had information regarding Project U-STARS ~PLUS that was real and had been experienced firsthand. An attempt of this study was to analyze what happened in Ashe City after the implementation of Project U-

STARS~PLUS. Since description is a goal of qualitative research (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007), the researcher described in detail what was found through analysis of an existing data set, focus group interviews with teachers, interviews with site administrators, interviews with fourth grade students, an interview with the Exceptional Child Services Directors, and analysis of the Academically and Intellectually Gifted Education written plans pre and post the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS. Bogdon and Biklen (2007) described this type of research as words that give insights to how subjects understand the situation.

The questions asked to teachers, principals, and students were semi-structured in nature in that the same general questions were asked to each of the subjects studied. By asking generally the same questions to the interview participants, the answers could be compared (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007).

Qualitative research also was the best method of research for use with this study because this research was multifaceted as seen in the conceptual framework. Many factors were incorporated into this study and the researcher supplemented other data that existed. This study took place in real schools with real people. Most importantly, Cresswell (2008, p. 51) described that qualitative research had the power to “advocate for the change and bettering the lives of individuals.” Empowering culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children had the potential to better the lives of many.

Specifically, the methods the researcher employed in this study fit the grounded theory design of qualitative research. Grounded theory means that data was collected first-hand regarding a notion. That information was the foundation of the theory

discovered. Bogdon and Biklen (2007, p. 6) state, “Theory developed in this way emerges from the bottom up, from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected.” Each stage of this research built upon the preceding in order to lay the foundation of understanding.

Research topics that deal with quantitative measures look at validity and reliability of a study. Validity means that the study truly measured what it was supposed to measure. Reliability means that it can be repeated over time. Both are irrelevant to a qualitative study such as this. However, various other factors come into play with a qualitative study.

In qualitative studies, credibility refers to the ability and effort of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher in this study ensured measures to add credibility to this research. The researcher continually reflected upon the focus group data, principal data, exceptional child services director data, fourth grade students’ data, *Profile of High Growth*, and the document review of the AIG written plan. The focus group participants and the exceptional child services director were allowed to cross check their data for accuracy. Ashe City Schools granted permission to the researcher to conduct this study in her home district. The participants of this study voluntarily participated. Information gained from the participants was provided on their own free will. The researcher established credibility for this project.

In qualitative studies confirmability means the degree to which the results could be confirmed by others (Trochin, 2006). The data was confirmed by the focus group participants and the exceptional child services director by sharing the transcribed data with the participants for approval. There was not a need to share the information with the

principals in this study since the principals wrote out their responses, leaving little room for variance of interpretation. The researcher checked and rechecked this information throughout the study.

Data Collection Methods

Table 2

Data Collection Methods

Research Question	Method	Data Sample
How many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS ~PLUS that otherwise would have been overlooked?	Review of existing data set called <i>The Profile of High Potential Forms</i> .	<i>The Profile of High Potential Form</i> Data Sets were located at Frank Porter Graham Institute in Chapel Hill.
To what extent did Project U-STARS ~PLUS teachers feel that the program impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential?	Focus Groups	Teachers at Cliff Elementary, Ross Elementary, and Mayflower Elementary
What impact did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on the school level?	Interviews	Principals at Cliff Elementary, Ross Elementary, and Mayflower Elementary
What impressions did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on students impacted by the program?	Interview with three fourth grade students identified by Project U-STARS~PLUS	Three fourth grade students identified by U-STARS~PLUS
What changed in the gifted education program of Ashe City Schools upon the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS?	Interview	Exceptional Child Services Director
To what extent did policy, the academically and intellectually academic written plan, for Ashe City reflect a change in the	Document Review	Pre and Post U-STARS~PLUS Academically and Intellectually Gifted Written Plan

nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged households?		
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Dissertation Study Procedures

Upon approval of the research proposal by the dissertation committee, the researcher applied for approval from the Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board. The notice of approval is included in Appendix A.

In order to conduct research in Ashe City Schools, the researcher contacted the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and submitted a written request for research in the school district. Research permission was granted prior to proposal defense. After proposal defense, the component of children interviews was added. The researcher again contacted the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in Ashe City Schools with an addendum to the research project. The addendum was also approved. Ashe City Schools' permission for research can be found in Appendix B.

In order to facilitate research in specific schools in the study, the researcher contacted the principals at each school site requesting permission to set up focus groups and interviews in their schools. Permission was granted and research was begun.

Extant Data – Profile of High Potential Forms

The first part of this study was to examine a pre-existing data set known as *The Profile of High Potential Form*. *The Profile of High Potential Forms*, as found in Appendix D, were filled out at the end of each school year by kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers participating in the research and comparison schools from the 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 school years. *The Profile of High Potential Form* was after the

first year of the study. The second edition of the form allowed the teacher to record more information. *The Profile of High Potential Form* was constructed for teachers to use at the end of the school year to collect data on all children who were seen as demonstrating high potential as observed by teachers using the *Harrison Observation Form* in their classrooms.

One specific area of Project U-STARS~PLUS was the use of systematic teacher observation through the use of *Harrison Observation Forms* for referral to gifted education programs. The *Harrison Observation Form* allowed teachers to look at the child through several lenses. Teachers observed the following: ease of learning, advancement of skills, curiosity and creativity, strong interests, advanced reasoning and problem solving, display of spatial abilities, motivation, social perceptiveness, and display of leadership. Teachers were trained to look through various lenses rather than at standardized test scores as indicators of giftedness. Teachers were also taught to look for potential instead of lack of potential. An overly used reliance on standardized tests and state mandated tests was a noted factor in lack of identification of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. Coleman and Gallagher (1995) noted that school systems often continued their reliance on standardized tests mainly due to state policies that require their use. The *Harrison Observation Form* is an alternative tool that allows for systematic teacher input as part of the process for recognizing children with high potential.

The researcher examined the *Profile of High Potential Forms* given to teachers at the conclusion of each school year at which time the teacher rated each *Harrison Form* child. The form included information such as the following: identification of

culturally/linguistically diverse, low socio-economic status, differentiated services provided, services provided from an Academically Gifted / Gifted Talented teacher, referral for gifted services, and formal identification of gifted services. The form also permitted the teacher to indicate if the *Harrison Form* had allowed the teachers to see the children through a different lens. The form also asked the number of children that might have been missed if the *Harrison Form* had not been employed. These two questions were of particular interest.

The summary form was conducted by the U-STARS~PLUS team in order to pull together many pieces of documentation onto one source. Coleman and Coltrane (2003) developed the *Harrison Observation Form* in collaboration with Ann Harrison. The summary form asked teachers to transfer information from individual *Harrison Forms* to a sheet that listed all children of potential in their classrooms. Charmaz (2006) described pre-existing data sets as extant text. Extant texts were materials in which the researcher did not form; rather, these materials were formed by others. In the case of Project U-STARS~PLUS, the extant data were filled out by teachers in Ashe City School.

This extant data gave the researcher insightful information into the thoughts of the teachers in Ashe City who participated in Project U-STARS~PLUS. The researcher was given access to *The Profile of High Potential Forms* for Ashe City Schools from Dr. Mary Ruth Coleman, lead researcher of Project U-STARS~PLUS. The data use agreement is included in Appendix C.

Teacher Focus Groups

The researcher further explored Ashe's journey with Project U-STARS~PLUS through focus groups with teachers. Bogdon and Biklen (2007, p. 109) described focus

groups as, “group interviews that are structured to foster talk among the participants about particular issues.” Focus groups consisting of four or greater teachers were conducted to explore the range of views surrounding the implementation and effect of Project U-STARs ~PLUS at the three elementary sites.

The purpose of the focus group was to help evaluate the effect of Project U-STARs~PLUS through the eyes of the teachers. The researcher facilitated the group discussion and asked the participants several predetermined questions. The researcher audio taped the focus groups to ensure all the information was recorded. This information was then transcribed and coded. The coded data were then sent to each teacher participant for review. Each teacher in the focus group confirmed that the information recorded was actual information discussed during the focus group discussion. The benefits of the focus group included time efficiency, willingness of participants, allowance for follow up questions, and viewing of nonverbal cues (Feng & Brown, 2004). The population of the focus group which consisted of teachers, not administrators, allowed the teachers more freedom to talk.

Focus groups took place at the three participating elementary schools in Ashe City. Invitations to join focus groups was placed in all K – 3 teachers’ mail boxes. Incentives to participate in the focus group included a gift card from the Ashe City Chamber of Commerce to use at various locations around Ashe City. The invitation to attend the focus group is included in Appendix E.

Interviews with School Based Administrators

An invitation for an interview was sent out to each principal at the three elementary study sites in Ashe City Schools. The invitation is included in Appendix E.

The three administrators at each school site were best able to relate information regarding Project U-STARS~PLUS at their respective sites. They chose to respond to the questions via a typed email response. The email responses were entered into ATLAS ti software for coding.

Interview with Director of Exceptional Child Services

An interview took place with the Director of Exceptional Child Services in Ashe City Schools. The purpose of this interview was to gain understanding about gifted education from the point of view of the district level. The invitation for an interview and protocol can be found in Appendix E. The interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and entered into ATLAS ti software for coding. The researcher sent the transcribed data to the exceptional child director for verification of content. The exceptional child director verified the content of the interview.

Interviews with AIG Students

After parent approval, the researcher conducted interviews with three fourth grade students, one from each elementary site after parental approval. The students were recommended for interviews from the focus group participants. All three students were identified in gifted education, and had been enrolled at their home base schools since their Kindergarten year therefore, they each had participated in U-STARS~PLUS since their Kindergarten year. The parental consent and child assent for an interview is included in Appendix F. The interview questions can be seen in Appendix G.

*Analysis of Written Academically and Intellectually Gifted Education Plan for Ashe City
Schools Pre and Post Project U-STAR~PLUS*

The state of North Carolina required that each school district submit a written plan for the academically and intellectually gifted education programs. Project U-STAR~PLUS was implemented from 2003 to 2008 in Ashe City. Ashe City rewrote their gifted education plan as required by the state of North Carolina in 2006. A review of the gifted education plan prior to 2006 and a review of the gifted education plan written in 2006 revealed information regarding the nurturing of potential strengths in culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students. A final step in this study was to examine the old versus new gifted education plan to note the differences in service options to culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. Access to these gifted education plans were public record and were found in Ashe City School's Central Office.

Dissertation Study Participants

This dissertation study took place in Ashe City Schools. Ashe City is a city system within a larger county in the Central Piedmont of North Carolina. During the 2008 – 2009 school year, Ashe City educated approximately 4,451 students between five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.

Three elementary schools in Ashe City comprised this study. Two of these schools, Cliff Elementary and Mayflower Elementary, were randomly picked as treatment schools for Project U-STAR~PLUS by UNC – Chapel Hill. These schools' staff received training on nurturing potential in children, visits from the U-STAR~PLUS staff to incorporate differentiation strategies, and monthly newsletters that

contained ideas for science enrichment for children. One elementary school, Ross Elementary, was selected as a comparison school and remained inactive for the first three years of the project. However, Ross Elementary received the same services of intensive training on nurturing potential in children, visits from U-STARS~PLUS staff to incorporate differentiation strategies, and monthly newsletters that contained ideas for science enrichment for children during the 2007 – 2008 school year. The remaining two elementary schools in Ashe City were not incorporated into this study due to their later commitment to the program.

The researcher chose to study Ashe City due to its central location and the location of the researcher. The researcher also chose to study Ashe City because out of the five treatment and five comparison schools involved in U-STARS~PLUS throughout the state of North Carolina, two treatment schools and one comparison school came from Ashe City School System. The majority of data was centrally located in Ashe City.

Academically and Intellectually Identified Children in Ashe City Schools

In order to picture fully the capacity of gifted children identified in Ashe City Schools, the researcher obtained data from Ashe City Schools Central Office regarding specific numbers of children identified in Ashe City's five elementary schools. Information regarding demographics of children identified in Ashe City during the 2004 – 2008 school years is detailed below.

Table 3

2004 – 2005 School Year – Number of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Number
White	19	13	18	29	25	104
Hispanic	4	2	5	1	0	12
Black	1	2	0	1	1	5
Asian	1	0	1	0	2	4
Mixed	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number	25	17	24	31	28	125

During the first year of the study, 2004 – 2005, there were 125 elementary gifted children identified in Ashe City Schools.

Table 4

2004 – 2005 School Year – Percentage of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe

City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Percentage
White	76%	76%	75%	94%	89%	83%
Hispanic	16%	12%	21%	3%	0%	10%
Black	4%	12%	0%	3%	4%	4%
Asian	0%	0%	4%	0%	7%	3%
Mixed	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

During the first year of the study, 2004 – 2005, 84% of the children identified in Ashe City in gifted education were White, 10% were Hispanic, 4% were Black, and 3% were Asian.

Table 5

2005-2006 School Year – Number of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe City

Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Number
White	8	13	15	24	16	76
Hispanic	4	1	2	0	0	7
Black	3	2	0	0	0	5
Asian	1	1	1	0	1	4
Mixed	0	0	1	0	1	2
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number	16	17	19	24	18	94

During the second year of the study, 2005 – 2006, there were 94 children identified in gifted education in Ashe City Schools.

Table 6

2005-2006 School Year – Percentage of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe

City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Percentage
White	50%	76%	79%	100%	89%	81%
Hispanic	25%	6%	11%	0%	0%	7%
Black	19%	12%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Asian	6%	6%	5%	0%	5.5%	4%
Mixed	0%	0%	5%	0%	5.5%	2%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

During the second year of the study, 2005 - 2006, 81% of the children identified in Ashe City in gifted education were White, 7% were Hispanic, 5% were Black, 4% were Asian, and 2% were of Mixed ethnicity.

Table 7

2006 - 2007 School Year – Number of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Number
White	4	13	14	25	18	74
Hispanic	3	2	1	2	0	8
Black	2	1	0	0	2	5
Asian	0	1	1	0	0	2
Mixed	0	0	2	0	0	2
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number	9	17	18	27	20	91

During the third year of the study, 2006 – 2007, there were ninety-one children identified in gifted education in Ashe City Schools.

Table 8

2006 - 2007 School Year – Percentage of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe

City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Percentage
White	45%	76%	78%	93%	90%	81%
Hispanic	33%	12%	5.5%	7%	0%	9%
Black	22%	6%	0%	0%	10%	6%
Asian	0%	6%	5.5%	0%	0%	2%
Mixed	0%	0%	11%	0%	0%	2%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

During the third year of the study, 2006 - 2007, 81% of the children identified in Ashe City in gifted education were White, 9% were Hispanic, 6% were Black, 2% were Asian, and 2% were of Mixed ethnicity.

Table 9

2007 – 2008 School Year – Number of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Number
White	8	13	9	28	27	85
Hispanic	1	3	0	1	1	6
Black	0	0	0	0	2	2
Asian	0	0	1	1	0	2
Mixed	0	0	3	0	0	3
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number	9	16	13	30	30	98

During the fourth year of the study, 2007 – 2008, there were ninety-eight children identified in gifted education in Ashe City Schools.

Table 10

2007 – 2008 School Year – Percentage of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe

City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Percentage
White	89%	81%	69%	93.3%	90%	87%
Hispanic	11%	19%	0%	3.3%	3%	6%
Black	0%	0%	0%	0.0%	7%	2%
Asian	0%	0%	8%	3.3%	0%	2%
Mixed	0%	0%	23%	0.0%	0%	3%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

During the fourth year of the study, 2007 - 2008, 87% of the children identified in Ashe City in gifted education were White, 6% were Hispanic, 2% were Black, 2% were Asian, and 3% were of Mixed ethnicity.

Table 11

2008 – 2009 School Year – Number of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Number
White	6	8	12	21	30	77
Hispanic	10	2	2	3	2	19
Black	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	1	2	0	0	0	3
Mixed	0	1	0	0	1	2
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number	17	13	14	24	33	101

During the 2008 – 2009 school year, there were 101 children identified in gifted education in Ashe City Schools.

Table 12

2008 – 2009 School Year – Percentage of Identified AIG Elementary Children in Ashe City Schools

	Mayflower Elementary	Ross Elementary	Luflin Elementary	Guy Elementary	Cliff Elementary	Total Percentage
White	35%	62%	86%	87%	91%	76%
Hispanic	59%	15%	14%	13%	6%	19 %
Black	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Asian	6%	15%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Mixed	0%	8%	0%	0%	3%	2%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

During the 2008 – 2009 school year, 76% of the children identified in Ashe City in gifted education were White, 19% were Hispanic, 0% were Black, 3% were Asian, and 2% were of Mixed ethnicity.

Study Participants Demographics

Throughout Ashe City Schools, the researcher conducted focus groups with teachers at three elementary schools, interviewed principals from three elementary schools, interviewed fourth grade academically and intellectually identified students who formerly participated in U-STARS~PLUS, and interviewed the exceptional child services director from Ashe City Schools.

Focus Group Demographics

The focus groups took place at three elementary sites in Ashe City Schools. An invitation to participate in a focus group was put in all K – 3 teachers mailboxes as can be seen in Appendix E. No K – 3 teacher was excluded an invitation. Secretaries at each

elementary school site allowed the researcher to put invitations in teacher mail boxes after principal approval. Teachers chose to participate in the focus group discussion. A \$5 local Chamber Check was given to participants for their time. Mayflower Elementary's focus group took place on May 14, 2009, in the conference room. Cliff Elementary's focus group took place on May 19, 2009, in the AIG room. Ross Elementary's focus group took place on May 28, 2009, in the AIG room.

Table 13

Focus Group Participants

Name	Grade Level	Number of Years Teaching	Number of Years Involved in U-STARS~PLUS	Number of Summer Institutes Attended	Ethnicity	Gender
Mayflower Elementary Focus Group Participants						
N = 4						
Teacher 1	2	4	4	1	W	F
Teacher 2	3	34	4	0	W	F
Teacher 3	3	10	4	1	W	F
Teacher 4	2	1.5	1.5	0	W	F
Cliff Elementary Focus Group Participants						
N = 11						
Teacher 5	1	1	1	0	W	F
Teacher 6	3	26	4	0	W	F
Teacher 7	3	7	4	2	W	F
Teacher 8	3	10	4	0	W	F
Teacher 9	1	11	3	0	W	F
Teacher 10	1	1	1	0	W	F
Teacher 11	3	5	4	0	W	F
Teacher 12	2	5	4	0	W	F
Teacher 13	2	25	4	1	W	F
Teacher 14	K	26	4	2	W	F
Teacher 15	K	16	4	1	W	F

Ross Elementary Focus Group Participants						
N = 8						
Teacher 16	1	11	4	2	W	F
Teacher 17	2	15	4	2	W	F
Teacher 18	1	4	4	1	W	F
Teacher 19	2	3	3	0	W	F
Teacher 20	K	9	4	0	W	F
Teacher 21	K	20	4	0	W	F
Teacher 22	2	2	2	0	W	F
Teacher 23	K	2	2	0	W	F

The focus group data were indicated by schools above. However, for the purpose of this study, all teacher data were included for the summary. The purpose was not to analyze each school independently but Ashe City as a whole. Therefore, it is noted that four teachers participated in the focus group at Mayflower Elementary, eleven teachers participated in the focus group at Cliff Elementary, and eight teachers participated in the focus group at Ross Elementary. Altogether twenty-three teachers participated in three separate focus group sessions.

The teachers for these focus groups were K – 3 teachers because Project U-STARS~PLUS was a K – 3 initiative. Of the twenty-three total teachers, five were kindergarten teachers, five were first grade teachers, seven were second grade teachers, and six were third grade teachers.

The years of teaching experience throughout the focus groups ranged from one year to thirty-four years. The average years of experience in teaching were approximately eleven years. The median year of teaching experience was nine years. A total of seventy-seven years of teaching experience was represented by the focus group participants. It was not a hypothesis of this study to determine the differences in answers of beginning to veteran teachers. A collection of all teacher data were analyzed.

U-STARS~PLUS started in Ashe City during the 2004 – 2005 school year. Sixteen teachers from the focus group had been involved in U-STARS~PLUS since the beginning of the project. Two teachers had been involved for three years. Two teachers had been involved for two years. One teacher had been involved for one and one half years. One teacher had been involved for one year.

Of the teachers involved in the study, nine had attended the summer institutes offered during the summers of 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. Of those nine teachers, four had attended for two summers and five had attended for one summer. The remaining fourteen teachers did not attend any summer institutes offered by Project U-STARS~PLUS.

Table 14

2008 – 2009 Teacher Population

School	# Teachers	# K – 3 Teachers	# K – 3 Teachers in Focus Group	% of K – 3 Teachers that Participated in Focus Group
Mayflower Elementary	27	20	4	20%
Cliff Elementary	20	14	11	79%
Ross Elementary	22	14	8	57%
Total	69	48	23	50%

An invitation was placed in all K – 3 teachers mailboxes in their school workroom.

The table above represents the percentage of teachers who decided to participate in the focus groups.

A total of twenty-seven classroom teachers were employed at Mayflower Elementary, twenty of which were K – 3 teachers. A total of four teachers in K -3, or 20%, chose to participate in the focus group discussion at Mayflower Elementary.

A total of twenty classroom teachers were employed at Cliff Elementary, fourteen of which were K – 3 teachers. A total of eleven teachers in K – 3, or 79%, chose to participate in the focus group discussion at Cliff Elementary.

A total of twenty-two classroom teachers were employed at Ross Elementary, fourteen of which were K – 3 teachers. A total of eight teachers in K – 3, 57%, chose to participate in the focus group discussion at Ross Elementary. When combined, 50%, or

half of the total forty-eight teachers that possibly could have participated in a focus group discussion in Ashe City did participate.

All of the teachers who participated in the study group were female. It should be noted that at all three school sites, there were no male teachers in the K – 3 classrooms during the 2008 – 2009 school year, therefore, there were no male focus group participants. The focus group gender was representative of the K – 3 teacher gender population in Ashe City Schools.

All the teachers who participated in the study were White. It should be noted that in all three schools invitations were sent to all K – 3 teachers. At Mayflower Elementary, there was no other K – 5 teachers of ethnic diversity. At Cliff Elementary there was one Black teacher in fifth grade, not a grade level included in this research. At Ross Elementary there was one Black teacher in third grade. However, she chose not to participate due to the fact she was in the process of retirement. Overall, the focus group ethnicity was representative of the population of K – 3 teachers in Ashe City Schools.

Administrator Participants Demographics

An invitation was sent out to each principal at the three elementary sites. The invitation, as seen in Appendix E, asked for an interview to discuss the effects of Project U-STARS~PLUS in their schools. A copy of the interview questions was included with the invitation. Administrator 1 emailed me her responses to the questions and asked if the emailed response could take the place of the interview. Administrator 2 was gone from the building frequently during the end of May and June due to a death in her immediate family, but she emailed me her responses to the interview questions at the conclusion of the school year. An interview time was set up with Administrator 3 during

the workdays in June. However, Administrator 3 had a sudden emergency in her immediate family. Once she returned to school in July, she also emailed me her responses.

Table 15

Demographics of Administrators in Study

	Years of Experience in Education	Years as Principal at Studied School	Years involved in U-STARS~PLUS	Number of Summer Institutes Attended	Ethnicity	Gender
Administrator 1 Cliff Elementary	8	1	2	0	B	F
Administrator 2 Mayflower Elementary	25	8	4	3	W	F
Administrator 3 Ross Elementary	30	2	2	0	W	F

Administrator 1, an African-American female in her mid-thirties, had been an assistant principal at Ross Elementary during the 2007 – 2008 school year. Her first year as a principal was 2008 – 2009 at Cliff Elementary. She had two full years of experience with Project U-STARS~PLUS due to her previous role as assistant principal at Ross Elementary, but she had not attended any summer institutes sponsored by U-STARS~PLUS. Administrator 1 had eight years of total experience in education. Administrator 1 submitted her responses to the questions on May 28, 2009.

Administrator 2, a Caucasian female in her fifties, had been principal at Mayflower Elementary for the past eight years. She had been involved in Project U-

STARS~PLUS since its implementation in the 2004 school year and had attended three summer institutes sponsored by the U-STARS~PLUS support team. Administrator 2 had twenty-five years of experience in education. Administrator 2 submitted her responses on July 7, 2009.

Administrator 3, a Caucasian female in her fifties, had been principal at Ross Elementary for the past two years and had been involved with U-STARS~PLUS during her two-year principal role. Administrator 2 had not attended any summer institutes. Administrator 3, who had thirty years of experience in education, submitted her written responses on July 28, 2009.

All three administrators gave permission for the researcher to conduct focus groups and interviews with children at their school. All three administrators willingly answered questions regarding U-STARS~PLUS. However, for various reasons, they answered their questions via a typed email response instead of through an interview.

Exceptional Child Services Director Demographics

The director of exceptional child services was interviewed on May 26, 2009, in her office at the Central Office in Ashe City. Ideally, the director would have been interviewed after the principals. However, the director took an early retirement and left the school system on June 1, 2009. Therefore, an interview had to be arranged prior to her retirement. Since the director had been instrumental in bringing U-STARS~PLUS to the school district, she had been involved with the project since its beginning in Ashe City in 2004.

Table 16

Demographics of Exceptional Child Services Director in Study

	Years of Experience in Education	Years of Director in Ashe City	Years Involved in U-STARS~PLUS	Number of Summer Institutes Attended	Ethnicity	Gender
Director of Child Services	30	5.5	5	4	W	F

Fourth Grade Academically and Intellectually Gifted Students Demographics

After parent approval, one child from each of the three elementary schools was interviewed for this study. Each student had been recommended by the focus group of teachers as a child that had been identified early from his/her *Harrison Form* as a child with potential. All three were identified for gifted education services and had participated in Project U-STARS~PLUS since their kindergarten year in Ashe City Schools.

Table 17

Demographics of Fourth Graders Identified in Project U-STARS~PLUS

	Grade	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Number of Years at Current Elementary School	Number of Years Involved with U-STARS~PLUS
Student 1 – Mayflower Elementary	4	10	H	M	5	4
Student 2 - Cliff Elementary	4	10	A	F	5	4
Student 3 – Ross Elementary	4	10	H	F	5	4

Student 1, a ten year old Hispanic male from Mayflower Elementary, was recommended as an interviewee by the teacher focus group, and permission was granted by his parents. Student 1 had been identified for gifted education services in the areas of both reading and math due to his aptitude test composite of 98%, math achievement test of 99%, gifted rating scale, and classroom grades. Student 1 had been in Mayflower Elementary involved with Project U-STARS~PLUS since Kindergarten. Student 1 had had a *Harrison Form* filled out on him since Kindergarten with recognition of possible strengths. Student 1 was interviewed on May 22, 2009.

Student 2 was a ten year old Asian female from Cliff Elementary. Student 2 had been identified for gifted services due to her mathematics achievement score, grades, and gifted rating scale. She had scored a 91% on her math achievement test and had made a 94 average in mathematics for her third grade year. Her teacher also rated her strong on all six categories of the gifted rating scale. Student 2 had made a 70% on her reading achievement and a 69 on her aptitude composite. Neither of these two scores could be used for identification purposes. Student 2 had had a *Harrison Form* filled out on her since Kindergarten. She was interviewed on May 28, 2009.

Student 3, a 10 year old Hispanic female from Ross Elementary, had been identified for gifted services due to her math achievement score, gifted rating scale, and math average for her third grade year. Student 3 had made a 92% on her math achievement test and had a 94% average math grade in her third grade year. Her teacher also rated her strong on all six categories of the gifted rating scale. Student 3 scored an 82% achievement on her reading achievement test which was not used for identification

purposes. Student 3 also scored an 81% on her aptitude test which was not used for identification purposes. Student 3 had had a *Harrison Form* since her Kindergarten year. Student 3 was interviewed on June 5, 2009.

Rationale for Methods

Each component of this study contributed beneficial information to determine if gifted education services were afforded to the culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children in Ashe City due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS. The steps of this study built upon each other. Data emerged as the researcher studied each separate step of the research process. Previous data helped clarify each step of the data collection (Creswell, 2008). The researcher conducted her study using the following steps: collected existing data, moved to the classroom level with focus groups with teachers, moved to an interview with the director of exceptional child services, interviewed three fourth grade students, solicited feedback from principals, and reviewed the Academically and Intellectually gifted education written plan.

The researcher verified the information through the multiple modes employed throughout this study. Triangulation means, “many sources of data were better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena you were studying” (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007, p. 115-116). Multiple sources led to this conclusion.

Data Management and Analysis

The first piece of information was the extant data already analyzed by the U-STARS~PLUS staff. The summarized information found from *The Profile of High Potential Form* is seen in Appendix D. Specifically the researcher looked at the numbers of children that had been referred for and/or identified for gifted education services. The researcher then looked to see if these children had been coded as ELL (English Language Learners) or low SES (Socio-economic Status). The researcher then looked to see if these children had an asterisk beside their names indicating that their strengths were noted through the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*, and, that they would have been missed without the utilization of systematic observation. The researcher summarized this data in chart form.

Next, information from focus groups and interviews was transcribed. The transcribed data were entered into ATLAS ti 6.0 software. The use of the ATLAS ti software was further explored through the Odum Institute on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Next data were categorized according to a coding system, which had been determined through multiple readings of the transcribed data. The researcher continuously self-checked this data to make sure that the coding was accurate. The researcher also cross-checked this data by sending it back to the teachers who validated the information reported from the focus groups. This method was time efficient because the researcher had access to the teachers. Data were also cross checked with the exceptional child director for validation. The information was not sent back to principals to validate because principals responded to their questions via a clear

typed response. The researcher had entered their data directly into ATLAS ti for analysis.

Themes emerged from the collected data that both supported and denied the concept that culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children were afforded equal rights to gifted education services.

Teacher as a Researcher

It is important to note that the researcher of this dissertation also was employed by Ashe City Schools. The researcher had been a third grade teacher in Ashe City Schools for nine years at an elementary site that was not included in this study. The researcher entered the role of gifted education consultant shared between Cliff Elementary and another elementary site not included in this study during the 2004 – 2005 school year. The researcher continued in this role until the start of the 2008 – 2009 school year when she became the shared AIG consultant between Cliff Elementary and Ross Elementary. The researcher was an employee of two of the three schools included in this study. In a small system such as Ashe City, the researcher was also familiar with the third school in this study, Mayflower Elementary. Perhaps it was because of the relationship that the researcher had with the staff at both Cliff Elementary and Ross Elementary that the staff decided to participate in the focus group discussions.

As an insider to the research, the researcher had to address the notion of insider knowledge. The researcher had to reflect upon the information, stepping back to process the meaning. To address the issue of bias, the researcher wrote a reflection after focus groups to determine how her insider status might affect her analysis and results. The

researcher also reflected upon her writing for the purpose of addressing bias and allowed focus group members to read the analysis to check for bias.

The researcher was allowed and encouraged to conduct this research in Ashe City Schools due to the need of the organization to understand equitable access to gifted education. Coghlan (2007) reported that insider research often is valuable to an organization because of both the academic knowledge and the practitioner knowledge that the research brings to the study. The researcher hoped this data would be beneficial to Ashe City Schools.

Limitations

Possible limitations of this project included the realization that the researcher was an insider. The researcher had been involved with Project U-STARS~PLUS for the past four years. As an academically and intellectually gifted consultant in her school system, the researcher understood U-STARS~PLUS from an insider point of view. This status was perhaps limiting in the notion that some items of the program seemed naturally logical, and the researcher needed to look at the program as an outsider as much as possible in order to understand fully the data collected.

Another possible limitation of this study was that the researcher herself is a middle class white who was once afforded gifted education services. The researcher, too, perhaps held unknown biases regarding access to gifted education.

An additional factor that may have affected the findings was researcher bias. The researcher was an employee in Ashe City Schools and worked as a gifted education consultant. The consultant job did not have any administrative responsibilities over teachers in the school setting.

An additional limitation of this study includes preconceived societal notions of gifted education. Some preconceived notions of gifted education could act as biases in teachers' beliefs, parental beliefs, and administrators' beliefs regarding gifted education.

Dissertation Study Timeline

Table 18

Time Frame of Dissertation Study

Task	Time Frame
Dissertation Proposal Defense	February 2009
Resubmitted Dissertation Proposal to Ashe City Schools due to addition of interviews with students	March 2009
Submitted for IRB Approval	April 2009
IRB Approval	May 2009
Analyzed Existing Data Set – <i>Profile of High Potential Form</i>	May 2009
Focus Groups at Mayflower Elementary, Cliff Elementary, Ross Elementary	May / June 2009
Interview with Exceptional Child Services Director	May 2009
Interview of three fourth graders	June 2009
Principals Respond via Written Response	June / July 2009
Transcription of Data Sets	July / August 2009
Document Review of Pre and Post AIG Plans	August 2009
Data Analysis with ATLAS ti Software	August 2009
Drew Conclusions and Wrote Results	September / October 2009
Dissertation Defense	November 2009

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

For the purpose of this study, the data will be shared as it addressed each research question.

The research questions were:

- How many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS ~PLUS that otherwise would have been overlooked?
- To what extent did Project U-STARS ~PLUS teachers feel that the program impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential?
- What impressions did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on students impacted by the program?
- What impact did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on the school level?
- What changed in the gifted education program of Ashe City Schools upon the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS?
- To what extent did policy, the academically and intellectually academic written plan, for Ashe City reflect a change in the nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

Research Question 1 – Extant Data Set

The first research question was as follows:

How many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS that otherwise would have been overlooked?

Information for this question was obtained from the analysis of the *Profile of High Potential Form* that was filled out by K – 3 teachers at the end of the 2004-2005, through data from the 2007-2008 school years, from data of children identified in gifted education and from the three elementary school sites. Each teacher filled out a summary form, as seen in Appendix D. This information was obtained from the U-STARS~PLUS research staff from the Frank Porter Graham Institute after obtainment of a data use agreement as seen in Appendix C.

One specific question on the *Profile of High Potential Form* asked the following:

How many children might you have missed as having high potential had you not used the *Harrison Form*? The results are conveyed in the following table.

Table 19

Profile of High Potential Form Data Number Summary

Students Missed without <i>Harrison Form</i>				
	Number of Teacher Responses	Response to Question	No Response to Question	Number of Students Missed without <i>Harrison Form</i>
2004/2005	16	4	12	5
2005/2006	32	24	8	28
2006/2007	33	25	8	27
2007/2008	17	17	0	23
Total	98	70	28	83

At the conclusion of the 2004 – 2005 school year, only sixteen K – 3 teachers out of Cliff Elementary and Mayflower Elementary turned in the *Profile of High Potential Forms*. Of those sixteen teachers, only four teachers responded to the question regarding the number of children they would have possibly missed without the use of the *Harrison Form*. Twelve teachers did not respond to the question. The teachers who did respond indicated that a total of five children would have been overlooked as having possible potential without the use of the *Harrison Form*.

At the conclusion of the 2005 – 2006 school year, thirty-two K – 3 teachers from Cliff Elementary and Mayflower Elementary turned in the *Profile of High Potential Forms*. Of those thirty-two teachers, twenty-four responded to the question regarding the number of children they would have possibly missed without the use of the *Harrison Form*. Eight teachers did not respond to the question. The teachers who did respond

indicated that a total of twenty-eight children would have been overlooked as having possible potential without the use of the *Harrison Form*.

At the conclusion of the 2006 – 2007 school year, thirty-three teachers from Cliff Elementary and Mayflower Elementary turned in the *Profile of High Potential Forms*. Of those thirty-three teachers, twenty-five responded to the question regarding the number of children they would have possibly missed without the use of the *Harrison Form*. Eight teachers did not respond to the question. The teachers who did respond indicated that a total of twenty-seven children would have been overlooked as having possible potential without the use of the *Harrison Form*.

At the conclusion of the 2007 – 2008 school year, seventeen teachers from Cliff Elementary, Mayflower Elementary, and Ross Elementary turned in the *Profile of High Potential Forms*. Of those seventeen teachers, seventeen responded that a total of twenty-three children would have been overlooked as having possible potential without the use of the *Harrison Form*.

From the combined years of 2004 to 2008 in Ashe City Schools, a total of ninety-eight teachers filled out the *Profile of High Potential Forms*. Of those ninety-eight teachers, seventy chose to respond to the question regarding the number of children that would have possibly been missed without the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*. Twenty-eight teachers did not respond to this question. The teachers who did respond reported a total of eighty-three children were seen as children with potential whom the teacher would have otherwise missed without the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*.

Table 20

Profile of High Potential Form Data Percentage Summary

	Number of Teachers Responses	Total Number of <i>Harrison Forms</i>	Number of Students Missed without <i>Harrison Forms</i>	Percentage of Harrison Students that would have been Missed without Form
2004-05	16	22	5	23%
2005-06	32	104	28	30%
2006-07	33	129	27	21%
2007-08	17	80	23	29%
Total	98	335	83	25%

The table above indicates the total number of *Harrison Forms* filled out by the ninety-eight K – 3 teachers that turned in their *Profile of High Potential* from 2004 – 2008.

At the conclusion of the 2004 – 2005 school year, sixteen teachers indicated filling out twenty-two *Harrison Forms* on children. Of those twenty-two children who were identified on a *Harrison Form*, five would have been missed if the *Harrison Form* had not been used. In other words, the *Harrison Form* led the teacher to see possible gifted traits in 23% more of the children.

At the conclusion of the 2005 – 2006 school year, thirty-two teachers indicated filling out one hundred four *Harrison Forms* on children. Of those one-hundred four children who were identified on a *Harrison Form*, twenty-eight would have been missed. In other words, the *Harrison Form* led the teacher to see possible gifted traits in 30% more of the children.

At the conclusion of the 2006 – 2007 school year, thirty-three teachers indicated filling out one hundred twenty-nine *Harrison Forms* on children. Of those one hundred twenty-nine children who were identified on a *Harrison Form*, twenty-seven would have been missed. In other words, the *Harrison Form* led the teacher to see possible gifted traits in 21% more of the children.

At the conclusion of 2007 – 2008 school year, seventeen teachers indicated filling out eighty *Harrison Forms* on children. Of those eighty children who were identified on a *Harrison Form*, twenty-three would have been missed. In other words, the *Harrison Form* led the teacher to see possible gifted traits in 21% more of the children.

Throughout the four year study, ninety-eight teachers indicated filling out three hundred thirty-five *Harrison Forms* on children. Of those three hundred thirty-five *Harrison Forms*, the teachers indicated that they would have missed eighty-three of those students if this form had not been in place. Conclusively, the *Harrison Form* allowed the classroom teachers to see eighty-three children or 25% more of the children with potential whom they would have otherwise missed if the *Harrison Form* had not been in place.

Table 21

SES Data on Children Possibly Missed without *Harrison Form*

	Low SES	Not Low SES	SES Unknown	Total Number
2004 – 05	Data Unknown due to Form Design			5
2005-06	7	8	13	28
2006-07	8	7	12	27
2007-08	5	11	7	23
				83

The data collected from the *Profile of High Potential Form* indicated that eighty-three children that would have been possibly missed without the use of the *Harrison Form*. Additional information gained from the *Profile of High Potential Form* showed the socio-economic status of these children. The data were not all inclusive because several teachers did not designate the status of SES, and, because the form design during the first year of the study did not provide a place to indicate SES status. The data for 2004 – 2005 did not provide any indication of the SES of the five children. Data for the 2005 – 2006 school year indicated that of the twenty-eight children identified, seven were from low SES backgrounds, eight were not from low SES backgrounds, and the SES status of the thirteen were unknown. Data from the 2006 – 2007 school year indicated that of the twenty-seven children identified, eight were from low SES backgrounds, seven were not from low SES backgrounds, and twelve's SES was unknown. Data from the 2007 – 2008 school year indicated that of the twenty-three children identified, five were

from low SES backgrounds, eleven were not from low SES backgrounds, and seven had no recorded SES.

Throughout the four years of this study, approximately twenty children who were recognized as having possible gifted traits were from low socio-economic backgrounds. Approximately twenty-six of the children were not from impoverished backgrounds, and approximately thirty-two children's background information was unknown. Data indicated that slightly more children not from low SES homes were identified as having possible gifted traits. However, these data were not all inclusive due to form design and to the lack of teacher response.

Table 22

ELL Data on Children Possibly Missed without the *Harrison Form*

	ELL	Not ELL	ELL Status Unknown	Total Number
2004 – 05	Data Unknown due to Form Design			5
2005-06	2	20	6	28
2006-07	8	10	9	27
2007-08	2	14	7	23
				83

The data collected from the Children with High Profile indicated that eighty-three children would have possibly been missed without the use of the *Harrison Form*.

Additional information gleaned from the *Profile of High Potential Form* was if the children were English Language Learners. Data was not all inclusive because several teachers did not designate the status of ELL, and because the form design during the 2004 – 2005 school year did not provide a place to indicate ELL status. The data for 2004 –

2005 did not provide any indication of the ELL status of the five children. Data for the 2005 – 2006 school year indicated that of the twenty-eight children identified, two were from ELL backgrounds, twenty were not from ELL backgrounds, and there were six unknowns. Data from the 2006 – 2007 school year indicated that of the twenty-seven children identified, eight were from ELL backgrounds, ten were not from ELL backgrounds, and there were nine unknowns. Data from the 2007 – 2008 school year indicated that of the twenty-three children identified, two were from ELL backgrounds, fourteen were not from low SES backgrounds, and there were seven unknowns. Throughout the four years of this study, approximately twelve children that were looked at as having possible gifted traits were from ELL backgrounds, approximately forty-four of the children were not from ELL backgrounds, and approximately twenty-two children's ELL background information was unknown. It appeared that the *Harrison Form* allowed more insight into non-ELL students, although some were seen through a different view. However, data was not all inclusive due to form design and to the lack of teacher response.

Table 23

Ethnicity Breakdown of Children Possible Missed without *Harrison Form*

	Black	Hispanic	White	Mixed	Not Identified	Total
2004-05	1	1	0	0	3	5
2005-06	3	2	9	2	12	28
2006-07	2	8	7	0	10	27
2007-08	2	3	8	0	10	23
Total	7	14	24	2	35	83
Percentage	8%	17%	30%	2%	42%	

The ethnicity data collected from the *Profile of High Potential Form*

disappointedly indicated that many of responses for ethnicity, 42%, were left blank by the teachers. Of the data filled in, 8% of the students that would have been missed without the *Harrison Form* were Black children, 17% were Hispanic children, 30% were White children, and 2% of the children that would have been missed without the *Harrison Form* were of mixed ethnicity.

The researcher found that of the data turned in, White children were the ethnicity that was most indicated as having potential that would have been missed without the *Harrison Form*. Hispanic children were next, but with almost less than half. Black children were next, but with almost less than half. Disappointedly, data were left blank from 42% of the teachers surveyed.

Summary

The first research question sought to find out how many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS. The researcher found the information from the *High Potential Profile Forms* interesting because of the number of responses. During the 2004 – 2005 school year, only sixteen teachers filled out the survey between the two treatment schools. During the 2005 – 2007 school years, about the same number of teachers filled out the data. Surprisingly, during the 2007 – 2008 school year, three schools responded because the treatment school was added, yet, the number of teachers' responses declined. This showed that not all teachers between the three schools turned in their survey data.

Another fact to note is that the Children with Potential Profile Form changed. During the 2004 – 2005 school year, the form did not have a place to indicate English Language Learner or Low Socio-economic Status. Also, there was a box at the very bottom of the form asking teachers to identify the number of children they would have potentially missed. From the 2006 school year on, the form had a place to indicate Limited English Proficient and Low Socio-economic status. Also, there was a box in which an asterisk by a child's name if he/she would have otherwise been overlooked. The researcher felt like the design of the new form allowed for better responses and more information.

Of the ninety-eight teachers that turned in surveys, twenty-eight left blank the question regarding the number of children they saw differently as a result of U-STARS~PLUS. The remaining seventy teachers reportedly saw eighty-three children differently as a result of Project U-STARS~PLUS. Out of the total 335 *Harrison Forms*

completed by ninety-eight teachers, eighty-three children were seen with potential that otherwise might have been overlooked. This number means that 25% of the *Harrison Forms* fulfills their purpose of allowing teachers to look at children through a lens of potential.

School Demographics

In order to obtain a whole picture of the school data, the researcher looked at the school profiles located on the Ashe City Webpage. The ethnic percentages during the 2008-2009 school year for all of Ashe City Schools included: 47.85% White, 14.58% Black, 31.27% Hispanic, 4.02% Multi, 2.02% Asian, and 0.25% American Indian students. Listings of the demographics from years past are included for each school. The data are recorded below.

Mayflower Elementary School Profile

Table 24

Mayflower Elementary School Profile

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Black	9.7%	10.3%	10.5%	10.17%	7.4%	6.0%
Asian	1.8%	1.7%	2.3%	2.4%	1.7%	1.6%
White	39.7%	36.8%	34.0%	29.57%	30.0%	30.0%
Hispanic	45.4%	47.6%	50.3%	54.53%	56.5%	60.0%
American Indian	0.4%	.35%	0.17%	0.74%	.2%	.2%
Other	3.1%	3.3%	2.8%	2.59%	4.2%	2.0%
Total Population	549	574	603	541	503	546

The population of Mayflower Elementary School was majority Hispanic with the Hispanic population growing each year. The White population was the second highest ethnicity group with the White population decreasing slightly each year.

The AIG identified population reflected the demographics of Mayflower elementary toward the end of this study within two ethnic groups. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 60% Hispanic students at Mayflower and 59% of the identified gifted population was Hispanic. During the same year there were 30% White students at Mayflower and 35% of the identified population was White. This was the only year during the study that the percentages were closely matched. The percentage of identified Black students decreased over the years of this study.

Table 25

Mayflower Elementary School Percentage of Exceptionalities

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Exceptional Children	12.93%	10.8%	10.95%	6.5%	7.9%	7.9%
AIG	4.92%	4.18%	2.82%	.5%	1.7%	3.3%
Limited English Proficient	35.7%	28.4%	37.15%	38.3%	45.9%	47.1%
Free/Reduced Lunch	68.31%	71.95%	78.22%	75.82%	79.2%	>80.0%

There was a decrease in the number of children identified in gifted education from 2003 to 2009 at Mayflower Elementary. There was also an increase in the Limited English Proficient population and an increase in the free/reduced lunch population during the years of the study. As the culturally/linguistically diverse children and economically challenged population at Mayflower increased, the AIG population decreased.

Cliff Elementary School Profile

Table 26

Cliff Elementary School Profile

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Black	26.5%	27.4%	21.5%	20.66%	23.27%	26.5%
Asian	1.8%	1.5%	0.8%	0.26%	1.3%	1.5%
White	51.9%	48.5%	51.2%	51.05%	47.31%	41.4%
Hispanic	14.7%	18.2%	19.9%	22.77%	22.25%	23.4%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	.5%	.5%
Other	5.0%	4.6%	5.7%	5.24%	5.37%	6.7%
Total Population	339	369	372	382	391	415

Although the population of Cliff Elementary School was majority White, there had been a decrease in the White population from 2007 to 2009. The Black population was the second highest at Cliff Elementary. The Black population had decreased between the years of 2003 to 2007, but from 2007 to 2009, the Black population had steadily increased. The Hispanic population was the third most represented ethnic group at Cliff Elementary, and it had increased over the years of this study.

The AIG identified population did not reflect the demographics of Cliff Elementary. The percentage of White identified students remained greater than 89% during the years of this study, whereas the White population was less than 51% throughout the years of the study. The percentage of Hispanic identified children rose only to 6% of identified children. The percentage of Black identified students decreased over the years of this study.

Table 27

Cliff Elementary School Percentage of Exceptionalities

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Exceptional Children	8.85%	15.4%	11.29%	15.0%	10.49%	11.08%
AIG	8.26%	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%	6.39%	6.26%
Limited English Proficient	12.68%	13.3%	16.4%	20.4%	25.0%	20.72%
Free/Reduced Lunch	56.64%	57.2%	58.17%	58.9%	53.71%	61.25%

There was a decrease in the number of academically and intellectually gifted children identified at Cliff Elementary from the 2003 school year to the 2004 school year. However, the AIG population then remained steady for three years. During the 2007 school year, the amount of AIG children identified increased. Consistently throughout the years of this study, the number of Limited English Proficient students increased. The free/reduced lunch population steadily rose, from 2004 – 2006, dropped during the 2007 school year, and then rose to its highest level in 2008.

The culturally/linguistically diverse children at Cliff Elementary increased. The economically challenged population at Cliff Elementary increased. The children identified in gifted education dropped after the initial year of U-STARS~PLUS implementation. Toward the end of the study, the gifted education population increased again but not as high as the year prior to implementation of the program.

Ross Elementary School Profile

Table 28

Ross Elementary School Profile

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Black	16.9%	17.5%	21.1%	20.29%	17.0%	17.7%
Asian	1.6%	2.2%	2.1%	2.09%	1.6%	.9%
White	41.9%	40.1%	38.1%	38.28%	39.9%	37.9%
Hispanic	34.5%	34.3%	30.2%	33.89%	36.4%	37.0%
American Indian	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	0.21%	.40%	0.0%
Other	5.1%	5.8%	12.3%	5.23%	4.3%	6.0%
Total Population	449	483	483	478	433	433

The population of Ross Elementary School was mainly White with the Hispanic population in a close second. By the end of the study, the White and Hispanic populations were almost the same. The Black population was the third most represented ethnic group at Ross Elementary.

The AIG identified population did not reflect the demographics of Ross Elementary. The percentage of White identified children remained greater than 62%, with the White population around 40% of the school. The percentage of Hispanic identified children never reached 20% of the identified students although the demographics of the Hispanic population remained greater than 30% of the population. The percentage of Black identified children decreased over the years of this study.

Table 29

Ross Elementary School Percentage of Exceptionalities

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Exceptional Children	14.0%	15.2%	13.87%	15.7%	14.0%	10.0%
AIG	2.5%	3.5%	3.31%	3.6%	3.9%	1.0%
Limited English Proficient	26.1%	25.8%	15.73%	29.2%	33.0%	33.3%
Free/Reduced Lunch	66.4%	62.2%	68.30%	65.64%	69.0%	69.0%

The percentage of academically and intellectually gifted children identified at Ross Elementary remained fairly consistent from 2003 until 2007 but dropped off during the 2008 – 2009 school year. The percentage of free and reduced lunch students remained greater than half of the student population throughout the years of the study. The percentage of Limited English Proficient students fluctuated throughout the years of the study.

The culturally/linguistically diverse children at Ross Elementary fluctuated throughout the study. The economically challenged population at Ross Elementary remained greater than half of the school population. The children identified in gifted education remained approximately the same throughout the years of U-STARS~PLUS implementation.

Summary

The three schools studied in this dissertation were of diverse backgrounds. All three elementary schools showed a decrease in the number of children identified in gifted education from the beginning to the end of the study. All three elementary schools

showed an increase in both the number of Limited English Learners and the number of Free and Reduced Lunch students in their population from the beginning to the end of the study.

Research Question 2 – Classroom Level

The second research question was as follows:

To what extent did Project U-STARS~PLUS teachers feel that the program impacted their interaction with possible gifted students or students with academic potential?

This question was answered through the transcription of focus group data gathered and analyzed with ATLAS ti software. A total of twenty-three teachers participated in focus group discussions that contributed to this data. The purpose of this research was to look at the information as a whole, not at the schools independently. The data are shared in this manner.

Different Classroom Strategies

The first question asked of focus group participants was to summarize what they do differently in their classrooms as a result of Project U-STARS~PLUS. All three focus group participants mentioned that they look at children differently. One teacher stated, “I am definitely looking at children that are annoying in a different light.” Other teachers stressed that the *Harrison Form* allowed them to see in concretely certain behaviors that might indicate giftedness. Another teacher commented, “I definitely have more data on some children because I force myself to sit down and do observations.” Overall, all three focus groups confirmed that U-STARS~PLUS allowed them to look at their children in a different light due to the use of the *Harrison Forms*.

Other aspects mentioned were that there were more hands – on science and family activities.

Recognition of Potential in Children

The second question asked the focus group participants to share how they recognize students who might have potential. This particular question brought many varied answers. Their responses included the following: ability to think, eagerness to participate, eagerness to read, levels of questioning, the number of questions asked, leadership skills, problem solving skills, desire and passion for learning, catching the fancy humor, and ability to see others' points of view. One teacher responded, "I used to look more directly at language arts. That was my focus more than of anything else. This (U-STAR~PLUS) has made me think more about math and science and other areas and seeing them as a total kind of thing." Overall, there were many responses to ways teachers recognize potential in their students.

Recommendation for Gifted Services

The third question inquired as to how children were recommended for gifted education services. This question seemed rather vague to focus group participants due to the nature of the set-up of gifted education services in Ashe City Schools. The focus group participants were K – 3 teachers. Gifted education services typically start in fourth grade in Ashe City Schools. As one teacher summed it up, "We start the *Harrison Forms* in Kindergarten, and then it goes from there." Even though actual identification for gifted services does not start until fourth grade, the documentation for needs of services starts as early as Kindergarten in the shape of the *Harrison Observation Form*.

Collaboration with Specialty Teachers

The fourth question asked the teachers to share about their collaboration with specialty teachers. All three focus groups mentioned that collaboration took place with specialty teachers during planning time or after school hours. The teachers confirmed that the overflow of curriculum from the classroom to the specialty rooms was something that they liked. One school discussed how the technology specialist and media specialist pulled some of the higher reading level children for research based projects. One school discussed how the AIG Consultant pulled some of the children to work on higher reading texts.

Harrison Forms

The next question asked about the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*. It is important to note that two schools agreed on the concepts, but one school shared a bitter experience with the forms.

Two schools shared the following opinions. One teacher replied, "I leave it on my desk so I see it everyday. If it is not right there, then I will forget it quickly!" A kindergarten teacher responded that they start the forms in kindergarten. Then a first grade teacher responded that they either start the forms because they had not received anything from the year before, they built on them. Much discussion took place regarding the notion that sometimes teachers received forms from previous years, and sometimes they did not. Then the discussion turned to the notion that sometimes they (the teachers) were surprised when they did receive a form on a child. One teacher stated, "I've received some and thought that I would have never thought about recommending this

child. But then when you start checking some of the qualities off, you see that he (the child) did have possibilities.”

The *Harrison Form* allowed teachers to take a closer look to see if there was something they had missed. One teacher summarized that she liked the form because it allowed her to look at students that were not necessarily the straight A students, but the students who did have other gifts. Another teacher commented:

It makes you look at the children, and some of the things listed on the *Harrison Form* are some things we sometimes think are bad such as misbehaving in the classroom. Sometimes that is an indication that we need to look closer to see why that is happening. Are they not being challenged enough? Or are they not understanding? We need to look at it. It helps us figure out what kind of instruction we need to be doing.

Another teacher commented:

Sometimes I’m surprised that some of the students have one (a *Harrison Form*), because I don’t see that potential in them. That has happened to me a couple of times. Then there are other students who do not have one who I see potential in, and they didn’t come with a *Harrison Form*. That might just come from maturity.

Then a third grade teacher commented:

It is interesting to see that teachers all along from Kindergarten on up, are seeing the same things you see. I am seeing the exact same thing on this child, so it is indicative of what that child is going to be like.

The third school was in contrast. The third school commented that they were handed *Harrison Forms* with children, names filled in for them and told to complete

them. These were children whom the AIG Consultant thought should have a *Harrison Form*. A teacher said, “I had a student that had a good background. I felt a little pressure to fill out a *Harrison Form*. I was handed them and said to do this. I felt like the child didn’t need it.” Another teacher then responded, “I was called at home to fill one out.” Then another teacher responded, “I was told to fill these out. All in all, they have been a negative experience because of things like that where my experiences have been overridden by a perspective of someone else’s.” Then a fourth teacher spoke up at this same school stating:

I had a similar experience. I was told a couple of children I had needed some (*Harrison Forms*) started on them. At the kindergarten level, it was a matter of exposure. They had had more opportunities than other children. I didn’t think they really stood out. I agree that it has almost been a forced thing instead of looking at who the teacher really recognizes.

Science Instruction

The next question asked of focus group participants inquired about the methods of science instruction in their classrooms. All three focus groups confirmed that they liked to integrate science with their literature groups when possible. All three focus groups mentioned that the district science kits were completed in their classroom and Brain Pop and United Streaming seemed to be favorite technology resources to integrate science. Two focus groups replied that science was very hands – on in their classrooms. One teacher summarized their thoughts with the following: “Well excuse me, but by the time we get through with reading and math there is so little time. I love science, but there is so

little room to do it!” Another teacher replied that science was covered but not as in depth as she would have liked due to lack of time.

Differentiation

The next question asked to the focus groups regarded the concept of differentiation in the classroom. A consensus from all groups indicated that reading instruction was differentiated in Ashe City due to the Balanced Literacy framework used in the elementary schools. Mathematics instruction did not seem to have the same level of differentiation. One teacher commented, “I think we probably need to look at mathematics for that kind of differentiation.” Another teacher commented that in the younger grades, centers were differentiated with different lessons at different levels.

Impact on Student Achievement

The next question asked the focus groups to describe the impact U-STARS~PLUS had had on student achievement in their classroom. All three focus groups confirmed that the one main thing U-STARS~PLUS had brought to their classroom had been an excitement for science. One teacher summarized:

It has made them more excited about science. And when children are more excited, then they are more eager to participate and to learn the concepts we are trying to teach not only in science but also in math. It has encouraged us as teachers to do more inquiry-based lessons. Instead of just teaching to them, they have to figure it out themselves. It has also taught them a method. U-STARS has helped give them a method of how to do inquiry-based activities.

Another teacher commented, “They talk about how their experiences might have differed. You hear good conversations that the children have with each other and the excitement

they have.” The overall consensus seemed to be that more hands – on science and less textbook science was going on in the schools.

Another common theme included getting families involved in their classrooms.

One teacher stated, “I have one child who has a very uninvolved mother, and she never sends anything back to school. But the first day he got his last project, she was on the phone with me immediately because she was wanting instructions because they were completing it together that afternoon. I think it probably made her feel good and him feel good because they were completing it together that afternoon. I think it probably made her feel good and him feel good to have something to bring them together at home.”

Another teacher commented, “It gives the parents a connection to the school with their education and with what they are learning.”

Best Thing That U-STARS~PLUS Made Happen

The focus groups were asked to describe the best thing that U-STARS~PLUS had made happen in their school. One school commented that a hands-on approach to science was the most important thing.

One teacher elaborated, “Opening our eyes to how science should be taught.

Being someone who is recently out of school, my perspective on science is very different than someone that has been teaching a very long time might be. Then again, if they have been teaching long enough, then it is the same.”

A veteran teacher replied, “It always comes full circle.” Interestingly, the same teacher who made the first comment stayed behind after the focus group and shared that she felt that not everyone in the building was teaching science by inquiry-based methods.

Another group focused on the concept of U-STARS~PLUS providing them with a tool (*Harrison Form*) that had been missing for looking at possible gifted traits in K – 3 children.

A teacher responded, “Making us aware of the things that could possibly show us someone that is gifted. Not just looking at grades anymore and what they are doing in class but looking at ‘Oh, I didn’t know that behavior could spark an AIG type child.’ Making us aware of what to look for.”

The third focus group agreed with both prior focus groups saying that the hands – on family science packets were a benefit and allowed them the ability to focus on the whole child. This group added that the *Harrison Form* allowed them to see minority children in a different way. One teacher commented, “I think it has helped us look at some of the minorities because they usually do not get recognized. They fit in a lot of areas on the *Harrison Form*.” Then another teacher responded, “I have been surprised at some of our ESL children. They have been gifted over the English speaking children.”

Relationship between U-STARS~PLUS and Family Involvement

The focus groups were asked to describe the relationship between U-STARS~PLUS and family involvement. All three focus groups echoed the same response. The science take-home packets seemed to be the biggest connection between U-STARS~PLUS and home. The science take-home packets were easy to use in both Spanish and English, had clear instructions, and came with all the materials needed to complete them. One teacher said, “I think the family is always pleased when there is something that they can participate in that relates to the school. Even the Hispanic parents seem really pleased to be able to do something at home with their child.”

Another teacher commented, “I think the experiments are parent friendly. I think they are very well written. Parents can use them. We provide the materials. It is not intimidating for the parents to use. I think a lot of times we give them experiences when parents have to do a lot of the work, but not with these experiences. They are very user friendly.”

Another teacher summarized that these experiments were good for the parents who had not had good experiences with science in their own schooling because the packets were friendly to use.

Change of Perceptions as a Result of U-STARS~PLUS

All three focus groups confirmed that their perceptions of gifted children had changed since Project U-STARS~PLUS.

One teacher commented, “Well, you know, one that comes in all talkative and little interruptive, I look at them a little different. I had a case a couple of years ago in which a child would not stop talking. He didn’t seem to understand anything. He was ESL. It turns out that he was just thirsting for knowledge. He would just absorb everything we did. At the end of the year, he had gone so far. We recognized him a couple of months into the program. Because of U-STARS, I really noticed this child which I would have overlooked. Instead of moving him out to Siberia, I could move on. I found what interested him.”

Another teacher commented, “Sometimes you look at the behavior that you thought was just unnecessary behavior, and you can see that actually it is part of the child’s creativity.”

Yet another teacher said, “I think you look at every child now as a child with a possible giftedness of some kind. Maybe not necessarily academic, but you are looking at everything.”

Each school focus group shared examples in which U-STARS~PLUS allowed them to see “troublesome behavior” in a new light.

Remains of Project U-STARS~PLUS

When the focus group teachers were asked what they would like to see remain from Project U-STARS~PLUS since the study had concluded, two items stood out. First, the take-home family packets seemed to be very popular and inexpensive enough to fit into the school budget. The second aspect that the teachers felt should remain was the *Harrison Forms*.

One teacher commented, “The folders, in my opinion are the best part of it because that is the piece that was missing in K – 3.”

Both the take home science kits and the *Harrison Forms* are what the teachers seem to want to keep.

Changes in U-STARS~PLUS

The focus group teachers had the opportunity to share what they would like to change regarding U-STARS ~PLUS. One focus group felt like overall (U-STARS~PLUS) was a relatively easy process.

A teacher stated, “It is one of the least-time consuming things we do. If they already have a folder started, then to maintain is really easy. It really isn’t that hard to do.”

Two possible changes were better alignment to the curriculum, and an incentive program to get families to return the take-home science activities. One teacher wanted the *Harrison Form* to have boxes included for all of her checks!

Recommendations for Fourth Grader to Interview

The researcher asked each focus group to recommend fourth grade children who had been at the school since kindergarten, who had participated in Project U-STARS~PLUS, and who were currently identified in gifted education. The conversation at one school was worthy of noting.

A teacher commented, “Maggie Walls, Casey Harvey...but Casey was only here for a short time. Havannah Ellis, she’s been here the whole time. Adam Brinkley and Jack Cranford. Will Kasey.” (The names of all children have been changed to protect privacy.)

Another teacher interrupted, “We are talking only about little white children here. There has to be some other child outside of the white race!” At that point the participants started thinking about children of different ethnic backgrounds.

Summary

Research question two sought to find out how teachers felt that Project U-STARS~PLUS impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential. The teachers felt that Project U-STARS~PLUS had impacted their interactions with possibly gifted students or students with academic potential. Teachers felt that the *Harrison Form* had allowed them to view children in a different manner and that instead of looking at children with a deficient model, they now looked at possible negative traits as underlying potential. Teachers felt like Project U-STARS~PLUS had

taught them to look at multiple areas of giftedness instead of just math and reading. The K- 3 teachers in the focus group also felt like they had input in identification of gifted children due to their initiation of the *Harrison Forms*. The focus group participants also felt that re-energizing science at their schools had helped all students with potential.

Research Question 3 – School Level

The third research question asked was the following:

What impact did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on the school level?

This question was answered through the transcribed interview questions answered from three principals at the three elementary sites and analyzed with ATLAS ti. software.

Aspects U-STARS~PLUS Brought to School

When asked what U-STARS~PLUS had brought to their schools, the main theme that all three principals noted was the use of hands-on inquiry-based science. All three principals felt that U-STARS~PLUS brought a focus on inquiry based science to the school and a connection between parents and science.

Principal 3 stated, “Project U-STARS~PLUS has provided very clear and focused lessons that focus on inquiry-based science. The extension of the program providing opportunities for students to become more actively engaged in hands – on science outside of school has been tremendous. Students are very proud of the opportunity to share their excitement for science with their parents.”

Impact on Gifted Education Program

The principals were asked how the gifted education programs at their schools were impacted by Project U-STARS~PLUS. Two of the three principals noted the

nurturing potential in children that had not been identified in gifted education was what U-STARs brought to their gifted programs.

Description of Gifted Education Services

The principals were asked to describe gifted education services at their school site. Two of the three principals noted that the services were described in detail in the AIG plan and that not only identified children received services, but nurtured students did as well.

Principal 1 noted that the AIG consultant provided mainly a pull-out program to identified students. The researcher, as an insider into this school system, noted that this was not the case. Pull-out and push-in services were both provided to identified and nurtured students.

Relationship between Gifted Education and U-STARs~PLUS

The principals were asked to describe the relationship between AIG and U-STARs~PLUS. All three principals had differing viewpoints.

Principal 1 noted that initially AIG was the reason U-STARs~PLUS was initiated but that was no longer true. In other words, U-STARs~PLUS was a teacher initiated endeavor rather than a focus of the AIG staff. Principal 2 noted that the AIG program and project U-STARs~PLUS was intertwined. She described how U-STARs~PLUS nurtured skills in grades K – 3 and AIG nurtured skills in grades 4 – 5. Principal 3 noted that both AIG and U-STARs~PLUS brought a challenged curriculum to learners.

Recognition of Potential

The principals were asked how teachers in their schools had recognized potential strengths in students. Regarding the recognition of potential in children, all three principals felt that Project U-STAR~PLUS allowed teachers to recognize potential in an easier manner. Two of the three principals mentioned the *Harrison Form* as a tool used to recognize potential. The other principal noted that many assessment tools were in place to recognize possible strengths in children.

Recommendation for Gifted Services

The three principals were asked how children were recommended for gifted services in their schools. Two principals differed in their answers regarding recommendation for gifted services. Principal 1 said the AIG Consultant or Guidance Counselor handled this issue. Principal 2 noted that teachers were much more apt to recommend a child for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STAR~PLUS.

Summary

Research question three sought to find out how Project U-STAR~PLUS impacted the school level. The researcher reflected carefully regarding the principal comments. The following conclusion was made from the reflection. Principal 1 was the first to respond and did not want a face to face interview. Principal 1 provided the least amount of information regarding the effects of U-STAR~PLUS. Principal 1 was in her first year as principal at Cliff Elementary. Although Principal 1 had an additional year of experience with U-STAR~PLUS at Ross Elementary where she had served as assistant principal the prior year, the principal had not attended any summer institutes to learn

about Project U-STARS~PLUS. Principal 1 entered the schools when U-STARS~PLUS was already up and running.

Principal 2 had been involved in U-STARS~PLUS from the onset at Mayflower Elementary and had attended three summer institutes. Principal 2 shared the greatest insight on the effect of the project in the school. Principal 2 summarized that U-STARS~PLUS nurtured the K – 3 population while AIG nurtured the 4 – 5 population at her school.

Principal 3 had been involved in Project U-STARS~PLUS only at a comparison site during one year of the study. Principal 3 had not attended any of the summer institutes or in-house training offered by the U-STARS~PLUS staff.

Together, all three principals confirmed that U-STARS~PLUS brought to their schools the ability to recognize potential that had perhaps previously been overlooked. All three principals felt that U-STARS~PLUS brought science back as a focus point in grades K – 3. Two principals also confirmed that U-STARS~PLUS brought a focus to nurturing potential in non-identified gifted education students.

Research Question 4 – Student Level

The fourth research question asked the following:

What impressions did Project U-STARS~PLUS have on students impacted by the program?

This question was answered through the transcribed interviews of three fourth graders, one from each of the three elementary schools and analyzed by ATLAS ti. software.

The three fourth grade gifted education students were referred by the focus group of teachers. All three students were enrolled at their home based schools since kindergarten. The 2004-05 school year would have been the kindergarten year for these students. Their kindergarten year was also the year that U-STARS~PLUS was implemented in Ashe City Schools.

Gifted Education

Several similar themes merged from the student data. All three students indicated that they did the same kind of activities in gifted education, mathematics and reading. The researcher noted that this was not a surprise since Ashe City identifies students for gifted education services in math and reading in 4th and 5th grades.

Difference between AIG and Younger Grades

All three students indicated that the main difference between gifted education and what they did in the younger grades was more advanced work. Student 3 summed it up by stating, "It is different because it is more advanced. It is harder. It really gets you to think." When the researcher asked them to recall some learning experiences from the younger grades all three students responded with a favorite memory. Not one student indicated an inquiry science activity or U-STARS~PLUS take home project. Instead, they remember specific classroom climate issues such as ice cream on Fridays or playing in centers.

Take Home Family Science

The researcher asked the students to share their memories about the U-STARS take home family science packets. All three students were prompted by showing them the Family Take Home book. The researcher allowed the students to look through the

book to refresh their memory since it had been approximately a full year since they left the younger grade level where the projects were completed. The responses to this question varied.

Student 1 recalled completing experiences at school and especially remembered the worm and ant experiment. Student 2 recalled that her dad wanted to throw it (the experiment) away because he thought it was not important but she told him that it was a science project. Mostly, Student 2 recalled the cracker experiment in 3rd grade. Student 3 vividly recalled one experiment.

Student 3 stated, “I remember the one time I took the project to Florida. You had to put a potato, an orange, and I don’t remember the last one. You had to put it in water, lemon juice, and something else. But it was very fun. I learned that sometimes things aren’t preserved with water and they are more preserved with other things.”

Student 3 said that her family really didn’t mind her taking the experiment all the way to Florida on a family trip!

All three students had varied responses and had to be prompted to recall information regarding the projects.

Favorite U-STARS Experiment

Upon asking the student to recall their favorite U-STARS experiment, two felt that their favorite experiment was Kerplunk – a sink and float activity. One student indicated “Worms, Worms, Worms!” was his favorite experiment because he did not get the opportunity to play with worms all that much. The researcher noted that both of these experiments involved hands – on manipulation to learn science.

How Learn Science

When the researcher asked how the children learned science and their experiences with science, the answers varied. Student 1 indicated that he participated in many more experiences in fourth grade than in the younger grades. He indicated that there were many hands – on science experiments in the fourth grade and more looking at pictures in the younger grades.

Student 2, on the other hand, seemed more excited about science in the younger grades. Specifically she remembered making a mess with jello and water when completing an experiment with properties that sink and float. She replied, “It is neater in upper grades.” Neater meaning, not cool, but rather cleaner.

Student 3 indicated that she learned more in fourth grade science because she did more at school experiences.

All three students shared insight on their beliefs of science. Two felt they were learning and doing more science in 4th grade than the younger grades. One felt that the younger grades were really much more fun in science!

Time in AIG Class

When asked about spending time in AIG class, all three students confirmed that they would rather spend more time in AIG class with their fellow identified gifted peers. All three reasoned that more time would allow them to learn more and grow. The researcher noted that in Ashe City, there is one AIG consultant per every two elementary schools. The consultant’s main role was to facilitate differentiation in the homeroom classrooms. Therefore, there minimum time was allocated for small group instruction. Students indicated that they wished to have more of the small group instruction.

Others That Should Be in AIG

The three children were asked to name other children that they thought should be in AIG that were not currently in AIG. Student 1 felt that a Hispanic girl should be in the program. He felt that the Hispanic girl was not in because only the top smartest from each class got in AIG and this child was 6th on the list.

Student 2 thought four other children should be in AIG. Of the four children, two were Hispanic, one Black, and one White. She felt that one Hispanic boy was not in AIG because he just started school last year. Before that the boy was in Mexico. Also, a Hispanic girl should be in because she helps her classmates out with work. Student 2 felt that the Hispanic girl was not in AIG because she was a little quite and shy sometimes. Student 2 felt that the Black girl was not in AIG because she liked to play around a lot. Student 2 felt that the White boy was not in AIG because the white boy forgets all of his work.

Student 3 indicated that she felt that an African American girl should be included in AIG because this person was one of her friends and she wanted to be in gifted education. However, Student 3 indicated that this child had very good grades aside from being her best friend.

The three interviewed students recommended six children – three Hispanics, two African Americans, and one White - for gifted education for varying reasons.

A concluding thought of Student 2 was, “In U-STARS, it is like a little kids AIG.”

Summary

The researcher found the interview with the three children fascinating. All three brought different perspectives to the table. All three were noted by their elementary

teachers as having potential and had a *Harrison Form*. All three were identified in gifted education and had insights as to who else should be included in gifted education. All three were prompted by showing them U-STAR~PLUS experiences in order to remember what took place. Two children felt like more science took place in the upper grades than in the lower grades. One child felt science was much more fun in the lower grades!

Research Question 5 – Central Office Level

The fifth research question asked the following:

What changed in the gifted education program of Ashe City Schools upon the implementation of Project U-STAR~PLUS?

The question was answered through the transcribed data of the director of exceptional child services in Ashe City Schools who is in charge of AIG in the school district. The transcribed data was entered into ATLAS ti software.

Description of U-STAR~PLUS in Ashe City

The AIG director clearly explained the U-STAR~PLUS project in Ashe City Schools. Ashe City agreed to participate in the project in the summer of 2004 due to the search to find a way to address the needs of the high and rising LEP population. She explained that U-STAR~PLUS was then adopted as part of the nurturing component in the 2007-2010 state mandated gifted education plan. The exceptional child services director stated, “We are a district that serves a high LEP population and we wanted to make sure that were addressing and meeting the needs of all children. Our focus of the project was to train teachers to look at diversity differently.” She went on to explain that the staff development offered at the summer institutes was some of the best offered on

diversity and differentiation. She further continued that U-STARS~PLUS had given teachers an integration tool with science and literature, another piece that was missing prior to implementation.

Impact of Project U-STARS~PLUS to the District

The director was asked if U-STARS~PLUS impacted the gifted education program in Ashe City Schools. The director stated, “I think before we were very middle class like. I think we have definitely increased our under-served African American, Hispanics, and boys.” She felt that U-STARS allowed Ashe City to focus on children that it had not focused on before.

Description of Elementary Gifted Services in Ashe City

The director of exceptional child services summarized gifted education on the elementary level in Ashe City Schools. She explained that there were three elementary gifted education consultants between five elementary schools. The consultant’s main responsibility was to touch the head of teachers that teach the gifted children each and every day with a main focus on differentiation techniques in reading and mathematics instruction. She further explained the importance of collaboration with the regular education teacher and the gifted education consultant. She explained that due to limited resources, there was only one consultant per two elementary schools. The director emphasized that the consultants collaborated with the regular education teachers continually to enrich and expand the curriculum for the higher learners.

U-STARS~PLUS and the Shaping of AIG Services

When the researcher asked the director of exceptional child services about how U-STARS~PLUS has shaped the face of gifted education in Ashe City. The director stated,

“I think U-STARS~PLUS has primarily shaped us with looking at things differently. We are not there yet. We have a lot of ways to go.”

The director also implied that U-STARS~PLUS was a vehicle that needed to remain in Ashe City Schools due to its integration of science and the newly tested fifth grade science curriculum. The director also implied that Title 1 mandated parent activities. She stated, “U-STARS~PLUS, rich in its take home family packets, totally fits the Title 1 mandates.”

Summary

The interview with the director of exceptional child services followed the guidelines of Ashe City Schools gifted education program. The director summed up her comments by stating:

I hope we are looking at children differently, especially the under-served population. I don't know if I can say that U-STARS~PLUS will be the reason. The demographics of the district have changed. It just so happened that it changed at the same times as we were embarking on U-STARS~PLUS. U-STARS~PLUS was the vehicle that helped us, along with our ESL/LEP director, to help look at these children differently.

The director summarized looking at children differently, science integration, and family involvement as three main ideas that have helped mold the visions of gifted education in Ashe City Schools.

Research Question 6 – District Level

The sixth research question asked the following:

To what extent did policy, the academically and intellectually academic written plan, for Ashe city reflect a change in the nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged households?

This question was answered through a side by side document review of the Academically Gifted Written Plan for Ashe City Schools. The state of North Carolina mandates that each local school board submit in writing a plan for Academically and Intellectually gifted services every three years for review. The two plans reviewed for the purpose of this study were the 2004 – 2007 Third Generation Gifted Education Plan and the 2007 – 2010 Fourth Generation Gifted Education Plan. It is important to note that U-STARS~PLUS was first implemented in Ashe City in 2003, during the writing of the first plan. Many similarities and differences existed between the two plans. The researcher mainly noted the information that dealt with the research of this study.

ELL Learners

The demographics of the two plans showed an increase in the percentage of Hispanic students in Ashe City Schools from 2004 to 2007. The plans also delineated different terminology to the Hispanic population. The 2004 plans called non-English speakers ESL students, English as a Second Language students. The 2007 plan called non-English speakers ELL students, English Language Learners.

Minority Students in Gifted Education

The benchmarks for both plans indicated a direct effort to identify minority students identified in gifted education. In 2004, one benchmark included an increase in

the percentage of minority students identified in the AIG program from 2.14% to 5% by the end of the three year cycle. The 2007 plan indicated that this goal was met and exceeded to 17% of minority students identified in the AIG program in all of Ashe City Schools.

Multiple Criteria for Gifted Education Services

The goals for 2004 and 2007 were similar. Both included a direct effort to utilize multiple criteria to appropriately identify students for services. The 2007 plan further elaborated regarding the use of instruments sensitive to under-represented populations such as LEPs, low income, minority, and twice exceptional. The 2007 plan further elaborated on multiple tests allowed for use for identification purposes. New instruments included the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test and the Universal Non-Verbal Intelligence Test, both designed for non-traditional English speakers.

Nurture of Gifted Potential

An additional goal included in 2007 that was absent in 2004 was the nurture aspect of gifted education. Specifically the system was to intentionally nurture potential found in under-represented populations. In order to accomplish this, all elementary school personnel were to be trained in U-STARS~PLUS and U-STARS~PLUS was to be implemented in all five elementary schools.

An additional component of nurture was included in the Student Search Nomination in 2007 AIG plan. This component included children entering a screening pool when a test score was 85% or higher on a nationally normed test. The children that were in the nurturing pool and that did not make the criteria for gifted education were

then placed on a nurturing list and reviewed bi-annually with their classroom teacher to make sure their needs were being met.

Needs Search

Both the 2004 and 2007 plans included a *Needs Search Form*. The *Needs Search Form* was a document given to third, fourth, and fifth grade classroom teachers in which teachers were encouraged to place their minority students in one of the four groups as seen below. The table shown below was used for Hispanic students. A form also existed in the same format for African American students, Multi-racial students, American Indians, and Asian students. Three forms existed in all that offered the classroom teacher the opportunity to look closer at typically under-represented children in gifted education.

Table 30

AIG Needs Search Form

AIG Needs Search Form		
Teacher _____	Grade _____	School _____
Directions: Please place all of the Hispanic/Black/Multi-racial/American Indian/Asian students that you have in your class in one of the following four groups.		
<p style="text-align: center;">Group I</p> <p>These children definitely show real strengths. I recommend them for assessment for gifted program participation with no reservation.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Group II</p> <p>While I don't feel quite as strongly about these children, they do exhibit many exceptional abilities. It is probably better to err on the side of inclusion and asses them.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Group III</p> <p>I have seen some indications of high potential in these children, but I'm just not sure if gifted placement would be in their best interest at this time. More time is needed to make additional observations.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Group IV</p> <p>These children occasionally show some real "spark" of potential, but overall, they probably are not good candidates for further assessment.</p>

Multicultural Enrichment Opportunity

Both plans listed a variety of enrichment opportunities provided by the gifted education consultants. The 2004 plan indicated Immigrant/International Days and 2nd Grade Family Science Packs. The 2007 plan indicated K – 3 Grade Family Science Packs. There was no mention of an Immigrant/International Day in the latter plan.

Needs Determination Team

Both the 2004 and 2007 plans included a Needs Determination Team. The Needs Determination Team at each school consisted of the child's current classroom teacher, principal or designee, guidance counselor, AIG consultant, and regular education teachers in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. The NDT team job included the evaluation of information on the child to determine if they qualify for gifted education services. The 2004 plan indicated that at least three members must be present in order for a decision to be made regarding a child and their gifted education services. The 2007 plan indicated that at least four members must be present in order for a decision to be made regarding a child and their gifted education services. In addition, the 2007 plan added the component of a D-NDT, District Needs Determination Team. The DNDT consisted of the director of exceptional children, AIG consultants from each school, LEP director, lead math teacher, lead reading teacher, and principal. In order for the DNDT to approve a school wide recommendation about a child, at least four members must be present.

Identification for Gifted Services

Included in both plans was a flow chart that showed the process for identification in Ashe City Schools. This flow chart was similar in the 2004 – 2007 plan except for the inclusion of a District Needs Determination Team and the inclusion of LEP students in the screening process who have advanced three proficiency levels in one school year. According to the 2007 plan, the District Needs Determination team reviewed all recommendations made on the school level regarding placement services. The District Needs Determination team includes the Exceptional Child Services Director and all AIG consultants. Also, according to the 2007 plan, if an LEP child has made significant

gains of at least three proficiency levels in one school year then the child should be looked at for possible gifted services.

The actual criteria for admittance for gifted education services changed from 2004 to 2007. The table below indicates the similarities and differences.

Table 31

2004 and 2007 Criteria for Elementary Gifted Identification

2004 Criteria for Elementary Gifted Services	2007 Criteria for Elementary Gifted Services
90% on Aptitude Test Composite or Partial Composite	90% on Aptitude Test Composite or Partial Composite
90% on Achievement Test Reading and / or Math	90% on Achievement Test Reading and / or Math
90% Grades = Teacher Recommendation Reading and / or Math	90% Grades = Teacher Recommendation Reading and / or Math
Level 4 EOG Reading and / or Math	X
X	Gifted Rating Scale Score of 60 on 4 of 6 subtests
X	Portfolio

For both plans a minimum requirement for gifted education services was a 90% on an Aptitude Test or a 90% on an Achievement Test. Ashe City gave all 3rd and 5th graders the CoGAT – Cognitive Test of Abilities, and aptitude test. Ashe City also gave all 3rd and 5th graders the IOWA Test of Achievement.

A huge difference in the plans was the pathways to gifted education. In 2004 in order for a child to receive gifted education services, a child had to meet three of the four criteria listed. The four possible paths included: 90% on an aptitude test, 90% on math and / or reading achievement test, 90% grades in math and / or reading, and Level 4 on End of Grade test in math and / or reading. However, in 2007, a child could receive gifted services through three distinct pathways as described below.

Table 32

2004 Pathway for Identification of Gifted Services

2004 Pathway for Identification of Gifted Services	
Must have three of the five listed below.	
90% Aptitude Test	
90% Achievement Test	
90% Grades / Teacher Recommendation	
Level 4 End of Grade Math Score	
Level 4 End of Grade Reading Score	

However, in 2007, a child could receive gifted services through three distinct pathways as described below. Pathway one indicated that a child would receive gifted education services if there was a score of greater than or equal to 98% on an Intelligence Test. Pathway two indicated that a child would receive gifted education services if there was both a 90% on an aptitude test and a 90% on a math and / or reading achievement test. Pathway three indicated that a child would receive gifted education services if the child achieved three of five of the following criteria. The child must have either a 90% aptitude or a 90% achievement in math and / or reading. Next a child needed to have 90% grades in reading and / or math, and / or a Gifted Rating Scale with four of the six criteria at 60% or greater, and / or a portfolio of work samples in math and / or reading.

Table 33

2007 Pathways for Identification of Gifted Services

2007 Pathways for Identification of Gifted Services					
Pathway 1	98% or Higher on Intelligence Test				
Pathway 2	90% Aptitude Test		90% Achievement Test		
Pathway 3 (Must have 3 of 5 and one must be standardized test)	90% Aptitude Test	90% Achievement Test	90% Grades/Teacher Recommendation	Gifted Rating Scale	Portfolio

The main difference between the two identification pathways was there was greater opportunity to receive services in the 2007 plan which widens gifted education to reach a broader range of students.

Summary

Research question six sought to find a change in the nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged households in the written AIG plan for Ashe City. A side by side document review of the 2004 – 2007 3rd Generation Gifted Plan and the 2007 – 2010 4th Generation Gifted Plan indicated many similarities and differences related to this research study. Both plans indicated an increase of ELL learners in the district. Due to the increase of the ELL population the 4th generation plan included permission to use additional culturally sensitive tests for identification purposes. The 4th generation plan also indicated that the nurture component of observation of children that had 85% or greater on standardized tests. The 4th generation plan also added a Needs Determination District Review in order to address the

needs of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. The 4th generation plan also revised their pathways to gifted education. These pathways allowed for greater access to potential services through the use of a possible portfolio, a Gifted Rating Scale, and the elimination of the use of the End of Grade tests, yet the gateway still at 90% on an achievement or aptitude test.

Research Material Further Analyzed

Themes emerged from the data through the process of coding. Several themes emerged that relate to the overall research questions but do not necessarily answer them. They are included because they provide insight to the overall nature of the study, Ashe's journey to recognize potential in all students.

When information from the three focus groups, three principal written interviews, exceptional child services director interview, and three fourth grade student interviews were compiled together and analyzed using ATLAS ti. software several similarities emerged. Other data emerged with not as heavy of an emphasis but is noteworthy to include.

Science

Upon the coding of data, the most frequently noted concept regarding U-STARS~PLUS was science. Focus groups with teachers differed from group to group. The focus group from Mayflower Elementary revealed the notion that after math and reading instruction, there was little time for science. Mayflower also indicated that they tried to fit science in whenever they could by integrating it into other subject areas. Popular topics for science instruction were Brain Pop and United Streaming, videos that taught science concepts. Mayflower commented that they completed their required

experiments from the kits (district adopted science kits), which left little time to really expand on concepts. Mayflower also commented that the take home packets gave children something in which to excel. At this same school, the administrator said that U-STARS~PLUS brought the hands – on science to their school and indicated that science education had changed in the past few years to a more inquiry-based approach. A teacher at Ross Elementary complemented her comment by saying:

U-STARS has opened our eyes to how science should be taught. Being someone who is recently out of school my perspective on science is different than someone that has been teaching a very long time might be. Then again if they have been teaching long enough then it is the same.

Both Mayflower and Ross indicated that U-STARS~PLUS brought an awareness of how to teach science to their teachers. Ross Elementary teachers indicated that there was inquiry-based science going on all over their school. The administrator at this school said that U-STARS~PLUS had brought focused activities in science.

Cliff Elementary indicated that there was much more integration with literature and science. Yet the administrator at this school felt that science was mainly taught in isolation due to the ineffectiveness of test results when Balanced Literacy was combined with science. At this same school the teacher consensus was that science was taught more intentionally since the onset of U-STARS~PLUS. One teacher commented:

It has made them (the students) more excited about science. And when children are more excited then they are more eager to participate and to learn the concepts we are trying to teach not only in science but also in math. Because it has encouraged us, as teachers, to do more inquiry-based lessons. Instead of just

teaching to them, they have to figure it out themselves. It has also taught them a method. U-STARS has helped give them a method of how to do inquiry-based activities.

The district exceptional child services director felt that U-STARS~PLUS coincided with Title 1 mandates of parent activities. The science family take-home packs served this purpose. The director also indicated that science was more integrated with literature since the use of U-STARS~PLUS.

The children interviewed show differences in their views of science. Two children suggested that more science happened in the fourth grade than in the previous grades (the K – 3 U-STARS~PLUS grades) while one suggested that science was much neater (meaning not as hands – on dirty) in fourth grade. Teachers, administrators, and the director of exceptional child services felt that more science was happening since the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS.

Observation Forms

Teachers at two elementary schools noted that the *Harrison Forms* were one aspect of U-STARS~PLUS that they hoped continued in Ashe City School because they provided a tool for looking at children through the lens of potential. One school, however, noted that they needed to change their mindset regarding the *Harrison Form* since it was district policy to utilize the *Harrison Form*. This particular school was forced to complete *Harrison Forms* on students that the teacher did not necessarily feel needed the forms. This school indicated that there were benefits of the *Harrison Form* when used as intended for teachers to decide, not as a forced issue.

All teachers at all three school saw a positive use to the *Harrison Forms* regarding teacher observation. One teacher stated:

I think one of the advantages too is, just because I don't recognize something, when they go to first grade, Leslie might. Leslie might say, I really think this child has this quality. They might recognize something I did not recognize.

Another teacher commented:

Sometimes I'm surprised that some of the students have one because I don't see that potential in them. That has happened to me a couple of times. Then there are other students who do not have one who I see potential in and they didn't come with a *Harrison Form*. And that might just come from maturity.

A third teacher added:

It helps us with children that we have an idea about that might be gifted. It helps us see it in black and white. We have proof in writing and are able to check off what we have been seeing in 3rd grade.

Finally, a teacher added:

It is nice to have another form of documentation. It is nice to have another lens to look through especially when they get to fourth grade for a child who may not have done well on tests.

The focus groups felt that the *Harrison Forms* were a useful tool for recognition of gifted potential.

Look at Children Differently

One major goal of U-STARS~PLUS was to teach teachers to look at children through an "at-potential" lens rather than a deficit lens. The exceptional child services

director and the teachers mentioned the notion of looking at children differently. One teacher at Mayflower noted:

Especially our ESL students. Their questions may be different. But they have their own questions going on. They might not quite have the sound advanced in vocabulary as another student. When I take the time to look at that folder and look at them, they have some thinking going on. They have a lot more going on than they are able to get out.

Another teacher at Cliff Elementary commented, “I think it has helped us look at some of the minorities because they usually do not get recognized. They fit in a lot of the areas on the *Harrison Forms*.” A teacher replied,

I think it makes us look at other things a little closer, not just the reading. There are other areas that children have special interests and abilities in. Not just language arts. We have to look at the total child in everything.

Another teacher from Cliff Elementary stated:

I think you look at every child now as a child of possible giftedness of some kind. Maybe not necessarily academic, but you are looking at art, computer, you’re looking at everything.

A teacher from Ross Street Elementary said:

I like to watch for the kids to come in and you think they might be delayed because they don’t have the prior experience they don’t know how to hold a pencil, don’t know how to color at all. Then as the year progresses seeing how beyond the other children that some of them are.

Teachers at all three elementary schools commented on the ability that U-STARS~PLUS brought for teachers to observe children through an “at-potential” lens.

From the district perspective, the Exceptional Child Services director mentioned several times that a goal of U-STARS~PLUS for the district was to train teachers to look at children differently. The Exceptional Child Services Director said:

It helped them look at all children differently. I’ll be honest, I am a little bias but it looks at all children with disabilities to children with giftedness and offer potential. Project U-STARS gave us a way to look at the children, to look at the whole group, and then we encouraged teachers to go back and to look at individual students.

She commented, “I think U-STARS has primarily shaped us with looking at things differently. We’re not there yet, we have a lot of ways to go.”

While the concept of looking at children differently was consistently noted throughout the focus groups and the interview with the exceptional child services director, it is noted that the principals or students did not indicate this concept.

Parent Involvement

The discussion that revolved regarding family involvement was similar in all three focus groups. The teachers seemed to want to keep the family take home science kits since it seemed to be a worthwhile activity. One teacher at Mayflower Elementary commented:

I think the family is always pleased when there is something that they can participate in that relates to the school. Even the Hispanic parents seem real pleased to be able to do something.

A Cliff Elementary teacher commented:

I think the experiments are parent friendly. I think they are very well written.

Parents can use them. We provide the materials. It is not intimidating for the parents to use. I think a lot of times we give them experiences when parents have to do a lot of the work, but not with these experiments. They are really user friendly.

A teacher from Ross Elementary commented, “I think the take home projects and making that connection more real between home and school, and integrating more science into their homework that we didn’t do in the past.”

Nurture Abilities

The concept of nurturing abilities was a reoccurring theme in the research. Ashe City adopted U-STARS~PLUS as a nurturing component in the 4th generation AIG Plan. With this adoption came the notion teachers would “watch” their children for possible gifted traits in the early K – 3 years and nurture their strengths. It also indicated that children that were not high enough to place into the gifted program would be nurtured to hopefully allow for later admittance. A teacher at Cliff Elementary commented, “We see the potential so we want to give them that extra little push, that extra something, to push them toward bigger goals, toward giftedness.”

Summary

Further analysis of the research material indicated that certain themes reoccurred from each data set explored in this study. Of particular interest were the concepts of science, observation forms, looking at children differently, parental involvement, and nurturing of abilities. Science was a reoccurring theme throughout the study. There was

an overall feeling that science was somewhat revitalized during the time frame of the study. This revitalization was not necessarily all due to the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS, although having U-STARS~PLUS allowed for a greater focus on inquiry-based science. There was also a focus on looking at children differently particularly though the use of the *Harrison Observation Forms*. The utilization of this tool allowed teachers to look at children through an “at potential” lens rather than a deficit lens. U-STARS~PLUS seemed to be inviting to parents. The parental involvement component of the program was a common theme that emerged. Last, Ashe City appeared to have a renewed sense of nurturing the potential that existed in all children, not just the math and reading strengths. There seemed to be an awareness that the untapped potential in children was exposed due to the various aspects of U-STARS~PLUS.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed Ashe City Schools' journey to recognize, nurture, and respond to the potential in all children via Project U-STARS~PLUS in order to identify and serve culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students in gifted education. The methods employed for this research included the following: analysis of existing data, focus groups with teachers, interviews with administrators and a director, interviews with three fourth grade children, and document reviews of two AIG plans. The data obtained were analyzed to determine the overall effect of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Ashe City Schools. Qualitative methods were employed to summarize the effect of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Ashe City Schools.

First Research Question

The first research question sought to find how many children were recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS. Approximately eighty-three children were recommended for gifted education services that would have otherwise been overlooked over the course of the four year research. Of those eighty-three children, approximately twenty were from an impoverished background, twenty-six were not from impoverished homes, and thirty-two's status were unknown due to lack of teacher response and form design. Of the eighty-three children, approximately twelve were English Language Learners and forty-four were not English

Language Learners. The remaining twenty-two children's ELL status was unknown due to lack of teacher response and form design.

Of the known ethnicity of the children, 8% were Black, 17% were Hispanic, 30% were White, and 2% were of Mixed ethnicity. The ethnicity was unknown for 42% of the children due to the teachers not filling in the information or due to form design. White children were the ethnic majority of the students that would have been missed without the *Harrison Form*. The data did not indicate that culturally/linguistically diverse students were necessarily looked at differently. Still, eighty-three children, regardless of their socio-economic status or their cultural diverseness were looked at differently and recommended for gifted services by their classroom teachers.

Throughout the years of the study, as the culturally/linguistically diverse and economically challenged population of Mayflower Elementary increased, the AIG population decreased. Cliff Elementary also saw an increase in the culturally/linguistically diverse and economically challenged population increase during the years of the study. The identified gifted population decreased from the initial year of implementation, then toward the end of the study the population of identified children at Cliff Elementary increased but not as high as the year prior to implementation of U-STARS~PLUS. The population of culturally/linguistic diverse students at Ross Elementary fluctuated, while the economically disadvantaged population remained greater than half. The gifted population at Ross Elementary remained approximately the same throughout the study, dropping off during the year of this research. Overall, there was a decrease of children identified in gifted education during the 2004 – 2008 school years, the years of implementation of U-STARS~PLUS.

Eighty-three children could have been overlooked, so in that regard, U-STARS~PLUS served its purpose of recognition of potential in students. Eighty-three children over the course of four years were looked at differently in the eyes of their teacher.

Similar research, such as Project STEP-UP, Systematic Training for Education Programs for Under-served Pupils, showed similar results. Teachers through Project STEP-UP were trained to use alternative tools for admittance into gifted education programs. Many more students were identified and looked at for services due to training teachers to look at children differently (Cline & Schwartz, 1999). Project U-STARS~PLUS in Ashe City Schools showed that eighty-three more children were looked at for possible gifted services when teachers looked at them through an at potential lens rather than a deficit lens.

The researcher felt that the overall data collected were data that could be celebrated in Ashe City. Regardless of economic status or regardless of ethnic background, children are children and eighty-three children were looked at differently through the eyes of their teacher.

The researcher then learned that even though eighty-three children were looked at differently, there was still a hurdle to overcome in order to be identified for gifted education services. That hurdle included the 90% score that a child needed to make on an aptitude or an achievement test to be considered for further gifted services. Although potential was seen, there was still a gateway to surpass for identification.

Second Research Question

The second question sought to understand the extent to which Project U-STARS~PLUS impacted teachers' interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential. The findings in this study indicated favorable results for the interactions among teachers with students due to the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS.

Through the analysis of the focus group data, the researcher found that teachers looked at children differently as a result of Project U-STARS~PLUS. The teachers felt that Project U-STARS~PLUS impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential by allowing them to see gifted potential. The gifted potential was seen through the use of the *Harrison Form*, which allowed the teachers to look at children in a different manner. Teachers felt that instead of looking at children through a deficient model, they looked at possible negative traits as underlying potential. Teachers felt like Project U-STARS~PLUS taught them to look at multiple areas of giftedness instead of just the areas of math and reading. The K- 3 teachers in the focus groups also felt that they had a say in identification of gifted children due to their initiation of the *Harrison Forms*. The focus group participants also felt that science was re-energized at their schools which helped all students with potential. The focus groups also felt that the take home family science packs impacted interactions with their families plus encouraged more science involvement.

Research question two further detailed the information learned from research question one. Research question two gave teachers the opportunity to explain how they saw children differently. One teacher concluded:

It makes you look at the children, and some of the things listed on the *Harrison Form* are some things we sometimes think are bad such as misbehaving in the classroom. Sometimes that is an indication that we need to look closer to see why that is happening. Are they not being challenged enough or do they not understand? We need to look at it. It helps us figure out what kind of instruction we need to be doing.

Research question two indicated many other areas that directly and indirectly impacted students in the classroom. In addition to the traditional math and reading tested curriculum, the teachers felt that science was a curriculum focus. Not only was science a focus, but families were involved in worthwhile science activities through the take home science packs.

Finally, K – 3 teachers felt empowered to participate in the identification process of gifted education children in Ashe City Schools. Gifted education traditionally was reserved for fourth and fifth grade students, with the gateways of testing occurring at the end of the third grade school year. U-STARS~PLUS allowed the K – 3 teachers a voice in the process of gifted education through the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*.

The research confirmed that naturalistic observation over time was a method to reduce teacher subjectivity of a concept (Bouchamma, Godin, & Godin, 2008). The teacher observations that were noted on the *Harrison Forms* over time were empowering to teachers who realized that gifts were apparent in children even if standardized test scores did not reveal the same information. These daily observations of strengths allowed the teachers to plan instruction based on the needs of the child. Stiggins (2004,

p. 25) stated, “The instructional decisions that have the greatest impact are made day to day in the classroom...not once a year.”

The researcher felt that the *Harrison Observation Form* gave the teachers the tool they needed to inform their daily instructional practices instead of waiting for a standardized test to share which gifts were apparent in children. Science was again on the forefront of instruction in Ashe City, where math and reading had been the guiding factors. The teachers that contributed their experience and knowledge of U-STARS~PLUS genuinely wanted to do their part in identifying and serving culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children. The voices of the teachers told the stories of how Project U-STARS~PLUS impacted their interaction with students possessing gifted potential.

Third Research Question

The third research question sought to examine the impact that U-STARS~PLUS had on the school level according to the administrators of the schools. The research concluded that U-STARS~PLUS brought a focus on science, a nurturing of potential strengths in students, and a recognition of previously overlooked gifted qualities. The main consensus of the three principals from the three sites, was that science was more of a focus, and that nurturing potential in students was more of a focus at their schools since the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS. The most useful comment was from the veteran and experienced administrator that attended U-STARS~PLUS summer institutes to learn about the program. She explained that U-STARS~PLUS nurtured skills in grades K – 3 and AIG nurtured skills in grades 4 – 5.

Fullen et al. (2006) advocated that for change to occur in a school system, change had to start in the heart of the classroom. Above that, there must be a strong and supportive administration. The researcher felt that the information gleaned from this dissertation study showed a strong change in the perception of teachers in the heart of the classroom. However, the researcher did not feel that a full understanding of the potential power of U-STAR~PLUS was understood by the leaders of the individual school sites. This leads to the question of maintaining the momentum of recognition of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically challenged gifted students in the absence of a formalized study occurring in Ashe City. If the momentum for recognition of under-served gifted children is to happen then the researcher feels that a system wide initiative needs to fully re-explain the purpose of U-STAR~PLUS at the administrative level.

The researcher reflected upon the administrators' comments and felt that more information could have been gleaned if one on one interviews had taken place. Better yet, in hindsight, a focus group with all three present in the same room could have revealed the many perceptions and misconceptions about U-STAR~PLUS and gifted education in general. The focus group might have even been a teaching point to learn more about the potential impact that Project U-STAR~PLUS could have at their school if supported and understood from the top administration.

Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question examined the impressions of Project U-STAR~PLUS on students. The interview with three fourth grade students was

insightful. These three students had experienced U-STARS~PLUS since their Kindergarten year in school and were identified for gifted services in Ashe City.

When asked about a favorite learning experience from younger grades, all three students remembered social and emotional aspects of their primary grades. The students responded with favorite classroom memories of events that happened related more to classroom climate issues, not specific U-STARS~PLUS experiments. However, the researcher reflected on this aspect and looked at the center of the U-STARS~PLUS conceptual framework (Figure 1, p. 3) which showed the heart of the program. The concepts of nurturing strengths, recognizing strengths, and responding to strengths, advocated for positive classroom climate. The classroom climate created by the elementary teachers allowed for an atmosphere where students were safe enough to feel nurtured. U-STARS~PLUS did not necessarily create this climate, but the teachers created the climate in which U-STARS~PLUS could thrive.

The three students all shared their favorite U-STARS~PLUS experiment after looking at samples from the *Take Home* book. The three students picked “Kerplunk” and “Worms, Worms, Worms” as their favorites. The researcher was not surprised because these two experiments involved hands-on inquiry-based science. Brendzel (2005) explained that inquiry-based science resulted in better understanding and retention of science concepts because the student was involved in something that they enjoyed and loved. These students remembered their hands-on science experiments.

The three students were also able to share that they felt several of their peers should be included in gifted education. These three students recommended that three Hispanic, two Black, and one White child should be in gifted education. Their reasons

varied regarding why they were not identified but overall they concluded academic successes as the underlying reasons.

Overall, the researcher found that the three students remembered U-STARS~PLUS components when prompted. Two of the three felt that more science was taught in the fourth grade than in their previous school years. The researcher noted that the students would have recommended six additional children into gifted education for various reasons dealing mainly with academic successes. The researcher also noted that all three of these children were afforded U-STARS~PLUS activities, had a *Harrison Form* completed on them, were seen as children with possibilities from a young age, and surpassed the 90% achievement/aptitude barrier that existed in their school system. Regardless of anything else, these children would not have been identified in gifted education if they had not made the 90% needed score on a standardized test. This notion of the gateway was not mentioned by the students, only noted by the researcher.

Fifth Research Question

The fifth research question examined the changes in the gifted education program in Ashe City as a result of Project U-STARS~PLUS. This question was answered by the Exceptional Child Services Director who had been involved in U-STARS~PLUS since its implementation in 2004. The director emphasized that looking at children differently, science integration, and family involvement were three of the things that U-STARS~PLUS brought to Ashe City Schools. She emphasized that since teachers look at children through an “at potential” lens, more students were being nurtured in their strength area. She also felt that science integration was a plus of the program with the science/literature connection a strong curriculum focus point, emphasizing the

importance of the take home science packs that allowed the child and parent to work together. All three of these components were seen as a plus that U-STARS brought to Ashe City, although, these three components were not necessarily a direct impact of U-STARS~PLUS. She reflected that U-STARS~PLUS came along at the same time that the population of Ashe City was becoming more and more diverse. U-STARS~PLUS was initiated about the same time that balanced literacy came to the system with a focus on integrating literature with subject areas. U-STARS~PLUS also fit nicely with the Title 1 mandates of family involvement in Ashe City Schools.

The researcher noted how the director felt that this program meshed with the initiatives already in place in Ashe City. It seemed natural. It fit. It was not necessarily because U-STARS~PLUS was implemented that these things occurred; rather, it was because the population changed that the system sought to find new ways to meet the needs of children. U-STARS~PLUS was to help identify and help meet the needs of this special population of children.

A similar initiative took place in Palm Beach, Florida in which the school board was mandated to look at their under-served gifted population due to the diverse ethnic makeup of the system. The Office of Civil Rights was called in to overhaul their gifted education program due to low representation of culturally diverse children (Castellano et al., 2003). The results indicated an increase of culturally diverse students identified in gifted education.

The researcher did not get the sense that Ashe City was at the point of a major overhaul in their gifted education program. Rather, Ashe City seemed to be at the point of understanding that their population was changing and they were proactively trying to

find a way to serve children's academic strengths that needed nurturing. The researcher also felt that this was a start in Ashe City to recognizing under-served gifted children.

Sixth Research Question

The sixth research question examined the differences between the policy written in Ashe City regarding academically and intellectually gifted services prior to and post implementation of U-STARS~PLUS.

Both the third and fourth generation plan indicated an increase in ELL students in Ashe City Schools. The fourth generation plan indicated multiple pathways for a child to be identified for gifted services, an indication that the district was trying to be more inclusive of their diverse population. However, both plans indicated a 90% gateway on an achievement or aptitude test. Even with alternative pathways, the 90% standardized test score remained a hurdle for admissions.

The fourth generation plan specifically indicated a nurture component to recognize potential in all children by training Ashe City employees in U-STARS~PLUS. This was an indication that the district was trying to be more inclusive in its identification of its diverse and changing population. The district was even addressing the student population that scored at 85% or higher on standardized tests. These students were also reviewed bi-annually by the teachers to make sure their needs were being met.

The fourth generation plan indicated that if an ELL child scored three proficiency levels or higher on their ELL placement test, then the child should be screened for gifted services. Before the fourth generation plan, there was no mention of advancement of ELL students based on their proficiency test score.

The fourth generation plan also indicated that a Needs Determination Team was to be in place on the district level to review and evaluate the recommendations made by individual school sites. The researcher felt that this was a means of making sure from the top that the needs of all children were being observed and met.

Overall, the written district plan for Ashe City indicated that Ashe City was moving in the direction of serving their changing culturally/linguistically diverse and economically challenged population. The plan indicated an intentional focus on looking for gifted potential in children. Fullen et al. (2006) says that in order for full system change to occur that everyone has to move away from what has always been done. The researcher did not see that change was apparent in every aspect of the written policy, but change was apparent. Ashe City seemed to be moving in the right direction.

Conclusion

U-STARS~PLUS was a program initiated by Ashe City Schools to help identify culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children in gifted education. Overall, Ashe City tried to initiate systemic change of their identification of gifted children through the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS. To help initiate this change, the program offered high-end learning opportunities to the teachers who participated through summer staff development. The teachers were taught to look for potential in students through the use of the *Harrison Observation Form*. Science was seen as a vehicle in which to observe student strengths and teachers were given resources to promote hands-on inquiry based science activities. As an aside, parents were involved in this process through the science take home packs.

Were children recommended for gifted services due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS that otherwise would have been overlooked? Yes. A total of ninety-eight teachers filled out 335 *Harrison Forms* over the four year study. Out of those 335 students, eighty-three would have been missed. However, these eighty-three children were not necessarily identified for gifted education due to the 90% standardized test score hurdle. Another concerning factor is that the total number of gifted identified children decreased over the years of the study, yet the number of culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged students increased in the district.

Did teachers feel like U-STARS~PLUS impacted their interactions with possible gifted students or students with academic potential? Yes. Teachers felt that the *Harrison Form* allowed them to look at children through an “at potential” lens and allowed them to look at multiple areas of giftedness instead of just reading and math, which were the previous identifiers. The teachers also felt a renewed interest in science, which impacted all students.

Did Project U-STARS~PLUS have an impact on the school level? Yes. Principals felt that science was re-energized at their schools. Principals also felt that teachers looked at children through an “at potential” lens instead of a deficit lens and that teachers nurtured potential in children more as a result of the program.

Did U-STARS~PLUS leave an impression on children? Yes. The students interviewed indicated that they remembered the hands-on science take home activities the most! However, above all, the students remembered social/emotional classroom climate issues from their primary school years.

Did the gifted education program of Ashe City change upon the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS? Yes. The gifted education program changed upon the implementation of the program and in conjunction with the change of the demographics of Ashe City Schools. Specifically, teachers paid closer attention to gifted traits. Science instruction was a curriculum focus and families were involved with take home science kits. The gifted education program changed, but not necessarily solely because of the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS.

Did the written gifted education plan for Ashe City indicate a change in the nurture, recognition, and response to children from culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged backgrounds? Yes. The written gifted education plan allowed for multiple pathways for identification into gifted education. The 90% gateway on a standardized test still remained however; there was indication of a desire to nurture potential in students that were close to the 90% standardized test score.

Ashe City Schools implemented Project U-STARS~PLUS as a means to recognize, nurture, and respond to the needs of all children. Fullen et al. (2006) said that in order for full system change to occur that everyone has to move away from what has always been done. In order for change to occur in the identification of gifted children, teachers must learn to look differently at children. The old ways of recognizing special gifts and abilities do not fit the new day and age. Ashe City has started the journey to recognize the gifts in their changing population. The journey has begun, which can be celebrated, but there is still room to grow.

From the beginning, the researcher felt that the school district would have shown success if this study indicated that a difference was made to culturally/linguistically

diverse and economically disadvantaged students in the classroom. A difference was made to children in the classroom and some of those children were culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged. Eighty-three children were seen as having potential due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS. These eighty-three children may have been overlooked, but were now seen as having high potential.

The impact of Project U-STARS~PLUS on the school level was verified by school principals. Whereas more information could be gained in this area, the overall consensus was that U-STARS~PLUS impacted the science curriculum in a positive way and the teachers broadened their views on children.

Ashe City has started to take a second look at children from culturally/linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged homes. This is happening in conjunction with changing times, and may not necessarily be solely due to the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS.

An implication of this study was that when teachers are given a tool, such as the *Harrison Form* that U-STARS~PLUS provided, to intentionally look at possible gifted traits, then gifted traits are identified. This has been a success of the program.

Since the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Ashe City Schools, children are looked at differently through the lens of “at potential” by their teachers. These data are worth sharing because one school district sought to find a way and found a way to recognize and nurture potential in under-represented gifted children. Somewhere, perhaps, there is a school system like Ashe City, a system that changed because of the economy, a system that changed because of the diverse population, a system that wants

what is best for all of their children. This information could be beneficial to systems similar to Ashe City Schools.

Additional Concluding Thoughts of the Researcher

The researcher noted a decrease in the number of identified children in Ashe City Schools over the years of this study. Multiple outside factors could have contributed to this decline. Ashe City was experiencing economic hardships with businesses closing and families moving away to find employment. During the 2007 school year, Ashe City experienced a redistricting of its school lines. Children were moved from school to school based on their address, therefore causing numbers of identified gifted children to fluctuate at some schools. Yet another reason could include that some families opted to move out of Ashe City when a private school opened. Therefore, the decrease in the number of identified children in Ashe City Schools could be a result of various uncontrollable factors.

The researcher further understood the importance of fully completing data sheets for the purpose of studies. If all teachers in Ashe City could have taken the time to accurately fill out the information on the *Profile of High Growth Form*, then more conclusive data may have been learned. In hindsight, if the *Profile of High Growth Form* was part of the end of the year checklist then teachers might have filled it in more precisely.

Recommendations for Ashe City Schools' AIG Program

It is a recommendation that in the Fifth Generation AIG Plan, which is due to Department of Public Instruction in the summer of 2010, that the *Harrison Forms* is used as one of the pathways to admittance into gifted education in Ashe City Schools. This

will allow more access to the children that do not score the 90% on an aptitude or achievement test but that do excel and are noted by their teachers as such.

An additional recommendation from the teachers is that the U-STARS~PLUS take home science packets be aligned with the Ashe City Schools' curriculum and sent home as the topic arises. These take home science experiments should be written into the science pacing guide, rewritten each summer, to coincide with Ashe City Schools' policy.

Teachers in Ashe City would like and should be given the authority to use *Harrison/TOPS Forms* for those students they choose. Forms should be passed from teacher to teacher. Observation forms should be initiated only by persons who have observed the students. The observation form is a teacher tool and therefore initiated by teachers.

It is a recommendation that system wide staff development takes place in Ashe City regarding the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS. This staff development should be offered to all new staff in Ashe City as well as any elementary administrator that has not had prior U-STARS~PLUS training. A possible training could take place during the monthly elementary curriculum meetings.

Parents would benefit from the knowledge gained in this study. Parents should know about the *Harrison Observation Form* as a broader lens in which to identify gifted students. Parents should know about alternative observations and assessments that allow teachers to take a second look at their child!

School board members should pay attention to this study because the numbers of identified children in Ashe City are decreasing and broader methods of identification are being explored. This information is worth further exploration and continued study.

Further, are alternative assessment resources necessary for identification being utilized to the full extent? Are the current resources adequate for gifted programs? Are adequate staff members available to fully implement the U-STARS program and insure nurturing of skills? All of these questions and others should be explored in order to meet the needs of the brightest academic population.

Suggestion for Future Research

One aspect worth exploring might include admittance into gifted education through peer recommendations. The three students interviewed during this study indicated strong preferences for certain children to obtain AIG services. Peers witness through a completely different lens, one negative of bias or at least from a different perspective than the teacher. Future research might include programs in gifted education that accept peer recommendations as one criterion for admittance. The same may be true with parents. Should parent voices be heard as a criterion for admittance?

Although the use of teacher observation is one that is highly thought of by the teachers in these focus groups, a child still may not enter gifted education services in Ashe City Schools without the baseline 90% on an aptitude or achievement test. The use of teacher observation over time could be looked into as one indicator for admittance into gifted education.

The overall aspect of this study was to look at the under-served culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children in gifted education programs as a whole group. Another study might include the study of identification strategies for under-served girls versus under-served boys in gifted education.

The researcher also thinks it would be helpful to view data from other school systems that implemented Project U-STARS~PLUS. It could be helpful to understand different strategies and results found in various school systems that serve culturally/linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children in gifted education!

Appendix A:

IRB Approval

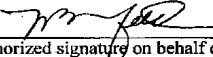


THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS
Medical School Building 52
Mason Farm Road
CB #7097
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7097
(919) 988-3113
Web site: ohre.unc.edu
<https://my.research.unc.edu> for IRB status
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #4801

To: Angela Kern
School of Education
1810 Taylors Creek Dr

From: Behavioral IRB


Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

Approval Date: 5/04/2009

Expiration Date of Approval: 5/03/2010

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

Submission Type: Initial

Expedited Category: 7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups,5.Existing or non-research data,6.Voice/image research recordings

Study #: 09-0831

Other #: School of Education : 09-045

Study Title: City Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS-PLUS

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

Purpose: To describe one school district's efforts to reduce the likelihood of disproportionately low representation in gifted education of culturally and linguistically diverse and economically disadvantaged children through the implementation of project U-STARS-PLUS.

Participants: Approximately 15 (total) K-3 teachers from the 3 schools that participated in U-STARS-PLUS, principals from each of the 3 schools, the Exceptional Children Director from City Schools, and 3 fourth-grade students who receive gifted education services and were part of the projects.

Procedures: Conduct a focus groups with teachers and one on one interviews with the school principals, the Exceptional Children Director, and students.

Regulatory and other findings:

This research, which involves children, meets criteria at 45 CFR 46.404 (research involving no greater than minimal risk). Permission of one parent or guardian is sufficient.

This research meets criteria for a waiver of informed consent according to 45 CFR 46.116(d). for the extant data set ONLY.

page 1 of 2

Investigator's Responsibilities:

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

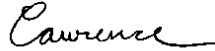
When applicable, enclosed are stamped copies of approved consent documents and other recruitment materials. You must copy the stamped consent forms for use with subjects unless you have approval to do otherwise.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the modification form at ohre.unc.edu/forms). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the adverse event form at the same web site.

Researchers are reminded that additional approvals may be needed from relevant "gatekeepers" to access subjects (e.g., principals, facility directors, healthcare system).

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Good luck with your interesting research, Angela!



Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, Ph.D.
Office of Human Research Ethics
Co-Chair, Behavioral Institutional Review Board
aa-irb-chair@unc.edu

CC: Barbara Day, School of Education
Crystal Daniel (School of Education), Non-IRB Review Contact

Appendix B:

Approval from District



City Schools

...the subject is excellence

Office of the Superintendent

P.O. Box 1102

, NC 27204-1103 • 1126 South Park St. • (336) 625-5104 • (336) 625-9238, fax • www.k12.nc.us

Date: January 21, 2009

To: Superintendent

From: Ed.D. [Signature]
Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and InstructionRe: ***"Ashe City Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in all Children via U-STARS~PLUS"***

I have reviewed the attached research proposal from Angela Kern, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and AIG Consultant for City Schools. I have discussed this project with Ms. Kern and have determined that her project meets our policy and procedural requirements.

Ms. Kern is interested in examining the effect the U-STARS~PLUS program has had on our AIG program over time. More specifically, Ms. Kern would like to examine:

- numbers of underrepresented children referred to the AIG program as a result of the U-STARS~PLUS program,
- the effect of this program on teacher interaction with potentially gifted students,
- and the way(s) in which the U-STARS~PLUS program has shaped the district AIG plan.

In her proposal, Ms. Kern requests permission to survey faculty members at three elementary schools who volunteer to participate in the study. In addition, Ms. Kern proposes to interview three building level administrators and the Director of Exceptional Education. Ms. Kern expects to review the summary data already available through the annual collection of "The Purple Summary Forms". She does not plan to involve any students directly in the data collection process. She will maintain confidentiality of all research results.

Ms. Kern plans to share the results of her study with her colleagues within City Schools. She expects the study to shed light on the effectiveness of our efforts to serve linguistically diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged gifted students. I recommend that we approve this proposal.

Approved
1-23-09

An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer
Centennial logo design by Amanda Carter

Parent permission will be obtained prior to any contact with the children. In addition, parents will be invited to sit in on the interviews. Interviews will take place prior or following the school day with a minimal anticipate time of 30 minutes per child.

Interview with 4th grade student served in Gifted Education and previously in Project U-
STARS~PLUS

(Questions subject to change after focus groups with teachers)

Date:

Time:

Location:

(Conduct the following prior to starting interview)

_____ Parental consent form is signed


_____ Check audio equipment for sound

1. Tell me what you do in gifted education. (High –End Learning Opportunities)
2. How is what you do in gifted education different than what you did in younger grades?
(High – End Learning Opportunities)
3. Tell me about some learning experiences you remember from the younger grades. (High
– End Learning Opportunities)
4. Tell me about the completion of the U-STARS~PLUS Family Take Home Packets.
(Parent/Family Involvement/Hands-On/Inquiry-Based Science)

- a. What do you remember about these science projects? (Family Take Home Packets)
 - b. What was your favorite U-STARS packet? (Parent/Family Involvement, Hands-On/Inquiry-Based Science)
5. How do you learn science in your classroom? (Hands-On/Inquiry-Based Science)
 - a. Is this the same or different than the way you learned science in the younger grades? (Hands-On/Inquiry-Based Science)
6. If you could spend more or less time in your AIG class, what would you pick? Why? (High – End Learning Opportunities)
7. Are there any kids you think should be in AIG with you who are not? Why? (Teachers Systematic Observation)

Appendix C:

Data Use Agreement

	<p>THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL</p>	<p>FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE</p> <p>SHERYL-MAR BUILDING CAMPUS BOX 8185 CHAPEL HILL, NC 27599-8185 www.fpg.unc.edu</p> <p><i>FPG: Advancing knowledge. Enhancing lives.</i></p>
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DATA USE AGREEMENT

Project U-STARS~PLUS

Using Science Talents and Abilities to Reach Students

This Data Use Agreement, effective as of **April 8, 2009**, is entered into by and between **Angela Haywood Kern** ("Recipient") and **U-STARS~PLUS Research Team** ("Covered Entity"). The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set for use in its Research.

Requested Data Files:

☒ The Children with High Profile (Purple Summary Forms)

Time Period:

☒ 2004-2005 School Year

☒ 2005-2006 School Year

☒ 2006 -2007 School Year

☒ 2007-2008 School Year

School District:

☒ Schools

The stated Recipient, Angela Haywood Kern, is granted permission use of the Limited Data Set known as The Children with High Profile Form (Purple Summary Form) for the 2004 through 2008 school years for _____ / Schools. The data will be de-identified by the U-STARS~PLUS research team at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center in Chapel Hill prior to the Recipient's use. At no time will the Recipient have access to identifiers.

The stated Recipient, Angela Haywood Kern, has permission to use The Children with High Profile Form for use in the Recipients research. The Children with High Profile Form will be returned to the U-STARS~PLUS research team after use.

In WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

COVER ENTITY:

By: Mary Ruth B. Coleman
Print Name: Mary Ruth B. Coleman
Print Title: Senior Scientist

RECIPIENT:

By: Angela H. Kern
Print Name: Angela H. Kern
Print Title: Graduate Student

Appendix D:

2004 – 2005 *Profile of High Potential Form*

Teacher _____

School _____

District _____

U-STAR~PLUS

2004-05 School Year End Summary: *The Harrison Form Kids*

Classroom Teachers: Please complete this form and return it to us. Please be sure that U-STAR~PLUS has copies of the Harrison Forms that you completed this school year.

1. Number of students in your class: _____

2. Students for whom you completed a Harrison Form:

Child's Name	M/F	Race	Rec'd some differentiated services in the classroom.	Referred for AIG Services?	ID'd as AIG?	Will Next Year's Teacher follow?
*Whole Class						
	M/F		Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	M/F		Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	M/F		Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	M/F		Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	M/F		Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
	M/F		Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No

3. Did using the Harrison Form help you see children differently? ____ No ____ Yes

4. How many children might you have missed as having high potential had you not used the Harrison Form? _____. Please put a * next to the child's name(s) you would have missed without using the Harrison Form.

2005 – 2008 *Profile of High Potential Form**"Harrison Form Kids"*

Classroom Teachers: Please complete this form and return it to us. *Include all "Harrison Kids" you have found as well as any you inherited from last year's teacher.*

Be sure that we have copies of all *Harrison Forms* you completed for your students. Use additional sheets as needed.

1. Number of
2. Students for whom you completed a new or added information to an existing individual Harrison Form:

*	Child's Name	Harrison Kid last year	Moved	Race	Gender	ELL	Low SES (give your best guess)	Rec'd any differentiated services from classroom teacher	Rec'd any services from AIG/GT teacher	Referred for AIG/GT Services	Formally ID'ed as AIG/GT
		Y/N	Y/N		M/F	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N/NA
		Y/N	Y/N		M/F	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N/NA
		Y/N	Y/N		M/F	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N/NA
		Y/N	Y/N		M/F	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N/NA
		Y/N	Y/N		M/F	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N/NA
		Y/N	Y/N		M/F	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N/NA

3. Did using the *Harrison Form* help you see children differently? ____Yes ____No

4. How many children might you have missed as having high potential had you not used the *Harrison Form*? _____.

* Put a * next to the name if you would have missed this child without using the *Harrison Form*.

Appendix E

Invitations to Participants

APPROVED - IRB, UNC-CH
MAY 04 2009

Invitation to Teacher Focus Group at Elementary Schools

Spring 2009

Dear K – 3 Teachers,

I hope this spring semester is going smoothly for each of you!

I am pursuing my doctoral degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the area of curriculum and instruction. This semester I am conducting the research for my dissertation on Project U-STARS~PLUS. The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I will be conducting my research in late spring of 2009 and invite you to participate in a discussion on the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in your school. This is part of on-going research to determine the effect of Project U-STARS~PLUS in _____ Schools. In addition to focus groups, I will be interviewing principals and the exceptional child services director, and talking to several students.

Project U-STARS~PLUS was implemented in _____ Schools at the start of the 2004 school year to address the needs of _____ culturally and linguistically diverse and socioeconomically challenged gifted education students. The first group of Kindergartners that benefited from Project U-STARS~PLUS are now old enough to be served in the gifted education program. I would like to seek your input on the effectiveness of Project U-STARS~PLUS to meet the needs of our children in _____ Schools.

Participants will take part in a focus group that consists of fellow teachers at your school. A list of questions for the focus group is included for your review and reflection. I would like to request your consent to tape record the focus group discussion. I personally guarantee anonymity to the school and any teachers interviewed as part of my research. All names will be changed so that the school and its teachers will remain anonymous. I will also share the results of the focus group with you prior to my dissertation submission in order to cross check for accuracy.

This focus group will take place on _____ in the _____ Elementary School Conference Room starting at 3:00 pm. The focus group will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Refreshments will be served and you will also receive a \$5 Chamber Check for your participation! Chamber Checks can be used at most businesses in _____

I have included the consent form for review. If you are willing to participate in my study please contact me by email or phone. Thank you for consideration!

Sincerely,
Angie Kern
AIG Consultant
akern@_____

Teacher Focus Group Questions

1. As a result of U-STARS~PLUS, what do you do differently in your classroom?
 - a. How do you recognize students who might have potential?
 - b. How do you recommend children to receive gifted education services?
 - c. How do you collaborate with specialty teachers?
 - d. How do you utilize systematic observation such as the Harrison/TOPS form?
 - e. Tell me about how you teach science in your classroom.
 - f. Tell me about differentiation in your classroom.
2. Tell me about your experience with using the Harrison/TOPS form.
3. What do you look for in students when deciding who may have high potential?
4. What impact has U-STARS~PLUS had on student achievement in your classroom?
5. What is the best thing that U-STARS~PLUS has made happen at your school?
6. What is the relationship between U-STARS~PLUS and family involvement?
7. How have your perceptions of children changed as a result of U-STARS~PLUS?
8. What elements of U-STARS~PLUS do you see remaining in the future?
9. If you could change anything about U-STARS~PLUS, what would you change?

APPROVED - TRB, UNC-CH

MAY 04 2009

Invitation to School Administrator Interview

Spring 2009

Dear School Administrators,

I hope this spring semester is going smoothly for each of you!

I am pursuing my doctoral degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the area of curriculum and instruction. This semester I am conducting the research for my dissertation on Project U-STARS~PLUS. The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I will be conducting research and to invite you to participate in an interview regarding U-STARS~PLUS at your school.

Project U-STARS~PLUS was implemented in Schools at the start of the 2004 school year to address the needs of 's culturally and linguistically diverse and socioeconomically challenged gifted education students. The first group of Kindergartners that benefited from Project U-STARS~PLUS are now old enough to be served in the gifted education program. I would like to seek your input on the effectiveness of Project U-STARS~PLUS to meet the needs of our children in Schools.

I would like to sit down with you and ask you several questions regarding the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS at your own school. The questions are included for your review and reflection. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. If you decide to participate in this interview, I will share the results with you prior to submission for my dissertation to cross check for accuracy. I would like to request your consent to tape record you during my study. You do not have to consent to being tape recorded to participate in the study. In addition to this interview, I will be conducting focus groups with teachers, interviews with other principals, an interview with the exceptional child services director, and interviews with students. All names will be changed so that the school and participants will remain anonymous. This is part of on-going research to determine the effect of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Schools.

Please review the included consent form. If you are willing to participate in my study, please contact me by email or phone. I can meet with you after school hours in your office at your convenience. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Angie Kern
AIG Consultant
akern@

School Administrator Questions

1. What has Project U-STARS~PLUS brought to your school?
2. How has the gifted education program in your school been impacted by Project U-STARS~PLUS?
3. How would you describe the services offered in gifted education?
 - a. Who receives those services?
4. What is the relationship between Project U-STARS~PLUS and gifted education services in your school?
5. As a result of Project U-STARS~PLUS:
 - a. How do teachers in your school recognize potential in children?
 - b. How do teachers in your school recommend children for gifted education services?
 - c. How do teachers and specialty teachers work together in your school?
 - d. How do teachers in your school utilize the Harrison/TOPS Observation Forms?
 - e. Describe how science is taught in your school.
 - f. Describe the differentiation that occurs within your school.

APPROVED - IRS, UNC-CH

MAY 04 2009

Invitation to District Exceptional Child Director Interview

Spring 2009

Dear _____,

I hope this spring semester is going smoothly for you!

I am pursuing my doctoral degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the area of curriculum and instruction. This semester I am conducting the research for my dissertation on Project U-STARS-PLUS.

Project U-STARS-PLUS was implemented in _____ Schools at the start of the 2004 school year to address the needs of _____ culturally and linguistically diverse and socioeconomically challenged gifted education students. The first group of Kindergartners that benefited from Project U-STARS-PLUS are now old enough to be served in the gifted education program. I would like to seek your input on the effectiveness of Project U-STARS-PLUS to meet the needs of our children in _____ Schools.

I would like to sit down and ask you several questions regarding the implementation of Project U-STARS-PLUS in our school district. The questions are included for your review and reflection. I would like to request your consent to tape record you during my study. You do not have to consent to being tape recorded to participate in this study. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes. If you decide to participate, I will share the information with you prior to submitting my dissertation to ensure correct representation.

In addition to this interview, I will be conducting focus groups with teachers, interviews with principals, and interviews with students. All names will be changed so that the school and its teachers and students will remain anonymous. This is part of on-going research to determine the effect of Project U-STARS-PLUS in _____ Schools. With the rewriting of the gifted education plan just around the corner, this information will be helpful in determining future in serving our brightest and neediest students.

I have included in this packet a copy of the consent form for your review. If you are willing to participate in my study please contact me by email or phone. I can meet with you after school hours in your office at your convenience. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Angie Kern
AIG Consultant
akern@

Exceptional Children Director Questions for Interview

1. Explain Project U-STARS~PLUS in your school district.
2. How has the gifted education program been impacted by Project U-STARS~PLUS?
3. How would you describe the gifted services offered on the elementary school level?
 - a. How has Project U-STARS~PLUS shaped/changed these services?
4. Who is served in gifted education in
5. What did Project U-STARS~PLUS bring to Schools that will remain in place?
6. What about Project U-STARS~PLUS would you change?

APPROVED - TRE, UNC-CH

MAY 04 2009

Invitation to Parent for Child Interview

Spring 2009

Dear _____,

I'm Angela Kern, a Gifted Education Consultant, in _____ Schools. I am pursuing my doctoral degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the area of curriculum and instruction. This semester I am conducting the research for my doctoral dissertation on U-STARS~PLUS.

As a fourth grader, _____, is currently identified for services in gifted education. _____ also experienced the services of Project U-STARS~PLUS during his/her Kindergarten through third grade classrooms. I am writing to ask permission for your child to participate in an interview regarding his/her experiences with Gifted Education and Project U-STARS~PLUS. The interview is to help me better understand the effectiveness of Project U-STARS~PLUS to meet the needs of our children in _____ Schools. In addition to this interview, I will be interviewing two other children in _____ Schools. I will also be interviewing teachers, principals, and central office staff regarding Project U-STARS~PLUS.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will take place in the conference room of your child's school. I would like to request your consent to tape record your child during this interview. You may request that I do not tape record during this interview. I personally guarantee that all names will be changed in my research so that the school and its students remain anonymous.

Please indicate if you will allow your child to participate in this interview. Please review the parent permission form that is included in this packet. If you decide to grant permission, then please sign the permission form and return it to your child's teacher at school. An additional copy of the permission form is included for you to keep. In addition, I have included a form for your child to sign giving permission to interview. Please review the assent form and have your child sign if he/she agrees to participate. Please return the signed copy to your child's teacher at school. An additional copy is included for you to keep.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Angie Kern
AIG Consultant
akern@

Appendix F:

Consent and Assent Forms for Participants

THIS CONSENT DOCUMENT SHOULD BE USED ONLY
BETWEEN 5-4-09 AND 5-3-10
APPROVED BY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants: Teacher – Focus Group
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study # 09-0831
 Consent Form Version Date: 04/21/09

Title of Study: / Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Department of Curriculum and Instruction
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-962-7739
Email Address: akern@triad.rr.com
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Barbara Day, bday1@email.unc.edu, 919-962-7739

Study Contact telephone number: 336-636-5872
Study Contact email: akern@triad.rr.com

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
 You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?
 The purpose of this research study is to learn about the effectiveness of the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Schools. U-STARS~PLUS stands for Using Science Talents and Abilities to Reach Students ~Promoting Learning in Underserved Students. Schools has been involved in Project U-STARS~PLUS since the 2004 school year. This study is designed to examine and describe the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS at the district, school, classroom, and student level.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are a K – 3 teacher involved in Project U-STARS~PLUS.

Page 1 of 4

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 15 teachers in this research study. In addition, school administrators and students will also participate.

How long will your part in this study last?

The anticipated length of this focus group is 30 to 45 minutes.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

You will take part in a focus group discussion regarding Project U-STARS~PLUS. You will be asked questions about Project U-STARS~PLUS. Your information will be used to tell the story of the implementation on U-STARS~PLUS in _____ Schools.

The researcher needs to audiotape the focus group discussion because she wants to capture accurately what participants say. If you do not want to be taped, then simply decline participation.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no known risks involved in this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

Your privacy and the confidentiality of the information you provide will be protected.

- Your name will not be used in the study. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym when the data are analyzed, and when they are reported. Only the principal investigator will have access to the individually identifiable data.
- You may use a fictitious name if you choose during the group. However, all the members of your focus group are teachers at your school.
- You are expected to not reveal to others private information discussed by the group members.
- The focus group discussion will be audio taped. Until the tape is transcribed, it will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the gifted education office at _____ Elementary School.
- Once the audio tape is transcribed, the tape will be destroyed. The transcribed interview, without identifiers, will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the gifted education office at _____ Elementary School.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will be receiving a \$5 _____ County Chamber Check for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There will be no costs for being in the study

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Title of Study: Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

**University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants: Principals and Other Administrators
Social Behavioral Form**

THIS CONSENT DOCUMENT SHOULD BE USED ONLY
BETWEEN 5-4-09 AND 5-3-10
APPROVED BY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

IRB Study # 09-0831
Consent Form Version Date: 04/21/09

Title of Study: Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Department of Curriculum and Instruction
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-962-7739
Email Address: akern@triad.rr.com
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Barbara Day, bdav1@email.unc.edu, 919-962-7739

Study Contact telephone number: 336-636-5872
Study Contact email: akern@triad.rr.com

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the effectiveness of the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in Schools. U-STARS~PLUS stands for Using Science Talents and Abilities to Reach Students ~Promoting Learning in Underserved Students.

Schools has been involved in Project U-STARS~PLUS since the 2004 school year. This study is designed to examine and describe the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS at the district, school, classroom, and student level.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are an administrator in Schools who was involved in the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 4 administrators including principals in this research study. In addition, teachers and students will also participate.

How long will your part in this study last?

The anticipated length of the individual interview is 30 minutes.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

You will take part in an interview regarding Project U-STARS-PLUS. You will be asked questions about Project U-STARS-PLUS. Your information will be used to tell the story of the implementation on U-STARS-PLUS in _____ Schools.

The researcher prefers to audiotape the interview so she can capture accurately what you say. However, if you do not want to be audiotaped, the researcher will simply take notes.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no known risks involved in this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

Your privacy and the confidentiality of the information you provide will be protected.

- Your name will not be used in the study. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym when the data are analyzed, and when they are reported. Only the principal investigator will have access to the individually identifiable data.
- If you give your permission, the interview will be audio taped. Until the audiotape is transcribed, the tape will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the gifted education office at _____ Elementary School.
- Once the audio tape is transcribed, the tape will be destroyed. The transcribed interview, without identifiers, will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the gifted education office at _____ Elementary School.
- Check the line that best matches your choice:
____ OK to record me during the study
____ Not OK to record me during the study

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There will be no costs for being in the study

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Title of Study: Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

THIS CONSENT DOCUMENT SHOULD BE USED ONLY
 BETWEEN 5-4-09 AND 5-31-09
 APPROVED BY
 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Parental Permission for a Minor Child to Participate in a Research Study
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study # 09-0831
 Consent Form Version Date: 04/21/09

Title of Study: Ashe City Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Curriculum and Instruction
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-962-7739
Email Address: akern@triad.rr.com
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Barbara Day, bday1@email.unc.edu, 919-962-7739
Study Contact telephone number: 336-636-5872
Study Contact email: akern@triad.rr.com

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to give permission, or you may withdraw your permission for your child to be in the study, for any reason. Even if you give your permission, your child can decide not to be in the study or to leave the study early.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. Your child may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you and your child can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this permission form. You and your child should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the effectiveness of the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in ^WSchools. U-STARS~PLUS stands for Using Science Talents and Abilities to Reach Students ~Promoting Learning in Underserved Students. Schools has been involved in Project U-STARS~PLUS since the 2004 school year. This study is designed to examine and describe the implementation of U-STARS~PLUS at the district, school, classroom, and student level.

Your child is being asked to be in the study because your child has been in Schools for their K – 3 school years, and had participated in U-STARS~PLUS activities, and your child currently receives gifted education services.

How many people will take part in this study?

If your child is in this study, your child will be one of approximately 3 children in this research study. One child from each of three schools has been invited. In addition, school administrators and teachers will also participate.

How long will your child's part in this study last?

Your child will be asked to answer questions in an interview in which I ask questions regarding gifted education and U-STARS~PLUS. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will take place in the conference room of your child's elementary school.

What will happen if your child takes part in the study?

I will ask your child to participate in an individual interview. I will ask your child questions about his or her experiences in gifted education and experiences in U-STARS~PLUS. I would like to audiotape the interview so I can capture accurately what your child says. If you or your child prefers that I do not tape record the interview, then I will just take notes.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. Your child may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no known risks in this study.

How will your child's privacy be protected?

Your child's privacy and the confidentiality of the information your child provides will be protected.

- Your child's name will not be used in the study. Your child's name will be replaced with a pseudonym (fake name) when the data are analyzed, and when they are reported. Only the researcher will have access to the individually identifiable data.
- With your permission and your child's assent, the interview will be recorded. Until the tape is transcribed, it will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the gifted education office at _____ Elementary School.
- **Once the audio tape is transcribed, it will be destroyed. The transcribed interview, without your child's real name, will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the gifted education office at _____ Elementary School.**
- Check the line that best matches your choice:
☐ OK to record my child during the study
☐ Not OK to record my child during the study

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study.

Will your child receive anything for being in this study?

Your child will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything for your child to be in this study?

There will be no costs for being in the study

What if you or your child has questions about this study?

You and your child have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you or your child has questions about your child's rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your child's rights and welfare. If you or your child has questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Title of Study: Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern

Parent's Decision: Please check the response below that reflects your decision.

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time.

☐ Yes, I voluntarily give permission to allow my child to participate in this research study.

OR

☐ No thanks, I am not interested in my child being in the study. Please invite someone else.

Printed Name of Research Participant (Child)

Signature of Parent

Date

Printed Name of Parent

Please return the signed copy of this form, whether you give permission or you do not, to your child's teacher.

If you have decided NOT to give permission, then you do not need to include your child's own form. If you DO GIVE PERMISSION, your child may still say either "Yes" or "No" so your child's signed form should be returned too.

**University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Assent to Participate in a Research Study
Minor Subjects (7-14 yrs)**

THIS CONSENT DOCUMENT SHOULD BE USED ONLY
BETWEEN 5-4-09 AND 5-3-10
APPROVED BY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

IRB Study # 09-0831

Consent Form Version Date: 04/21/09

Title of Study: Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the
Potential in All Children via U-STARS~PLUS

Person in charge of study: Angela H. Kern / Dr. Barbara Day

Where they work at UNC-Chapel Hill: Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Study contact phone number: 336-636-5872

Study contact Email Address: akern@triad.rr.com

The people named above are doing a research study.

These are some things we want you to know about research studies:

Your parent needs to give permission for you to be in this study. You do not have to be in this study if you don't want to, even if your parent has already given permission.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

Sometimes good things happen to people who take part in studies, and sometimes things we may not like happen. We will tell you more about these things below.

Why are they doing this research study?

This study is designed to look at the needs of children who receive gifted education services in your school district.

The reason for doing this research is to examine and share the effects of the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in the gifted education program.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are now receiving gifted education services, you have been in Schools in your primary years, and you experienced Project U-STARS~PLUS activities.

How many people will take part in this study?

Three students, one from each of three schools, will take part in this study. In addition, teachers and principals and other administrators will also be in the study.

What will happen during this study?

During this study, you will be asked to take part in an individual interview in which the researcher, Angela Kern, will ask you questions regarding gifted education and U-STARS~PLUS. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The researcher would like to audiotape the interview so she can capture accurately what you say. If you or your parent prefers that the interview not be taped, then the researcher will just take notes. If you and your parent agree that your interview may be taped, the tape will be stored in a locked cabinet in the AIG room until it is transcribed, and then the tape will be destroyed..

The interview will take place at _____ Elementary School Conference Room and will last about 30 minutes. You can choose to skip over any questions you do not want to answer.

- Check the line that best matches your choice:
_____ OK to record me during the study
_____ Not OK to record me during the study

Who will be told the things we learn in this study?

The information you share will help to increase understanding about the implementation of Project U-STARS~PLUS in _____ Schools. This information will be shared with the district office of _____ Schools. Your name will NOT be used in the report, and your name will not be on the tape (if there is a tape) or the transcript (if there is one) or the notes about what you say. The principal, other teachers, and students in the school will NOT know that you were in the study.

The researcher will also write about this study for her own dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

What are the good things that might happen?

People may have good things happen to them because they are in research studies. These are called "benefits." There is little chance you will benefit directly from being in this research study, but you might enjoy the opportunity to share your thoughts about your experiences and your education.

What are the bad things that might happen?

There are no known risks in this study. No one except the researcher will know what you said. This means your teachers, your parents, and other students in the school won't know what you said. And if you don't want to answer a specific question, you can just skip it.

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study, you or your parents may contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Title of Study: Schools Journey to Recognize, Nurture, and Respond to the Potential in All Children via U-STARS-PLUS

Principal Investigator: Angela H. Kern

Please indicate whether or not you want to be in the study.

Yes, I do want to be in the study.

No thanks, I don't want to be in the study. Please invite someone else.

Sign your name here

Date

Print your name here

Please return the signed copy of this form to your teacher, along with your parent's signed form. Keep the other copy of this form, and the parent form, for your family's records.

Appendix G:

Protocols

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location:

(Conduct the following prior to starting focus group)

_____ Participants sign consent form

_____ Discuss confidentiality

_____ Check audio equipment for sound

1. As a result of U-STARS~PLUS, what do you do differently in your classroom?
 - a. How do you recognize students who might have potential?
 - b. How do you recommend children to receive gifted education services?
 - c. How do you collaborate with specialty teachers?
 - d. How do you utilize systematic observation such as the Harrison/TOPS form?
 - e. Tell me about how you teach science in your classroom.
 - f. Tell me about differentiation in your classroom.

2. Tell me about your experience with using the Harrison/TOPS form.
3. What do you look for in students when deciding who may have high potential?
4. What impact has U-STARS~PLUS had on student achievement in your classroom?
5. What is the best thing that U-STARS~PLUS has made happen at your school?
6. What is the relationship between U-STARS~PLUS and family involvement?
7. How have your perceptions of children changed as a result of U-STARS~PLUS?
8. What elements of U-STARS~PLUS do you see remaining in the future?
9. If you could change anything about U-STARS~PLUS, what would you change?

Interview with School Based Administrators Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location:

(Conduct the following prior to starting interview)

_____ Participants sign consent form

_____ Discuss confidentiality

_____ Check audio equipment for sound

1. What has Project U-STARS~PLUS brought to your school?
2. How has the gifted education program in your school been impacted by Project U-STARS~PLUS?
3. How would you describe the services offered in gifted education?
 - a. Who receives those services?
4. What is the relationship between Project U-STARS~PLUS and gifted education services in your school?
5. As a result of Project U-STARS~PLUS:
 - a. How do teachers in your school recognize potential in children?
 - b. How do teachers in your school recommend children for gifted education services?

- c. How do teachers and specialty teachers work together in your school?
- d. How do teachers in your school utilize the Harrison/TOPS Observation Forms?
- e. Describe how science is taught in your school.
- f. Describe the differentiation that occurs within your school.

Interview with District Exceptional Education Director Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location:

(Conduct the following prior to starting interview)

_____ Participants sign consent form

_____ Discuss confidentiality

_____ Check audio equipment for sound

1. Explain Project U-STARS~PLUS in your school district.
2. How has the gifted education program been impacted by Project U-STARS~PLUS?
3. How would you describe the gifted services offered on the elementary school level?
 - a. How has Project U-STARS~PLUS shaped/changed these services?
4. Who is served in gifted education in Ashe City Schools?
5. What did Project U-STARS~PLUS bring to Ashe City Schools that will remain in place?
6. What about Project U-STARS~PLUS would you change?

Interview with Fourth Grade Students Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location:

(Conduct the following` prior to starting interview)

_____ Check for parental consent form

_____ Participants sign assent form

_____ Discuss confidentiality

_____ Check audio equipment for sound

1. Tell me what you do in gifted education?
2. How is what you do in gifted education different than what you did in the younger grades?
3. Tell me about some learning experiences you remember from the younger grades.
4. Tell me about the completion of the U-STARS~PLUS Family Take Home Packets.
 - a. What do you remember about these science projects?
 - b. What was your favorite U-STARS packet?
5. How do you learn science in your classroom?

- a. Is this the same or different than the way you learned science in the younger grades?
- 6. If you could spend more or less time in your AIG class, what would you pick?
Why?
- 7. Are there any children that you think should be in AIG with you that are not?
Why?

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